

# Special Meeting of the Town of Richmond Selectboard

Selectboard Minutes  
12/13/2021

Members Present by Zoom: Bard Hill, David Sander, June Heston

Members In-Person: Christine Werneke, Jay Furr

Absent:

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Others Present In- Person: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Dennis Gile, Fire Chief; Gerald Levesque, Assist. Fire Chief; Mary Houle

Others Present by Zoom: Linda Parent, Town Clerk; Pete Gosselin, Highway; Connie Bona, Finance; Ravi Venkataraman, Planning; Kyle Kapitanski, Police Chief; Glenn Murray; Highway, Rebecca Mueller, Library; Kendall Chamberlin, Water Sewer; Ian Bender, Suzanne Parent, Gabrielle

**Called to Order:** 7:00 PM

**Welcome by Christine**

**Public Comment:**

1. Mary Houle commented on the \$3000 of OT being budgeted for.
2. Mary Houle commented on the Champlain Housing Trust loan saying they asked for a continuation of their note and then wanted an extension. Mary said she provided documents to Jeff Forward the past town manager related to this. She said the money was to be paid back for economic development with the idea there would be a gain to the town to be used for additional development in the future. Mary thought Champlain Housing Trust should be asked how they plan on paying Richmond back. The extension was granted without interest, and she thought they should pay it back before purchasing more properties and the money used for economic development. Christine asked who the arrangements were made with, Mary H. said whoever it was it was it is now the Champlain Housing Trust. Christine thought they had come and presented a year or two ago, David commented that in 2014 or 2015 there was a 15-year deferment agreed to that came due and they wanted another deferment. At the time he was concerned it would not be repaid but since there is a note it should be. Christine said she was able to find what she was looking for and would take it off-line to be looked at more closely. She thanked Mary.

**II items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**

**a) Consideration of submitting an application for the FY23 Better Roads Program**

Josh reported:

- that this would help with costs covering 80% of the project
- that the grant application was due this Friday
- that this was work that has to be done regardless of the application

David moved to approve applying for the FY23 Better Roads Program grant and appoint Josh Arneson as the grant manager; Jay seconded. Roll call vote: David, Bard, Jay, June, and Christine voted affirmatively. Motion passed.

### **III. Review and Discussion of the FY23 Budget**

#### **a) Review of changes to budget since last meeting and discussion of current consumer price index**

Josh reported:

- that there were changes made to the budget overall
- that the employer contribution numbers to VMERS had been updated
- that with insurance decided PACIF was updated by department
- that increases for wages were included in anticipation of the wage and compensation study being completed
- that \$5000 was included for a position with Community Well-being
- that the Front Porch Forum amount budgeted was moved from Appropriations
- that the Police Union contract was signed with 95% health insurance being paid by the Town instead of being paid at 100%
- that fuel was reduced to reflect savings with the Tesla
- that highway was updated to reflect the \$2/hour raise approved by the Selectboard at their last meeting

Discussion included:

- that increases to the wage lines were for post study wage increases and were a separate item from the \$2 Highway employee raises per hour. June asked where the money was coming from for wage increases, Josh said there was an offset from restricted funds or general unassigned funds. Bard asked if there would be savings in highway from the new plan asking how the public see those savings. Christine said it that was part of the plan Pete had and this was related to the compensation study. Bard thought people would want to see where the savings were. Christine said she wanted to show the changes made by the Selectboard decision and what the compensation study changes would mean.
- that Bard asked about the community well-being positions funding under consideration, he wanted to know about what the position itself looked like. Christine thought the money was coming from a grant, Mary asked if ARPA funds could be used, Jay thought it would make a good proposal. Christine said this did not mean that a town position would be created but that this could go toward paying someone wherever the position originated. She said Stefani Hartsfield asked for a placeholder for this role. Connie thought if it not a new position it should be moved to contracted services. Christine thought having it as its own line was important but should be moved.
- that last year's increase was 1.32% and 6.1% was the current rate shown on the consumer price index for the northeast. Christine thought finding a balance between those rates was important. Currently the proposed budget increase was 1.72%, she asked for Selectboard member's thoughts, June thought the rate could be better saying we level funded some things that were not spent last year, she said 2021 ended with \$1.3 million in unassigned funds and using more of those funds would benefit the taxpayers. Bard agreed with June and wanted to focus on how much to use from unassigned funds. David thought the CPI was going to go higher and

taxpayer salaries would not be going up with it, he added that the school budget was an unknown. Jay agreed with spending more from unassigned funds to help taxpayers. Christine thought using the fund allowed for flexibility. June thought using \$300,000 was appropriate and would leave more than enough for a rainy day. Christine asked if the \$300,000 replaced the \$75,000 proposed, June said yes. Josh said there was not a "general offset", but one could be created. Bard wanted to know what the ending balances in unassigned and restricted unassigned funds would be afterwards. Jay said he would like to see the end balances end at a combined total of \$400,000. Connie wanted the Selectboard to know the \$335,000 estimated gain was FEMA funds and not guaranteed to arrive on a date certain. She thought adding \$175,000 would be ok but did not think more was prudent. Connie said if departments wanted to use their reserve money cash could be a problem but with Pete's recommendations we could be in a good place. June thought the restructure of highway did not show in the budget adding the town was in a good position to be ok at the end of the year and spending money left over from last year should not be a problem. Using June's suggestion there would be more than \$400,000 remaining between the accounts at the end of FY23

**b) Planning and Zoning**

Ravi asked if the Selectboard had any questions for Planning & Zoning

Discussion included:

- that the Planning Administrator position would be increasing to 40 hours
- that the salary line was the biggest increase due to the increase of hours

**c) Fire Department**

Christine reported:

- that the increase was high due to the purchase of the fire truck which was funded by a reserve and if that was removed the department was basically level funded

Discussion included:

- that travel for trainings in Williston would now be paid for
- that Jay asked about the energy audit for the Fire Dept. building and wondered if money should be set aside for remediation. June thought budgeting something that was not yet known and could be an ARPA funded project should wait. Bard asked if Fire Capital Reserve could be used for building improvements. Christine thought that was reasonable, Connie said there was a purchase that would wipe it out next year and another truck was to be purchased in the next two years. Bard said maybe imprudent but not illegal, Connie said yes. She said two truck loans could total over a million dollars.
- that Pete said there has not been an energy audit done but lighting had been updated and new garage doors installed. Jay thought an audit should be done.

**d) Police Department**

Christine said she did not have any questions related to the proposed police budget and the budget was updated to reflect the new Union contract.

Discussion included:

- that June asked about the "HSA" line, Josh said high deductible plans are offered employees and the difference between the cost of the platinum plan and the high deductible plan is put into the employees HSA account.
- that one and one-half cruisers was being budgeted for each year
- that if the TESLA worked out Kyle hoped to change to a 6-year cruiser replacement cycle
- that the TESLA was all wheel drive and handled well in the snow so far

**e) Library Department**

Christine reported:

- that retirement and PACIF lines were updated

Discussion included:

- that Jay asked if storage was needed, Rebecca said they have not had two book sales due to COVID, so those books were taking up the allocated storage. She said when there was a sale date, probably in May, they would be able to clear out the inventory.
- that the Town Center Fund was paying for the ongoing cost of the use of the building
- that the library paid for things like painting and new carpet with building repairs and servicing were paid for through the Town Center Fund

**f) Highway and Recreation & Trails**

Pete reported:

- that his proposal would impact the budget with immediate savings to the taxpayer
- that mowing properties would go to an independent contractor and would eliminate the part-time position. Pete had an estimate from a local contractor that covered all the town properties that totaled \$50,180.
- that restructuring the Highway Department would save money by enabling big projects to be done in-house
- that the savings to the town could be over \$800,000 or about 63% of the total cost over 3 years

Discussion included:

- that June loved Pete's idea, she asked if Pete would be overseeing the mowing contractor, Pete said each department would pay their share of the bill with the contract awarded through the RFP process
- that June asked if finding a contractor would be an issue, Pete said for the company he received the bid from it would not be a problem
- that Highway would be able to focus on things legitimately highway
- that total highway savings would be about \$31,000 this year so there would be a net increase of about \$18,000 across other departments but a savings of about \$800,000 over three years
- that Bard was receptive to the idea and wanted it to be clear in the annual report to taxpayers about the changes
- that Bard wondered if the mowing expense should go to departments or be an administrative line item, managed by Administration. Pete said it was done by property to know what the maintenance costs were. Bard wondered whether there

was a benefit to have it broken down versus doing it all together. Christine agreed with Bard and did not see a need to break it out.

- that Jay asked about paving the Volunteers' Green parking lot and he wondered if that was included in the numbers Pete presented, Pete said that was budgeted between the Highway and Planning budgets. Pete said the paving would be contracted.
- that Christine asked about there being no cost for the pavement removal dumping, Pete said it would go back to the asphalt plant
- that engineering costs would not be needed for oversight of the work being done
- that traffic control would be handled by town highway employees
- that if the trench box was used by employees on any project PACIF would need to be notified to have coverage since our application says we do not use them
- that the cemetery is town owned property, that knowing roles and responsibilities would be beneficial as with the library
- that if it was necessary the restructuring of the highway department could be reversed, and employees redirected to do the mowing with the hiring of a part-time person
- that wear and tare on the equipment was considered and would not make a difference
- that staff was consulted, and they were in favor of the restructure
- that Pete manages recreation now and would continue, if a point person was needed it would be him
- that several loans were redone last year to get lower interest rates and bond loans could not be repaid early
- that the equipment used for mowing was paid for and had other uses including mowing the town highway department so would be retained
- that the deposit on the new truck had been paid, the question was whether to get a loan or paid for outright
- that a tax decrease was a possibility

June moved to not pursue a loan for the dump truck that was voted for last year; Bard seconded. Roll call vote: Jay, David, Bard, June, and Christine voted affirmatively. Motion passed.

Discussion included:

- that this was only for the dump truck and not the other equipment contemplated for purchase with no loans
- that the \$150,000 would come from restricted funds and was already accounted for in the ending balance of the funds discussed earlier of no less than \$400,000

#### **g) Town Administration and Assessors**

There were no changes to this part of the budget.

#### **h) Charitable Appropriations**

(Heard prior to item a)

Christine reported:

- that FPF was moved out of this section of the budget since they were no longer a charitable organization

Discussion included:

- that Hale & Hearty asked not to be included since they had not been meeting due to COVID

## **VI. Adjourn**

David moved to Adjourn; Bard seconded. Roll Call Vote: Jay, June, Bard, David, and Christine voted affirmatively. Motion passed. Meeting ended at: 9:54PM