

Town of Richmond Selectboard Minutes 1/3/22

Members Present: Christine Werneke, David Sander, Bard Hill, June Heston, Jay Furr

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner

Others Present: Meeting was recorded by MMCTV, Joe McLean, Chris Haggerty, Ian Bender, Andy, Ann Naumann, Lauck Parke, Gretchen Paulsen, Jeff Forward, Martha Nye, Rod West, Connie Van Eeghen, Judy Rosovsky, Eveline Killian, Patty Brushett, Mary Houle, Cathleen Gent.

Called to Order: 7:04pm

Welcome by: Werneke

Public Comment:

Houle: I want to know what should be happening with Champlain Housing Trust. I believe that they should be helping people become owners of their homes. It could happen that Champlain Housing Trust could be sold and could push out the current residents. This has happened with similar arrangements in the past. Champlain Housing Trust is gaining dollars so they must start now to build a payment plan to repay the \$300,000 that was lent to them. But they may run the clock out. Houle submitted articles on this topic.

Brushett: I have observed we live in a kind community. Unkind words can come from a few. When you come to the Board come with a specific action that you'd like to ask the Board to take. If you are angry, please try to be calm and civil when approaching the Board. I would like to thank the Selectboard for the many hours over the past two years especially. Let's start the New Year with kindness and civility.

Sander: I put a Front Porch Forum post with a similar request for civility. I received many emails of gratitude for that post. We have a wonderful community and are fortunate to live here.

Werneke: Thank you Patty for that touching sentiment. I believe we are all under a lot of stress and I hear peoples stress when they are angry, not their hearts. We have a lot of positive things we can do and there are many good people in the Town doing great things for the Town.

Executive Session

Furr moved to find that premature general public knowledge of the Selectboard's discussion of a pending civil litigation related to Williams Hill Rd. to which the public body is a party, would clearly place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Heston seconded. Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Heston, Sander and Werneke in favor. Motion passed.

Furr moved to enter into executive session to discuss a legal matter under the provisions of 1 VSA 313(a)(1) of the Vermont State Statutes and to invite the Town Manager, Josh

Arneson, Attorney Joe McLean and Surveyor Chis Haggerty, into the executive session. Heston seconded. Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Heston, Sander and Werneke in favor. Motion passed.

Furr moved to exit executive session. Heston seconded. Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Heston, Sander and Werneke in favor. Motion passed. Executive session was exited at 7:43pm

Consideration of setting a hearing date to consider adoption of a rule requiring the wearing of face coverings indoors in public spaces

Werneke: The Rule that was recently passed is only in place for 45 days. The process to renew involves setting a hearing and warning that hearing. If it is re-adopted, then future Rules would only be valid for 30 days up until April 30th. We need to discuss tonight a hearing on January 18, the Tuesday after MLK Day. The last day the current Rule is in effect is February 3.

Furr moved to set a hearing date of January 18, 2022 at 7pm to consider adoption of a face covering mandate in the Town of Richmond. Heston seconded.

Ian Bender: Do you have any metrics that you will use to determine if you want to reject or set the mandate?

Hill: To date the CDC has suggested continuing to wear masks. I am thinking that when the guidance from prevalent health care officials does not recommend masks is when we would stop.

Furr: I think we should stay the course until the authority to do so runs out at the end of April.

Roll Call Vote: Hill, Furr, Heston, Sander and Werneke in favor. Motion passed.

Consideration of approving a bond vote for Gateway sewer expansion

Werneke: This is not a decision item for tonight.

Sander: We ran over time during the Water and Sewer Commission meeting so we did not discuss this this evening. We will discuss at a special meeting of the Water and Sewer Commission next week.

Hill: There was discussion about the scope of the project, including the question of if we should include water in the bond vote in addition to the sewer.

Werneke: So, the current question is if the Bond should include water as well as sewer?

Hill: Correct. Some items of interest include housing and zoning, and the addition of water may change what people develop in the area.

