



Town of Thetford Vermont

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Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes Thetford Town Offices

(w/Virtual Attendance Option)

Monday, August 7th, 2023, 7:00 PM

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

Others present: Community Nurse Sunny Martinson RN, Cemetery Commissioner Sam Eaton, Town Service Officer Jessica Eaton, Town Clerk/Treasurer Tracy Borst, Selectboard Assistant Martie Betts

Contributing community members: George Stowell, Melissa Krzal, Tom Ward, Cathy Newbury

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

1. Agenda Review

Sharon said there is a 3rd Request to Cater that will be added to item #9.

Steve asked if item #7 could be moved in front of item #5 as the Cemetery Commissioner was present. The item order was changed.

2. Notes from the Selectboard Chair

Sharon said that Town Manager Brian Story had a death in his family in the mid-west and is currently on-route back to Vermont. He will be unable to attend even via Zoom. He is planning on being back in the office Thursday.

Sharon thanked Mary Bryant for her dedicated years of service on the Selectboard. Mary served for just under 3 ½ years, coming on in 2020. Sharon said that Mary always made sure people felt good and got credit for what they did, and that they were appreciated for their efforts.

Mary said she was truly grateful for the chance to serve on the Selectboard, saying it has been an honor. Mary said she feels torn about the decision, but sometimes you must take a different course. Mary said Thetford has amazing town employees. She feels blessed and happy to say the town is in good hands with their employees, Selectboard and Town Manager.

Sharon said Brian is continuing to follow up on the dangerous building on Houghton Hill Road. Steve said he had information that the building was knocked down yesterday.

Sharon said Brian and Dale Lewis have been interviewing candidates for the Department of Public Works.

Brian is also checking with FEMA on whether we can get FEMA funding to upgrade the washed-out culvert on New Boston Road.

He is continuing to work with Chief Scruggs on hiring another police officer.

Brian will be back in time to participate in the interviews for Zoning Administrator this Thursday evening.

Mary Bryant suggested that Chris Brimmer might be a good resource for the new Zoning administrator.

~~3. Town Manager Report – Brian Story~~

4. Public Comment

George Stowell wondered if the Selectboard was aware of the situation on Stowell Road at the intersection of Route 132 with tree cutting along the right-of-way. Sharon said Dale has been in conversation with the person who was doing the tree cutting and will touch base with Brian when he gets back.

George wanted to know how the whole road closing permission came into being, what the process was. Sharon did not have any details and Dale was not able to attend the meeting tonight. Sharon will email George after she speaks with Dale.

George said the Selectboard should be aware that there was no signage in that operation at all. There were a few orange cones and a truck parked across the road. He suggested that Selectboard members should go and see the work for themselves. He noted that there are still trees marked for cutting but the work has not been done yet.

5. (Moved to Item #7) Pros and Cons of Adding a Town Social Worker Position – Initial Discussion

Mary Bryant and Steve Tofel researched the idea of a Town Social Worker and explained their process. Interviews were conducted with Jody Biddle, the chair of the Thetford Elder Network, Bugbee Senior Center Executive Director Mark Bradley, and Social Worker Eleanor Zue. The consensus of those interviewed is that overall, there is an overwhelming need as federal, state, town and school resources have been cut back.

Steve said he noticed that a lot of money is being allocated to things that there are state and federal programs for, but people don't know about the programs or how to contact them. There is even help from the utility companies, but people aren't aware of it. Steve feels the town needs someone to guide people to these resources.

The suggestion for the position is 10 hours a week with a wage of between \$35 and \$55 per hour.

Sharon said she was in favor of a part-time social worker but was not convinced the position should be under the Police Department. Sharon spoke with Chief Scruggs, a social worker, and the Town Manager in Brattleboro, as well as read a few articles. There are several issues a social worker would deal with that have nothing to do with law enforcement. If they are under the Town Manager, the social worker could still be in contact with and get referrals from the Police Department, but they wouldn't be constrained by police matters. Chief Scruggs agreed, but he couldn't be at the meeting tonight.

There was discussion about whether the Selectboard should make the decision to add the position or bring it before the town as a warned article.

Town Service Officer Jessica Eaton said she spends a lot of time helping people fill out a lot of forms. One person can't read. Others simply don't follow through, so there is never a resolution to the larger problem.

David Goodrich asked about the social services we give appropriations to, and whether they can help these people.

Jessica said they are in contact with the organizations but then the person doesn't follow through.

Community Nurse Sunny Martinson agreed. She has helped people fill out forms for Green Mountain Power. Some people don't have a computer or comprehend how to do it. For them, it's just easier to ask for money.

There was continued discussion on what type of services should be offered.

Melissa Krzal wondered if 10 hours a week was enough based on the discussion of need. Sunny told the Selectboard that it's important that the job description be well thought out. If someone is having an emergency, they need to call 911. A part-time social worker can't be asked to take a call at midnight. Boundaries must be set.

Cathy Newbury said the Thetford Elder Network (TEN) is in support of a social worker and they think it would be very helpful. TEN is delighted that the Selectboard is moving in this direction, and they want to encourage the Selectboard to move as quickly as they can. The sooner the better to put this into place. Ideally someone would be in place by Town Meeting and could explain how they have been able to help. Social interaction is critical for everyone but especially seniors. A social worker could be another ally for them. Sharon thanked everyone for their comments and said it was time to move on in the agenda. The position is not in the budget for this year, but this discussion will allow for planning the next budget.

6. Set the Tax Rate for 2023

Tracy Borst reviewed the spreadsheet with the Selectboard.

There was discussion on how the upcoming appraisal might impact taxes.

Motion by Li Shen to accept the 2023 tax rate as submitted by the Town Treasurer. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0). **Motion carried.**

7. (Moved to Item #5) Possible Approval of Revised Cemetery Commission Rules and Regulations

Sam Eaton, Cemetery Commission Chair, explained that there are no current rules, regulations, or bylaws for the Town, which is why the Commission decided to write them. They reviewed documents from other towns to help write the document for Thetford. There was discussion about when cemeteries are open to the public, green burials and the planting of flowers and shrubs.

Steve commended the members of the Commission, saying they are very dedicated, and spent a year creating the document.

Motion by Sharon Harkay that we approve the bylaws for the cemeteries in Thetford which are overseen by our Cemetery Commissioners, with the edits and amendments as discussed. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0). **Motion carried.**

8. Consideration of Letter in Support of Responsible Wakes for Vermont Lakes' Position

The Selectboard reviewed the letter that was crafted by Steve and Tom Ward. Tom explained that the initial support letter was part of the original petition in March 2022. Since then, there have been hearings which allowed for public comment, and it is now important to formalize the Selectboard position.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to send the letter as drafted by Tom Ward and Steve Tofel to the Agency of Natural Resources. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0). **Motion carried.**

9. Convene Local Liquor Control Board to Review Multiple Requests to Cater from White Mountain Distillery LLC and Blood's Catering and Party Rentals Inc.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to suspend the regular Selectboard meeting and convene a meeting of the Local Liquor Control Board at 8:35 PM. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0).

Motion carried.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to approve the 4 Request to Cater Permits: White Mountain Distillery LLC at Ohana on August 25th, 2 for Bloods Catering & Party Rentals Inc at Ohana on September 3rd and Ohana on September 23rd, and Monkey Hospitality at Ohana on August 26th. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0). **Motion carried.**

Motion to adjourn the Local Liquor Control Board at 8:38 PM and reconvene the regular Selectboard meeting. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0). **Motion carried.**

10. Warrants and Minutes

#16.2 \$15,211.41

#28.1 \$24,844.71

#29.1 \$30,024.44

#15.4 \$23,929.33

#14.3 \$2,251.54

Motion by Li Shen to approve the warrants as presented. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0).

Motion carried.

Motion by Steve Tofel to move that the Selectboard meeting minutes of July 17th, 2023 be approved as corrected. VOTE by Role Call: Mary Bryant – in favor, Steve Tofel – in favor, Sharon Harkay – in favor, David Goodrich – in favor, Le Shen – abstain. **Motion carried.**

11. Anticipated Executive Session to Discuss the Planning Commission’s Choice for Interim Zoning Administrator per 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3)

Motion by Sharon Harkay to suspend the open portion of the Selectboard meeting at 8:48 PM and enter Executive Session to discuss the Planning Commission’s choice for the Interim Zoning Administrator per 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3). VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0).

Motion carried.

The Selectboard exited executive session at 9:16 PM.

Motion by Sharon Harkay to accept the Thetford Planning Commission’s request to hire Mary Ellen Hayward Parkman as the interim Zoning Administrator for the period of August 14th to the tentative end date of September 1st, with the possibility to extend that by mutual agreement between Mary Ellen and the Town. VOTE by Roll Call: Mary Bryant - in favor, Steve Tofel - in favor, Sharon Harkay - in favor, Li Shen - in favor, David Goodrich - in favor. **Motion carried.**

Sharon will inform Mary Ellen of the Selectboard’s decision in Brian Story’s absence, and that there will be a meeting between Mary Ellen and Brian on the 14th to discuss the terms.

Questions were asked about future agendas and the procedure for the open seat on the selectboard.

12. Adjourn

Motion by Steve Tofel to adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 9:26. VOTE: All in favor (5-0-0). **Motion carried.**