**Selectboard Meeting**

**Richford, Vermont**

**Approved Meeting Minutes**

**April 3, 2023**

Chair Pond 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, Brian Grandchamp, Joe Montagne, Joe Ovitt, and Cameraman Gerry Vaisey.

The board said the pledge of allegiance.

Chair Pond recognized guests. Joe Montagne attended the meeting from Pike Industries to discuss the paving bids the Selectboard received for 2023. Selectman Steinhour asked if the selectboard could start off with deciding which company to choose, and the board agreed. There were three bids total: J-Hutchins at a rate of $ 89.40 a ton, Hungerford Paving at $ 89.50 a ton, and Pike Industries at $ 86.50 a ton.

A motion was made by Chair Pond to follow through with Road Foreman Jason Wetherby’s recommendation to select Pike Industries at a rate of $ 86.50 a ton for paving. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Joe asked if a budgeted amount had been decided yet? He quoted multiple sections when talking to Jason. Selectman Steinhour said they have a budget amount of $ 200,000 and will apply for a paving grant in hopes to double that.

Zoning Administrator John Libbey has a legal zoning issue for the Selectboard to discuss in executive session.

Carl Wetherby had two items for the Selectboard. He was able to confirm there was a resident who only has a municipal sewer connection, and not water. He asked how does the town bill someone for just municipal sewer? Selectman Fletcher responded that the person is billed at a fixed rate. Second, Carl said the town emergency generator for the school on the border of his property, has shrubs that need to be trimmed. He asked if it could be addressed this summer? Selectwoman Sheperd will reach out to Deer Run to see if they would trim the shrubs.

Brian Grandchamp said he has a zoning issue that has not been addressed. He explained his concerns with his neighbor who has accumulated bags of trash and junk on their property. Zoning Administrator John Libbey said he has worked on the issue, and it was passed to the attorney. Chair Pond said the town is doing what it can to help resolve the issue. Brian asked if letters could be sent to the residents? Rowena Brown added the town has sent letters and received no response. The next step is for the attorney to send a letter with a time frame to rectify the problem. If there is no compliance, then it goes to environmental court. This procedure can take a long time. Brian said would there be an issue if he wanted to install a fence along his property? Selectman Steinhour said if the proper permitting is followed then he is free to do so. Brian is frustrated with the length of time this is taking when he works hard to keep his property well kept. Selectman Steinhour said it is not quick and the town has gone through other instances where it is a multiyear process. Zoning Administrator John Libbey added thousands of dollars were spent as well. It can get to a point where it is out of the selectboard’s control. Carl noted there are getting to be a lot of properties like this around town. Selectman Steinhour asked if the neighboring property is rented or privately owned? Brian responded it is privately owned. Chair Pond said when it is a rental property there are things that can be done through the fire marshal, but it is more difficult when the property is privately owned.

Sheriff Andre Labier attended to give a police report. Franklin County Sheriff continues to work with the Drug Task Force and Vermont State Police. There was an incident of youth vandalism, but it has been taken care of, and the person responsible was able to repair what they did. Officer Labier said it was a productive experience. He would like to see a program set up with the town to help remediate youth vandalism. This particular situation had a good outcome where the father and son worked together to fix the damage. He encouraged the selectboard to think about it. Chair Pond said he would support a program like that. Selectman Steinhour asked if anything was done about the graffiti that was sprayed around town recently? Officer Labier said he was not aware of that and apologized. He will investigate further, but suggested a similar program could be created to remove graffiti as well.

Joe Ovitt attended the meeting to voice concerns about the drug issue in town. He would like to see something done, as one hotspot is located next to his house. He feels it is unsafe for his family to be on their front yard, and they have found needles there too. It is getting to the point where they are thinking of selling the property. Joe explained drugs are being made next door, and one error could result in an explosion that would significantly impact their house, and the surrounding houses, since they are in close proximity. Officer Labier stated he has heard from dozens of other residents with similar concerns. He is hoping within the next couple of weeks some actions will be taken. Joe added there have been instances of them being harassed by people walking next door as well. He understands it takes time, but this has been said for a while. Joe mentioned it seems like police patrols have gone down since this started. Officer Labier assured there is an active police presence in Richford, even if people do not see a police cruiser.

Selectman Fletcher discussed new information he learned for the process of selling town properties. Selectman Fletcher, the Town Clerk, and the Town Administrator had a phone conversation with the town’s attorney to discuss the topic. He believes the Selectboard should divide their properties into two groups, ones acquired by tax sale, and one not. The properties not purchased through tax sale should be reviewed closely to understand why they were bought in the first place. Selectman Fletcher said he does not want to see a situation where the board sells a property they need. There is the option of going through a realtor to sell, but Selectman Fletcher does not think it is necessary. For non-tax sale properties, the town can keep all the funds. Selectman Fletcher asked the attorney if there are reporting requirements for the money received through a sale. The attorney said they would have to research that question. They will also research if it is possible to put restrictions on properties the selectboard wants to sell. For tax-sale properties, the town is required to sell it for as much as they can, but they can only keep the money that was spent on the property. The rest of the dollars must go to the original owner. If the owners are deceased, then the family would have to be contacted to open an estate. The town is required to hold the money until it can be dispensed to the proper owners, but if none can be found, or an estate cannot be opened, then it goes to the state as unclaimed property. When tax-sale property goes out to bid, it is important to disclose the property is being sold as is. Selectman Fletcher continued that a quit claim deed is their most logical choice for the sale. Selectman Steinhour asked if there was a ballpark idea of what properties fall into each category? Selectman Fletcher responded that still has to be determined. Tax-sale properties cannot be donated, and the process is not a quick even if a buyer is found. Carl asked when the selectboard desires to sell a property does it have to go to voters first? Selectman Fletcher said it does not.

Next Selectman Fletcher discussed the financing of the ambulance stretcher. He is strongly against how the leasing company handled the financial documentation. The interest rate was meant to be six percent, but when Selectman Fletcher reviewed the numbers, it did not add up. The stretcher costs $ 26,000 dollars, and the cost of interest was $ 6,000. He suspects they are charging 18 percent interest. Selectman Fletcher stated the leasing company did not put the six percent interest rate in writing, which is concerning. He suggested the board needs to look at alternative financing. He thought the $ 7,000 dollars for the warranty was expensive too. Joey explained the warranty is technically a service contract. They currently pay it for the other stretcher RAS has. Joey said this is important because the stretcher is serviced yearly without cost, and it comes with a sticker stating the stretcher is certified. If this service was not provided, and something malfunctioned during an ambulance call, the town will be held liable. Chair Pond asked if there were grants from VLCT to help pay for this stretcher? The Town Administrator will investigate further. Chair Pond then asked could the revolving loan fund be an option for financing? Selectman Fletcher said it could be possible. The board agreed they should look for financing elsewhere. Chair Pond thought the revolving loan fund would be their best option.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to seek funding for the ambulance stretcher through the revolving loan fund. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Fletcher added he would like to see the whole board review financial documents going forward. It will allow for more transparency and more eyes reviewing the documents. Then it can be recorded in the minutes that the board reviewed the financing.

The selectboard moved to approve the previous meeting minutes.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to approve the 3/16/23 meeting minutes. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 3-0. \*Amended\* Selectwoman Paquette was not present to vote on the 3/16/23 minutes and Selectwoman Sheperd could not vote on them as she was not present for the meeting. This set of meeting minutes was not officially approved until the 4/17/23 selectboard meeting.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to approve the 3/20/23 meeting minutes. Chai Pond seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Update From Town Administrator –

A letter from the Listers was read off, asking the Selectboard to authorize the treasurer to cut a check, not to exceed $ 3,000 to the United States Postal Service for postage and a certificate of mailing. These funds will be taken out of the ‘Listers Reappraisal Fund’.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to authorize the treasurer to cut a check, not to exceed $ 3,000 to the United States Postal Service for postage and a certificate of mailing. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Next the Town Administrator passed around two documents for the Selectboard to sign. Both are for the 2024 Town Highway Structures and Roadway grant. The first document was a form stating the town complies with the State’s Bridge and Road standards, which the town adopted in July of 2019. The second document was the TA-60 Form which is the annual financial plan for the Town Highway. The grant deadline is April 15th.

The town received the Transportation Alternatives Program Grant, which will fund a scoping study to potentially install a sidewalk along route 105 to the elementary school.

To continue working on the rail trail extension project, there needs to be a new engineering firm involved as the town’s contract with the previous firm expired, and that firm was absorbed by another. The next step is to review three proposals from Vermont Agency of Transportation Design and Scoping Consultant Procurement website. After a firm can be selected, and a proposal can be submitted to them to continue the design work.

A meeting for the Park & Ride grant is taking place tomorrow between 10:30 and 11. This is a meeting with the engineer to create a design that satisfies the state’s title 22 requirement before any work can be conducted.

Highway Report – Selectman Steinhour said the new town truck is in possession of the highway crew. After talking with Highway Foreman, Jason Wetherby, Selectman Steinhour proposed an idea for spring cleanup. He suggested placing debris in paper bags for a faster cleanup on the highway crew’s end. Selectwoman Sheperd asked who is responsible for the bags? Selectman Steinhour said it would be the owner. Selectman Fletcher wondered how well the bags would work. People would be putting large amounts of debris in them, and it would require a lot of bags. Carl added how would you know people are not putting garbage in them. Selectwoman Sheperd asked when is the cleanup? Selectman Steinhour said he is not sure if there is an exact time. Carl proposed a program should be started to have students sweep and clean the streets. Selectman Steinhour liked the idea, and it would provide a job opportunity for younger kids. He will have to discuss the logistics with the Town Clerk. Selectwoman Sheperd asked if there was a green up program? Selectman Steinhour responded with there is, but it is only one day in May. Selectwoman Sheperd thought could the beatification committee get involved? Rowena Brown stated the committee needs more members. She added in the past the state had programs for youth cleanup efforts. Chain Pond suggested advertising on the electric sign that the beatification committee is open for new members.

Rowena Brown asked if the new highway truck had a bedliner? Selectman Steinhour did not believe so. Brian asked if the truck was a diesel? Selectman Steinhour responded that it was gas.

Buildings Report – The Town Administrator gave the buildings report since Selectwoman Paquette did not attend the meeting. The work for NorthCountry continues at the Post Office building. Last week the Fire Marshal and the State Plumbing and Heating inspector came. There are a couple of items that need to be addressed from the results of their inspection. The plumbing and heating inspector said a low water cutoff needs to be installed on one of the boilers, and both boilers need to be inspected by the town’s insurance. The Fire Marshal noticed there are certain areas in the basement ceiling where wire runs through, and it created sizable holes. He wanted to see those filled and closed. Over the weekend a cracked office window was replaced as well.

This Friday there will be a walkthrough of the upstairs water damaged areas of the Post-Office to gather quotes to remove the asbestos plaster. These quotes will help determine the scope of work for the Historical Preservation Grant which will build back the impacted areas, but not the remediation of the damaged plaster.

The town hall has a handful of emergency lights that need new batteries replaced.

Selectman Steinhour asked about the meeting for the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. The Town Administrator met with Marlena Valenta who attended the last selectboard meeting to discuss the grant further. Two applications could be submitted for two separate buildings, making the Town Hall and Post-Office eligible for funding. There was discussion of potential upgrades like a new heating system and electrical upgrades might be a possibility. The energy audits will have to be done first before proceeding with the grant application. NRPC is still working on the specifics, but they are hoping over the next couple of months they can start scheduling assessments. This grant is a 500,000-dollar grant with no match requirement.

Water & Sewer Report – Chair Pond said Chief Operator Jeremy Weigand purchased a new boat for the lagoon as the other one was damaged. Selectman Fletcher said the water and sewer policy meetings have been productive. Selectman Fletcher asked Selectman Steinhour if there was an update on digitalizing the documents so they could start making edits electronically? Selectman Steinhour said he will follow up on it this week. Chair Pond and Selectman Fletcher would like another policy meeting setup for next Thursday.

Parks, Playgrounds, & Cemeteries Report – Selectwoman Sheperd said she plans to meet with the Town Clerk to learn about job duties and responsibilities.

Other Business – Chair Pond read a letter from the Lion’s club stating they will not be hosting the 4th of July fireworks this year due to the increase in the cost of fireworks. They feel it would be better to use that money elsewhere. The town’s $ 3,000 contribution to the fireworks was reimbursed on 3-18-23. The letter is attached to the minutes.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to go into executive session to discuss personnel at 7:16 pm. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to exit executive session at 7:49 pm. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

As a result of the executive session Selectman Steinhour made a motion to support the settlement agreement of the Corliss Road subdivision denial. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm.

Submitted by

Michael Olio – Town Administrator

Attest:

