



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, April 19, 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: Sharon Harkay (Chair), Mary Bryant, Li Shen (Vice-chair), Steve Tofel

Selectboard members absent: Nick Clark

Others present: Bryan Gazda (Town Manager), Tracy Borst (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Martie Betts (Selectboard assistant)

Total Zoom attendees: 28

Sharon Harkay called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

1. Agenda Review

Li Shen noted that there were 3 residents who submitted comments for the retreat about the same topic that are not included in the review. Sharon said they could be discussed during public comment.

Sharon Harkay said there was going to be a possible executive session, but it was not properly warned on the agenda, and the Town Attorney was not ready to brief the Selectboard on the contract negotiations for the Department of Public Works. That agenda item will not be addressed at this meeting.

Mary Bryant said she had a letter she would like to read. Sharon said it could be read during public comment.

2. Town Manager Report – Bryan Gazda

Green Mountain Power Project on Academy Road: Bryan said he met with representatives from Green Mountain Power, and the contractor about the underground lines project on Academy Road. The above-ground poles are being discontinued and the lines will be buried. Bryan said his biggest concern is making sure drainage is put back to the same or even better level than what we have today. It is within their scope of work to replace culverts or pipes.

VTrans Grants: Bryan said applications were submitted for 2 VTrans grants, one for \$220,000 to be used for the paving of Latham Road and the other in the amount of \$166,000 to be used for the Stowell Road bridge work.

May 1 Green Up Day: Bryan said this was a big discussion during the staff meeting and we are ready to go.

Treasure Island: Bryan had 2 meetings last week on site, including one with Doug Tifft, a member of the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee. They are in the process of getting a clean-up day scheduled. Possible dates are May 8th, 15th and 22nd. Bryan will be going up again this week to see what the Department of Public Works can provide. Sharon asked if they are



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going to be looking for volunteers to help with clean up. Bryan said he believes the committee already has volunteers lined up.

Steve Tofel asked if there were any updates from FEMA. Bryan said he had a last-minute request from the State for a cover letter with specific verbiage. The State did indicate that the Town has submitted a very strong packet.

3. Public Comment

Melissa Krzal said she sent an email asking for FEMA requests, and was told she would receive their answers. Who does she need to ask to find out what FEMA is requesting? Tracy Borst said she did send a reply email to Melissa that said the response from FEMA also includes what they are requesting.

Li Shen said she wanted to include all resident's feedback for the Selectboard retreat and there were 3 comments about the police department suggesting a desire to move funding to social services that were not on the summary of responses. The example of the Hartford Police Department's Special Needs Support Center was mentioned, and mental health services, housing needs, food insecurity and safety measures were suggestions for additional funds.

Mary Bryant read a resignation letter from a former Town employee.

Sharon Harkay wanted to recognize Sara Ecker, while still serving on the Recreation Advisory Council (RAC), as of their last meeting she has stepped down as chairperson. Sharon wanted to call attention to the fact that Sara joined RAC in 2013 and became their chair in 2015. She has served as chair since then, and when the Recreation Director stepped down Sara found herself with a lot more responsibilities. Sara worked with the Norwich Recreation Department to be able to offer activities through the winter for Thetford residents. She handled emails and updates to the website. Sharon thanked Sara for going the extra mile for our town. Mary suggested that the Selectboard send a thank you letter. All agreed and Sharon will compose it.

4. Scheduling of Subdivision Regulations Hearing

Li Shen said by statute, there is a specific process for adopting land use regulations. The Planning Commission warns and holds informational meetings and a hearing, then reports to the Selectboard. The Selectboard must then warn and hold a public hearing and complete the adoption. The minimum time between the warning of, and holding the hearing is 15 days. The notice must be posted in public places and in the newspaper.

Motion by Li Shen to schedule the Selectboard Subdivision Regulations Hearing for Monday, May 17th, 2021. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

5. Possible Acceptance and Adoption of the 2021 Local Emergency Management Plan

The emergency management plan was reviewed.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to adopt the 2021 Local Emergency Management Plan. Mary Bryant noted that a great deal of thanks goes to Mariah and Chad Whitcomb, and everyone else who worked to put this together. Mary said the town is very fortunate to have them doing this work. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**



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6. Committee and Commission Appointments

Motion by Sharon Harkay to re-appoint Marshal Van Norden as Town Historian, for a 3-year term ending in 2024, Katherine Saunders to the Historic Preservation Committee, for a 3-year term ending in 2024, and Jamie Thaxton to the Planning Commission, for a 3-year term ending in 2024. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

7. Selectboard Priorities and 90-Day Plan for Town Manager

Sharon said this discussion goes back to the Selectboard priorities and the designation of the plan for the Town Manager for the year. Based on the discussion last week, Sharon has revised the bullet list.

Sharon said several things have been added, including the purchase of a new front-end loader for the Department of Public Works. The Emergency Alert training was also added under emergencies. Sharon said other minor changes were made, such as a list of things that could be started this year, but not completed, using the example of looking for land for an expansion of the Department of Public Works and the Transfer Station/Recycling Center.

Mary Bryant said she would like to add under Economic Development, a discussion about putting in water sources, community, or municipal water for at least East Thetford. Thinking proactively about the future in terms of housing, we really need to take a hard look at the possibility of community septic or water. Li Shen responded that in principle those things are all necessary if we want to foster development in those areas, but they are million-dollar projects, and we have five villages. During a previous meeting, the Selectboard was warned by Mike Kiess to be careful, because even though we may be able to get a grant to create the systems, someone then must take care of these systems unless it is all privatized and paid for through fees. Do the residents want to be charged for a public sewer and water system? This is also not a project for a volunteer board. This requires engineering studies and knowledge about hydrology, septic systems, and soil systems.

Sharon Harkay said she was also going to bring up the fact that Mike gave us a compelling argument for us not getting involved in that. Sharon reminded the Selectboard that East Thetford seems to have at least temporarily solved their problem, but they need more people to hook into the system to make it more affordable. Rather than the town trying to develop something that would take millions of dollars, if people wanted to build more houses or business, they could tie into the existing water systems which would then bring the cost down for everybody.

Steve Tofel said he thinks they are a little ahead of the curve on this one, as he believes a significant amount of grant and federal money may be available for infrastructure projects. To try and decide this right now may be bad timing. Instead, they could keep an eye on things and watch where the federal money ends up. Part of the water problem in East Thetford is the level of manganese, which is borderline according to the State level. Steve suggested keeping an eye on where the federal money will be going and be ready to act.

Mary said her thinking is more for East Thetford, because if we are going to have just one village center for the town, that would be it. Mary thinks we should do the evaluation, and while she really respects Mike's opinion, she feels we should at least look at how spread apart these houses are and how we are going to increase the capacity for adding more houses. It would be looking at



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the possibilities and it would be the Town Manager doing this. Mary doesn't want to find the town 10-years down the road without ever having considered options.

Bryan Gazda said he will be meeting with Dave Fisk on Thursday to talk about the Post Mills water system and tour their pump station. When you think about development, there are usually regulations that need to be followed. Bryan said he would like to understand the current water systems. How do we work with them and what does it take to tie into their systems? What is their ability for expansion? Bryan said he wants to learn all these things and then start putting that bigger picture together.

Sharon wanted to clarify that Bryan is suggesting he get up to speed on the water systems that exist, and then start to look at how we might expand or make those more efficient. Bryan said not so much the town doing that, but we could be that conduit for information. If a new business or home comes into the area we could let them know what needs to happen to tie into those systems.

Li said she has just written several articles about the landfill and the Post Mills water system that she can send to Bryan. The Post Mills Water Association well was put in following a settlement with the landfill, because the wells in the surrounding neighborhood were contaminated by landfill chemicals. Their water system, although it is pure, has a slow recharge rate, and it's not capable of supporting more than 9 households, which they already have on it.

Sharon said to reiterate, under Economic Development, we could add for the Town Manager to get up to speed on the existing water systems in town, so he could help developers know how to tie into systems. Bryan said they just need to make sure that as development comes in and the review process is done, that commissions responsible for review are aware of it too. Maintenance costs would be under the users of a water district anyway, so we need to know what is going on and how to use it.

Sharon said she liked that the people who are using the water systems would pay, not that we are developing a whole municipal system that we would all wind up paying for.

Sharon said she wants to make sure everyone is clear on is who is responsible for the various things on the list. For instance, the Selectboard is responsible for the items under Regulations and Bylaw Reviews and Updates. Bryan had said that he'd like to have us note which are Selectboard items and which are Town Manager items.

Li asked if the Selectboard is responsible for enacting ordinances, are they also responsible for actually putting them into action, for example, follow through with one of the identified dangerous buildings.

Steve said he thought the Selectboard is more legislative, and that enforcement is with the Town Manager.

Bryan agreed with Steve, saying enacting means the Selectboard adopts that legislation.

Li said the Peabody library, listed under Historic Resources, was supportive of applying for a Vermont Roadside Historic Site marker. Li said she wouldn't mind researching the application process, although the library federation would complete the application. As for the Village Designation program, once they have been approved, the residences involved will be eligible for tax relief on certain improvements and should get a mailing with that information. Bryan said he thought a letter would be fine if they remain cognizant of the details of the program.

Sharon said she would put together ideas for a specific ceremony for the sign installation on Sayre Bridge on Tucker Hill Road.



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Mary Bryant said under Animal Control, the second bullet point, it says publish the Explanation on the website with contact information. Does that mean the Hybrid Ordinance that was adopted last year? Sharon said she meant an explanation of who does what. Mary said this year has been a year of more and more people letting their dogs out, a year of many incidences of dogs running away or barking. Mary was wondering if information could be given to people when they come for their dog licenses, maybe they read the dog ordinance, and sign. It should be something that helps to explain the responsibilities of what it means to own a dog. Even people who don't own dogs would know what a dog owner's responsibilities are. Bryan noted that there is not only no veterinarian for the town, but there is also no vehicle to transport a caged animal. There was discussion about developing materials to give people about the Dog Ordinance. Sharon will work on something.

Mary Bryant wondered about following up on designating Route 132 as a State Highway again. Li said Jim Masland and Tim Briglin would need to take that on. They have before and have been rebuffed. Plus, there are many towns along that road, and they would all have to do it. Li said there are 2 policies that need to be written, a telecommuting policy and the tax stabilization policy. As for who would need to write the policies, Bryan said policies need to be adopted by the Selectboard, but a policy can be written by the Selectboard, a combination of the Selectboard and Town Manager, and staff.

Mary wondered about putting town-wide internet under Communications. Sharon said a resident had contacted her with an idea of putting in more Wi-Fi hotspots, and suggested projectConnect. Sharon forwarded the information to Bryan. ([Wi-Fi Hot Spot Project | Department of Public Service \(vermont.gov\)](#))

Bryan explained that the hot spot outside Town Hall is connected to the Town ECFiber account. Various other places aren't going to be able to use our one account. Then, each hot spot would be \$40-\$60 a month per unit. If cable with internet capability is already in a place, why should the town be paying for internet in that area? Li said that ECFiber did a complete build out in Thetford, the trunk lines are laid and it's just a question of people hooking up to it.

Steve Tofel said hot spots were already at Latham and Peabody libraries, plus Town Hall. A town like Hanover can provide internet, but Thetford is a little more spread out, plus it has varied topography. Sharon wondered about communicating the information about projectConnect to the community for those who might use it. Li reminded the Selectboard that there isn't a budgeted line item for town-wide internet, so we can't spend money for it.

Mary said many meetings ago when discussing dangerous buildings, she wanted to add in blight, but she is really interested in protecting people from neighbors with a lot of trash and rat problems. For health and safety, could the Selectboard act on that. Sharon suggested that people contact the Town Health Officer. The Planning Commission tried to tackle that kind of ordinance and found it was very difficult to write. Li said the Planning Commission really must get the zoning ordinance done, so the Health Officer should be first in line to help. Bryan said he did speak with Mariah about this, and it's not something that a Health Officer would be responsible for. What is needed is a Code Enforcement Officer, someone who would be equipped to enforce these types of ordinances. The Health Officer doesn't have any authority over these matters and would probably have to call someone from the State. Mary said they could work on a Property Maintenance Code, under Regulations and Bylaws.



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Steve suggested an agenda item to address concerns about speeding in conjunction with the sharrows grant, to determine if the concern is about speeding or sharing the road. Li recalled that Steve had previously mentioned a change in the speed limit on Academy Road. Chief Evans has done a review of all the speeds and recommended the increase in the speed. Bryan did see the study Chief Evans completed with the former town engineer and thought 35 mph was reasonable.

Li asked if this was going to be put into a more formal list or this discussion with notes would be enough.

Bryan said he and Sharon could meet to create a more formal list.

Motion by Li Shen for the Town Manager and Selectboard Chair to finalize the list of expectations for the Town Manager for his first year. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

8. ~~Warrants and Minutes~~

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the regular Selectboard meeting minutes of April 5, 2021, as amended. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

Motion by Sharon Harkay to adopt the special Selectboard retreat minutes of April 12, 2021, as amended. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

9. Other Business

~~10. Possible Executive Session pursuant to Title 1 V.S.A. section 313(a)(1)~~

11. Adjourn

Motion by Steve Tofel to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 8:26 pm. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**