



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, January 25th, 2021 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 (Interim Town Manager), Brian Gazda (Incoming Town Manager), Tracy Borst (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Martie Betts (Selectboard assistant)

Total Zoom attendees: 32

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

1. Selectboard reports for Town Report

The Selectboard reviewed the Green Fleet Report and Vehicle Inventory. One edit was made.

The Selectboard reviewed the Selectboard Report.

The Selectboard reviewed the Budget Report, making several edits.

2. Approval of the Town Meeting Warning

There was discussion about article #3 “Shall the town set the penalty charged by the collector of delinquent taxes for payments made after the due date for payment to four percent of the tax for the first fifteen days, and then an additional four percent of the tax for the sixteenth day and thereafter pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1674 (3)(B)?”

Li Shen said articles #8 and #9* probably warrant a discussion at a live meeting in order to explain how this would actually work. Assuming that you are stabilizing someone’s taxes downwards, then other people are picking up that unpaid tax. In other situations where people are not paying their taxes through an appeal to the Board of Abatement, there is a real procedure for that. The Board of Abatement is a much bigger board, including the Justices of the Peace and the Listers, making the decision and there are very defined rules on what constitutes sufficient grounds to abate taxes. This article appears to be a very loose idea that the Selectboard can take action without any procedures or rules. How do people apply, and what is the criteria? Li did not think there was any reason to vote on these articles this year.

Sharon Harkay said she knew of a business that might benefit from this, but she also has a lot of reservations. Sharon wondered how this would work and how the Selectboard could avoid appearing to play favorites. They would need to consider how it would impact revenue.

Sharon said she would like to remove articles #8 and #9.

Tom Yennerell said that tax stabilizations are very common and the Selectboard will have to adopt policies about how people would apply, what would qualify for a stabilization, the processes, and the different types of stabilizations available. The most common stabilization is



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deferment. People could apply to pay a reduced amount for the first five years and then start paying more starting in the 6th year.

Mary Bryant wondered if there could be a follow-up meeting for more discussion. It's a good idea but there are many details that need to be worked out.

Steve Tofel wondered about adding it as an article after establishing the policies for implementation.

Nick said they wouldn't be rushing into handing out agreements. They would be doing a lot of research, including its impact. Nick would be hesitant to defer a year because of the economic impact of the ongoing pandemic. It's just a possible tool that we could possibly use if there was a need. Having it in place doesn't mean we have to use it.

Sharon said after hearing Tom's explanation she feels better about leaving the articles on, as long as it can be explained.

The articles will remain on the warning.

Public comment on the articles:

Liz Ryan Cole expressed concern that without an in-person Town Meeting the budget would be voted down. She would like to have the Town Meeting postponed.

Sharon asked if Liz received the email from her explaining the reasons for the decisions the Selectboard made about Town Meeting. Liz said she did but was not persuaded by those arguments.

Li Shen added that in March we are already spending the 2021 budget. The concern is the farther into the year you go, the more the approved budget and what you're already spending are going to start deviating.

Liz Ryan Cole said the big unknown is how much assistance will be coming from other sources. Nick said these discussions have already happened in at least 2 or 3 Selectboard meetings in November. Nick looked into many of the towns that have postponed their meetings, and they run on a fiscal year, running July through June, whereas Thetford's budget runs on a calendar year.

Tom Yennerell said there were other factors to consider as well. There are big projects that will go out to bid very soon. We have to make sure we have the money to do those projects.

Sharon Harkay said after listening to the news and hearing about the slow rollout of the vaccine, it sounds more like fall before an in-person meeting could take place. The likelihood that we can have a meeting in April or May seems slim.

Nick added that part of the equation here is crafting a budget that the bond bank will be comfortable with.

Li said she agreed with Sharon's point about when we could have in-person meetings. According to tonight's news, unless a lot more vaccines are delivered, we won't get through the most vulnerable people for many months, let alone the rest of us. Li doesn't expect to be able to have in-person meetings for the foreseeable future.

Melissa Krzal agreed with Sharon that in-person meetings wouldn't take place until late summer or early fall, which would put it halfway through the budget year.

Robin Brown also expressed concerns about not having an in-person meeting, especially in this time when transparency is huge. It would be prudent to have people's voices heard. Robin asked about paving Latham Road.



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Nick said that a surplus from the Highway Fund was just moved into the Paving Fund and Latham Road should be on the project list for 2021.

Alexis Jetter asked Town Moderator, Mike Kiess what happened with all the ideas generated during a Selectboard meeting a few weeks ago. She went away from that discussion thinking there was going to be an in-person Town Meeting.

Mike Kiess said there was a discussion about the feasibility of holding a virtual Town Meeting where people could discuss articles and then have a vote. The question is how we can be engaged in articles and come to have a decision. Having a way to vote hasn't been solved. People would need to be marked on the voter check list, and then there would need to be a way to accurately count their vote. During the discussion, it seemed like there were a lot of creative ideas for information sharing; what's in the budget and why, what are the articles and why. During this pandemic time, an absentee ballot or in-person ballot is only way we have to register one vote per person.

Alexis wondered if the answer was to separate the voting and the discussion.

Mike said by having a number of informational sessions, that is essentially what will be happening. There will be several opportunities for discussion during Zoom informational meetings, but Mike also wanted to encourage written questions and answers. Citizens can go visit someone who doesn't have online access. Share information with your neighbor. Share as much as you can so everyone will be prepared to submit ballots by Tuesday March 2nd by mail or in Town Hall. Mike said he agreed with Robin that it is a very important time for people to feel heard and to have transparency; to understand why certain things are being recommended. People need to have confidence in the vote. We have a process that we trust because we know it's accurate. We've done it before – in August and in November.

Mike reviewed the proposed schedule; Town Reports would be available electronically on February 3rd and would be mailed the week of February 14th. The school reports follow a similar schedule. We will be utilizing our forums like Facebook and the listserv to encourage people to review the Town Reports and then share their views in writing. After the information sessions, Mike said he would encourage people to talk with their neighbors. The information session for the Town Warning and for a candidates' forum will be on February 22nd at 7:00 pm. The school will have an informational meeting on February 23rd at 6:00 pm. The final Town Warning informational hearing will be on February 27th, with the town portion from 9 – 11 am and the school portion from 1 – 3 pm.

Liz Ryan Cole said there would still be no opportunity to make any changes this year.

Michael said the information sessions will be very valuable to talk about why there are the suggested numbers for each purpose. The articles and budget will be a yes or no vote.

Nick agreed that the challenge is finding a way to check voters in and then make sure the vote count is correct. The bond vote can't be separated out. We need a budget for the bond bank to give us the money to fix the road. None of us asked for this pandemic and it's been an incredibly difficult balancing act. As for the position of Recreation Director, that has been completely removed and voters don't vote on personnel matters. A part-time Recreation Coordinator is the position in the budget. We can do this because so many recreation programs have been cancelled because of the pandemic. The vote is for the budget, how many tax dollars the town can raise. The Town Manager makes personnel decisions within that budgeted amount.



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Nick said there is a window of time in statute to set the Town Warning. It either has to be approved tonight or they will need to call another special meeting.

Motion by Nick Clark to approve the 2021 Thetford Town Meeting Warning as presented, and to allow the Town Clerk to make any non-substantial edits. **VOTE by roll call: Li Shen – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, Mary Bryant – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, Nick Clark – in favor**

3. Adjourn

Motion by Nick Clark to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 8:08 pm. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**