

TOWN OF WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT

SELECT BOARD

Select Board

Martin Memorial Hall
5259 Route 5, Ascutney VT
Monday, February 7, 2019
7:00 PM

REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

APPROVED 2/18/2019

Select Board Members Present: N. John Arrison
Daniel Boyer
C. Peter Cole
Tom Leach
Kelly Murphy

Select Board Members Absent:

Ed Morris, Town Manager

Others Present:

Edith Stillson	Paul Tillman	Karey Waters	Josh Dauphin
Dwight Jarvis	Josh Compo	Nora Waters	Amy Messina
Bonnie Jarvis	Ben Waters	Travis Compo	Dave Gulbrandsen
Levi Parker	Mychael Spaulding	Tracy Dauphin	Cheryl Watson
Richard Watson	Judy Jarvis	Peter Jarvis	Darcy Hodgdon
Darrin Spaulding			

1. Call to Order

Ms. Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.

2. Comments from Select Board and Town Manager

a. Website update

Mr. Morris announced that the new town website had gone live this day. He acknowledged that there may a glitch or two, but said things should smooth out quickly. He urged the public to notify him of problems they may encounter.

b. Tax Sale

The tax sale was held this day. Three properties were sold. They were all purchased by someone other than the town, so the town will get the back taxes.

3. Comments from Citizens on topics not on the agenda

Judy Jarvis said the farmers market will again have a free booth available for any nonprofit wishing to do fund raising at the market. All she asks is for some advance notice.

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Dwight Jarvis said he had heard that the town had purchased 3 acres of land from the Abbotts for \$80,000. Mr. Morris said the town is working with the attorney for the purchase of land for a parking area and an easement for a trail to the town forest. The purchase has not yet been made. The price will be fair market and will be determined by an independent assessment. The town had earlier purchased a house owned by the Abbotts on Jason Smith Road. All the funds are applied to the Abbotts' back taxes. It is likely that some of the accrued penalties will be abated, as they are sizable.

4. Review minutes from previous meetings – 1/21/2019, 1/29/2019

Minutes of 1/21/2019:

Additions/corrections/deletions:

- a. Page 3 – *Vote on the motion: 1 opposed; 4 in favor*- change to unanimous
- b. Page 5 – *Total municipal tax need of \$2,105,308 – up .095* – change to .0095
- c. Page 2 – *Me. Cole* – change to Mr. Cole

Motion: Approve as edited

Made by: Mr. Leach **Second:** Mr. Boyer

Vote: Unanimous in favor

Minutes of 1/29/2019

Motion: To approve

Made by: Mr. Boyer **Second:** Mr. Leach

Vote: 1 abstention; 4 in favor

Ms. Murphy said that last Friday, Mr. Cole, Mr. Arrison and Mr. Morris and she went to SAPA to do a taping for the budget (presentation of the articles, explanations, etc.). Mr. Arrison noted that a quorum of the board was together and wondered if their gathering should have been warned (as a meeting), which it had not been. Mr. Morris consulted VLCT – VLCT said it should have been warned, so it was put on the website. VLCT also advised the board to announce it at this meeting to let the public know. Ms. Murphy said there had been no discussion of business other than what will be shown on the video and no voting on anything. Minutes are on the website.

Mr. Arrison noted that the video is available on line (www.SAPATV.org) for those that are not on Comcast cable TV. Mr. Morris said it will be posted on the town's website and Facebook page.

5. Municipal Fire Discussion

a. Selectboard Annual Report

This year's report is focused on the history of fire services leading up to this discussion. It is on the town website for public viewing. The board agreed to shorten the report a bit and submit it as a letter to the editor of the paper.

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b. Question and Answer – Facebook Questions

Ms. Murphy said there continue to be a lot of questions from community members, some of them on Facebook. Several of the questions and Mr. Morris's answers were printed and in the board's meeting packet.

Once again, Ms. Murphy stated that this is the time to answer people's questions – repeatedly if necessary – and to correct the misinformation that she hears around the community. She then opened the meeting for questions.

Dwight Jarvis asked why the board was looking to change things. He said he sees how hard the volunteers work and can't envision them giving up everything they've worked so hard for. He also said the volunteers won't work for a paid chief.

Ms. Murphy deferred to the WWVFD to answer the question. Josh Dauphin said the division between the departments has gotten worse over the past 50 years; that the demand on the firefighters has steadily increased to where they struggle to keep up training and making it to calls. A full time fire chief would lift a lot of the burden from the firefighters. The move to a municipal fire department would improve fire services; it would eliminate the “sides” and make fire services unified for all of the citizens of Weathersfield.

Ms. Murphy indicated the four sheets of paper hanging on the walls of the hall that list all of the tasks that the chief would do. The lists were created by both departments. She said they are a driving force (behind the need for a paid chief) that was identified by both fire chiefs.

\$60,000 is the proposed salary for the chief - the rest is insurance and taxes (erring on the high side). The total cost of a full time chief would be \$110,000.

Ms. Murphy asked the volunteers present in the audience to address the issue of volunteers under a paid chief.

Mychael Spaulding said the volunteers do what they do because they care about the community and they feel this is the best idea for the town. He said they would be proud to work next to the chief.

Ben Waters said their department had voted unanimously for this.

Ms. Murphy said that she had heard anecdotally that some prior volunteers were contemplating coming back if this went through.

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Mr. Leach said there are very real safety issues on both sides; that training is not getting done; the number of volunteers is dropping; that there are two sets of protocols with the two departments when everyone needs to be on the same page at fire scenes and that its not happening; there is a break down in communications; that the work requires accountability; and that the town can't make any changes with two private nonprofits.

Judy Jarvis asked how having a paid chief would make for better training. Mr. Dauphin said that the chief would take over many of the tasks that the volunteers now have to do, which would free up the volunteers' time to focus on training and firefighting. Mr. Morris added that currently the departments meet four times a month, two which meetings are spent on business matters. With a chief, the volunteers can use all four meetings for training. He added that the federal government is making more and more demands on the fire departments and that much of the work is not getting done under the current arrangement.

Dave Gulbrandson asked if both departments are merged and if there are two stations, to which station would the volunteers go when they are toned? Josh Compo and Mr. Morris said it would be the new chief's job to organize those issues, including answering calls and consolidating and distributing equipment. Having two stations would allow us to retain our current ISO rating. Ms. Murphy said the departments are working through these issues with the board.

Dwight Jarvis challenged the idea of getting rid of equipment. Ms. Murphy said the equipment issue is a process that's evolving. Mychael Spaulding said there aren't enough people to use all of the equipment – why keep it if we don't have the people to use it?

Mr. Jarvis asked if having a municipal department would save money or cost money. Ms. Murphy said the total budget for fire services in FY17 was \$265,960. The proposal for a municipal department with a full time paid fire chief and volunteer firefighters would be \$265,070.

Mr. Jarvis asked where the fund raising money would go? Mr. Dauphin said the raised funds come from the taxpayers – it's just not called taxes.

Dusty Hodgdon said he won't be donating any services to a paid chief and, if his taxes go up, he will have to move. He said he was certain that his taxes would be going up sooner or later (as a result of this proposal).

Mr. Arrison said he had been on both the select board and the fire department for many years and acknowledged that the transition would be uncomfortable for some and agreed that eventually we'll have to pay the firefighters something for their services.

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Mr. Arrison said that there is a claim on social media that this is some sort of a power grab. He said the only thing the board can control is the money in the budget. He said the fighting isn't going to change and the board has no way to address it under the current model. He said the town spent \$6,000 to study the issues of the fire services. The resulting study sat on a shelf until WWVFD approached the board with a request to move forward with it.

