

Town Of Groton, Vermont – Selectboard Minutes, November 5, 2015 (Approved)

The duly warned meeting of the Groton Selectboard of November 5, 2015 was held at the Groton Community Building, 1476 Scott Highway.

Attendance for the meeting included: Lisa Hart, Carrie Peters, Linda Nunn, Brent Smith, Phillip Palmer, Dorothy Knott, Shawn Crown, Janet Locke, Jim Langloise, Brad Houghton, Jim Downing, Roy Vance (Caledonia County Judge) and Dan Robinson.

The Following Selectboard Members were in attendance: Peter Lyon, Andrew Dorsett, and Mary Grant

The Meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM

Updates/Adjustments to the Agenda:

Peter Lyon made the following adjustments to the agenda: Discuss Washington Electric Coop support of the town, Philip Palmer wanted to discuss personnel, Review a Powers Plumbing Proposal, Community Building insulation RFP, and a Washington Electric Coop Permit request for Minard Hill. Andrew wanted to add a quick discussion of Class 4 roads. Jim Downing, 1st Constable, wanted to review his budget with the Select Board as he is unable to attend the November 7th budget meeting.

Peter commented that there are a lot of businesses that support the town and one that is rarely mentioned is Washington Electric Coop and their support for the Community Club Fall Foliage Programs, which earns money for scholarships and other town projects. They have been there for the town year after year, so he wanted to recognize them for the record. Andrew mentioned that he was still looking for a source for a “thank You” card that was reasonably priced. Dan Robinson indicated that he may know of a couple sources to check, Mary and Peter added that Dan may be able to design a card and use the printer available in the Town Clerks Office to print them. Dan agreed that this was a project he would take on. Brent Smith wanted to recognize Jim Liggett for the work and time spent mowing and cleaning up around the town signs prior to Fall Foliage. The Select Board Chairman added that town’s people noticed but was unsure who did the work, so Peter expressed the town’s appreciation for Jim’s efforts in preparing the town for another successful Fall Foliage Day.

Caledonia County 2016 Budget:

Roy Vance and the Caledonia County Budget was next on the Agenda, however Judge Vance had not arrived so the Select Board moved on to the next item on the Agenda and will afford Judge Vance time when he arrives.

Status of Clean-up Request:

Brad Houghton, Zoning Administrator, reported that 8 letters had been drafted to residents, based on complaints, to clean up materials and large amounts of “junk” around their property in town. The complaints were filed based on safety, proximity to travelled highway, possible access for emergency services, etc. He also reported that he has driven by these residences and has noticed that minimal work has been done to resolve the complaints. He has seen a dumpster at one residence, another reported that they have been doing some clean-up, but there are others that appear to be ignoring the letter or at least postponing any clean-up. Brad stated to the board that the next step is up to the Select Board.

Andrew Dorsett stated that we are a nation of laws and if there are laws on the books, then as elected representatives of the town, they are obligated to enforce those laws until they are changed or repealed. Mary Grant asked for copies of the letters so that the Select Board can review them to see which laws they were in violation of. She also asked if the letters stated what fines could be imposed and if there was a time limit for compliance. Brad Houghton replied that this was the 1st letter and was trying to be more congenial and follow-up letters if needed would be more direct. Mary Grant asked what the next step was according to the town's bylaws. Brad Houghton said it would be a notice of violation with a fine. Mary Grant said that would have to be sent certified mail, all concurred. Peter asked if it was appropriate to fine them now or send a second, more direct, letter. Brad Houghton replied that he doesn't think a second letter would make much difference. He also wanted to bring up the fact that if the town is going to be vigilant in enforcing zoning bylaws, that the town should be just as vigilant in complying with bylaws and the permitting process. Linda Nunn, Town Clerk, wanted to add that one of the residents that received a letter visited her office to clarify the letter and to ask why others were not sent letters. Linda replied that the letters were sent based on complaints that had been filed by other residents. Brad Houghton said that he does not drive around looking for residents out of compliance. He is responsible for acting on complaints. Mention was made of items that were next to the road that were being sold, Mary Grant added that if this was ongoing, then the property needs to be listed as commercial and taxed at the higher rate. Brad indicated that he would ensure the Select Board gets a copy of the letters. Jim Downing wanted to add that one resident may be difficult because he is a tenant. Phillip Palmer wanted to know how the list was made, Linda Nunn and the Select Board answered that it came by way of complaints from other residents. Dorothy Knott asked "is the law going to be enforced on all properties in town or was the Select Board only going to discriminate against the 8 that were sent letters?" Andrew Dorsett and Mary Grant both responded that the law is enforced when the town receives a complaint, which was the case for the 8 letters that were sent.