Discussion of next steps regarding equity and inclusion

Werneke: Jay will update the Board on a conversation he and I had with Milton Town Manger Don Turner on this topic.

Furr: Richmond enacted a declaration of equity and inclusion on November 1, 2021. The question is now what are the next steps to put this into practice. Milton began work on equity and inclusion in 2017. They worked with town staff, selectboard, and school board. The eventually expanded to include more residents in Town. The Selectboard and School Board have worked cooperatively on the initiative. They did create a police supervisory committee to meet with the Police Chief to provide advice on equity and inclusion. They also created a committee comprised of business and organization leaders that the Milton Town Manager meets with on a weekly basis. Milton built a new flag pole specifically for community organizations to fly a flag, after approval. To date they have not had many requests for flags to be flown. They are reviewing municipal code to update with an eye toward removing bias. Milton is not focusing on one specific group, rather they are trying to make everyone in Milton feel like they belong, to bring everybody into the discussion. Milton has tried to focus on what we can do together, there needs to be a focus on making sure everyone feels included.

Killian: I am on the business committee that Don Turner is on. That is something that the Abundant Sun person started and is independent from the Town's work. It is CEO's of different Vermont companies along with a few Town Managers. I want to mention that Don Turner uses the word belonging rather than inclusive, because you can be included but still not feel like you belong.

Furr: Milton is working with the Vermont Council of Rural Development on the belonging issue.

Heston: This was very helpful information. Years ago we had a police advisory committee, it is not oversight and the advice can be very helpful to the Police Chief. It may be helpful to revive this. I would be interested to find out more about how they feel the group working with business leaders is helping to represent those who are feeling a lack of equity?

Furr: The Vermont Council on Rural Development is helping with this question.

Werneke: To be clear the business leader group is not a Milton specific group. But, Milton did engage with the Vermont Council on Rural Development for some specific work in Milton.

Furr: One example was for the Town of Milton to work with a group who wanted to put on a drag queen parade in town.

Killian: The Vermont Council on Rural Development has a program to work with Towns for this kind of outreach. I asked if they could work with Richmond, but they are overextended right now and cannot add Richmond at this time.

Houle: We did have a police advisory committee in Richmond. Peter Thomas was an initiator of the committee and he designed the rules for the Committee. Does the VLCT have anything available to help towns with this work at a low cost?

Heston: I had a conversation with Abundant Sun and I know it can be expensive. I don't know what training VLCT offers. Perhaps there is an opportunity to work with other towns to share the costs. I am also cost conscious, but you get what you pay for.

Hill: We should be thoughtful to look for what we want and be willing to pay for it once we identify what we want. A thoughtful process may get a better service for the Town.

Killian: The Williston Community Justice Center also offers very high-quality training on restorative justice topics and they may be free.

Naumann: It is fine to say we don't want this to be for one group but we need to be thoughtful about how to include people.

Werneke: We do have a budget for FY22 to act on training. We can look at some resources and take action to set something up for Town leadership. I was not aware we had a police advisory committee in the past but it would be good to see what we had and start from there. Also, this should be advisory, not oversight. Don also talked about the role of the School Board and linking that with the Town. Two members of the School Board did come to talk with the Richmond Selectboard to reach out about collaboration a couple years ago. This may be an opportunity to reach back out and coordinate on this initiative. Josh, it was your wife who is on the School Board and was at that meeting, can you talk to her about this?

Arneson: Yes

Naumann: I think we may need to have some more oversight by the community of the police force than what an advisory committee can provide.

Houle: I believe there is State regulation that establishes how the police force is regulated.

Hill: My recollection matches Mary's and this may merit a deeper dive at a future Selectboard meeting.

West: It has been explained to me former Police Chief Buck that State law has set up a wall between the political leadership of the Town and the Police so that politics cannot influence policing. Chief Buck also felt like the former advisory committee just sort of fizzled out.

Naumann: It is my understanding that people regulating the police are other police, and this may not be in the best interests of the people being policed and we need a bigger discussion about this.