Mr. Morris quoted from the Woods report about a single department, *“The single department concept is the best practice for fire protection in the community. The Select Board and the two fire associations should move to identify the best approach to create a single department.”*

He further quoted John Woods with regard to the safety of the firefighters: *“In summary, the most important reason for creating a single fire department is to reduce the risks of injury and death to firefighters, while enhancing fire protection in the community.”*

Mr. Jarvis asked what would happen to the equipment that AVFD owns. Mr. Morris said the he and they are still working on an agreement. He said WWVFD has already said they would give all of their equipment to the town.

Darrin Spaulding said he wanted to correct misinformation that he claimed had been given by the board regarding a drill at the school, training, SOGs and bylaws, and their support of this proposal. He said AVFD has voted five times on this proposal and each time they have unanimously voted no. He said if the town has a municipal department, once a year the firefighters will have to have a physical. at a cost of \$350 per scva certified firefighter and \$250 for those not certified. He asked if this expense had been budgeted in. Mr. Morris said he would look into it, but he believed it is not required. Mr. Spaulding claimed that self-employed firefighters are not covered by the town's insurance if it's a serious injury. Mr. Morris said he would look into it, but that we don't have that now and it has been that way for 10-15 years. He said there is no differentiation on legalities between volunteers having to take a physical or the town having to take a physical. There is no NFPA differences in municipal vs non-municipal. Mr. Spaulding said that was not what the Chester fire chief told him - he said the Chester budget “jumped”. Mr. Morris acknowledged that Chester may do that every year as does Springfield, but it is a decision, not a requirement. Mr. Spaulding thought the town's liability would benefit from it. Mr. Morris said the town has that liability right now – the town pays all of the insurance.

Judy Jarvis asked if the town has a safety net for the firefighters now – for when someone gets hurt and can't work. Mr. Morris said the town pays workmen's comp on the volunteers now, but he would have to research more on the self-employed angle.

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Tracy Dauphin said she wanted to counter allegations that WWVFD is promoting a municipal fire department because they are “broke”. Mrs. Dauphin read off the amounts in each of the department's financial accounts, which totaled in excess of \$40,000.

Josh Dauphin said there is too much emotion in the fire services; that John Woods had put the report together without the emotion in it. He said too much emotion is why nothing has changed in 50 years – it's why the two departments can't work together without issues. This change is for the safety of all firefighters in town. He said the drop in volunteers is a national problem, not just a Weathersfield problem. This change would eliminate a lot of the stress on the people we have left.

Mr. Morris said the chief can and would work on recruitment and retention of volunteers. The chief can also apply for far more grants than the current volunteers can to offset some of the equipment costs.

Mr. Jarvis said that if there is a core of people who can't get along, then that core should be eliminated to solve the problem. Mr. Arrison said that gets to the heart of the problem – the town can't control it because the departments are two private non-profit organizations. Having a municipal department will create the accountability the town doesn't have now.

Mr. Morris acknowledged that in the beginning, managing personnel will be hard and will take time, but felt confident that over time, morale will improve and volunteers will return.

Ms. Murphy said this is not about devaluing anyone or taking anything away; its about getting everyone to figure out how to make this work.

Bonnie Jarvis suggested having a fire chief come to a meeting to talk to people and answer their questions about what they do. Ms. Murphy said that former fire chief Rick Bergeron had attended an earlier meeting and he had said that this made sense.

Ms. Murphy again encouraged people to talk and ask questions and get accurate information. Mr. Morris said all of the reports are available on the town's website.

c. Review Last Meeting

d. AVFD Option B Review

6. Board of Liquor Control Commissioners

Ms. Murphy convened the Board of Liquor Control Commissioners at 9:00 PM. Mr. Morris said that Chief Daniels had no problem with renewing any of these licenses.

a. Second Class Liquor License Renewal

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- 6.a.i. Fireside Beverage, LLC/DBA Fireside Beverage
- 6.a.ii. Scott Rogers, LLC/DBA Scott Rogers, LLC
- 6.a.iii. J.W. Sandri Inc./DBA Sandri #204

Motion: Approve the renewal of a Second-Class Liquor License for Fireside Beverage LLC/ DBA Fireside Beverage; for Scott Rogers, LLC/DBA Scott Rogers, LLC and for J.W. Sandri Inc./DBA Sandri #204

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Leach

Vote: Unanimous in favor

Ms. Murphy closed the Board of Liquor Commissioners at 9:00 PM and reconvened the select board meeting.

Motion: To continue the meeting to 9:30 PM to finish the agenda.

Made by: Mr. Cole **Second:** Mr. Boyer

Vote: Unanimous in favor

7. Point to Point Race

Ascutney Outdoors is helping to put on the Point to Point road cycling race. They are looking at several trails around the mountain, some of which come through our town. The board is being asked to grant permission for the race to use some of the town's roads. Mr. Morris felt it would be good for the board to lend its support to the event – not necessarily monetarily, but by allowing the race to use town roads and by helping to promote it – as the event is very much in line with our focus on recreation as a form of economic development.

The event will be on August 10th. Police Chief Daniels does not have any concerns about it other than ensuring that the routes are well marked and there is sufficient traffic control.

Motion: To approve the Ascutney Trails Association nonprofit to host their Point to Point Race utilizing town roads August 10th, 2019

Made by: Mr. Leach **Second:** Mr. Cole

Vote: Unanimous in favor

8. Ordinance Review

- a. Repeal Advertising ordinance (2nd reading continued from 4/16/2018)
- b. Animal Cruelty (2nd reading continued from 4/16/2018)
- c. Repeal Child Safety ordinance (2nd reading continued from 9/4/2018)
- d. Highway Access (2nd reading continued from 8/20/2018)
- e. Large Assembly (2nd reading continued from 8/6/2018)
- f. Repeal Mobile Home ordinance (2nd reading continued from 8/20/2018)

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No additional changes were requested.

Motion: To move the proposed ordinances to a 3rd reading

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Cole

Vote: Unanimous in favor

9. Town Manager Evaluation Process

Ms. Murphy explained the process for completing the Town Manager's performance evaluation. It will be a compilation of reviews from Mr. Morris himself, the town staff, and the board members. The process will be completed by the March 4th meeting.

10. Reschedule Selectboard meetings:

a. Regular select board meeting scheduled for 2-18-2019 (Holiday)

It was agreed to not reschedule this meeting.

b. Municipal fire meeting scheduled for 2-14-2019 (Valentine's Day)

The meeting was rescheduled to February 21st.

11. Accept FY2018 Audit

This item was tabled. Mr. Morris said the audit is available for public viewing on the website and in the town office.

12. Appointments

No appointments were requested or made.

13. Approve Warrants

Motion: To approve the warrants for 2/7/2019 as follow:

General Funds	Operating Expenses	\$65,791.15
	Payroll	\$16,522.66
Highway Fund	Operating Expenses	\$42,831.75
	Payroll	\$12,378.55
Solid Waste Management Fund		
	Operating Expenses	\$12,896.25
	Payroll	\$1,523.58
Library	Operating Expenses	\$4,857.20
	Payroll	\$1,945.22

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Grants	Operating Expenses	\$60.00
Agency Monies	Operating Expenses	\$8,386.00
Reserves		\$40.00
Long Term Debt		\$0.00
Grand Totals	Operating Expenses	\$134,862.35
	Payroll	\$32,370.01

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Boyer

Vote: Unanimous in favor

Motion: To approve the warrant for \$884 from the General Fund Expenses (for mailing the Town Report).

Made by: Mr. Cole **Second:** Mr. Boyer

Vote: Unanimous in favor

14. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Ms. Murphy once again reviewed the process and timeline for completing the Town Manager's evaluation.

15. Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn the meeting

Made by: Mr. Boyer **Second:** Mr. Arrison

Vote: Unanimous in favor

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

deForest Bearse

WEATHERSFIELD SELECTBOARD

N. John Arrison, Selector

Daniel E. Boyer, Selector

C. Peter Cole, Vice-Chairperson

Tom Leach, Clerk

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Kelly Murphy, Chairperson