



Town of Thetford Vermont

3910 Vermont Route 113 • P.O. Box 126 • Thetford Center, VT 05075
802-785-2922 • thetfordvermont.us

Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes

– Online Only –

Monday, December 7, 2020 7:00pm

Please note Section 6 of H.681, signed into law on March 30th, 2020, for the temporary suspension of designated physical meeting location requirements.

Selectboard members present: Mary Bryant, Nick Clark (Chair), Sharon Harkay, Li Shen, Steve Tofel

Others present: Tom Yennerell (Town Manager), Tracy Borst (Town Clerk/Treasurer)

Total Zoom attendees: 26

Nick Clark called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1. Agenda Review

Steve Tofel said he was hoping for a time when the Selectboard could discuss not only tonight's agenda, but also future agenda items, in order to get our thoughts in order and set our priorities. With the agenda review at beginning, it's more focused on what we're going to talk about tonight. By the time the end of the meeting comes, it's hard to focus on setting future agendas. Due to the Vermont Open Meeting Law, it's hard to schedule outside of public meetings. Steve said it would be nice to have a strategic planning meeting, but in the middle of budget season it may not be possible.

Li Shen suggested having paper and pen nearby during the meeting to jot down thoughts and ideas to discuss at the end. The Selectboard retreat is their strategic planning meeting.

Sharon Harkay said one item she and Steve were discussing was an article that would change penalties for late fees on property taxes, and they'd like to put that on an upcoming agenda.

Nick said that could be put on later and will come into play when planning for Town Meeting. Statute does dictate parts of the late fee penalty.

Mary Bryant said putting things on an agenda in the future is different from having a strategic plan. Something on agenda does not allow us to sit down as a group and prioritize our top hits for the year. The Selectboard retreat this year was taken over by COVID-19 planning. Maybe they could plan for something early in the new year.

Sharon asked how many more meetings would the Selectboard have before the holiday season?

Nick said probably just one more, as he could see skipping at least one or two in December.

Li said it was possible they might have a few extras because of Town Manager recruiting, but they wouldn't be regular Selectboard meetings.

Nick said he was thinking of having a meeting on the 14th but skip the 21st and 28th. In January they will be tying up the budget and preparing articles and town meeting.

Li asked about the deadline for the Selectboard report.

Nick said the warning is January 31st and all those pieces need to be done, although he has heard there is a bill in legislature that may alter plans for Town Meeting. In the Legislative update, they



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may allow towns to reschedule Town Meeting outside of that three-day window to make appropriate changes for COVID-19.

Tracy said they were proposing to allow towns to extend Town Meetings and also allow for a virtual informational meeting with Australian ballot.

Nick said this would be an item for the next agenda.

2. Public Comment

No public comment.

3. Town Manager Report – Tom Yennerell

Tom said he had an additional item to discuss under Executive Session. The Selectboard agreed to add it.

Tom said a lot of his time has been spent dealing with an unusual personnel issue and doing the DPW director job.

The bridge on Turnpike Road South is now passable. A cost estimate for guardrails will happen this week and then the road will be open.

There is progress on the FEMA request for information. Tom met with Stantec at Town Hall last Friday. FEMA still has not sent information for the last three requests for information, but that's not super critical. The 30-day time clock to respond does not start until they have sent all the information requested.

4. Conservation Commission appointment(s)

Motion by Nick Clark to accept the resignation of Judy Harvey from the Conservation Commission, and to appoint Katherine Milligan to the remainder of Judy's term.

Li said with the passing of Bob Pulaski there is another unfinished term. Li suggested that the liaisons could be compiling a list of vacancies and term limits of committee/commissions.

Mary agreed and said that the Senior Affordable Housing Committee still needs 4 members.

VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)

5. Decision and Order of the Selectboard Of the Town of Thetford For the Condemnation of a Portion of Land Abutting Tucker Hill Road.

Motion by Nick Clark to approve the Decision and Order of the Selectboard of the Town of Thetford for the Condemnation of a Portion of Land Abutting Tucker Hill Road.

VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)

6. Possible adoption of the revised Personnel Policy.

Nick said the policy has been reviewed by the Town attorney.

Motion by Nick Clark to adopt the Personnel Policy as presented.

Roll call vote: Li Shen – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, Mary Bryant – in favor (audio out, Mary used paper to indicate vote), Steve Tofel – in favor, Nick Clark – in favor

7. Discussion on the 2021 draft municipal budget. <https://bit.ly/3qtxtnV>

Nick said the budget discussion will be different this year because we now have a Town Manager. Nick said he also worked on the budget.



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The looming factor is the Route 132 bond vote that passed. While the town won't have to pay principal in 2021, there will be \$16,000 in interest. There will be a new line item in the highway budget that adds a sub-category in the paving fund for \$18,000. The theme of the budget as presented is that the paving fund must increase dramatically, but we are still in the middle of a pandemic so a large increase in the overall budget would be hard for residents. There are a lot of cuts across the board, but hopefully they won't impact the departments too much.

Steve said he has questions but the format this year is much clearer.

Nick said that employee benefits have been dispersed to their departments. That was advised by Guy when he was here and the Selectboard was interested in showing true cost. Some sections were moved completely to make it cleaner and more apparent that we have a different form of government. Nick asked if the Selectboard was comfortable with that premise.

The Selectboard agreed.

Budget questions/items discussed:

Increase in computer support - This increased because computer support and IT support were combined into one line item.

Telecommunications - There is a new telephone system, plus the addition of a Town Manager cell phone. The new system will be paid for in 3 years. Tracy said it ended up being the right move especially in the pandemic as voicemails are forwarded directly to a person's email so no matter where they are working, they can get their messages.

Local agreements – These are tax exemptions that the Town votes on and the town pays the education tax. These are budgeted and once voted they can't be altered.

Annual professional audit – This is done once a year in January. It's important when receiving federal money.

There is a small increase for audit and legal services.

Stipends – Stipends are easier to administrate than hourly wages for positions such as the Animal Control Officer and this year the goal is to establish the practice of issuing stipends. There was discussion about who should receive stipends.

Town Hall – Trash removal is much lower, and this includes the DPW.

Timothy Frost Building – Costs for PACIF and insurance have been added.

Town Clerk – The assistant Town Clerk is paid out of different line items; Town Clerk and Selectboard. There are 3 or 4 employees that have a split line like that because they work for multiple departments.

Town Treasurer – Some line items were consolidated.

Listers – The Listers requested a reduction of their hours. A town-wide reappraisal is anticipated in 2022, but there is a separate fund for that.

Parks and Recreation – There is a lot of change in this department due to the pandemic. Money for basketball 2021 is in the budget.

Planning and Zoning – The Zoning administrator is now full time with benefits. There is also money allotted for a dangerous building inspection if needed to enforce that ordinance.

Public Safety – A category has been added for emergency management. Chief Evans expressed concerns because this budget is drastically different from what he discussed with the Town Manager. Chief Evans said it is troubling that he submitted a budget and after Nick took it from the Town Manager it is very different. This is also the first time that Chief Evans is seeing the changes. Chief Evans asked how the Selectboard intended to accomplish these changes and do



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they have a plan to share with the public. How will the Selectboard reduce union police officer shifts from 12 hours to 10 hours when they are set by a contract. Chief Evans said his salary is being reduced 1.2% and wondered when they were planning on sharing that with him. Nick said the line item for Chief Evan's salary is an error. As for the reduction in officer hours, there have been several meetings during the year that took place in executive session with the Town attorney. Chief Evans said while there had been turmoil during the summer, including grievances filed, he has not been consulted before now and given no opportunity to express his comments. He finds it very concerning and troubling that this is how the town is conducting business at this point. He would like to hear how these numbers were arrived at and since the hours of work are set by a union contract it's a dangerous step that the town is taking. Nick said Chief Evans could review the budget with Tom, but it was not the first time he's had the opportunity to talk about this, as both Town Managers have discussed it with the town attorney. Nick said this budget needed to be completed by the end of January, so it is still in discussion.

Fixed costs - A lot of the dues were moved here, and there is an increase to the tax abatement budget.

Tri-Town Commission – The Tri-Town budget is divided between three towns. They are anticipating periodic dam inspections which requires payment to the inspector. Li Shen said the minutes of the Tri-Town budget meeting are on the website. The Town of Fairlee treasurer handles the bills. There is no actual fund; the bills come in, and they are paid from the Tri-Town account. The treasurer pays the bill and then divides the amount amongst the 3 towns according to the acreage of the lake. The towns send their payments in and the treasurer puts it back in the Tri-Town checking account. There was discussion about setting up a capital account.

Department of Public Works – The department lost a crew member in the fall and while it was budgeted to back fill, the town didn't do that. This budget is for four crew members instead of five. The Public Works Director line item originally include a Town Engineer. Some work was contracted out which saved money. The director's salary is going up 22 ½ percent because it was changed from a split department position (DPW and Zoning) and put in as a full-time position under public works.

Transfer station – this will be moving under public works.

Capital funds – The Police Department has a cruiser that is near or over 120,000 miles and should be considered for replacement. There was discussion about replacing the roadside mower and chipper. Tom said there was also some potential issues with the loader.

Appropriations – There are still a few organizations that haven't submitted a request. Nick said he was going to follow up with the Lake Fairlee Association about filing a petition.

Fish and Game Club – There is ongoing discussion about taxes for which the town is currently liable.

Nick said more information and revenue numbers should be available by the first Selectboard meeting in January.

8. Warrants and Minutes

Motion by Nick Clark to approve the regular Selectboard meeting minutes of November 30, 2020 as edited. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**



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9. Real estate negotiations, anticipated Executive Session, 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(2)
 - a. Town Forest on Five Corners Road
 - b. School District lands on Thetford Hill

Motion made by Nick Clark at 9:17 pm to enter Executive Session per *Discussion of Matters as per 1V.S.A., subsection 313 paragraphs (a)(2)* to discuss real estate matters, and invited Tom Yennerell, the Interim Town Manager, to participate. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

10. Adjourn

Motion by Nick Clark to exit Executive Session at 10:50 pm. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**
No action taken.

Motion by Nick Clark to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 10:50 pm. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**