Hill: We may also want to invite our State Representative to that conversation.

Naumann: Will there be discussion about a committee to work on equity and inclusion?

Werneke: Let's put that on the list for a future agenda.

Heston: It is important to make our first priority training so we know what we are putting a committee together for.

Update on status of Rt. 2 paving project

Werneke: This is a chance to review where we are with the Rt. 2 paving project. In summary the project will include. Five foot shoulders from Richmond Park and Ride to Village Limits with a few exceptions where this width is not possible. A left turn arrow at the Bridge Street Intersection for left turning vehicles off from Bridge Street onto US-2 Westbound. Without the need for a left turn lane. ADA compliant intersection features at Bridge Street. Traffic signal preemption for emergency services. Culvert maintenance and replacement. The Town will be responsible for the cost of replacing the sidewalks on

East Main St. This has been discussed in the FY23 budget meetings with Road Foreman Pete Gosselin and he has a plan to conduct this work with Richmond Highway staff and equipment. The Town will also be responsible for the cost of raising water valves and manholes to match the new surface level of the street. The Water and Sewer Commission has agreed to have the State include this in the bid package with the goal of having the contractor who wins the bid with the State also be responsible for raising the structures. This cost will come out of the Water and Sewer budget.

Arneson: The project is scheduled to start at the end of the summer of 2022.

West: Regarding the pinch points on Rt. 2 I understand the objection to not replacing one of the culverts, but I don't know why they can't put in larger box culverts where they are replacing box culverts.

Sander: I agree if that were being replaced, then they should upsize it.

Rosovsky: Could there be a bike lane, was there any word from the State on that?

Werneke: This project does not include a bike lane but will have expanded shoulders. There has been a separate discussion about a bike path from the Village to the Park and Ride, but that is a separate project.

Hill: There is a long history of failure to connect park and rides via bikes and pedestrians. But, in this project an increased bike lane was out of scope for this project. I feel we got the best case in this scenario with the wider shoulders.

Gent: There is continuing work to be done on a bike and pedestrian path. We have studies being completed, but having a path directly on Rt. 2 is off the table for this project.

Naumann: It is very nice to have the extra five foot lane but it does not do much good with the pinch points because people will be pushed up next to traffic a bit unexpectedly.

West: It is my observation that the shoulder is covered in gravel so we should try to have the shoulders swept more often in the year.

Gent: I want to thank Pete Gosselin, the Highway Staff, Josh, and the Selectboard for the idea to excavate and install sidewalks on East Main St. using in-house staff.

Heston: Pete said they can work in conjunction with VTrans.

Discussion of 2022 Town Meeting and review of draft warning

Werneke: The Draft Warning has not changed since last meeting. We have heard that the Conservation Commission would like to modify the wording of the article for the Conservation Reserve Fund.

Rosovsky: We had noticed in the past that this is a fund that exists and is embedded in Town policy, but Josh pointed out that our efforts to say this is an ongoing fund it makes it sound like we are steering the vote in a certain direction. We want to try to make it clear that the fund is not a new thing, but that has legal ramifications with wording such as this.

Werneke: It seems in past years people are in support of this and we provide information on this at Town Meeting and in the Town Report. I am confused as to why you think the current language is not working?

Rosovsky: I was hoping that this would be a simple request, but it is not, and I am fine with letting this go.

Werneke: Thank you. I wanted to be sure we were supporting you and solving the right problem, but it sounds like there is not a big concern.

Werneke: Currently Town Meeting will be held in person, but we have heard that the Legislature may allow towns the same flexibility to hold Town Meeting by Australian Ballot. If this happens we may have a decision to make on how we want to hold Town Meeting. As of right now the meeting will be held on the evening of Monday, Feb. 28 with all floor voting that evening and all Australian Ballot items on Tuesday, March 1. If there is a move to put all items on Australian Ballot then we would have an informational meeting on Monday, February 28 and we could have early voting.

Arneson: We may want to hold a special meeting next week to address a change if the Legislature acts this week.

Hill: The first two weeks of the Legislative session is primarily virtual, so that may illustrate how they would guide towns and cities.

Forward: Will the budget be voted from the floor on Monday night?

Werneke: Yes, if we have a regular meeting it would be from the floor on Monday evening.

Discussion of verbiage in Town Report regarding Conservation Reserve Fund and the FY23 Budget

Werneke: We want to be sure we are describing the Conservation Reserve Fund as clearly as possible. Last year we added language to the top of but budget in the Town Report, to be clear that the Conservation Fund is not included in the budget as presented to voters. Wording was included last year and that has been updated as a draft for this year.

Rosovsky: This looks fairly straightforward. Thank you.

Werneke: We will include this language.

Update on Common Level of Appraisal

Werneke: When we discussed the Town wide appraisal there was question of if we wanted to do this now or hold off. According to the current Common Level of Appraisal we would now be mandated to conduct a reappraisal. I also see that the reassessment has started.

Hill: Do people have to let them into their house or are there alternatives?

Werneke: They have a system where they would give you a camera to view your house.

Heston: The information I received was to make an appointment for an interview and you can schedule them to do this by video. I do have a question on the CLA letter.

Arneson: I don't know how they calculate the education grand list. I will find out and report back.

Minutes Warrants and Purchase Orders.

Heston: For the minutes, change "president" on page three to "precedent.". On that same page I did not say "I feel she should get the bonus" I said "She is still employed. She should get the bonus." Please change that.

Heston moved to approve the minutes as amended. Hill seconded. Role call vote. Furr, Heston, Hill, Sander, and Werneke all in favor. Motion passed.

Sander moved to approve the warrants. Furr seconded. Role call vote, Furr, Heston, Sander, Hill, and Werneke in favor. Motion passed.

Items for Next Agenda

- Follow up on equity and inclusion to focus on training and police advisory committee
- Discussion with Community Justice Center.
- Hearing for mask Rule.
- Possible inclusion of Bond vote for Town meeting

Adjourn. Furr, then Heston.

Adjourned at 9:20pm.

Chat file from Zoom

00:08:25 Ann Naumann: Second Patty's sentiments

00:35:36 Patty Brushett: My observation of our Selectboard, the community members who attend these meetings, and community posts on FPF demonstrate that we live in a good, kind and civil community. Unkind words come from a very small minority. And they can poison a conversation and a sense of community. So whenever you go to a board meeting and you seek a change, come with a specific ask or action you want the Selectboard to take or you want to take. My ask is of this audience ...my neighbors, if you are angry and frustrated tonight please take a deep breath. Speak your concerns and listen in this meeting like you would to a friend or a neighbor. We are! As Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said, "It is possible to disagree without being disagreeable." And as Author Deborah King wrote: "Civility is the art and act of caring for others." And to the Selectboard? You have given untold hours to our town and especially during these past two difficult years. You are always kind, respectful and listen to each other and the community. I am

00:35:55 Patty Brushett: this is the public statement I made earlier

00:37:24 Patty Brushett: the rest

00:37:28 Patty Brushett: I am very grateful to you all. Thank you all for your service. Let's start the New Year with kindness and civility as our top priority in all our interactions.

00:49:13 Jeff Forward: I for one really appreciate the continuation of the mask covering mandate.

01:01:28 Judy Rosovsky - VT: Good words Patty. And I too appreciate the mask mandates.

01:11:30 Patty Brushett: That's a great idea

01:17:50 Patty Brushett: Cindy Preston

01:18:37 Patty Brushett: we are losing tw

01:18:41 Patty Brushett: two

01:26:43 eveline killian: Thank you to Christine and Jay and all for that great conversation about equity and inclusion!

01:27:37 Ann Naumann: Thank you for keeping this issue in the forefront

01:38:13 Ann Naumann: Totally agree Rod!!

01:41:09 Ann Naumann: many thanks to the transportation committee for their work on considering the needs of all of the users of the roads