



Town of Thetford Vermont

3910 Vermont Route 113 • P.O. Box 126 • Thetford Center, VT 05075
802-785-2922 • thetfordvermont.us

Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes Thetford Town Offices (w/Virtual Attendance Option) Monday, January 10, 2022 7:00pm

Selectboard members present: Sharon Harkay (Chair), Li Shen (Vice-Chair), Mary Bryant, Nick Clark (via Zoom), Steve Tofel

Others present: Town Manager Bryan Gazda (via Zoom), Town Clerk/Treasurer Tracy Borst, DPW Forman Dale Lewis (via Zoom), Selectboard Assistant Martie Betts

Contributing Community members: Phebe McCosker, Stuart Rogers, Lucas Stepno

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

1) Agenda Review

Sharon Harkay said she wants to make sure the Town Report is as accurate as possible, and the Thetford Elder Network has neither the term limit listed, nor their individual term dates.

Mary Bryant noted that the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee all have this year listed as their term expiration dates.

Both committees will be added to agenda item #10.

2) Town Manager Report – Bryan Gazda

a) UVM Local Government Intern Program

Bryan Gazda said he was contacted 3 months ago about the University of Vermont Intern Program for local government, and he had responded that he would be interested. He was notified last week that they were getting ready to assign interns to municipalities, and he received a presentation about what the interns will be able to do. Bryan wanted the Selectboard to know that it was possible there will be an intern in Thetford for the spring semester. He thought a good project for the intern would be the water study project.

b) AT&T Cell Tower Update

Bryan spoke with a representative from TowerCo a few weeks ago and they are ready to get going with construction on the cell tower. They are ordering materials now in anticipation of starting once roads allow it. Bryan will speak with Dale Lewis about it, but TowerCo would like to start in early May.

Li Shen asked if they were planning on constructing the tower in early May, or the access road. Bryan said it would likely be a combination of the two. They anticipate having the tower up within 60 days. Bryan thought they would put an access road in to get the project started, and then put a final road in when the project was complete. Li said she is concerned about deep ruts and damage to the land while it's still drying out from mud season. Bryan agreed and said he was also concerned about Five Corners Road. Bryan has asked to have a project meeting before construction starts. His understanding of the contract is that the revenue will start coming in as soon as they start the project.

Sharon asked Bryan if he knew how many hours per week were in the UVM Intern Program. Bryan did not know, but said the information might be in the presentation, which he hasn't had a chance to finish.



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3) Public Comment

No public comment.

4) Library Federation Presentation & Request for Funds

Sharon said the Selectboard had asked members of the Library Federation to come to the meeting to explain their financial request for this year.

Phebe McCosker said there were two library contingents at the meeting. She is the treasurer of the Library Federation, and Peter Blodgett, and Barbara DeFelice are Federation board members. David Goudy and Hedi Parafina are on the Latham Library board, as well as Barbara DeFelice who is chair. Emily Zollo is the librarian.

The budget is level funded for this year. Phebe said they were in the process of 2 different transitions; one is energy efficiency work being done on the building, and it is a little hard to budget for that as it is in the early stages. The other change they are looking at is a change in their head librarian. In the past the head librarian had done a bit of maintenance/custodial work as part of the job description and Latham is looking at having that split off from the job description. Money is budgeted for a custodial position.

Sharon asked if the Latham budget comes entirely from the Federation. Phebe explained that the Federation consists of 5 distinct 501c3's or independent institutions, Thetford Academy, Thetford Elementary School, the Historical Society, Latham and Peabody Libraries. Sharon said she was asking because when writing the warning she included the Federation, but not Latham Library. Phebe said the Federation gets an appropriation from the Town which is used in 3 different ways, some to Latham, some to Peabody and some stays with the Federation for building maintenance. No other article is needed.

It was confirmed that an article would be warned for the Library Federation in the amount of \$116,190.00.

5) Certificate of Highway Mileage

Bryan explained that this is an annual certificate submitted to the State which will help determine the amount of State highway funds given to the town. This is an opportunity to make any changes if necessary. There are no changes currently.

There was a discussion about asking the state to take over Route 132. This will be considered for a project in 2022 after Town Meeting.

Motion by Li Shen that we sign the Certificate of Highway Mileage to verify that road mileage has not changed. **VOTE by Roll Call**; Mary Bryan – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, Li Shen – in favor, Nick Clark – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor. **Motion Passed.**

6) Initial Discussion of Town Meeting Plans

Sharon said this discussion is intended to be an initial discussion of whether to have an in-person Town Meeting or to move to Australian ballot and have informational hearings, as we did last year. The Vermont Legislature has passed a bill that would allow us to do that or move the date to later in the year. The legislation has not been signed by the Governor.

Tracy Borst said that informational meetings are required if they move to a ballot vote. Tracy would like to have an in-person Town Meeting, but does have concerns about health safety, and



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Thetford Academy asked if we still wanted to use their facility for the meeting. Tracy noted that the Vermont House is having remote meetings only and the Senate has also moved to virtual meetings through February. Schools are also closing due to COVID infections. Tracy would not be in favor of mailing ballots to everyone automatically, but by request of the voter.

Mary Bryant added that she felt the informational meetings were well attended last year. She also noted the closing of schools and expressed concerns about someone becoming very ill because they attended a town meeting. For budget purposes, Mary felt moving the meeting until later in the year would cause a lot of other problems.

Steve Tofel felt they should delay the decision if they possibly can. He has heard epidemiologists say they were expecting a dramatic drop of COVID cases by the end of February. If the meeting is delayed a few months, even if the virus is progressing, the meeting could be held outdoors.

Steve did not have concerns about the delayed approval of the budget.

Tracy confirmed that a decision would need to be made at the January 24th Selectboard meeting to meet the deadline for the warning.

Li Shen said she does not have a good feeling about postponing the meeting, and the discussion about cases dropping is all conjecture. She would like to make the decision so they can then be clear about what they are doing.

Bryan Gazda felt the budget is the biggest concern. There have already been changes to the budget and this might cause more radical changes. He will contact the town Health Officer for her perspective. Bryan would like to keep moving forward with the current date and have it like we normally do in February, only remotely.

Sharon said they came to conclusion last year that we didn't have the technology to hold a remote meeting.

Tracy said the legislation doesn't allow for voting that way, so they can't hold Town Meeting remotely. The bill passed allows you to change the date and allows you to move your floor vote to Australian ballot. There is also additional legislation that will remove the requirement of a physical meeting location, but that exception is only through April.

Nick Clark thought that people would not be concerned about voting by Australian ballot but would be concerned about attending a meeting to vote in person. He felt there would be maximum participation by going to Australian ballot.

Sharon had been feeling like this current surge could dissipate by the time we have Town Meeting, and with the size of the gym people could be safely spaced for an in-person meeting. However, she has been hearing that while we might be able to meet and discuss in person okay, there might not be enough people interested in coming and voting. Sharon said that while she would feel okay about meeting, she doesn't want to have other people too afraid to come. Sharon noted that there is time to keep listening and watching what happens with the virus.

Steve said to not have an in-person meeting is a disenfranchisement to the entire town and the ability to amend from the floor, or to make a motion from the floor.

Nick said that wasn't quite true, as anyone can have an article on the warning.

Steve said in practicality that doesn't happen.

Li said she agrees with Bryan's feeling that they need certainty about the budget at an earlier date.

Tracy said a person can make a motion from the floor to change the total budget amount but can't make a motion to cut a specific piece of the budget.



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With no further comments, the discussion was ended.

7) Revised Budget Discussion

The Selectboard reviewed the changes made to the budget discussed at a prior meeting. Bryan explained that he created two scenarios; one without the Social Service appropriations, and one with the appropriations added in.

Mary Bryant wanted to bring the life insurance benefits for 9 full-time employees up from \$25,000 to \$50,000. This was discussed last year to make it more equitable between employees. It would also be a benefit that would help us be competitive.

Tracy Borst said this would cost \$11 per employee per month.

Mary said that would be a total of \$1188 per year and it would still only be about 1/3 the cost of police union employees.

Bryan said he would check into it and report the impact on the budget.

Sharon asked if the police body cameras and video storage are in the budget?

Bryan said the radar signs are in there, but he needs to follow up with Chief Scruggs for a price quote on the cameras and storage.

Li asked about the consulting fund, as she thought that had been spent. Bryan said the first invoice from Stantec was just received so that money hasn't been taken out yet.

8) Review of Town Meeting Warning

Sharon had a draft version of the warning for Selectboard review. This draft supposes the meeting will be in-person and will have to be changed if they move to Australian ballot and informational meetings. Sharon said in the past the capital equipment funds were separate from department budgets and wanted to know if they should have separate articles this year.

Stuart Rogers said several years ago the capital equipment funds were included in the department budget and it was very loudly stated that people wanted it separate for discussion. They wanted a separate vote, and it is legally a separate fund.

Steve said if they went with Australian ballot that would make it one article.

Sharon said each of the Social Services will need to have their own articles, as well as the Library Federation, the Fire Department, and the Lake Fairlee Association. The Upper Valley Ambulance is in the budget.

Bryan wanted to clarify that the Social Services are not a part of the general budget.

Nick pointed out the reason everything was consolidated last year was for printing the ballots on one page. The Library Federation, Fire Department and Lake Fairlee Association aren't social services because they don't qualify under statute. We are members of Upper Valley Ambulance which is why they are a line item in the budget.

Tracy confirmed that they do not have to have the article about the tax penalty.

Sharon said she would contact the chair of the school board.

9) Review of Selectboard Report

Li Shen, who wrote the draft, suggested adding in language to recognize accomplishments of the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer.

Sharon wondered about including the Post Mills Airport and mask mandate.



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Li didn't think the circumstances with the Post Mills Airport are ready for the report but could add in something about the mask mandate.

Sharon gave some edits.

Bryan said his report would include Route 132, FEMA reimbursements and a recognition of staff.

10) Review of Open Elected and Appointed Positions

Sharon had asked for a comprehensive list of open positions so the board can be knowledgeable about what committees need help. Sharon is waiting for confirmation that the school board vacancies are a 2-year term and a 3-year term.

Sharon said that the question about the Thetford Elder Network came up because there is no term limit listed and none of the members have an expiration date. Sharon wondered if the Selectboard should assign term limits to come in line with all the other committees and commissions.

Steve Tofel, the liaison to TEN, said it is a very social group that does a lot of very good things in the community. He thinks they see themselves as serving for a very long time and is not sure anyone in town is going to care one way or the other.

Li asked if committee and commission members have some sort of liability protection through the town. Bryan confirmed.

Li said if this committee has not been officially recognized by the Selectboard that might impact that.

Nick Clark thought that the TEN meals already get some coverage under our insurance, such as workers comp for the chef. Nick noted that TEN has been acting in good faith as a town committee.

Sharon suggested that Steve could simply ask the members about term limits and Steve expressed concerns that they may use that as their opportunity to leave the committee.

There was brief discussion about the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee being set up as temporary. Selectboard assistant Martie Betts read the motion that created the committee in 2020, and no date was set for the duration of the committee itself. Sharon noted that Lucas Stepno was at the meeting, and he is a member of the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee. She told Lucas that she was under the impression everyone on the committee wanted to continue. Lucas said that was the general consensus and said Doug Tifft should be added to the list. Mary Bryant suggested that they continue with 1-year terms and see what happens. The Selectboard agreed.

11) Warrants and Minutes

#1.1 \$79,467.23

#1.3 \$37,191.84

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the warrants as presented. VOTE unanimous (5-0-0)

Motion passed.



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Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the regular Selectboard meeting minutes from Monday, January 3rd, 2022. VOTE (4-0-0) Nick Clark left the meeting at 8:36 pm, prior to the vote.

Motion passed.

12) Adjourn

Motion by Steve Tofel to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 8:37 pm. All in favor.

Motion passed.