**Selectboard Meeting**

**Richford, Vermont**

**Approved Meeting Minutes**

**March 20, 2023**

Town Administrator Michael Olio called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm with members Andy Pond, Wally Steinhour, Alan Fletcher, Sherry Paquette, and Kristen Sheperd present. Guests at the meeting included Carl Wetherby, Joey Randall, Lister Eric Collins, Officer Andre Labier, Marlena Valenta, Catherine Dimitruk, and Cameraman Gerry Vaisey.

The board said the pledge of allegiance.

The first item on the agenda was the selectboard’s reorganization. The first motion was to nominate the selectboard chair. The board agreed Selectman Pond did a good job last year in the role, and felt he should do it again.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to nominate Selectman Pond as selectboard chair. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Chair Pond proceeded to run the meeting. The next motion was a nomination for vice-chair. Everyone agreed Selectwoman Paquette did a good job last year.

Chair Pond motioned to nominate Selectwoman Paquette for vice-chair. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Next the selectboard moved to delegate responsibilities amongst members. The roles are as followed:

Highway Commissioner – Chair Pond made a motion to nominate Selectman Steinhour. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Buildings Commissioner – Chair Pond made a motion to nominate Selectwoman Paquette. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Water & Sewer Commissioner – Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to have Selectman Fletcher and Chair Pond as co-water & sewer commissioners. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Parks, Playgrounds & Cemeteries Commissioner – Selectwoman Paquette motioned to nominate Selectwoman Sheperd. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Appointments for town officials are as follows:

* Animal Control – Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to nominate Tracey Ovitt. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 5-0.
* Health Officer – Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to nominate Tereasa Leonard. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 5-0.
* Regional Planning Commission Representative – Rowena Brown is resigning from this position. As of right now it will remain vacant since the selectboard was not sure who to nominate.
* Road Foreman – Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to keep Jason Wetherby. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 5-0.
* Town Ambulance Directors – Selectwoman Sheperd made a motion to have Selectwoman Paquette and Chair Andy Pond as co-ambulance directors. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0 with Selectman Steinhour abstaining.
* Town Attorney Brian Monaghan
* Town Energy Coordinator – Daniel Parsons
* Fire Warden – Chair Pond will check on this.
* Solid Waste District – Selectwoman Sheperd
* Tree Warden – Selectman Steinhour made a motion to nominate Daniel Parsons. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.
* TAC Representative – Chair Pond made a motion to nominate Selectman Steinhour. Seconded by Selectwoman Paquette. Motion passed 5-0.

Richford Firefighter Association submitted three nominations for Fire Wardens to the selectboard. They are:

* Andrew Pond
* Shelby Paquette
* Tom Chiaravalle

Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to accept the nominations of the three fire wardens. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

After the nominations the selectboard proceeded with their regular meeting. Chair Pond recognized guests. He started with Eric Collins who wanted to see the board be more receptive to helping local businesses. He said the selectboard should offer the tax stabilization program if approached by a business like Vermont Natural Forest Products. Selectman Fletcher said VTNF was asking for a break in their taxes. Eric responded with the board can help steer them in the right direction. He also mentioned the water line extension for a business on route 105 by the Border Patrol Station. Selectman Steinhour said he agrees, but there were efforts made to help this business, and it came to the point where the project needed an engineering plan from the owner before proceeding. The project may go in a different direction now. Carl asked wouldn’t that water line extension go to the voters for approval? The selectboard would have to research the water and sewer extension section of the town charter, but they thought it needed a vote when they borrowed money. As of right now it is a moot point. Eric asked why could it not have extended from the federal building? Chair Pond and Selectman Steinhour said sewer could have, but water would not. Eric said the minutes should make note when a project is closed to keep people informed. Selectman Steinhour agreed with Eric saying the board needs to act more swiftly to attract potential businesses.

Officer Andre Labier from Franklin County Sheriff's Office attended to give a police report. He said there is a pool of new candidates they are looking to get certified. This will help with their staffing issues. FCSO continues to be proactive with the drug task force in the area. Officer Labier is available 24/7 so do not hesitate to reach out for anything. Selectwoman Paquette asked if the police could patrol by the river front to curb ATVs and dirt bikes from riding through there? Officer Labier said he patrols all streets of town and will make note of it for the other officers. Chair Pond asked if the town could do anything to help the Sheriff’s Office? Officer Labier urges everyone to continue to be proactive with the department.

Marlena Valenta and Catherine Dimitruk from Northwest Regional Planning attended the selectboard meeting to talk about an upcoming grant program out called the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. This program is dedicated to helping municipalities become more energy efficient. The program has three parts: first is a $ 4,000 capacity building grant for small projects such as hiring a grant writer, hosting educational events, or creating a new energy committee. The second is a free energy assessment for municipalities. The Town Administrator asked if the assessment is similar to Efficiency Vermont’s? Marlena said this one is more in-depth. The last part is a $ 500,000 grant that will help with building renovations to enhance energy efficiency. Marlena said Richford is a high energy burdened community, so they have a strong case. Selectman Steinhour asked if there is a grant match? Marlena noted there is no match required.

Cathy Dimitruk said Rowena Brown was a great representative for the Regional Planning Commission. Most of the Regional Planning Commission meetings are virtual so the meetings require minimal travel. She also mentioned there is a 3 million dollar grant for municipal capacity building. It could be for water and sewer, housing, infrastructure improvements, etc. The grant applications are prioritized on a statewide index which Richford does not top, but there is potential for eligibility if there is money left over from priority projects. Selectman Steinhour asked what the funds would be used for? Cathy said it is to help develop engineering plans for projects the town desires to implement.

Next the board discussed several town agreements. Selectman Fletcher said there are a handful of agreements that are expired, and wanted to figure out how the selectboard will move forward. The first one was an agreement with a resident for 15 Troy Street. It is a small piece of property for snow piles, and no money is involved. In the agreement it is written to be reviewed annually. Selectman Steinhour asked if this could be one of the properties they sell? Carl pointed out this property was acquired through tax sale. Chair Pond said the board would like to sell certain properties, so they should start figuring out the process to move forward. Selectman Fletcher added they need to identify properties they would like to sell and pursue with the lawyer’s help. Ultimately the selectboard decided to update this agreement and send it to the owner for a signature.

Selectman Fletcher discussed the five-year agreement with LF Hurtubise & Sons by the sewer plant. The agreement allows LF Hurtubise & Sons to cut hay on 14 acres of land. The town is still receiving payments despite the lease expiring. The selectboard would like to renew this lease.

A Willow Street property owner leases a small amount of town owned land with stipulations. The payment is a negligible amount. This agreement causes plowing issues for the owners from snow pile up, but Selectman Steinhour said he met with Highway Foreman Jason Wetherby to figure it out. The solution was to plow Willow Street like they do other streets to avoid snow piles. One pass down and one pass up. Selectman Steinhour added he has not heard complaints since. He continued to say the town should identify their property line as there is potential encroachment from owners on both sides of the street. The Town Administrator and Selectman Steinhour will investigate further.

A town owned property on Home Street with a house on it expired in 2013 and was supposed to be renewed annually. The town does collect taxes on it. Selectman Fletcher asked should the board renew the agreement? Carl asked what is the difference between collecting taxes and collecting rent on it? Eric said taxes could go up a little from the reappraisal, but ultimately it would be the same. Eric also added the house was purchased last year. Selectman Steinhour said the selectboard should send a letter to the new owners to create a lease at the same rate as long as the taxes are paid.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to renew agreements as discussed. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

The board moved to approve the meeting minutes from 2/20/23 and 3/6/23. Selectman Steinhour made a motion to approve them. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Selectwoman Paquette mentioned there was interest in the Farrar Street property. The selectboard agreed they should make this a priority to put out to bid. Selectman Steinhour said he would like to see stipulations associated with this property if possible. Carl asked how someone would figure out the money invested into the property by the town? The expenses incurred from lawyer fees, or the cleanup should be itemized, but it would take some time to find all the expenses. The selectboard still needs to learn the process of selling a property they acquired through tax sale before proceeding.

Town Administrator Update – The Northwest Communication Union District needs the selectboard to appoint a representative. It is a yearly appointment.

A motion made by Selectwoman Paquette to have Michael Olio continue to be the representative on the Northwest Communications Union District board for Richford. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

The selectboard needed to update the Local Emergency Management Plan. Since it was updated late last year, no major changes were needed. Selectman Steinhour said there are some contacts that need to be updated.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to adopt the Local Emergency Management Plan for 2023 with updated contact information. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

The rail trail extension work continues. Currently the town needs a new contract with an engineering firm for the design plans. The contract expired with the previous firm, and they were absorbed by another company. The new company does not have the capacity to take on another project. The next step is to work with Ande Deforge, the state project manager of this project, to find a new engineering firm. It is crucial because some property owners would like to see design changes before they sign their easements. Selectwoman Paquette and Selectman Steinhour added this project has gone on for far too long and needs to be completed.

The TA is still helping the Highway Department with organizing their MSDS binders.

Highway Report – Selectman Steinhour said there was a special meeting to lease a new highway truck. They are leasing a 2023 Chevy Silverado 2500. If anyone is interested in looking at the truck quotes, they will be in the Town Clerk’s office. There is an interest from a new co-op student from Cold Hollow Career Center to work on the highway crew. It gives a student the ability to gain work experience, and it could be a good way to acquire future employees. As stated previously Selectman Steinhour and Highway Foreman Jason Wetherby met about the Willow Street plowing issue. Lastly Selectman Steinhour commented that the biggest snow storm of the year was a success.

Chair Pond would like a motion to work with their lease company for the new highway truck.

Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to work with the current lease company for the new highway truck. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Selectman Steinhour said he would like to see a better cycle of leasing highway trucks. There is potential of getting into a bind when the vehicles are at the end of their lifespan, and the highway crew could be down essential highway trucks.

During the special meeting, the selectboard agreed to put out to bid the two decommissioned highway trucks for parts. Selectman Steinhour asked how long should they wait before opening bids? It was decided to wait a month before making a decision.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to advertise the parts truck bids in the St. Albans Messenger, the County Courier, and Richford’s Economic Development Facebook page. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Buildings Report – Selectwoman Paquette said she has someone who will be doing community service to paint the inside of the town hall, and to touch up the elevator shaft. They will also be sealing the bricks in the Lister office.

Post Office building is okay. The renovations for the credit union continue.

Last week Selectwoman Paquette and the Town Administrator met with a library board of trustee member for a grant they are seeking for desired projects.

Joey Randall said the picnic table behind the fire station is in bad shape. Is it in the budget to get a new one? This table is used by the crew and community members alike during the summer months. Selectwoman Paquette said she will investigate.

Water & Sewer Report – Chair Pond said after the fire on Union Street, Chief Operator Jeremy Wiegand installed a new curb stop to shut the water off. Selectman Fletcher added the policy meetings for water and sewer are going well. The Town Administrator asked if they would like to have another meeting? They both agreed to have one. Carl Wetherby asked if billing could be changed to quarterly instead of six months? Chair Pond said they want to revise the policy to give the selectboard flexibility to change the billing cycle. Selectman Fletcher added as of right now they cannot change the billing based on how the policy is written. Carl wanted to know if the town would do away with the discounted water rates for the group of people who own their main water line? Selectman Fletcher said this group maintains their own lines, so the water rate is cheaper for them. The town just sells them water. Carl disagreed because some residents who pay the full rate, have long extensions from the mainline which would be expensive to fix. Selectman Fletcher thinks it is fair because it costs more when the town maintains the water lines. Carl added that there are people who have a municipal sewer connection, but no water. How do they pay? Selectman Fletcher said he was not aware of anyone in this situation, and would not understand how the town would bill that.

Parks, Playgrounds, & Cemeteries Report – Selectwoman Sheperd did not have much to report. The ice rink had a good season, and the warming shed was a great addition. She said she would meet with the Town Clerk to go over the duties of the Parks, Playgrounds, and Cemeteries Commissioner.

Selectman Steinhour mentioned it would be good to assess the playground building since last year’s repairs were a stop-gap measure.

The Town Administrator said he has been working with Northern Forest Canoe Trail on the annual Missisquoi Paddle Pedal event that takes place in Davis Park. At the next meeting there will be a list of items that will need selectboard permission for the event.

Other Business – Chair Pond forgot to bring up an appointment for a vacant Planning Commission seat. It was requested the selectboard appoint Rachel Dollar to the Planning Commission.

Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to appoint Rachel Dollar to the Planning Commission. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Chair Pond added the fire department would like to do a coin drop on April 15.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to permit the fire department to host the coin drop on April 15. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

The easter egg hunt will take place at Davis Park on April 1. A motion was made by Selectwoman Paquette to have the easter egg hunt at Davis Park. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Chair Pond said the board needed to convene the liquor control board. Selectman Steinhour made a motion to recess the selectboard meeting, and to convene as the liquor control board. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Chair Pond made a motion to approve the Pinnacle Jolley and the Richford Country Club’s liquor licenses. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0 with Selectwoman Paquette abstaining.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to adjourn the liquor control board, and return to the regular selectboard meeting. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Eric Collins reminded the selectboard of the class on open meeting laws for elected officials and municipal workers from VLCT. Next week is the online class.

Selectwoman Paquette mentioned there are two benches in the Post-Office building basement that she would like to see installed outside the town hall for a sitting area.

Chair Pond asked if the Highway Crew has downtime, behind the fire station there is a piece of property that is littered with old toys that need to be disposed of. Selectman Steinhour will let them know.

Meeting adjourned at 7:54 pm.

Submitted by

Michael Olio – Town Administrator

Attest: