

Selectboard Minutes 11/18/2019

Members Present: Bard Hill, Katie Mather, Christy Witters, Roger Brown, David Sander

Others Present: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Kathy Daub-Stearns, Admin. Assist.; Connie Bona, Financial Dir.; Rebecca Mueller, Library Dir.; Kendall Chamberlain, W & S Dept., and Ruth Miller was present to videotape the meeting for MMCTV Channel 15, also attending - Mary Houle; Marcia Gardner, Legislative Representative; Chris Granda, Planning Commission; Michelle Lewis, HR Delta; Dan Lyons, Gallagher Flynn; Geoff Urbanik, Andrews Forest Committee Chair; and Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County Forester. Called to Order: 7:00 PM

1. Bard welcomed everyone to the meeting, there was no public comment. Josh made the following additions: (a) a reminder that there is a Dec. 9, 2019 budget meeting and (b) the Chittenden East Supervisory has officially notified the Town they are moving out Dec. 13, 2019.

2. Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

a) Mary Houle came to discuss the items she feels necessary for the Board to address. Of note: 1. Mary feels the cost of living in Richmond is too high; her suggestion is to increase density since 14% of the town is conserved creating a larger grand list. 2. Mary believes that saving the environment by mandating solar and wind as California has done would help heal the planet. Mary would also like to see credits given to people who plant trees. She has planted 3000 trees. 3. Mary would like an inventory of all Town assets to be done that includes the life expectancy of each item. 4. Mary would like to know that each department is purchasing only what is necessary. 5. Mary would like to have the Board look at “unnecessary benefits” to keep the budget down. Mary would like the Board to look at benefits part time employees receive in particular as well as how health care is paid for. 6. Mary would like VYCC’s tax reductions to be reassessed since they never fulfilled their obligation to maintain all the trails in Richmond. 7. Mary would like Champlain Housing Trust to repay the money loaned to them so that it can be used to help other housing development. At the very least there should be a financial accounting as to why it hasn’t been repaid. 8. Mary believes the Selectboard meetings should move at a faster pace. 9. Mary would like there to be a ballot vote to hire a Recreation Dir. that could increase the number of volunteers Richmond currently has. 10. Mary wants everyone on the tax rolls to be treated the same way citing Cumberland Farms gas station as having to turn off and internal light after dark and take down banners & signs from the windows yet the Ski Rack has banners & signs and TD Bank has an illuminated sign on all night, even when closed. David thanked Mary for bringing these things to the Boards attention.

b) Marcia Gardiner Legislative Representative came to highlight the upcoming session and to answer questions. The Board had several questions:

1. Is there any reason to continue being forced to use the Burlington Free Press to advertise announcements for the Town? The cost is high and hardly anyone reads it. Marcia said she believes towns should be able to choose what works best for their community but the push back is that not everyone has access to being online to get notices and updates. It was mentioned that Hinesburg has switched to using their local paper and that Richmond has the Times Ink but that it is published only once a month so the notifications wouldn’t be timely. Roger thought using mass mailings or calls might work. Bard would like to see flexibility in what the Town can choose to do.

2. Is there a way to recoup some of the expense associated with emergency responses on the I 89
Marcia said she had looked into only the policing part of the question and found that departments were

happy with the reciprocal relationships that have been developed over time. Christy noted that our fire department was looking to replace “jaws of life” equipment that is primarily used in highway accidents situations and wondered if there was a mechanism that could help with the cost. Bard noted that Rescue can bill for their services and that not all communities bordering the highway have police departments so the State Police handle all the expenses making it a disproportionate expense to towns like Richmond. Marcia commented that there is a real strain on the State Police where towns have no police department of their own. Having only 1 training facility doesn’t help. Christy noted that it takes a year from application to attendance there and Dave noted that hiring becomes difficult because candidates from out-of-state need to attend prior to working here.

3. Christy wanted to know about Marijuana retail sales opportunities for communities asking if the towns have a say in the process. Marcia stated that at every level a town can say no with each component looked at individually.

4. What, if anything, is being done about rising health insurance costs? Roger noted that the budget was impossible to keep down when BCBS increases were 14% noting that BCBS has increased 25% since 2014. David commented that he knows people who have insurance but the deductible is so high they can’t use it. Marcia said there are no easy answers but agreed it’s a problem. Katie mentioned that part of the answer could be allowing nurse practitioners to operate independently. Roger asked that she bring the message back to Montpelier that small employers are having a hard time managing the cost of health insurance.

Marcia highlighted the following topics for the upcoming legislative session: 1. Paid family leave and the minimum wage will be addressed. The House passed both in the last session but there wasn’t time for the Senate to react. Once they are back in session both will be addressed. 2. Climate change legislation is coming that has considerable consequences if the law isn’t followed. Legislation will include a “cap and trade” that will allow entities to sell whatever carbon emissions they don’t use to someone else. Marcia also thought there would be incentives to switch from fossil fuels to electric. Katie asked if there would be any incentive to land owners for effective management of their land. Marcia responded that at this point there is not but that there could be a working group to explore it down the road. Bard expressed that vehicle emissions are the elephant in the room when it comes to climate change with Marcia responding vehicles & new homes are the reason for the uptick being seen. Christy thinks that public transportation is doing well in Richmond and her family uses it regularly into Burlington. 3. Marcia believes that during this session a Cannabis bill will be passed making recreational cannabis legal.

c) Discussion on updating the pay grid: Josh introduced Michelle Lewis, from HR Delta & Dan Lyons, from Gallagher Flynn who came to address questions from the Board related to the development or updating of the pay grid and employee compensation packages. 1. Josh asked how health insurance could be factored into doing a full compensation analysis. Bard mentioned that health insurance has become a large part of the conversation. Dan & Michelle agreed. Dan stated that companies decide wages may be less important to employees than great health insurance coverage, that it’s about developing a philosophy around what’s important to employees. Michelle said there are trade-offs.

2. Roger asked how other towns handle finding out people should have raises then aren’t able to budget the raises because of budgetary concerns? Dan responded that they do them over time, a few a year until caught up.

3. Bard thought that starting wages were up, then as people advanced through the pay grid they were bumping into people that have been here a while, how could that be addressed? Michelle said that

“compression” was something to look out for, while Dan thought that looking at the subject holistically you would think about those pitfalls while developing a philosophical comprehensive plan. Connie noted that there is a small pool of people with knowledge of municipalities and that should be taken into consideration when trying to decide what’s right. Connie felt that following what one town or another does doesn’t mean they’re doing it right. Michelle responded that it is important to be sure there is a wide enough group of towns being compared to. Kathy agreed saying that when providing information from the VLCT report criteria was set that would provide a larger cross section than just towns with a population of about 4000 and that for some reports individual circumstances were also accounted for in finding comparisons. Roger asked if it would be possible to continue internally, then bring one of them in if we got stuck. Michelle offered she would be willing to pop-in & out doing check in on how things were going. Dan offered that his firm would also be ok with that situation.

The discussion continued with Bard stating wages are easier to quantify than other benefits. A decision was made to continue working internally with a board member or two since this would be a long term discussion with no decision prior to this budget year. Roger volunteered. The plan is to look at job descriptions, longevity, wages, & benefits. Dan suggested determining what benefits employees may not be using as part of the analysis. Dan & Michelle were thanked for their time by the Board.

d) Adoption of Andrews Community Forest Management Plan. Ethan gave a presentation outlining the recommendations for the forest. There were 3 distinct areas, area 3 was earmarked as a reserve zone where no trees would be cut; area 2 would be “light touch management” meaning no whole tree harvesting equipment would be permitted; and area 1 where more intensive harvesting would occur.

There was a discussion surrounding the emerald ash borer as well as information on best practices for establishing trails while keeping forestry in mind. Ethan thought the next steps for the community would be to identify legacy trees, removal of invasive species and planting apple trees. Currently, there are no official trails although there is a loop trail being planned that will need the Vermont Land Trust’s approval. In the meantime people can walk the forest whenever they like.

Roger moved to adopt the Andrews Community Forest, Forest Management Plan, seconded by Christy. All were in favor. Ethan was thanked for the presentation and work on the management plan.

III. a) Follow up on amount raised in Fire Dept. coin drops. Josh reported that the Fire Dept. takes in about \$3200 and the parade money is used exclusively for funding the 4th of July fireworks adding that the Town does not contribute toward fireworks at all.

b) Follow up on illuminated crosswalk. Josh reported that Pete has ordered everything and it will happen soon.

c) Follow up on Dugway Rd. for repairs process. Josh reported that engineers will do a site visit on Thursday and that the threshold for FEMA has been met. The RPF for engineering services is out. Josh added that Dugway Rd. is likely to be closed for the winter with reconstruction in the spring. He added that school bus routes have been rerouted. The board would like the residents of Dugway Rd to have continued communication about the situation, plans & progress.

d) Vote on bank to contract with for the dump truck loan. Josh reported that TD Bank declined to submit a bid. Connie explained that there was a 1 week lead time from RPF to bid submission so between that and it being a short term loan, they declined. Adding that they currently hold 5 loans for the Town. Roger would like to see the Town do an RFP for banking to explore the possibilities. Bard thought TD should have submitted a bid based on Town deposits alone. Connie noted that Linda is

paid to make the deposits and having the banking be local could be important. Roger would like to explore the options.

Bard moved to approve the Community Bank loan at 2.52% for 5 yrs. Roger seconded. All were in favor.

IV. Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders

a) Minutes of 11-4-19 - Bard moved to approve the minutes, Christy seconded, all in favor.

b) Minutes of 11-12-19 David noted he was not in attendance so could not have welcomed everyone. With that correction Bard moved to approve the minutes, Katie seconded, all in favor except David who abstained.

Purchase Order 3845 to TD Bank for two truck notes not to exceed \$74,257.49 - Bard moved to accept, Katie seconded. All in favor.

Purchase Order 3909 to Mansfield Painting, LLC for interior and exterior painting of the Post Office not to exceed \$10,249 - Bard moved to accept, Christy seconded. All in favor.

Discussion: Katie asked Josh how the Town Planner search was going. Josh responded that there had been 24 applications submitted and that 4 rose to the top, 1 backed out. Interviews would take place shortly.

Need to search to see if anyone is interested in being the town Health Officer. The current officer is not interested. After searching if no one comes forward, possibly appoint an employee to do it. Josh will post on Front Porch Forum.

Katie wanted to know if anyone every paid Mary for her plantings, Josh said she never submitted an invoice, so no. David thinks it would be nice to acknowledge it publicly, everyone agreed.

Next agenda:

1. Dugway update.
2. Development on Railroad Ave looking for an exception to width of right of way.
3. Planning Commission may have a revised Jolina Court Amendment for next week.
4. Richmond Conservation Commission wants to come and present the information they want to have on the ballot at Town Meeting.
5. Need to vote on the Conservation Commission appointment.
6. Timing of Town Meeting and how reports will be distributed.
7. Appropriations voting; how should it be done? Ballot or voice? Line by line voice vote?

Christy moved to adjourn, Bard seconded. All in favor the meeting adjourned at 10 PM.