Request for the use of the Community Building Gymnasium for Youth Basketball:

Brad Houghton, Youth Basketball Coach wanted to request the use of the Community Building gym for Youth Basketball. This time of year, the BMU gym is booked with varsity and JV basketball practice as well as BMU cheerleader practice. BMU Youth basketball has used the Community Building gym in the past and was hoping to continue to do so. He had a letter from Todd Powers, outlining the request. Peter Lyon asked if this was practice and games or just practice. Brad indicated that it was just practice. There was a concern that a few areas of the floor that needed repair would prevent games from being played there. Peter asked about the mats that were ordered for the area behind the goals. Brad said that he would ask Todd Powers about those, It was his understanding that they had been ordered. Mary Grant asked if they paid a rental fee and if the school's insurance covered this activity. Linda Nunn said that the school paid the hourly rate of \$5.00 and that their insurance covered the practice. Andrew moved to authorize the BMU Youth Basketball program to utilize the Community Building Gym, Peter seconded the motion and the Select Board voted unanimously to approve. Peter added that he may have a cost effective solution for the floor he would pursue, speaking with Nathan Puffer who had talked with a local builder and were working on the issue. Peter asked if they were able to fix the floor, would BMU Youth Basketball commit to having games there, Brad said they would.

Review of new Dispatch Services Contract:

Jim Downing reported that he received a memo from the Caledonia County Sheriff's office indicating that the town's dispatch service fee was going to increase from \$1200 to \$2520. The letter also stated that there was no increase last year and with the added log times that it was felt this was a reasonable increase. Jim indicated that he only calls in roughly 50% of his stops because of communication issues. If he were able to call in all of his stops, dispatch services would most likely double. Peter Lyon asked what his recommendation was for the record. Jim indicated that he has to have a dispatch. Andrew asked if it was possible to utilize another county for dispatch. Jim indicated that where the town is situated geographically, Caledonia is the only dispatch he can contact. Andrew asked if there was a communication company that could perform a communication survey to determine if there is a special grant that could mitigate the radio transmission problems in town. Jim and Andrew are going to research the issue for a solution.

Law Enforcement Budget review:

The major expense for the upcoming year is communication. Caledonia received a Grant in 2014 to upgrade their radios to digital. They will be finished in the summer of 2016 and no longer have analog radios. In order for the Constable to use their dispatch services, he will have to upgrade his radio to digital as well. Jim added that he was received 2 estimates. The 1st from Rinker's Communications for \$3838.25 and the 2nd from Pikecomm for \$2817.16 Peter asked how this related to a piece of equipment purchased earlier. Jim said that was the console and the new radio should fit into the console and would most likely only need a new face plate which would be a minimal cost. Andrew asked if it was good to adjust that line on his budget to reflect \$2817.26. Jim acknowledged the change. Next he ask about funding for a radar speed limit sign that he could move to various spots in town to warn traffic if they are speeding. Andrew said there is the possibility of getting public safety grants that would cover up to 50% of the cost and asked if he has researched that aspect for funding assistance. Jim answered that he is not familiar with the grant process. Andrew stated that he would help him research a grant to help fund the sign. Going over the 2015 budget in comparison to his proposed 2016 budget, where 2015 was \$9,656.00 and for 2016 \$28217.00 is being requested. This includes wages. During the course of discussion, Andrew found a radar sign grant online and passed the contact phone number 802-229-9111, to Jim. This particular grant would cover 50% of the cost. Peter asked Jim how long he plans on remaining in the job. Jim stated that he would like to remain for another 2 years or as long as he is able. Peter said he only wanted to know for planning purposes as training a new Constable would take additional training funds and would need to know sooner rather than later. Peter said that the Select Board would discuss his budget further during the budget meeting on Saturday. Jim wanted to add his make sure his additional hours were annotated in his budget. Andrew asked about any outstanding payments on the cruiser. Peter answered that the cruiser was paid for and the town owns it.

Next Step on Audit Recommendations:

Lisa Hart, Treasurer, indicated that she had spoken with Nathan Hawley at Pace and Hawley. He sent her two agreements for the Select Board to sign. One was for Compilation services at a rate of \$100 per hour plus mileage, not to exceed a total of \$4000. The other was for a Review of finances up to December 31st, 2014 facilitating the transition of Treasurers. The cost of this service is \$100 per hour plus mileage not to exceed a total of \$2000. Lisa presented those to the Select Board for signature. Andrew made the motion for the Board to accept the contracts with Pace & Hawley for the compilation and transition review, Mary seconded the motion and the board voted unanimously to approve.

Mary wanted a decision on whether accounting was going to be on the cash or accrual method. She went on to recommend the accrual method as it being an easier method for a new treasurer. Mary made the motion to adopt the accrual method and at a future time a change is needed, the board will take up the subject again, Andrew seconded the motion and the board voted unanimously to approve.

Lisa reported that the fee for Nathan Hawley to attend the previous Select Board Meeting was \$290.00 and asked what account was paying for that. The Select Board stated that would come from the fund established for auditor services, along with the cost of the 2 contracts from Pace & Hawley.

Railroad Street and Harv Orr Road update:

Peter updated Railroad Street. He spoke with Vermont League of Cities and Towns and was told The person responsible for any damage is responsible for the repair. VLCT recommends that the town do the repair and bill the property owner. Andrew stated that the town should send a letter to the property owner stating that the town is aware of the damage to the road based on the Road Commissioners input or at least that we are watching to ensure that there is no damage. Any letter should include the state statute, statement of liability and any fees, fines or financial responsibility of the offender. Andrew made that a motion, Mary seconded and the Board voted unanimously to approve. Dan will work with Brent to write the letter.

The Select Board recognized that Roy Vance had arrived and inserted him into the agenda:

Peter had Judge Vance read into the record the current and proposed budget figures, current year \$370,953.00 and proposed 2016 \$353,742, a reduction of \$17,211. Judge Vance explained that the budget decreased because revenue decreased. The county has also consolidated a couple positions to help reduce costs. Contracts for the Sheriff's office, such as the hospital, have helped keep his department employed. Judge Vance said that Groton's County tax went down for 2016. Select Board Chairman asked Judge Vance for his recommendation for inclusion in the budget, Judge Vance recommended \$13000 and the Chairman instructed the Treasurer to put that in the 2016 budget in that line for planning purposes, until we get the actual number from Judge Vance's office.

Harv Orr Road Update (cont.)

During Mr. Vance's Budget review, The EMS/Fire Crew were toned out. The Road Commissioner is on the Fire Department so was unable to answer questions for the Select Board. The Select Board still heard comment and questions from the Harv Orr Road volunteers. Shawn Crown presented pictures of the road to the Select Board. Peter repeated that the work being done was pointing towards the goal of becoming a class 3 road. Jim Langloise remarked that the work done by Brent Smith and Phillip Palmer on the road was exceptional. He did question why the ditches on section closest to Great Road were not done to the 24' width that the volunteers were told was the standard. Jim stated that Brent explained to him he was only doing to the road width. In order for the road to be eligible for upgrade to class 3, the width would have to be 24" which means the ditches would have to be redone. The Select Board indicated that they weren't aware of any deviation and would have to consult with Brent to get an answer. The volunteers wanted to ensure that no stone was put in the ditch work until the ditch placement was resolved and taxpayer's money was not wasted. Andrew asked what would be the best remedy. Shawn Crown described pulling material from the back side into the new ditch to fill it and pack it while creating the new ditch at the proper width. Peter wanted it stated for the record that the volunteers were happy with the quality of the road, but need that section of the road widened. Mary Grant offered that if the road is functional now, in the spring when the remainder of the culverts are installed, re-do the ditches that need to be wider. The Board came to the consensus that they would have to discuss the issue with Brent and let the volunteers know what the next steps are.

USDA Grant Opportunities:

Mary Grant briefed the Select Board on the availability of USDA grants for municipal facilities and buildings typically a 50% match. She went on to express the Building Committee's position that no more projects are taken on until the Community Building is brought up to code. There are a number of plumbing, electrical and safety issues that have been ignored over the past few years that now have to be addressed. Mary went on to describe the work that should be done. She is asking the Board to allow her to apply for up to \$22,000 in grant money to be applied to work on the community building to begin to work on getting the building up to code. Mary said she can have the Building Committee work on putting together a "punch list" of work that needs to be done. Andrew suggested the list be separated by category ie Safety, energy efficiency and so on. Peter asked Mary if she could assist in putting together a packet to help formalize the request and she agreed. Andrew made a motion to support Mary Grant's efforts in obtaining the grant, Peter seconded the motion, and the board voted unanimously to approve.

Assistant to the Web Master:

Peter asked how the meeting between Dan Robinson and Dave Spencer went. Dan reported that it was a constructive meeting in reference to learning Dave's approach to maintaining the town's website. We reached agreements on assisting with minute and agenda uploads and site maintenance when Dave is unavailable. Andrew made the motion to appoint Dan Robinson as the Assistant to the Webmaster, Mary seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

Solar project for the Town Update:

Peter want to give the Select Board a heads up on a project he has been researching to install solar panels in the old dump. The revenue generated is annualized and represents several thousand dollars with no investment required by the town. Andrew had information on another solar contractor that he passed on to Peter to also look into for price comparison. Peter wanted to let the Board know, this looked like to be a long term lease on unused town land that may generate some revenue for the town and he would keep the board informed.

Proposal from Power's Plumbing:

Peter received proposals from Power's Plumbing to fix a sewer pipe for \$300, and fix a vent that was not function for \$900. And a proposal to replace a sewer pump for \$1125. Peter wanted to be able to review these with the other board members during the budget meeting, so he asked the secretary to have copies available for the rest of the board for Saturday's meeting. Andrew asked if this was for next year or this year, Peter replied, this year if there was any end of year money available.

RFP for Insulation:

Peter put together a Request For Bid to find a contractor to do some insulation work in the community building. He has been working with Efficiency Vermont and they have \$1500 to put towards the project. The key fact is that the Town must use contractors that are approved by Efficiency Vermont. Peter wanted to ask the Board's permission to deviate from policy and to advertise only to contractors that are on the approved Efficiency Vermont list instead of the general public so that the Town would be eligible for the \$1500 grant. Andrew said he would research a buildings/facilities grant to help offset the cost to the town. Mary asked if an energy audit had been done, Peter said yes and we have it on file. Andrew wanted to ensure that the RFP stated that the town had to right to reject any and all bids in the event that the Town wasn't able to raise the funds needed.

Mary made the motion to allow Peter to announce the RFP, Andrew seconded and the board voted unanimously to approve. Andrew wanted to make sure that the response date allowed time enough to put together funding to be able to award the project and get the work done.

Permit for Washington Electric:

Washington Electric submitted a permit to move a telephone pole on Minard Hill Road. Andrew made the motion to approve the permit, Mary Seconded and the board voted unanimously to approve the permit.

Class 4 Road obstructions:

Andrew wanted to inform the board that he was out riding over the past weekend and he spent time on South County Road. As he approached the Rt 232 end he encountered a brush pile in the road. He was riding a street legal dirt bike so he drove over the brush pile without incident. However he expressed concern that a property owner may be trying to deter residents from using a legal town road and wanted to research the matter further. In his research, he found that State statute prohibits any persons from placing obstacles or debris in a travelled roadway or trail to impede or hinder travel on said roadway or trail and are subject to fines of not more than \$1000 or the actual cost of repair and attorney's fees payable to the name of the town or state. Andrew would like to send the resident a letter with a copy of the statute. The Board agreed by consensus to send the resident a letter.

Budget vs End of year Projections:

Peter opened by saying this agenda item was to ensure that we were in a fiscally responsible position going into Saturday's budget meeting. Lisa wanted to express that she may not be as prepared as she would like because this was the last week of current year tax collection and her first year doing this so she and the Assistant Treasurer have been very busy working on both. Lisa pointed the Board members to the budget roll-up in their folders. Peter asked her to take them through the items she had concerns with.

Item 1 was Bookkeeper wages, Peter answered that either reallocate those funds to the Assistant Treasurer wages or simply pay from that fund. Andrew also suggested she debit one account and credit the other, and to do the same with the insurance fund for the Assistant Treasurer.

Item 2, Town Clerk wages are up 89 % but her overall is 83%. That account will balance after the Town Clerk reallocates department funds.

Item 3, Treasurer training and mileage is over because of the expense of having NEMRC train the new Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. Even with those overages, the overall department budget is on track. Peter asked where she was at with the \$15,000 insurance was after the Treasurer office refurbishing. Lisa said that the bills/invoices has been paid. Because of how that funding worked, Andrew and Peter suggested using the same debit and credit process to place those funds in the building line to more accurately reflect those expenditures.

Item 4, listed under Community Bldg repairs, electrical panel is listed and needs to have funds reallocated from appropriate line to cover the cost.

Item 5, Recommend reviewing money allocated to committees as very little has been expended from those accounts.

Item 6, looking at EMS dispatching services, EMS is currently at 90% and should be at 83%, so they will have to closely watch expenses for the remainder of the year. Peter indicated that Dorothy Knott does an exceptional job managing her books.

Item 7, Cruiser maintenance expenses are up most likely based on an unexpected brake job.

Item 8, Mary asked about the cemetery account because of unexpended funds, Lisa said she is expecting a bill that will need to be paid. Andrew asked about agency appropriations being paid. Lisa said they generally wait until end of year to submit bills to the various towns.

Item 9, Peter wanted to see the line for the auditors and the warranted fund for the professional audit. Peter said the \$13,000 can be reallocated to cover the cost of the 2 contracts with Pace & Hawley and the meeting visit. The remainder can be reallocated to cover the costs in other depts that have a gap.

Item 10, Highway department, question on culverts. The bottom line on all funds are not too bad, however there are a number of bills left to be paid. Repairs and maintenance, there are a couple bills that brought it over, based on some plumbing problems at the garage. Lisa wanted to mention that Brent Smith is one of the only Department heads that fill out PO's properly. The board suggested that she start sending PO's back that are incorrect or incomplete.

The review is complete at this point and Lisa asked the board's assistance in reallocation of funds to lines that have a debit.

Ricker Mills Road invoices, to be paid out of the \$30,000 highway paving reserve fund. Peter remarked that Bob Farquarson had mentioned that a short section of the road wouldn't be able to reach the 20' width standard, Peter said he would have to go back to the Select Board with it for resolution, Bob stated that he had spoken with Brent Smith and Brent had already approved it. Peter said that Brent is the Road Commissioner, so he had the final word. But if he was asking Peter for a decision, then he would have to go to the Board. Mary indicated that there was still a \$15,000 shortfall for the project, so discussion continued researching unexpended funds. Andrew pointed out \$11,000 in Highway infrastructure that was available and Peter announced there was also \$6500 from the Railroad Street bridge that was postponed because of high water concerns. Andrew told the Board that he had asked Brent for a 3 year road plan so that the Town could prioritize future projects. Lisa asked how we were paying for culverts. Peter said that he had received an email from Gary Lamberton, former Select Board member, that \$6920 had been placed in the budget, unallocated that could be used for end of year shortfalls. Peter said he would find that email and pass it along to the other Board members. Peter said that the Highway Department should stop future spending until their budget is balanced. The Board agreed to pay what was available and meet with Brent at the budget meeting to balance out the rest.

Peter announced it was the consensus of the Board that departments should stop any additional spending until the year end budget was balanced.

Lisa wanted to address the Powder Spring Road Flag Pole invoices. Going through the donations, Lisa had a \$200 donation from Matt Nunn. Peter said she should invoice him for the recycle bin in the parking lot as was agreed upon and he is overdue last year and has not paid current year. Lisa said she was short \$300, Peter said to invoice Matt \$150 each for the past 2 years. Matt Puffer donated \$125 and Peter will be picking up the \$95 donation from Bill Kane.

Memory Wall invoices. Peter stated that the two parts to that project were to fix drainage to prevent further water damage to the building, and the other was to reestablish the corner with the Cilley property. Peter indicated that funds should be allocated to the community building fund. Peter said to move \$2500 from the excess in the auditor fund to the community building fund to cover those costs. Lisa reviewed the fund reallocations to double check her notes.

Lisa also wanted to ensure that PO's and documents were signed before the Meeting adjourned.

Approval of Previous Minutes:

Andrew Moved to Approve the minutes of the October 8th 2015 Meeting, Mary seconded and the board voted unanimously to approve.

Andrew moved to approve the minutes of the October 22nd 2015 meeting, Mary seconded and the board voted unanimously to approve.

Select Board Meeting was adjourned at 10:10 pm.

Minutes prepared by Dan Robinson, Select Board Secretary