



# 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, February 1, 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: Bryan Gazda (Town Manager), Tom Yennerell (Outgoing Town Manager), Tracy Borst (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Chief Michael Evans, Martie Betts (Selectboard assistant)

Total Zoom attendees: 39

Nick Clark called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

### 1. Agenda Review

No changes.

### 2. Public Comment

No public comment.

### 3. Introduction of Town Manager Bryan Gazda

Nick Clark introduced Bryan Gazda, Thetford's new Town Manager. Bryan said during his first day in office he has been meeting employees and doing paperwork. He is looking forward to meeting everyone and getting to know the community.

### 4. Discussion of the Civic Pride Award

Nick suggested a quick discussion on the Civic Pride award, which is usually announced on Town Meeting day. Usually nominations are submitted during February, and a notice will go out encouraging people to send in candidates. The decision cannot be discussed in executive session, which makes discussion a little awkward but are there any questions or comments about process. The Selectboard will make the decision at the February 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

### 5. Draft Town Report

Nick said the order of budget pages is different than the budget summary page.

Tracy Borst noted that one of the charts is in the report twice.

Nick asked for the auditor's report.

**Motion** by Nick Clark to approve the Draft Town Report with non-substantial edits. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

## 6. Possible signage for Tucker Hill Road covered bridge (“Sayre Bridge, circa 1840”)

Katherine Babbott said she and Sally Whitlock, along with the Historic Society have been discussing the possibility of a sign for the covered bridge on Tucker Hill Road. She had noticed the sign on the Union Village bridge and thought it would be nice to have one that matched for the Tucker Hill Road bridge. Katherine asked the Selectboard if they would support the sign, and if so, what would their recommendation be for the wording, Thetford Center or Thetford Center Vermont. The wording on the Union Village bridge is “Union Village Bridge – rebuilt 2002”. The thought for wording on this would be “Sayre Bridge”, and either Thetford Center or Thetford Center VT.

This project would be funded through donations or grants. Katherine said they have asked the Historic Society if they would be willing to accept the donation checks.

Mary Bryant supports the idea and would be fine with just Thetford Center on it. Mary thanked Katherine for doing the work and for Sally helping to do the historical part of it.

Sharon Harkay also expressed her full support of the sign and thought it might look cleaner with just Thetford Center but said there are a lot of people who take photos of themselves in front of the bridge, so perhaps Vermont should be included.

Katherine said they have contacted Sparky Potter and Wood & Wood Designs in Wakefield. Each sign would be about \$750. There are two styles. The Union Village sign has stick-on letters and will last between 5 to 10 years whereas painted signs which will last between 10 to 20 years with a price difference of \$200. Katherine would rather fundraise for the additional money for painted letters.

Alexis Jetter gave a little bit of history about the bridge which she learned when she wrote two stories about the miraculous rescue at the bridge.

Li Shen said she has no feelings one way or the other about Vermont being on or off the sign, but it might be nice for the tourists.

Nick said he is fine either way and suggested that the Selectboard let Katherine and Sally make the decision. Nick said Town Manager should make the decisions about who will mount the sign. **Motion** by Nick Clark to authorize Katherine Babbott and Sally Whitlock to accept a sign design for the Tucker Hill Road covered bridge. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

## 7. Reading and possible adoption of the Ordinance Regulating Dangerous or Unsafe Buildings

Nick said there will be a 60-day window after the Selectboard adopts the ordinance before it goes into effect.

Mary Bryant said she has looked at similar ordinances from other towns and thought this one may be missing some opportunities. She noted definitions that included blighted premises, attracting illegal activity, fire hazard, garbage and trash that could be harmful to children, old cars and other hazardous conditions.

Nick said that blight is usually covered in a separate ordinance, and he has heard the Planning Commission discuss it several times.

Li, who is the Planning Commission liaison, said they had been talking about a blight ordinance but ran into objections to the strong stigma to the word blight. She will ask them about it. Li said that people have expressed concerns about an overuse of an ordinance like this.

Mary Bryant said one enforcement option she read about included a 72-hour notice of inspection to the property owner.

There was discussion about mailing a notice or having it served by law enforcement.

Bryan Gazda suggested both a certified letter and have it served, but he will look into it a little more. He will be meeting with the Health Officer and will bring up issues such as rodent infestation, which doesn't necessarily mean an unsafe building.

Chief Evans expressed concerns that the implication of the ordinance was that Town officials would enter a person's property to inspect it. That would require an administrative search warrant, as the 4<sup>th</sup> amendment protects people from inspections from the government. Chief Evans suggested wording to make it clear that the owners need to consent to an inspection, or a search warrant is needed.

Nick said there has been an ordinance for a while, but it is difficult to enforce because it calls for an appointed building inspector which we have never had. This language makes it the responsibility of the Town Manager.

Tom Yennerell added that if someone refuses once the building has been entered and determined that it is unsafe and needs to be demolished, they can be taken to Superior Court. Tom said structural engineers would write a report that could be submitted as evidence.

There was continuing discussion about adding language about obtaining permission from the property owner.

Bryan said that no additional language is really needed, as this is an administrative process.

Mary said she assumed if a landowner is asked to take something down that they would have to pay.

Nick said if a landowner refused, the town could do it and put a lien against their property.

Mary said that was concerning because people do not always have the financial means to do that.

Katherine Babbott wondered if the local fire department could use a building like that for training.

Chief Evans said there are environmental regulations which may preclude that.

Bryan said the first step is to reach out to the property owner for compliance, then you would look at legal remedies.

**Motion** by Nick Clark to adopt the Ordinance Regulating Dangerous or Unsafe Buildings as presented.

Alexis Jetter said she felt it was important to take a step back and look at the times we are in, that of all times to be imposing on people the destruction of the house that they live in. It's a time to think twice about that.

Sharon Harkay responded that this ordinance is to assess buildings that are dangerous to the larger community.

**VOTE by roll call:** Li Shen – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, Mary Bryant – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, Nick Clark – in favor

Nick said the Selectboard will need to stop by Town Hall to sign the ordinance.

To view the adopted ordinance, click [here](#).

## 8. Approval of Driveway Permit

**Motion** by Nick Clark to approve the driveway permit application number DP21-35. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)** Steve Tofel left the meeting at 8:15 pm.

## 9. Warrants and Minutes

**Motion** by Nick Clark to approve the warrants as presented. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

**Motion** by Nick Clark to approve the special Selectboard meeting minutes of January 14, 2021, as presented. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

**Motion** by Nick Clark to approve the special Selectboard meeting minutes of January 15, 2021, as presented. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

**Motion** by Nick Clark to approve the special Selectboard meeting minutes of January 20, 2021, as presented. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

**Motion** by Li Shen to approve the Selectboard meeting minutes of January 25, 2021, as amended. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

#### **10. Real estate negotiations relating to the Town Forest, anticipated Executive Session, 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2)**

Nick Clark **moved** to find that premature, general public discussion of a real estate negotiation would clearly place the municipality, other public body or person involved to suffer a substantial disadvantage. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

**Motion** by Nick Clark at 8:25 pm to discuss these matters in an Executive Session per *Discussion of Matters as per IV.S.A., subsection 313(a)(2)* and invite Bryan Gazda and Tom Yennerell. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

Nick Clark made a **motion** to exit executive session at 8:49 pm. **VOTE unanimous**

Nick Clark made a **motion** to authorize the Selectboard Chair to sign the application for annexation of a parcel of land, ZP21-02-TSD 687. **VOTE unanimous**

#### **11. Adjourn**

Nick Clark made a **motion** to adjourn at 8.54 pm. **VOTE unanimous**