



Town of Thetford Vermont

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Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes – Online Only –

Monday, February 8, 2021 7:00 pm

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), Li Shen, Steve Tofel, Sharon Harkay

Others present: Bryan Gazda (Town Manager), Tom Yennerell (outgoing interim Town Manager), Tracy Borst (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Mike Kiess (Town Moderator)

Total Zoom attendees: 32

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

1. Agenda Review

No changes to the agenda.

2. Public Comment

Alyssa Southworth asked when to speak about land on Route 244. Nick Clark said discussion would be during the agenda item.

3. Town Manager Report – Bryan Gazda

Bryan said the final 2 requests for information from FEMA were received and are under review. The bond was approved for the work on Route 132. Bryan thanked Tracy Borst and Tom Yennerell for their hard work in securing the financing.

Bryan said he has enjoyed his first 2 weeks in Thetford and has met a lot of people.

4. Town Meeting Information w/Michael Kiess, Town Moderator 8:02 pm

Mike Kiess, Town Moderator, told the Selectboard he had made a post on the Thetford Listserv, the Front Porch Forum and both Thetford Facebook pages, requesting that people support each other and to feel free to submit questions. Mike said that one person has sent a question in, but he hasn't had any questions or opinions expressed about the timing and the dates. He will repost the information. Mike also thought it would be helpful to have a summary of the questions and answers on the Town Meeting webpage. This would be a moderator's summary and not official minutes or any reflection of the Selectboard.

Mike said he was scheduled to meet with Tracy Borst and Martie Betts at Town Hall on Wednesday afternoon to try out the audio/visual equipment and consider ways it might be used as part of the informational meetings. Mike said he thought it might be good to have a type of script that would aid in helping people to work through muting and unmuting, determine ways to submit questions, and figure out a way to manage people who are waiting to speak.

The Selectboard discussed getting together to try the equipment. Li expressed concerns about the length of time they would be together in the room. Nick wondered if there would be a disadvantage to candidates that would not be there, as 2 are currently on the Selectboard and would be together.

There was discussion about wearing masks and the ability to hear someone speaking if they were wearing a mask. Mike suggested a podium where the candidates or other speaker could step up and remove their mask. Mike said he would have a better idea of their options after Wednesday. Mike thanked the community for their patience and encouraged them to reach out to other people so all could be heard.

The Selectboard thanked Mike for his work and efforts to reach out to as many residents as possible.

Tracy Borst wanted to remind everyone that the Town Meeting articles have been moved to Australian ballot and voting day will be on March 2nd. All 2200 ballots will be in the mail to all registered voters in town by Thursday. The ballots are not in the building yet, but envelopes are ready to go. It will be a two-sided ballot with all the officers on one side, and all the articles on the back. There is a handy page on the website that Tracy put together with Martie, which includes the warning, a link to Town Report, the Zoom links for the informational meetings and other information. Printed copies of the Town Report will be going out in another 10 days. A sample ballot will be put on the webpage as well. The ballots are absentee and can be returned in the mail or put it in the drop box at the front of Town Hall, which is checked frequently all day long. Tracy suggested putting ballots in the mail at least a week before March 2nd.

As for March 2nd, there will be Covid-19 screening outside and if you are able to enter the building you need to bring the absentee ballot with you, or you will be filling out a short affidavit. A postcard was mailed to everyone with information. Tracy encouraged people to reach out to the Town Clerk's office with any questions or concerns.

Nick thanked Tracy, the Board of Civil Authority and anyone else who has been helping with the mailing.

5. Discussion of Route 244 Land Sale in Post Mills (Parcel #0V0422.26.2)

Nick Clark said that no bids had been submitted by February 5th, but an alternative proposal was received after that date, which the board has not had a chance to review as of this meeting. Nick said the sealed bid process was advertised in the Journal Opinion and the Valley News with no bids resulting. An option now would be to list the property for sale on real estate websites as "for sale by owner".

Sharon Harkay asked if the ad should take into account what a potential buyer is going to do with the land.

Bryan Gazda said the purchasing policy does offer that option.

Mary Lou Jordan expressed concerns about the entire process of the town purchase of the land, the financial history of the land and the increased asking price.

Alyssa Southworth added that there is a big interest about the community potentially purchasing the land.

Nick Clark said that first and foremost the town needs to repay the trust, which is why he is in favor on putting it on the market while considering any local proposals.

Mary Bryant said she would like to support the community by giving them a window of time to come together with different proposals.

Li Shen noted that the town did borrow money from the trust, and they want to be paid back. The trust needs to be considered in terms of how long they want to wait. There is interest from an abutter that we should at least look at.

Joe Tofel, who is on the board of the trust, said that while he can't speak for the whole board, he thought inside of two months would be a good timeframe for the town to pay back the trust. Steve Tofel pointed out that the trust basically made a no interest loan to the town, and that is an asset of the trust that is costing them money.

Nick Clark said they would be open to receiving proposals from any resident, but the Selectboard has an obligation to repay the trust. Nick suggested that the property be listed online while considering proposals from residents as they come along.

Alyssa Southworth asked if the Selectboard would be willing to have the discussion about potentially listing it with a description guiding how the land would be used.

Mary Lou Jordan asked who backs up the Selectboard on financial questions.

Mary Bryant said they could put an ad out again and give a time frame of one month for the community to come together.

Sharon Harkay said she couldn't remember when it was first advertised, but people have already been given at least three weeks to come up with ideas and some financing. Sharon also didn't see the harm in talking with the abutter about their proposal.

Keith Merrick said he would hope that the group in Post Mills could get a date to submit their proposal.

Nick Clark said there will not be a meeting on February 15th because it is a holiday, so the next meeting will be on the 22nd. This gives the citizens 2 weeks to get together a proposal.

Alyssa Southworth said the abutter is part of both groups, but they certainly would be willing to put a proposal together.

Bryan Gazda said it might take a little time to figure out the proposal from the abutter that has already been received.

Cathee Clement said she is very concerned that the Selectboard is starting to do an analysis based on something very different than what they started. The Selectboard would find themselves in the position of vetting proposals for property that is up for sale.

Steve Tofel said the moment you put an add out as a proposal you are going to limit your ability to get the top price. If there is a proposal, you won't find out what the top bid is.

Sherry Merrick wondered if the Selectboard would hold off for two weeks in order to get input.

Nick Clark said it is very easy for the months to slip by between Selectboard meetings and timing is somewhat of the essence.

Li Shen said that a covenant on that land already restricts what you can do on that property.

There was more discussion about whether the ad should contain a request for proposal on land use.

Bryan Gazda said he would post the ad on several online realtor sites and there would be mention of the covenant.

A special Selectboard meeting will be scheduled for Friday, February 26th at 7:00 for further discussion.

6. Bond Resolution and Certificate (Route 132) 8:23

Motion by Nick Clark to approve the Bond Resolution and Certificate for Route 132. **VOTE by roll call:** Li Shen – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, Mary Bryant – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, Nick Clark – in favor

7. Seasonal Road Postings

Motion by Nick Clark to post the roads from March 14th, 2021 to May 15th, 2021, as presented. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

8. Annual Liquor License Approval

Motion by Nick Clark to suspend the Selectboard meeting and convene a meeting of the Liquor Commission. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

Motion by Nick Clark to approve the 2021 liquor license renewal applications for Huggett's Mobile Service INC, and Ranger's General Store INC DBA Thetford Village General Store and Baker's Store. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

Motion by Nick Clark to adjourn the meeting of the Liquor Commission and reconvene the regular Selectboard meeting. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

9. Warrants and Minutes

Motion by Nick Clark to approve the warrants as presented. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the Selectboard meeting minutes of February 1st, 2021, as edited. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

Motion by Li Shen to accept the Selectboard special meeting minutes of February 2nd, 2021, as amended. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**

10. Adjourn

Motion by Nick Clark to adjourn at 8:37 pm. **VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)**