



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 5, 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, Steve Tofel

Selectboard Members absent: Nick Clark

Others present: Bryan Gazda (Town Manager), Tracy Borst (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Amy Fahey (Recreation Coordinator), Susanne Simon (Recycling Coordinator)

Total Zoom Attendees: 49

Sharon Harkay called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

1. Agenda Review

Sharon Harkay said she would like to add in a renewal request for the liquor license for Wings Market under Other Business. There were no objections.

2. Public Comment

Tom Ward commented on the grant for the sharrows on Tucker Hill Road and Academy Road. As a resident of Tucker Hill Road and a member of the Energy Committee, although he's speaking for himself, he's all in favor of alternative transportation, but does not think the sharrows are a good use of the funds. Tom said Tucker Hill Road is in pretty poor repair and he doesn't think that sharrows will last very long. Tom said he is not sure what the goal is, but if it is safety, it would be more important to repair the roads. If someone is on a bicycle on Tucker Hill Road, there are many spots where you have to move to the center of the road, so you don't crash. There is a lot of uneven pavement. Tom said he is not sure what problems the sharrows would solve, and they are not in keeping with the rural character of the road.

Katherine Babbott added that if we want the roads to be safer, we need to make them safer, and the way to do that is to repair the roads so the bikers can stay safely within 10" to 12" of the edge of the road. When road damage goes into the lane 36" or sometimes more, cars really have to swing wide to go around. Katherine said she is not in favor of sharrows.

JoAnn Berns said she is concerned about what she has been seeing on the listserv about the Open Meeting Law and the kinds of communications that have been going around.

Robin Brown congratulated Sharon Harkay on her role as Selectboard Chair, saying she is really excited for her and her leadership. Robin said she wanted to express how warm and excited she felt to see a different kind of post from the whole board, asking about what our priorities are for the future, what they are working with and working on. Not that what I want, or what other people want will necessarily be what the collective board chooses to focus on, but that the question was even asked was so wonderful. Robin said she feels strong and confident in Sharon's leadership.



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3. Town Manager Report – Bryan Gazda

Bryan introduced the new Recreation Coordinator Amy Fahey. Bryan worked with the Recreation Advisory Council (RAC) and interviewed several applicants. The choice for Amy was unanimous. Amy is a resident, and her children are involved in the recreation programs. Her experience lies with the formation of the Rivendell Recreation Association, and for 6 years she served as the board president. Bryan said during the past few weeks Amy has begun working on baseball. Bryan thanked Sara Ecker (RAC chair) for stepping up and starting the process with the baseball program this year. The concentration has been on the softball and baseball programs, but Amy will be starting to work on Treasure Island soon.

Amy Fahey said they were focusing on baseball right now and have about 60 participants of all levels from T-Ball up through sixth grade, with a few in 7th grade who are age-eligible. Amy said she is looking at some possible programs for the summer and getting going on Treasure Island. Sharon Harkay said she wanted to officially welcome Amy and they are glad to have her on board.

Bryan said they will be updating the Rec website in the next day or two.

Bryan said Susanne Simon, the Transfer Station coordinator has been working on several projects and was at the meeting to talk about them.

Susanne Simon said the event on Saturday is in collaboration with COVER (COVER Home Repair, Inc. – Repairing Homes & Building Community), and is called Stuff-a-Truck. Donations should be power tools, yard tools and hand tools. Susanne said the other event is Green Up Day on May 1st. Susanne has been working with the Conservation Committee, posters have gone up and advertising has started. Susanne said in terms of having clothing bins at the recycling center, she had started looking for companies to recycle clothing since Planet Aid left the area several years ago. Susanne said she will be working with a company called HELPSY (<https://www.helpsy.co>) which is located out of New York, but they have bins in Vermont and New Hampshire. They are willing to come up and put in bins for us. Mary Davenport has indicated that she would be interested in putting bins at her stores in Fairlee and East Thetford. This will allow people to give away items no longer needed. They can be torn, worn, stained, etc. as long as they are clean, dry and odorless. Donations can also include footwear, sheets, towels and curtains.

Sharon asked if Susanne knew what COVER would be doing with the tools. Would they be using them on projects or selling them in their store?

Susanne said they will be for the store and the sales will be used for projects in the Upper Valley. Route 132: Bryan said he had a meeting with design engineers last week and the designs have been completed. The project will now be going out to bid with a 30-day window which means they will be due on May 6th. This will be posted locally as well as regionally in hopes of getting a big response to the project. Bryan said he would like to hold an informational meeting for the residents and it's good to have a contractor in place and at that meeting.

Road Update: With the recent rains some of the roads were in rough condition. The Department of Public Works crews worked over the weekend straight through Monday. There were 70 plus loads of dense fill, approximately 1400 tons of material to fix the roads. There are certain areas that are still bad. We will be looking for ways to repair these areas over the summer.



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American Rescue Act (H.R.1319): Bryan said he will be attending a webinar on Thursday where he hopes Senator Sanders will be giving more information on the details.

AT&T Filings: the filings are on the town website as we are trying to make the information accessible. If you are interested in following this more closely, there is a link in the information that will allow you to sign up for notifications.

Land sale for 27-acres: Attorneys from both sides are still working on the documents which has caused a little delay in the closing. We have been advised that the closing will happen in the next couple of weeks. An extension has been made until May 1st.

VTrans Grant: the town did get funding in the amount of \$5250.00 but it is a 50/50 split, which means the town is responsible for the same amount. If we don't spend that amount of money it will still be a 50/50 split. Bryan still has to do a study for them and then they will send an agreement which is expected in the next 2-3 weeks. This will give us an opportunity to hear from the residents and think about what we really want to do with the grant.

Diversity Training: A consultant has been signed to conduct a diversity training for employees sometime early to mid-May. Bryan will be holding a staff meeting with department heads on April 14th to look at dates.

Doug Stone said he would like to have public comment available after the Town Manager report instead of before, as there may be a lot more questions after. Doug said he had a question for Li about signs made for the green across the road. Doug had them made and then turned them over to Guy Scaife. This would be a good time of year to put them in.

Li Shen said she did remember the discussion about the signs and recalled there being a map for parking. Li said she never saw the signs.

Bryan said there were signs in the corner of his office, and he wondered what they were for. He invited Doug to come in and explain what they were made for.

Li said if Doug was busy, she would be willing to speak with Bryan.

Laura Gagnon asked if any of the Selectboard members that were elected last year had the opportunity to attend the annual Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) training workshop.

Sharon said VLCT was not prepared to offer them with COVID-19 until several months in and then they eventually did do webinars. VLCT is currently offering a series of three webinar trainings which are accessible to view at any time. The materials were sent to people who attended. The series has to do with transparency in town government.

4. New Business

a. Curing of Alleged Open Meeting Law Violations

Sharon Harkay gave a summary of each of the alleged Open Meeting Law violations. The emails in question will be in the next Selectboard packet. A special meeting to discuss the Open Meeting Law is also scheduled for Wednesday, April 7th, at 7:00 pm, with the Town Attorney. That meeting is open to anyone who would like to attend.

Sharon said she would like to make it clear that the Selectboard members are not intentionally trying to break the law or hide anything, but they have made communication errors.

Sharon said she wanted to apologize for any instance in which she may have broken the law, but she is not intentionally trying to keep the public from anything.



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Sharon said that according to Town Attorney, these are alleged because it is not a true violation until the court deems it to be so. Anyone who would like to allege a violation should email the Town Manger (townmanager@thetfordvt.gov) or the Selectboard chair (sharkay@thetfordvt.gov).

Robin Brown said her understanding of the Open Meeting Law from her time on the school board allowed emails and individual conversations as long as it didn't involve a quorum. Sharon Harkay confirmed. Robin said it didn't sound like a violation to her, more like one person talking to another. Sharon said she was right, that it was usually just 2 Selectboard members communicating at a time. Once in a while, somebody would accidentally press reply all instead of replying to one person. On Wednesday they will be looking into all of those details, and the information will come from one expert source, the Town's attorney.

Tracy Bach said she is happy the Selectboard is having this session on Wednesday and she will attend. Tracy said that maybe we should really try not to use email, as the chain effect does pull in a quorum issue. She hopes people will attend on Wednesday so they will get a sense of where the transparency bar is set. This will help not only make people good citizens, but also be supportive of the Selectboard.

b. Update of Sayre Bridge Sign on Tucker Hill Road

Sharon Harkay explained that Katherine Babbott is behind this initiative after looking at the covered bridge signs in Union Village. Katherine worked with Sally Dustin and the Historical Society. Katherine was very successful with her appeals and raised \$2490.00 which will cover the cost of the two signs. The design is in the packet and the signs will be made by Wood and Wood out of Waitsfield VT. The contract has been signed, the design delivered and a deposit of \$900 sent. Sharon said they are hoping the signs will be delivered in 4 to 6 weeks, and she would love to have a dedication ceremony, perhaps with a photographer and reporters.

Katherine Babbott appreciated the collaboration between the Selectboard, the Town Manager, the Historical Society, and her husband, Tom Ward. Katherine thanked all the donors and hopes people will enjoy the signs.

c. Update on Treasure Island

i. Fundraising for Treasure Island Coordinator

Sharon Harkay said the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee (TIE) took it upon themselves to do some fundraising for a Treasure Island beach coordinator, once they learned there was not money set aside in the town budget. They received a generous offer of a \$9000.00 one-time donation from the Lake Fairlee Association and some private donors to fund a Treasure Island coordinator for the 2021 Season. This will come to Thetford via the Ompompanoosuc Community Trust. The Treasure Island coordinator will work under the guidance of Amy Fahey and Bryan Gazda.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept this one-time donation of \$9000 for a 2021 Treasure Island coordinator. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

ii. Application for AARP Vermont Grant

Sharon said the TIE committee has also put together a grant for the AARP Community Challenge Grant Program for 2 – 100-foot-long beach mats for better access down to the beach from the parking lot or entrance. David Roth, chair of TIE, said the goal is basically to be as



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close to the parking lot or point of ingress as possible, to make it more accessible for wheelchairs. The deadline for grant submission is April 14th, and Bryan will be submitting the grant, so it is coming from the town, even though the committee wrote the grant.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to approve this submission of the grant application by the Town Manager for the 2021 AARP Community Challenge Grant Program. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**
Sharon thanked the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee members.

5. Other Business

a. Donation for Thetford Planning Commission Recording Clerk

Sharon explained that in the process of making up the town budget for this year most stipends were cut. Those cuts included the money to pay the recording clerk for the Thetford Planning Commission. The Committee felt the recording clerk works a lot and is instrumental in getting their work done, so they raised funds in the amount of \$1700 for a conditional donation to pay the recording clerk's position for the 2021 calendar year.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept this conditional one-time donation of \$1700 to be used to fund the Thetford Planning Commission's recording clerk position for the 2021 calendar year. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

b. Watershed Grant for Taylor Floodplain Preserve

Sharon said the Watershed Grant Citizen Review Committee has recommended that the Thetford Conservation Committee's proposal for the Taylor Floodplain Riparian Restoration receive partial funding of \$5000.00. This money will go towards the elimination of invasive plants, the planting of native woody plants to replace the invasives, and the stabilization of the eroding riverbank with the goal of improving the quality of the habitat. This is an important habitat because state or federally listed species are present.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to give the Town Manager the authority to issue a W-9 form and Certificate of Insurance to allow for the acceptance and processing of the \$5000.00 Watershed Grant received by the Conservation Commission for habitat restoration at the Taylor Floodplain Preserve. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

c. Gathering and Categorizing Advance Ideas for Goals and Priorities

Sharon said the Selectboard has been asking the public to give ideas for goals and priorities that we should be working on in this coming year in advance of the Selectboard retreat. Sharon said she would like to propose a similar thing but with Selectboard member ideas.

Mary Bryant said it sounds like a good idea. She would also encourage people to look at our amazing town plan that volunteers and committees have put together as a reference for ideas. (<https://www.thetfordvt.gov/community/town-documents>)

Sharon said Selectboard members can email ideas to her and she will prepare them for their retreat.



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d. Purchase and Sale Document for Route 244 Property

Sharon said three changes have been made to the purchase and sale document. Brian Ricker is now the purchaser, the seller is now the Town of Thetford, and the closing date has been moved to May 6th.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the revised purchase and sale contract as put forth by Brian W. Ricker for the purchase of the parcel on Route 244 in Post Mills, pending approval of town attorney, and to give Li Shen or Sharon Harkay the authority to sign the document. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

e. Conservation Commission Appointment

Motion by Sharon Harkay to appoint Krista Karlson to the Thetford Conservation Commission. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

Motion by Sharon Harkay to adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 8:03 pm to convene a meeting of the Board of Liquor Control. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

Motion by Sharon Harkay to approve the liquor license for Wings Market beginning on May 1st, 2021 and ending April 30th, 2022. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

Motion by Sharon Harkay to adjourn the meeting of the Board of Liquor Control at 8:05 pm and to reconvene the regular Selectboard meeting. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

6. Warrants and Minutes

Motion by Mary Bryant to accept the warrants as presented. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

Motion by Li Shen to accept the regular Selectboard meeting minutes of March 15th, 2021, as edited. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**

7. Adjourn

Motion by Steve Tofel at 8:12 pm to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting. **VOTE unanimous (4-0-0)**