**Selectboard Meeting**

**Richford, Vermont**

**Approved Meeting Minutes**

**April 17, 2023**

Vice-Chair Paquette called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm with members Wally Steinhour, Alan Fletcher, and Kristen Sheperd present. Guests at the meeting included Carl Wetherby, Joey Randall, Officer Andre Labier, Zoning Administrator John Libbey, Rowena Brown, Greta Brunswick, and Cameraman Gerry Vaisey.

The board said the pledge of allegiance.

Vice Chair Paquette recognized guests. Zoning Administrator John Libbey inquired when the town crew will be picking up debris for spring cleaning, he has eleven bags ready to be picked up. Selectman Steinhour said they have started to go around town, so he encouraged John to put the bags on the curb for pickup.

Officer Andre Labier gave his police report. There were significant operations in Richford, one resulted in the seizure of an ounce of fentanyl which equates to 14,000 lethal doses. Officer Labier stated the operations were a group effort, and greatly appreciates the cooperation of the public. He explained there are not many patrols currently, but the Vermont Drug Task Force is here. Selectman Steinhour asked if the people arrested were released? Officer Labier said some were released, but believes they will face federal charges. ATV season has arrived and there have been many calls already. Vice-Chair Paquette added there was an incident where an ATV flipped, and the vehicle was not legal, and the occupants were not wearing helmets. Officer Labier said he was not aware of the incident, but if someone contacted him about it, they could do a report. Selectwoman Sheperd asked if there was more information on the arrests listed in the March police report? Officer Labier said he does not make the reports, so he will check with the Sheriff. She was interested to know if the reports could outline what type of incident lead to the arrests.

Rowena Brown asked if there will be doggy bags placed in the parks? Selectwoman Sheperd said they will be placed in the parks. Rowena asked if the town crew will work with beatification to clean up the overgrowth in the Post-Office parking lot along the retaining walls? Selectman Steinhour said he would look into it.

Selectman Steinhour told Rowena that the new highway truck does have a spray on bed liner. Vice-Chair Paquette asked if the trucks are undercoated? Selectman Steinhour said they are not, but it could be a possibility to do. Joey added fluid film works well as an undercoating. Rowena said it would help with the longevity of the truck.

Next on the agenda was the assistant zoning administrator position. Selectwoman Sheperd wanted to discuss it as it was budgeted for and wants to see the position filled. The selectboard tasked the Town Administrator to work with John on creating a job description for the position. Selectman Steinhour asked Rowena what are the requirements to have a building condemned? Rowena stated a building must be vacated, the building is in disrepair (broken windows, its boarded up, etc), and the lawn is not maintained. The requirements should be the same for a business as well. Rowena asked Vice-Chair Paquette if the planning commission made a bylaw mandating business to only place items outside during business hours? She said the Planning Commission tried to implement it, but never came to fruition along with other proposals. Rowena would like to revisit the subject between DRB, zoning, and the planning commission. Rowena explained a bylaw allows existing properties to be grandfathered, but an ordinance would require them to come up to code, and maybe an ordinance should be considered. Carl added that the issue becomes enforcing the ordinance.

Selectwoman Sheperd wanted to discuss the non-profit organization, Cat Crusaders. She continued saying since they have been in Richford frequently helping with the stray cats. She wondered if the selectboard was willing to donate money to them so they could purchase additional resources. Vice-Chair Paquette asked if there was a specific dollar amount? The selectboard agreed to donate $ 250.

Selectwoman Sheperd motioned to give a $ 250 donation to the Cat Crusaders. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Fletcher continued the discussion of town properties. His research has been focused on four properties.

Priest Block – Selectman Fletcher said this property has two issues. One is the sale of the property predates NEMRIC, and there was a mobile home on the property. Selectman Fletcher is unsure what happened to it, if the town paid for the demolition, or if it happened prior to the town acquiring the property. Since it predates NEMRIC the records are paper filed, and it could take many hours finding an invoice, if at all. Second there is a sewer line that runs through the property, but the deed from the tax sale shows no record of it, and prior deeds only suspect it. Selectman Fletcher suggested contacting the attorney to discuss how to explore adding a right of way for the town to maintain the sewer line. Selectman Steinhour asked if it would be implemented into the deed? Selectman Fletcher responded that it would, but he does not know what is required. Carl asked if the property was a four-acre lot? Selectman Fletcher said it is recorded as a 1.74-acre lot. Vice-Chair Paquette asked if attorney fees could be recouped in the price? Selectman Fletcher is unsure but can find out.

Academy Lane Property – This property is a strip of land the town will most likely never use. Carl said its former use was a sidewalk, and then it was purchased by Sweat Comings through tax sale. Selectman Fletcher said he has not found the deed for it yet, as it predates NEMRIC. He is unsure if someone would buy it.

Jay Road Property – This piece of land is an oddly shaped one-acre parcel. Selectman Steinhour thinks there used to be a camper trailer on the lot. Selectman Fletcher said this is another property that predates NEMRIC so it could take months to find out who tore down the trailer. It was purchased in 1992 by the town for $ 296.03. Selectman Fletcher said this one is ready to be sold.

50 Farrar Street – Selectman Fletcher thinks this property could be sold through a realtor due to the house being on the lot, and they would know the disclosures the town may need. Selectman Steinhour still wonders if stipulations can be added? His hesitation is the property will continue to be in the condition it’s currently in. Vice-Chair Paquette asked if it can be donated to Habitat for Humanity? Tax-sale properties cannot be donated. Greta added Habitat for Humanity might be interested in the property if the town tears down the house. She recommended reaching out to Barre Lampke to discuss further. There have been discussions with Barry about this, but have not continued since it was confirmed a tax sale property cannot be donated. Carl said the tear down would be more expense for the town to recover. John questioned if there would be interest in the property. Carl asked if there are benefits for the town buying property at tax sale? Selectman Fletcher said if the town didn’t then there would be no consequences for not paying taxes. Carl continued saying the town loses money on the property it purchases at tax sale; he does not see the betterment. Selectman Steinhour said the town is the bidder of last resort when nobody else bids on it. Selectwoman Sheperd added there is a housing crisis, you never know who might be interested in it. State policies have been altered to be more flexible to accommodate housing. Selectman Steinhour asked Selectman Fletcher to see if restrictions can be placed on a property before selling. Carl asked if anyone knew where the sewer line runs through the property? Selectman Fletcher responded that it says the northeast corner of the property. Greta encouraged a meeting with Habitat for Humanity since they have not had a project in Richford and could potentially meet with their leadership to understand what Habitat is looking for. They may be interested in investing in Richford.

The selectboard tasked the Town Administrator to work on advertising with Selectman Fletcher for the Jay Road property. Selectman Fletcher asked to schedule another meeting with the attorney as well. Selectman Fletcher explained if a buyer is found for a property, the selectboard has the authority to sell, and the terms of the sale have to be posted in the paper for 30 days. If there is a petition signed by five percent of the voters, then it goes to a vote. If not, then the sale goes through. Selectman Fletcher wondered if they should continue with the sales, or should they wait and do a special vote for a handful of properties? Selectman Steinhour asked if the vote can be pushed to a voting day, or does it have to be within a certain time frame? Selectman Fletcher said they would have to wait till town meeting day since there is no election this year. Selectman Steinhour said to pursue the Jay Road property for now and continue working on the others.

Greta Brunswick attended the meeting to review the streetscape project that was worked on over the course of last year with the planning commission. The plan covers potential projects that could encourage economic development, increase safety, and add a sense of community. After reviewing the plan, the next steps would be to utilize grant funding sources, and to continue pursuing these projects if desired to do so. Greta said implementation can be broken out into multiple sections.

Selectman Steinhour opened the six sealed bids that were submitted for the two highway trucks that the town is selling as parts vehicles.

The six bids are as follows:

Mark St. Pierre put in a bid for $ 1,265 for the 2006 Chevy Silverado 2500.

Jason Wetherby put in a bid for $ 255 for the 2010 Chevy Silverado 1500.

Brian Barbour put in a bid for $ 1,200 for the 2006 2500 Chevy Silverado 2500.

Robert McCallister placed a bid for $ 239 for the 2010 Chevy Silverado 1500.

Robert McCallister placed a bid for $ 521 for the 2006 Chevy Silverado 2500.

Edward Bousquet placed a bid for $ 2,200 for the 2006 Chevy Silverado 2500.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to sell the 2006 Chevy Silverado 2500 to Edward Bousquet for $ 2,200 and the 2010 Chevy Silverado 1500 to Jason Wetherby for $ 255. Vice-Chair Paquette seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

The board moved to approve the 4/3/23 and 3/16/23 meeting minutes.

The 3/16 special meeting minutes were voted on incorrectly at the 4/3 selectboard meeting. During the special meeting Vice-Chair Paquette, Selectman Steinhour, and Selectman Fletcher were present. Vice-Chair Paquette was absent from the 4/3 meeting, and Selectwoman Sheperd motioned to approve the 3/16 minutes when she was not present at the special meeting.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to approve the 3/16/23 special meeting minutes. Vice-Chair Paquette seconded. Motion passed 3-0 with Selectwoman Sheperd abstaining.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to approve the 4/3/23 selectboard meeting minutes with the correction stating the 3/16 meeting minutes could not be voted on. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Update from Town Administrator – The Missisquoi Paddle Pedal is scheduled for July 15, and every year they ask the selectboard to reserve Davis Park in exchange for sponsorship of the event.

Vice-Chair Paquette motions to reserve Davis Park on July 15 for the Missisquoi Paddle Pedal event. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

The rail trail extension has another twist in its development. At the last meeting it was said another engineering firm will have to be selected to continue working on the plans. Initially Trudell Consulting, who absorbed the firm who designed the plans, was not interested in pursuing because they did not have the capacity to work on it. Bethany Remmers from Northwest Regional Planning talked to a staff member at Trudell Consulting and was able to change their mind to take on the project. This means the selection process for a new firm does not have to take place, and Trudell is available to be selected to work on the project.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to pursue Trudell Consulting for the Rail Trail Extension project. Vice-Chair Paquette seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

For the Transportation Alternatives Program grant, a project commitment form needs to be signed. Next time Chair Pond is available, the Town Administrator will get it signed.

Last Thursday there was a Capital Planning Seminar that was very informative. When the slideshows and resources are available, they will be sent to the selectboard for their review.

The Highway Structure and Class 2 grant was submitted for paving.

Reminder to convene the liquor control board in other business.

Highway Report – Selectman Steinhour reported the highway crew has been doing their spring cleaning. Selectman Fletcher said he has received complaints about it being too dusty when they clean. Selectman Steinhour said it’s unfortunate how dry it has been. There has been a lot of grading, and Selectman Steinhour said the roads have been holding up well this spring. The crew has done work on the playground building and the ball fields to get them ready for use. Selectman Steinhour said as he has discussed in previous meetings, the winter sand pit is close to depleted, and he has reached out to VLCT to figure out how utilize another source. He wanted to make sure they comply as they look for potential spots. Selectman Steinhour spoke with the Town Clerk about having summer help from students, but it became a question of funding, and supervision. There will be research into programs that may help. Lastly Selectman Steinhour said he would like to go into executive session to discuss personnel at the end of the meeting.

Buildings Report – Vice-Chair Paquette said the Fire Marshal and the State Heating and Plumbing Inspector visited the town hall. There were issues with railings, ramps etc. Vice-Chair Paquette said she has contacted Jason to see if the highway crew can fix the railings when they are not busy. The boiler room needs to be cleaned out, mudded, taped, painted, and drywall will have to be added to an exposed portion of the ceiling. She will have someone come to give quotes for the work. A couple of exposed pipes behind the theater will need to be capped off too. She added the stairs outside the town hall and Post-Office will have to be done, but that will be a big job. The railings outside will have to be redone as well because they are too short. It is nothing that has to be done this year, but it should start being budgeted for.

In the Post-Office, Mercy’s Plumbing and Heating did their yearly maintenance on the two boilers and found the boiler that heats the Post-Office side of the building has a water leak. It was shut down and tagged. Vice-Chair Paquette said she will be receiving quotes to either fix the boiler or to replace it.

Joey asked if D&D checked the upstairs bathroom light in the fire station? Vice-Chair Paquette was not sure, but she will check with them. Joey added the first-floor bathroom does not lock anymore, and thinks the mechanism is bad.

Water & Sewer Report – Selectman Fletcher asked Selectman Steinhour if there was any update on the students working to upload the water and sewer policies to a word document? Selectman Steinhour says he knows they are working on it because questions are being asked, but he does not know when it will be completed. He will make sure to have a timetable.

Selectman Fletcher then discussed a property on Eastern Avenue that is going to tax sale because of a water bill over $ 4,000. There was a large leak, and neither the tenants nor the landlord was aware of it. Selectman Fletcher explained if they waive part of the bill, it will change the minimum bid if it goes to tax sale. Selectman Fletcher continued saying most of the time the bill is paid before it gets to the auction. He said for leaks, the goal in the new water and sewer policy was to hold people accountable, but not bankrupt them when something bad happens. Vice-Chair Paquette said changing the billing to quarterly would be a major help. Selectman Fletcher said the current policy has billing two times a year, and it is changed in the draft of the new policy. Carl expressed his disapproval as a resident. He believes landlords should pay in full, and it would not be fair to the rest of the citizens. Selectman Steinhour does not want to contradict what was done in the past and suggests they review before making a decision. Selectwoman Sheperd asked if we received a letter from the owner stating the problem? Selectman Fletcher said no letter was received.

Carl gave a suggestion for the board to consider. He said in Rutland there were incidents where people were staying in hotels and the police had to respond to calls frequently. He said the town charged $ 75 dollars an hour to the hotel for police calls. He thinks Richford should consider doing something similar relating to rental properties.

Parks, Playgrounds, Cemeteries Report – Selectwoman Sheperd said they are working on getting the parks opened with tasks like delivering porta potties, putting dog bags out, etc. Selectwoman Sheperd thinks the board should investigate purchasing more cameras. Maybe there is a grant that can help fund the purchase.

Selectman Steinhour added there is an infrastructure grant available that could be used for water and sewer. Selectman Fletcher said the last time he checked; Wayne Elliot said the golf course road project was not eligible for grants because the water rates are too low. Selectman Steinhour said maybe it depends on the grant, and he will forward it along to Selectman Fletcher.

Other Business – Selectman Steinhour said he would like to start planning for the next trash day. Selectman Steinhour will work on it with the Town Administrator. John asked if there could be a day to dispose of hazardous waste as well? Joey said the Solid Waste District used to collect hazardous waste in Richford. Rowena added they stopped because it was not getting the traffic they wanted. She suggested revisiting it in hopes of bringing it back. Joey added the strip behind the fire station has a lot of trash on it.

Carl said he read an article saying some places increased their fees for trash. He encouraged anyone complaining about the Richford trash service to do their research on the cost.

Selectman Fletcher said there were complaints about kids on go karts with no helmets or safety gear on. Vice-Chair Paquette said she will see Officer Labier at the store and ask him to investigate.

Selectman Steinhour motion to recess the selectboard meeting and convene the liquor control board. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Vice-Chair Paquette motioned to approve Wetherby’s Quick Stop, The American Legion, Main Street Market, and Mokah’s for their liquor licenses. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to approve the Thirsty Burger for their liquor license. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 3-0 with Vice-Chair Paquette abstaining.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to exit the liquor control board and return to the selectboard meeting. Vice-Chair Paquette seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to go into executive session at 7:47 pm for personnel. Vice-Chair Paquette seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Steinhour motion to come out of executive session at 8:10 pm. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:12 pm.

Submitted by

Michael Olio – Town Administrator

Attest: