



Town of Thetford Vermont

3910 Vermont Route 113 • P.O. Box 126 • Thetford Center, VT 05075
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Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes

Thetford Town Offices

(w/Virtual Attendance Option)

Monday, October 17, 2022 7:00 PM

Selectboard members present: Sharon Harkay (Chair), Mary Bryant, David Goodrich, Steve Tofel

Selectboard members absent: Li Shen (Vice-Chair)

Others present: Town Manager Bryan Gazda, Town Clerk/Treasurer Tracy Borst, Listers Sean Boyce, Susan Howard and Barbara Harrington, DPW Foreman Dale Lewis, Bryan Ruoff with Stantec

Participating Community Members: David Forbes, Rebecca Holcombe, Tara Bamford, Liz Ryan Cole

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

1. Agenda Review

Sharon suggested moving item #10 to right after the Listers because Bryan Ruoff is at the meeting. All agreed.

2. Town Manager Report – Bryan Gazda

1. Thetford Volunteer Fire Department Board of Trustees Meeting Update

Bryan attended the TVFD Board of Trustees meeting on Wednesday night. He said it was a good discussion and he is very confident that the fire department has the capability to serve the community. There are currently 14 volunteers on the roster; 2 are EMS certified only and the rest are Fire and EMS certified. While there was not much discussion about mutual aid, there are 42 organizations involved.

Other

Bryan wanted to recognize Suzanne Simon, Recycling Coordinator, for her efforts in coordinating the cleanup at Montague Dam in Post Mills. Suzanne and some of the employees helped to remove 700 pounds of tires and over 1000 pounds of trash.

In regard to the Quail John Road cell tower, there was only a 30-day comment period, which expired today. Bryan understood it to be a 60-day period, but that was incorrect.

Bryan forwarded the agreement for the Treasure Island plan to Lisa Niccolai. He also heard back from Grace Flynn, who said the 2022 proposal for the wetland's delineation with a cost of \$3150.00 will be honored in 2023.

Bryan said he took the window frames back to Window Dressers for finishing. Sharon mentioned that she and David Goodrich painted them over the weekend.

3. Public Comment



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No public comment

4. Selectboard Chair – Announcement of Virtual Only Meeting on November 7th, 2022

Sharon announced that the next Selectboard meeting on November 7th will be virtual only. This is necessary because the meeting room needs to be set up for Election Day, which is the next day.

5. Listers Update, including Preliminary Thoughts on Town Wide Reassessment

The Listers introduced themselves, Sean Boyce, Susan Howard and Barb Harrington.

Sean explained that it is likely the state will be informing them that a townwide assessment will need to be done. Sean said he is anticipating that it will be a state-wide appraisal because of the market during the past few years. The Listers are creating a Request for Proposal (RFP) to contract with reappraisal contractors.

Sean explained the documents in the packet.

Sharon said she was surprised about how involved the work is for the contractor. She asked if the RFP was a boiler plate or if they put this together. Sean said they did look at other RFP's but as it will involve the computer software it will need to be compatible with the contractor.

Sharon asked about the cost.

Sean said there is a fund you should be aware of where the state helps to mitigate the costs. It seems adequate to cover the costs. It is a two-year process and Sean said they are aiming for completion by April 1st, 2025.

David Forbes asked if Thetford has used an outside contractor before. Sean said an appraisal in 2012 was done by the Vermont Appraisal Company. In 2002 one was done by Rust Bedouin, a representative for Proval (software company). David said according to news articles there has been a mixed experience with outside contractors in terms of value, and the other concern is the inflated home values during the pandemic. Outside contractors that don't have a direct connection with the town they are appraising can be a potent combination for an increase in taxes. A 17% increase in education tax just went through the legislature. David said his concern is making sure we don't have just an out of sight reappraisal set of estimates.

Sean said in Vermont most contractors are state approved, and they can't go to any unapproved contractor. Sean pointed out that with a town-wide assessment, everyone's value is affected. If property values, go up then the tax rate should go down. The impact is not going to be neutral because of the 17% education tax increase. There is also a grievance process as well as a question-and-answer process.

Sean said the cost tables that they used for David when his house was built were tables from 2012. Everyone has been valued from the same tables and now we need to set the tables for 2022 or 2023 to get everyone on the same page.

Steve Tofel asked if an assessment came through that was going to raise peoples taxes, does the Selectboard have the option of setting a lower tax rate? Sean confirmed. If the budgets don't change your tax rate will be lower.

Mary Bryant pointed out if identical houses were built in 2005 and 2021, the cost of the 2021 house will be higher because of construction costs. Will this in the end equalize the value?

Barbara Harrington said the depreciation will be different and that all of the towns in the state are



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grappling with this. Sean noted that some towns just got an appraisal in 2019 and the market inflated 20% in two years. Hopefully we are past that right now.

Sharon said she was impressed by the work the Listers have done. Once the bids have come back, the Selectboard will have another discussion.

6. ~~Social Services Policy Update Discussion~~ Replaced with Agenda Item #10 Consideration to Award a Contract for the Stowell Bridge Repair with Bryan Ruoff of Stantec

Bryan Ruoff said the information he sent to the Selectboard was incorrect and reviewed the correct information. Two bids were received. Northwoods not only had the lower price, but they have also done between 8-11 projects in town and their schedule would allow them to do the work this year. Based on this, Bryan said he would recommend Northwoods.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to award the contract to Northwoods in the amount of \$167,800.00 for the Stowell Bridge Repair project and authorize Town Manager Bryan Gazda to sign any documents. VOTE by Roll Call; Mary Bryant – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, David Goodrich – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor. **Motion passed.**

7. Social Services Policy Update

Steve Tofel explained what he would like to have changed in the current policy. The changes pertain to the process of what information is required and how the social service agencies should submit it to the town. Instead of the current 3-year petition cycle, agencies would be required to complete a specific form and submit it for review yearly. The Selectboard will either approve the request to be put on the warning, or deny it, which would then require the agency to submit a petition.

There was discussion about the agency reports that are currently submitted and whether they should be put in their entirety in the Town Report. Currently the reports are on the website.

The Selectboard reviewed and made edits.

Tracy Borst pointed out that the timelines and management of the paper flow has been handled by the Selectboard Assistant and wondered who would be handling this under the new policy.

Motion by Mary Bryant that we accept the new Social Services Policy and Form as amended. VOTE by Roll Call: Mary Bryant – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, David Goodrich – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor. **Motion passed.**

8. Lyme-Thetford Bridge Discussion

Bryan said there have been back and forth emails regarding the upcoming closure of the bridge. State elected officials have been involved in the discussions.

Sharon pointed out that the Selectboard and Bryan have reached out to state and federal people about this concern. Funding for business losses and a temporary bridge in North Thetford are ideas that have been talked about.

Bryan has been in contact with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) and Lyme Town Administrator Dina Cutting. Bryan said he feels a key strategy and place to focus our energy on would be on marketing. How do you market that you're open?

Sharon said she wanted people to know that they are trying to come up with possibilities and solutions.



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Rebecca Holcombe said she was really just at the meeting to listen, but she did speak to the Fire Chief in Lyme in the context of mutual aid. There is a fair amount of traffic across the bridge. The delegation is ready to listen, but they would need a concrete proposal.

Tara Bamford said she is glad to hear the Selectboard is looking at this constructively and not just thinking how we can stop it. Tara gave some history on the plans to do the bridge work, which started in 2013 when the bridge was put on the red list. Public meetings were held in 2014 and 2015. Pedestrian access and a temporary bridge were both explored at that time and found not to be feasible. DOT had engineers look at the bridge and found trusses wouldn't support the pedestrian access. When the bridge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, federal money for replacement was not feasible. Both towns were satisfied enough with plans at that time and asked that the timeline be moved up. Tara said it would be wrong for the town to fight against something they asked for and could result in the bridge being closed for an even longer period of time. The footings and structure are crumbling. Tara encouraged the Selectboard to support the project as planned.

Liz Ryan Cole said she spoke with Jennifer, from NH DOT today. Liz pointed out 2 problems; the short-term problem of closure and the financial damage it will cause, and second, do we really want to build a bridge that is just as dangerous as the bridge we're replacing. Liz expressed frustration with the lack of communication. Is it too late to stop it or would the Federal DOT be willing to look at this and adjust? Liz said the Lyme Selectboard did vote to send a letter of concern.

Sharon said the closure will affect her personally, as she travels over that bridge many times a week. In her mind, the safety of all of us and people that come to visit our state is of paramount importance. The bridge is terribly unsafe and if the the project doesn't go through at this point it may be many more months that the bridge is closed. Sharon likes the approach that Bryan and Dina have concerning marketing and creative solutions for teachers and students.

Sharon said Jim Masland was going to find out whether we could pursue a bridge in North Thetford.

Mary Bryant agreed that safety is a concern, and she does not want to put the project off any longer. Too much has happened to stop this project now. Mary said the closure will impact her as well, but it must happen. She felt putting a bridge in North Thetford would be hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Bryan agreed and said the question is who is going to pay for it.

Liz Ryan Cole said there is also a private landowner on the New Hampshire side and there are title issues.

Sharon said the goal of tonight was to have this discussion, and she doesn't hear that any of us are going to be quick to write a letter. We just need to figure out how to deal with it, so it gets repaired.

Liz said she is seeking signatures for a letter. Steve Tofel will connect with Liz.

Bryan said he is still hoping for a public meeting with the NH DOT



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9. Agricultural Tax Stabilization – Graduated Repayment of Taxes vs. Deferment

Sharon said she realized the policy was not yet in a state to send to the town attorney for review, as they haven't determined what kind of deferment, payback plan or incremental plan people would have. Sharon said she had spoken with someone who has an agricultural business in Thetford, and they were of the opinion that this is not needed because of the current use program. Mary Bryant pointed out that was just one person's opinion. Mary would like to create something that would encourage agricultural business to develop in Thetford. These businesses could help address food shortages and other community needs. The amount of money that we may lose is a drop in the bucket compared to the municipal taxes that we raise. Why give a deferment that they will then have to pay back.

Sharon said the attorney at Vermont League of Cities and Towns did not recommend deferring taxes, but rather establish a table of repayment or forgive them.

David Goodrich wanted to know how many properties there were in town or what the cost might be.

Sharon said there are currently very few.

David said there is a finite amount of property in town that could sustain farming. The first thing to understand is what the potential tax loss might be, and he is not sure of a good way to establish that.

Sharon said she would like to see a table put together that would apply to everybody.

Steve said reading the article that the town voted on gave the Selectboard authority, but it doesn't mean we have to use the authority. If we can come up with a valid reason for doing it than by all means, we should do it.

The Selectboard will gather more information for a future discussion.

10. Possible Acceptance of Hazard Mitigation Grant

Bryan explained that he was notified that the plan needs to be updated, so this grant is to help with that. The first step is to accept the grant for \$10,000.00 and the town has a 25% match.

Motion by David Goodrich to accept the Hazard Mitigation Grant with 25% matching funds from the town and to authorize Town Manager Bryan Gazda to sign any and all necessary forms.

VOTE by Roll Call: Mary Bryant – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, David Goodrich – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor. **Motion passed.**

~~11. Consideration to Award a Contract for the Stowell Bridge Repair~~ Moved ahead

12. Warrants and Minutes

39.1	\$115,506.74
40.1	\$161,344.00
19.2	\$8,232.88
34.3	\$19,113.82
35.3	\$205,001.32
36.3	\$1,639.27
37.3	\$11,808.01



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38.3	338,009.21
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Steve asked about the \$205,000.00 payoff of the FEMA note.

Tracy said that is the balance due with Community National Bank NA. No decision has been made on how that is going to be covered.

Bryan said he wants to see how we end up with Latham Road and Stowell Bridge. He's not sure he wants to use bond proceeds yet. He will go through the budgeting process and figure it out.

They may have to put a little bit into next year.

Motion by Mary Bryant to accept the warrants as presented. All in favor (4-0-0) **Motion passed.**

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the Selectboard meeting minutes of October 3rd, 2022, as amended. VOTE (3-0-1) David Goodrich abstained – he was not present at that meeting. **Motion passed.**

13. Adjourn

Motion by Steve Tofel that we adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 9:16 pm. All in favor (4-0-0) **Motion passed.**