



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, May 1, 2023, 7:00 PM

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

Others present: DPW Foreman Dale Lewis

Participating community members: Tom Ward, Bryan Gazda, Missy Krzal

Sharon Harkay called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

1. Agenda Review

Sharon said she would like to remove item #7 and put into the Executive Session as new information was received this afternoon.

2. Notes from the Selectboard Chair

Sharon asked vice-chair David Goodrich for an update on the new HVAC system.

David said on the Friday when the power was shut down, a representative from EEI was on site, and David, Bryan Gazda and the representative walked around and looked at progress to date.

The installation of the condensers has been completed and the units are mounted inside the building, but there is still a lot of work to be done. David said he is hoping there will be a meeting this week, if not next, to keep the project moving forward. Sharon said she understood they were not successful in switching the electric over. David said there were problems with the panel, so the electricity did not get switched over. No date has been set to complete that. Sharon said if the Town Hall has to be closed for that work, notice will be posted.

Li Shen asked about the air return, stating that it needs to be done by winter. David said it is still on track to be here in mid-July.

David will be monitoring the project during the transition period to a new Town Manager.

3. Public Comment

Department of Public Works Foreman Dale Lewis said that the roads are no longer posted.

4. No Mow May

Sharon said this discussion was prompted by emails from members of the Energy Committee, asking if the town would consider participating by not mowing town property that is usually mowed during the month of May. Sharon reached out to members of the Conservation Commission for their thoughts and put together information from several resources, included in the packet.

Tom Ward, a member of the Energy Committee, shared that the committee has been focusing on ways to encourage reducing energy consumption through events such as the Electric Lawn Care event last summer, and the information shared about reducing the size of lawns. “No Mow May” seemed like a natural follow up. There would be a dual benefit to not mowing; pollinators would benefit as well as a reduction in energy use. Tom said the gold standard would be to have lawns



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reduced by 50%. Other options would be to mow paths in your lawn and to mow lawns less frequently.

There was discussion of various articles in the packet which included pros and cons. Sharon said that Bryan Gazda had spoken with Tim Hodge, who owns the company that is contracted to maintain town property, and Tim pointed out that there are requirements that need to be met concerning the ball fields. Sharon said the properties would be the Timothy Frost lawn, the Town Hall lawn, and the Thetford Center Green. Martie Betts said the town also owned the Memorial Green in Post Mills, the small green at Buzzell Bridge Road and asked about the cemeteries. Steve Tofel said the Cemetery Commission oversees the mowing contracts for all Town cemeteries. Sharon noted that there are big patches of Pussytoe plants growing on the Thetford Center Green, which have been marked, and feels that they should not be mowed as they are pollinators. Sharon also reminded people that a large pollinator garden was planted on the Thetford Center Green last year.

Tracy Borst said they should take into consideration that the Town has conservation land, conservation spots, and asked that mowing not be reduced around Town Hall, which is the center of government.

Sharon said if mowing every other week makes the property look unkempt, they can reevaluate how much it is mowed.

Tom said that a cultural shift needs to happen and using words like unkempt should change. Motion by Sharon Harkay that we ask Tim Hodge to mow the Town lands, excluding the ball fields, every other week, and to not mow down the Pussytoe plants on the Thetford Center Green during the month of May, and further that she discusses with him whether he could set his mower to 4" during the month of May.

Steve Tofel disagreed that we should ask for 4" height of mowing. Tim does property maintenance for a living, and he thinks there should be discussion about the length of grass.

Steve felt including it in the motion would be micro-managing.

Bryan Gazda said there is already a contract with Tim, which includes things besides just cutting grass. Tim gave Bryan the impression that he is willing to work with the town concerning changes this year.

David Goodrich said he would have to look at the current agreement, but including every other week might also be more than we want to include in the motion. When they can mow could be dependent on the weather, and typically they would mow more between June and August. David didn't see the need to get into the detail of every other week.

Missy Krzal agreed with Tracy concerning Town Hall. Missy said she has tried to make the Town Hall more welcoming by planting and bringing pots of flowers and is not in favor of letting the lawn get too long. She also expressed concerns about ticks, as she is often on the ground weeding.

Sharon amended her motion to have the Selectboard ask Tim Hodge to mow every other week for this season and not mow the Pussytoe plants on the Thetford Center Green for the month of May, and to evaluate for a future decision.

Tom Ward suggested that the language say "no more frequently than every two weeks".

Sharon amended the motion again; **Motion** to have the Selectboard ask Tim Hodge to mow no more frequently than every two weeks for this season, and not mow the Pussytoe plants on the



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Thetford Center Green for the month of May, and the Selectboard will evaluate for a future decision.

Mary Bryant said there are beautiful native species that can be put in gardens and that the words “shaggy” and “beautiful” are a matter of perception. We are in a cultural shift about things that need to change for the environment, and this action could be a symbol of the changes needed. Steve likened it to telling the road crew what roads need to be paved and what potholes need to be filled. He felt that as a Selectboard we are trying to do more than we should be doing. Instead, the Selectboard should state what their goals are and work with Tim to find ways to achieve those goals. A policy should be to decrease the amount of energy we use, the mowing details are operations, which is the Town Manager’s job and not the Selectboards.

VOTE called, by Roll Call; Mary Bryant – in favor, David Goodrich – opposed, Li Shen – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, Steve Tofel – opposed. **Motion carried (3-2-0).**

5. Charge for Treasure Island Committee

Sharon read the charge submitted by the Treasure Island Committee, “Develop a financially sustainable way to improve and maintain facilities and expand recreational and educational activities while adhering to best environmental practices.”

Motion by David Goodrich that we accept the new charge for the Treasure Island Committee as presented. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried.**

6. Possible Adoption of the Agricultural Tax Stabilization Policy

The Selectboard reviewed updates from the attorney.

There was discussion of applicant eligibility, and the language around the farmer descriptions. Mary Bryant asked about the tax percentages.

Motion by Sharon Harkay that we accept the Agricultural Tax Stabilization as amended by the Town attorney with noted minor corrections. VOTE by Roll Call; David Goodrich – in favor, Li Shen – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, Mary Bryant – abstain.

Motion carried (4-0-1).

~~7. Possible Hiring of Interim Town Manager~~

8. Warrants and Minutes

PR #9 PPE 4-29-23 (review of)

#8.2 \$9,209.34

#8.3 \$275.00

#8.4 \$19,799.52

#9.2 \$3,140.92

#17.1 \$22,897.45

#18.1 \$2,821.82

Motion by Mary Bryant to accept the warrants as signed. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried.**

Motion by David Goodrich to accept the Selectboard meeting minutes of April 15th, 2022, as presented. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried.**



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Motion by Steve Tofel to accept the Selectboard meeting minutes of April 17th, 2022, as amended. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried**.

9. Anticipated Executive Session – Appointment or Employment or Evaluation of a Public Officer or Employee (Interim Town Manger and Permanent Town Manager Candidates) per 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(3)

Motion by Sharon Harkay to enter Executive Session at 8:30 PM to discuss Appointment or Employment or Evaluation of a Public Officer or Employee (Interim Town Manager and Permanent Town Manager Candidates). VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried**.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to leave Executive Session at 9:19 pm. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried**.

Motion by Li Shen to accept the Memorandum of Understanding between Tom Yennerell, doing business as Municipal Management Services Inc., and the Town of Thetford, allowing Tom Yennerell to take the position of Interim Town Manager, starting Thursday, May 4th, 2023. The arrangement can be discontinued at any time by either party. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried**.

Motion by Steve Tofel that the Selectboard Chair make an offer of employment to Brian Story, contingent on a successful background and reference check, and that we hire MRI to perform the background and reference checks. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0), **motion carried**.

10. Adjourn

Motion by Steve Tofel to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 9:22 PM. VOTE: All in Favor (5-0-0), **motion carried**.