**Selectboard Meeting**

**Richford, Vermont**

**Approved Meeting Minutes**

**July 17, 2023**

Chair Pond called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm with members Wally Steinhour, Alan Fletcher, Kristen Sheperd, and Sherry Paquette present. Guests at the meeting included Joey Randall, Robert Wetherby, Brandy Sickles, Kevin Sickles, Randy Martin, Rowena Brown, Franklin County Sheriff John Grismore, Franklin County Officer Andre Labier, Town Clerk Kiley Deuso, Town Administrator Michael Olio, and Cameraman Gerry Vaisey.

The board said the pledge of allegiance.

Chair Pond recognized guests. He started with Robert Wetherby who asked when he would receive an answer to his concerns from previous meetings? Selectman Steinhour said he drafted a letter that was read by all selectboard members. It will be sent out this week by the Town Administrator if the board agrees. The selectboard agreed to have the letter sent. Robert passed a paper he wanted the Town Administrator to read. The paper read was an email conversation between Robert and Ray Walker, the EMS Programs Administrator from the Vermont Department of Health. In the email exchange, Mr. Wetherby asked Ray what is considered a certified crew able to respond to an ambulance call? Ray responded that a certified crew is two EMS-licensed persons, with one tending to a patient being a licensed EMT or higher. An EMT and a VEFR is considered legal as long as the EMT tends to the patient. Mr. Wetherby asked Selectwoman Paquette if she agrees with what was said by Ray Walker. She said yes, she did and said they are abiding by what the state requires. Mr. Wetherby asked why did he not get an answer then? Selectwoman Paquette said the board wanted to send a letter addressing his concerns, and Selectman Steinhour wrote it and sent it to everyone for review. Robert questioned the transparency of the board if they are working through email. Selectman Fletcher said no decisions were made through email; it was to provide feedback on the letter. Mr. Wetherby asked Selectwoman Paquette about an article from the County Courier from January of 2021. It was about the mechanical issues of the fire station overhead door, and Selectwoman Paquette did not get it repaired in a timely fashion. Selectwoman Paquette said they were always able to get the door open and said she did not read the article. Robert thought a follow-up article should be done for the current situation.

Beth O’Brien attended the meeting to discuss concerns she has. She started off by thanking the selectboard for what they are doing. She feels we are living in a society where the issues everyone faces are becoming more complex, and emphasized that everyone needs to work together to improve the community. There is concern with the recent crime and drug activity in the town, and in the greater Franklin County area. Richford is fortunate to have Officer Andre Labier, but he is only one person. Beth wondered if other solutions like hiring a private security firm could help curb some of the activity? Or a letter written to Richford’s representatives illustrating the current situation? Both were considered by the selectboard. Beth also discussed other solutions that may help the image of the town. She thought some of the abandoned vehicles on Main Street need to be towed and would like to see a streetside parking ban on Main Street. Lastly Beth said she is concerned with the condition of some of the properties in town. Her idea was to send a letter with the tax bills encouraging people to work on improving their properties, which in return would improve the community.

Town Clerk Kiley Deuso invited Sheriff John Grismore to the meeting due to the recent crime upticks in Richford. She voiced her concerns with the drug activity and vandalism taking place at the playground where Notch’s Day Camp is held. She emphasized that the playground is supposed to be a safe place for kids. Beth added it all cannot be up to Andre to deal with these issues. Brandy and Kevin Sickles added their attendance to the meeting was to discuss the recent crime activity as well. They have experienced issues with four-wheelers, lawn mowers, trespassing, theft, and being shot at with BB guns. When they call 911, dispatch directs them to FCSO, and when they call, they get directed to Vermont State Police which has led to no response. Sheriff Grismore said he cannot speak on the Vermont State Police response issues, but he would like to hear from people directly about these concerns, and issues with dispatch. Andre added when patrols happen, the crime goes quiet, and makes it hard for the police to dispel the activity. Selectman Steinhour asked if there was capacity for extra coverage? Sheriff Grismore was unsure if they have employee capacity for more coverage. Selectwoman Sheperd asked can there be a creative solution to address these issues, for example adding more cameras? John said cameras do work as a deterrence for a while, but it only goes so far. Andre said he once wrote a ticket for a vehicle doing donuts in the street, but the case was dismissed since he could not identify the driver from the camera. Sheriff Grismore said returning to a grassroots police operation is what will deter crime. This means putting cruisers in visible places around town. Selectwoman Paquette asked if that could be the role of private security? Sheriff Grismore responded that it could be for appearance. Chair Pond asked when could we anticipate extra coverage being available? Sheriff Grismore said it is hard to estimate with the limited staff, and it can take up to a year for cadets to graduate from the academy. Andre explained the underlying issue to all the recent crimes is the increased drug activity. Selectwoman Sheperd said there needs to be increased resources in drug prevention. Resources are nearly non-existent in this area. Selectman Steinhour asked what can be done going forward? Sheriff Grismore said to apply the current allotted number of hours more effectively. He asked for a list of crime activity, identify the hotspots in town, the time of day, etc. Chair Pond wondered if there would be liability issues with private security. Sheriff Grismore said he thinks there would be liability concerns for it. He suggested starting a citizens advocacy group. There have been successes in other towns who have implemented them. Sheriff Grismore emphasized that this is a partnership and to please contact him when something happens.

John Libbey wanted to thank the highway crew for cutting the dead tree on main street, and he will plant another one soon. He asked what is the burning policy? There is a residence in the village that frequently has bonfires. Chair Pond said there isn’t a burning policy, but if someone is not burning what is considered clean wood, then you could call 911 for an illegal burn and the fire department will respond. John cited them for zoning violations of performance standards due to the fire and smell. John said he would like to see an on-street parking ban for residential parking on Troy Street, River Street, and Main Street. Lastly John brought up some maintenance issues he had with the town hall including weeds growing around the perimeter of the building, the bases of the columns rotting out, and the pile of sand on the concrete. Beth added there could potentially be students who can help with the issues for their project-based learning projects.

Selectman Steinhour asked John for an update on the Guillemette Road settlement. John said at this point if the agreement is not being followed, then it would be up to the courts to decide what should happen. Selectman Fletcher doesn’t think this should be the top priority for the selectboard and the money for attorney fees could be better utilized elsewhere.

Randy Martin had concerns he wanted to discuss, but said Beth covered most of what he had to say. He agreed there should be a ban on residential on-street parking. He reiterated the concerns from the bonfires that are taking place. Chair Pond said a process must be followed which is call 911 to report an illegal burn so the fire department can respond.

Rowena Brown talked about how she was glad to see security for the parade, but it was not perfect. She thinks there should be a list of what the town spent to organize the parade, so the town’s people know how much of their tax-payer dollars are being spent. Then she asked the Selectboard if ARPA money decisions have been made yet? Selectman Steinhour said there are some projects in the works but have not allocated the majority of it. Rowena followed up with if there were plans for public meetings for ARPA money? Selectman Steinhour said at this time there is not.

Chair Pond moved to the next agenda item which was to discuss the trash contract. Selectwoman Paquette said a member of the board should take this on so there can be a contract extension until the selectboard is ready put out bids. Kiley explained Tim Green was the selectboard member overseeing trash, but since his resignation, that has not been a board member that has overseen it. Selectman Fletcher wondered if we need to have a contract extension, or could we continue as is? Kiley said it was brought up by the auditors to have one in place. She continued that one board member should meet with Wetherby’s rubbish removal and report back to the selectboard. Selectman Fletcher said he would be willing if nobody else would.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to have Selectman Fletcher meet with Wetherby’s rubbish removal for trash extension discussion. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

The board moved to approve the 6/19/23 meeting minutes and the 6/22/23 special meeting minutes. Selectman Steinhour made a motion to approve the minutes, and Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Selectman Steinhour noted from the parade discussion that the security team should have radios for better communication as cell service was inconsistent. Kiley added a report from the parade committee could be added to the town report with the financials, so residents are kept informed.

Update from Town Administrator – Two 3-year DRB appointments needed to be made by the Selectboard. They were for Robert McAllister, and Jane Lariviere.

Selectwoman Paquette made a motion to reappoint Robert McAllister and Jane Lariviere to 3-year terms on the Development Review Board. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

For the scoping study funded by the Transportation Alternatives Program, the selectboard needed to assign a project manager. Vermont Agency of Transportation must review the candidate selected to ensure they are qualified. Northwest Regional Planning offered their services for the project and listed their employe Maddie Yandow to be the project manager if the selectboard approved. The Town Administrator passed around the letter from NRPC, and a flow chart of how the project will go. NRPC estimated $ 5,000 for their services which can be covered by the grant funds.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to approve Maddie Yandow as the municipal project manager for the sidewalk scoping study from Dollar General to the Elementary School. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

No update on the rail trail extension project. Will continue to try and organize a meeting with Ande Deforge.

Highway Report – Selectman Steinhour said the highway crew worked on grading and repairing culverts during last week’s rainstorm. Richford was fortunate to have minimal damage after all the rain. South Richford Road paving is completed. Kiley said the playground sidewalk is completed and looks great. John said there was a small washout on the People’s Trust parking lot and leads onto the sidewalk. He asked if the crew could fill it back in? Selectman Steinhour said he will report it to the highway crew.

Buildings Report – Selectwoman Paquette said the new eye wash station will be installed soon in the town hall boiler room. She is still waiting for Bobby Peters to work on the drywall in the boiler room.

In the Post-Office building, the Post-Office floors need to be rewaxed. The concrete stairs leading up to the front entrance need to be fixed, but it is difficult to find someone able to do it. Eventually it will need to be repaired.

Chair Pond said the valve that leads to the filling station outside the fire station is leaking. Selectwoman Paquette asked if it was the gasket? Chair Pond thinks the valve needs to be replaced.

Water & Sewer Report – Chair Pond said he was away for the last couple weeks, so he does not have much to report. Selectman Fletcher said the water policy is nearly completed and started working on the sewer policy. Chair Pond said the town received two days for valve exercising on August 22nd and 23rd. Chair Pond said Jeremy received a call from the Town of Georgia who needed water due to the flooding. The offer was $ 15 per 1,000 gallons. Have not received a response from them.

Parks, Playground, and Cemeteries Report – Selectwoman Sheperd said she met with the Richford Center Cemetery Trustees. They asked for gravel for a new road they are putting in. They also asked if there were grants to repair aging headstones. They do have a grant writer if a grant was identified. A concern from the trustees is the “green” burials Vermont offers. The trustees wondered what the legality of it is? They do not feel comfortable doing a green burial as it is not as secure, but wondered if the state would override their decision. Selectman Steinhour thought if it is a minimal service to do the stones, then they should. Selectwoman Sheperd received a safety concern about a baby swing in Davis Park. Chair Pond said to inspect the piece of equipment to determine if it needs to be replaced. Kiley added the highway crew has always fixed them when an issue arose. She added that the kayak shed was broken into, and Thomas fixed the latch.

The selectboard tasked the Town Administrator to contact the company where the town camera’s were purchased to research installing additional ones in the parks and playgrounds.

Other Business – Selectman Fletcher said when he was the Town Clerk, he researched putting a special tax on landlords to cover additional cost of law enforcement. At the time he asked the Attorney General and it was possible to do. He wondered if it would still be possible to do that? It would most likely have to be voted on, but he thinks it could make an impact. Selectman Steinhour said what is the first step? Chair Pond asked if other towns have it? He would like to work from something that has already been done. The selectboard asked the Town Administrator to contact the attorney and research information on it.

Selectwoman Paquette wanted to go into executive session to discuss personnel.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to go into executive session at 7:42 pm for personnel. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Selectman Fletcher motioned to come out of executive session at 8:03 pm. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. No decisions were made as a result of the executive session.

Meeting adjourned 8:04 pm

Submitted by

Michael Olio – Town Administrator

Attest: