**Selectboard Meeting**

**Richford, Vermont**

**Approved Meeting Minutes**

**August 7, 2023**

Chair Pond called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm with members Wally Steinhour, Alan Fletcher, and Sherry Paquette present. Guests at the meeting included Robert Wetherby (Zoom), Rowena Brown, Zoning Administrator John Libbey, Lister Eric Collins, Town Clerk Kiley Deuso, Town Administrator Michael Olio, and Cameraman Gerry Vaisey.

The board said the pledge of allegiance.

Before recognizing guests Selectman Steinhour addressed an open meeting law violation that was done through email while writing a letter for a resident. Selectman Steinhour acknowledged the error and admitted he initiated the exchange unknowingly when trying to garner feedback from other selectboard members. The Selectboard recognize the open meeting law violation, and after discussion with VLCT about a solution, Selectman Steinhour proposed assigning two selectboard members to address inquiries in writing when needed and bring it before the board for approval.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to assign two board members to address inquiries in writing and bring them before the board for approval. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Chair Pond recognized guests. Lister Eric Collins attended the meeting to talk about the reappraisal. Some Commercial property values decreased; Eric gave Blue Seal as an example. Due to the age and deferred maintenance of the building, there was a significant depreciation value from the last reappraisal in 2006 to the current one. Selectman Steinhour asked if the value is based on purely the building, or the production and equipment as well? Eric said it is strictly assessed on the property, and not the equipment or the product that is manufactured. Selectman Steinhour said the commercial assessments seem to have shifted some of the tax burden onto the residents. Eric said it could be the result of there not being a commercial database during the 2006 appraisal, and there being one now.

Rowena Brown on behalf of the Revolving Loan Fund Committee said a resident is interested in opening a business, and would like to take a $ 25,000 loan. The committee recommended the loan with certain conditions:

* A title search to be completed by an Attorney to confirm this loan will be in 1st, or 2nd lien position.
* Mortgage deed and promissory note attached to their primary residence and deed duly recorded in the town’s land records at the cost to the borrower.
* The principal sum of $ 25,000, amortized for 5 years at 5 percent interest.
* Total interest $ 2,064.03, total interest and principal $ 27,064.03. A balloon payment of $ 15,741.31 will become due 2 years from the date of this loan.
* Monthly payment of $ 471.78 will be due 30 days after the loan is issued and monthly for 24 months.
* A late fee of five (5) percent shall be added when the monthly payment is not received on time.
* The loan will be considered to be in default when monthly payments are in arrears of 6 months or more and the full amount of interest and principal will become due.
* Loan will not be granted if it would result it being in 3rd lien position.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to approve revolving loan fund loan if the conditions are met. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Robert Wetherby attended the meeting through Zoom. He received the letter sent by the Selectboard and asked if the whole board agreed with the content in the letter. The board said yes. He then asked if there was an official approval of the letter? The board said no, but they were all in agreement. Regarding the open meeting law violation Robert said the Selectboard has ten days to document it and sent it to the state. Selectman Steinhour said that was not the information he received and felt the acknowledgement and solution provided earlier will remedy the issue going forward.

Selectman Steinhour addressed more concerns from Robert that were received through email. Selectman Steinhour would discuss the concerns since Chair Pond wears many hats, and it can be hard to differentiate which role he is speaking in. One concern was the response times from Richford Ambulance. Selectman Steinhour said St. Albans dispatch was contacted to see if they have received any complaints about response times, and they have not. Another email from Robert Wetherby said before the July 17 selectboard meeting, he was sitting in the lobby catching his breath, and an EMT walked by him without acknowledging his difficulty breathing. Selectman Steinhour deferred to Chair Pond to answer from his EMT experience. Chair Pond said the EMT was not on duty the day of the meeting. Next Selectman Steinhour discussed the most recent email from Robert asking for information on when people were dismissed from Richford Ambulance and Richford Fire. Selectman Steinhour reiterated that the Fire Association and the members are not overseen by the Selectboard. Chair Pond said the individual from Richford Ambulance was not fired, but has been inactive in signing up for ambulance shifts. Robert said it seemed like he was fired after an incident of not being able to respond to a particular ambulance call. Chair Pond said this person did not acknowledge the call, and another first responder did. It was determined to wait for the responder who acknowledged the call. Chair Pond explained acknowledging a call is taking responsibility for it. Robert felt this was a hinderance to a prompt response time from the Ambulance Service. Selectman Steinhour restated St. Albans Dispatch has not received any complaints about Richford Ambulance response time. Robert felt that people would not complain to them if there was an issue.

The Selectboard moved to approve the 07/17/23 meeting minutes and the 7/24/23 special meeting minutes. Selectwoman Paquette motioned to approve the meeting minutes. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

The selectboard reviewed the furnace quotes for the Post-Office. There were three quotes, two from Fred’s Energy and one from Mercy’s Heating Service. The first quote from Fred’s Energy was to replace a block on the current malfunctioned boiler for $ 9,697. The second quote was a full replacement of the furnace for $ 23,352. Mercy’s Heating Service quote was a full replacement for $ 17,711. Selectman Fletcher voiced concern with installing a similar furnace with the high price of fuel. Selectwoman Paquette said a full conversion of the heating system would be an expensive and large undertaking due to the size of the Post-Office building. Selectman Fletcher asked how it would be paid for? Selectwoman Paquette said she is under budget for other municipal buildings.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to approve Mercy’s Heating Service for replacement of the Post-Office furnace for $ 17,711. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 3-1 with Selectman Fletcher opposed.

Richford’s downtown village designation is expiring in September. The Town Administrator has been working with Emily Kloft from Northwest Regional Planning on the renewal which includes a letter of support from NRPC, an updated map of the downtown village designation, and a cover letter from the town explaining the recent downtown improvements / activities. With the approval of the application from the Selectboard and its proof of record in the meeting minutes, the application can be submitted. The selectboard reviewed the cover letter and village designation map.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to approve the renewal application for Richford’s downtown village designation. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

The Rail Trail Extension meeting with Ande Defore took place. The discussion revolved around what are the options going forward for the project. The two options are either to continue with collecting the required easements for construction in the required timeline or end the project. If the project is scrapped then a letter will be sent to the head of Vtrans, and they would determine how much of the grant funding would need to be paid back. Before making any decisions on the project, Selectman Fletcher suggested finding out the total amount spent on the project, so the selectboard has complete information. Eric suggested using imminent domain for the remaining easements. Selectman Steinhour asked Ande DeForge about that, and he said it can be a hard process. The selectboard agreed with Selectman Fletcher, and would like to have a letter sent to Vtrans asking for financial information on the project.

Update from Town Administrator – The USDA Community Facilities grant to purchase new radios for both ambulance units is winding down. Chair Pond confirmed both radios were installed. All that is left is to close out the grant. As discussed, when the application was first submitted, ARPA dollars were going to be used for matching funds. By the next meeting it can be determined how much is needed.

The small HSIP grant was awarded to the town to clear shrubs and trees within the town’s right of way near the intersection of the McAllister and South Richford Road. Vtrans will send the grant agreement and it needs to be signed before the project can start.

The Municipal Energy Resilience program is open for applications. Earlier this year Marlena Valenta from NRPC attended a meeting to discuss the program that offers municipalities $ 500,000 with no match requirement to improve energy efficiency in municipal buildings. The Town Administrator asked if the Selectboard wanted to pursue an application?

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to apply for the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

The Town Administrator read an email sent from Brandy and Kevin Sickles about continued policing problems. In the email, they explained issues contacting Vermont State Police, and them not enforcing local ordinances. They had a noise complaint from a neighboring house who was playing loud bass music from their car. She said her house was vibrating from the low frequencies. They feel the response they received from the State Police is not right, and it seems like the town is left to do its own policing as the State Police refused to enforce local ordinances. Representative Lisa Hango was invited to the meeting to discuss policing concerns from Vermont State Police, but she was unavailable. However, she gave a person to contact from Vermont State Police to report complaints. Similar to compiling a list of complaints / incidents for Franklin County Sheriff, one could be sent to Vermont State Police to make them aware of the situation in town. Selectman Steinhour asked if this noise issue could fall under a zoning violation? Rowena said it would because it impacts the performance standards, but it is difficult to prove without a decibel reader.

Selectman Steinhour asked about the status of the park & ride project? The project is at a crossroads on how to proceed. A boundary was set from the state that the park & ride had to stay within. If it does not, then there would need to be an archaeological study done before it could be constructed. Selectman Steinhour said if the study was done, then the park & ride could have a larger design and the culverts underneath could be upgraded. If it stays within the boundaries, then it would be smaller and only a portion of the culvert underneath would be replaced. The archaeological study would not be covered by the grant, so it is up to the selectboard on how to proceed. Selectman Fletcher said he would like to see it developed within the boundaries and see how often it is used. If it is a popular lot, then there could be discussion for future expansion.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to approve the archaeological study to expand the boundaries of the park & ride. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 3-1 with Selectman Fletcher opposed.

Highway Report – Selectman Steinhour said a surplus of rocks, asphalt, and gravel were being crushed from the 105-bridge project and will be used around town. Selectman Steinhour addressed a letter received from a concerned resident about speeding on Green Avenue. He tasked Jason with pricing speed bumps. He explained it comes in 8 ft sections, and it would take three sections to go the full width of the road. It would cost $ 860 for a complete section. Selectman Steinhour suggested buying three sets and moving them around town as needed. Selectman Fletcher added the last time the town purchased speed bumps; they were stolen. Rowena suggested reaching out to the Sheriff’s office to see if they had a speed radar that could be utilized as they did a couple years ago. Selectman Fletcher asked how would the highway crew plow over them in the winter? Selectman Steinhour said it would be for summertime use only.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to purchase 3 sets of speed bumps. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Selectman Steinhour said the highway crew, with permission from the landowner, cleared brush behind the Masonic building. to hopefully counter the loitering and daytime drinking problem that occurs there.

Buildings Report – Selectwoman Paquette said she is searching for someone to work on the base of the pillars out front of the town hall and is still waiting on the installation of the eye wash station in the boiler room, along with the drywall work.

A valve at the fire station was replaced.

Water & Sewer Report – Chair Pond reported that Jeremy is working on water meter replacements. He told Selectman Steinhour he could not trace where the water line is at the old hockey stick factory, but knows where the sewer line is. Selectman Fletcher said they are progressing through the water and sewer policy updates. He would like to finish it so it can be posted as soon as possible. Chair Pond added there were hydrants on Dunlavey Ave that were inoperable and would like to solve the problem. Selectman Fletcher thought if the owners were willing to bear the cost of upgrading the line to state standards, then the town would take over the lines. They would need to figure out who to contact, and deed research may be required. Eric suggested asking the owner the date of installation and use that to find what is on record in the village meeting minutes.

Parks, Playgrounds, and Cemeteries Report – Selectwoman Sheperd was not present to give her report.

Other Business – Selectman Steinhour discussed another community trash day in the fall. He asked about the possibility of sending out letters to residents to better advertise. Selectman Fletcher thinks it is a great event and should be advertised as well as possible. Selectman Steinhour asked if he can work with the Town Administrator to set a date for it. The board agreed.

The Town Administrator and Selectman Steinhour had a working lunch with Tim Smith and Elisabeth Nance from Franklin County Industrial Development to discuss starting an economic project in Richford. From that meeting there was interest in the Masonic Hall building. A walkthrough of the building was organized for Tuesday, August 8th with the owner. Selectman Steinhour mentioned during this meeting there was discussion of the upstairs space in the Post-Office building, and Tim Smith did not believe it would require needing an elevator. Selectwoman Paquette said she has been approached about renting the upstairs as a workspace. Lastly FCIDC said there was interest from People’s Trust in donating the green space they own adjacent to their parking lot on Main Street. FCIDC offered to have an architect develop a sketch of an overlook in the green space to give to the town.

Chair Pond reported the SCBA packs were denied by the revolving loan fund committee. He would like to brainstorm ideas on how to acquire these packs. Chair Pond reminded the board the estimate for the packs was around $ 67,000 for eight packs. He said it is at the point he cannot send fire members for training due to the age of the equipment. Selectman Fletcher suggested they could partially fund it and take out a bank loan to purchase the rest. Selectman Steinhour thought they could split the purchase over the next two years. Instead of purchasing eight at once, it could be four this year and four next year. It would cut the price in half, which would leave the board to find approximately $ 10,000.

Selectwoman Paquette motions to purchase four SCBA packs this year and budget four for next year, and to find $ 10,000 if necessary. Selectman Steinhour seconded. Motion passed 3-0 with Chair Pond abstaining.

Selectwoman Paquette motioned to go into executive session at 6:41 pm for personnel. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motioned passed 4-0.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to come out of executive session at 7:02 pm. Selectwoman Paquette seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

No decisions were made as a result of the executive session.

Meeting adjourned 7:03 pm

Submitted by

Michael Olio – Town Administrator

Attest: