**Selectboard Meeting**

**Richford, Vermont**

**Approved Meeting Minutes**

**September 18, 2023**

Chair Pond called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm with members Sherry Paquette, Alan Fletcher, Wally Steinhour, and Kristen Sheperd present. Guests at the meeting included Robert Wetherby (Zoom), Library Director Christy Liddy, Rowena Brown, Will Ducolon, Jonas Hardy, Joey Randall, Beth O’Brien, Darlene Gregoire, Kathy Benoit, Franklin County Sheriff Officer Andre Labier, Vermont State Police Officers Lieutenant Jerry Partin, Sergeant Mike Filipek, Captain Shaun Loan, Zoning Administrator John Libbey, and Town Administrator Michael Olio, and Camerawoman Annalise Durocher.

The board said the pledge of allegiance.

Chair Pond recognized guests. He started with Robert Wetherby. Selectman Steinhour said he was informed of his question about the “illegal” meeting minutes. Robert said he has not seen the email exchanges between July 15 and August 20. Selectman Steinhour believes all email correspondence was sent to him and everything else was discussed in the selectboard meetings. Selectman Steinhour encouraged Robert to review previous selectboard meeting minutes on the topic and if he has questions, bring them to the next meeting.

Will Ducolon attended to discuss the Bear Run Road. Chair Pond said the information received from VLCT was a gate can be installed, but it cannot be locked. The board wanted to keep the right of way at this time. Will said he researched the land trust property near him and said the land will stay undeveloped which is different than what he was told at the previous meeting. Jonas asked how long is a road considered a road? Chair Pond said he is not aware if there is a time frame. The selectboard said a gate can be put up with no lock and encouraged alternative security measures. Selectwoman Sheperd suggested to legally post the property. Will said he has tried everything and doesn’t believe it would help. Selectman Fletcher said he has had success with his land being posted. Selectman Steinhour said they will give him Jason’s contact information to discuss the gate.

Christy Liddy is the new Library Director for the Arvin A. Brown Library, and she attended through Zoom to introduce herself to the Selectboard.

Rowena Brown said she had something to discuss under parks.

Zoning Administrator John Libbey said the Planning Commission held the interviews for the Assistant Zoning Administrator position, and they nominated Cameron Paquette. The selectboard reviewed his Resume.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to approve the nomination of Cameron Paquette for the Assistant Zoning Administrator position. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Chair Pond went to the discussion of the parking ordinance. Selectman Steinhour suggested scheduling another meeting to review it. The Selectboard agreed to a meeting on September 25 at 3:00 to go over the ordinance.

The board moved to approve the 9/11/23 meeting minutes. Selectwoman Sheperd made the motion, and Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 3-0 with Selectman Steinhour abstaining for not being present at that meeting.

Update from Town Administrator – There are two driveway permits that needed approval from the Selectboard. The selectboard reviewed both.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to approve both driveway permits. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

The TA handed out an appropriations policy from VLCT for their review.

The community trash day is going to be advertised around town this week and slips of paper will be mailed with the trash bills.

Highway Report – Selectman Steinhour said the crew has been working on ditching, sidewalks, signs, and general maintenance. No update on the HSIP grant. Selectman Steinhour said the McAllister Road change has been a hit or miss for people. He hopes with the HSIP grant they will complete the project to increase visibility by the stop sign and meet the needs of everyone. his

Buildings Report – Selectwoman Paquette was not present at this time to give her report.

Water & Sewer Report – Chair Pond said the water leaks on 105 near Pinnacle Jolley and the corner of Elm and North Avenue were fixed. Selectman Steinhour asked about the valve break by Blue Seal. Chair Pond said that happened during the valve exercise tests and has been repaired. Selectman Fletcher said they are still working on the sewer rules and regulations. It is taking longer than expected, but the sewer portion nearly started from scratch.

Parks, Playgrounds, and Cemeteries Report – Selectwoman Sheperd said she contacted Nick Deuso to get the water shut off at the playground building for the winter.

Rowena Brown said she was cleaning up Main Street Park and noticed there were no doggy bags or trash bags. Selectwoman Sheperd said she will work on it. She added that she had a conversation about trash pickup in the cemetery with Wetherby’s Rubbish Removal. They will pick up the garbage.

Other Business – Selectman Steinhour discussed Kiley’s email saying a resident who lives at the end of Short Street wanted to be added to the trash service. Darlene said they own that property, and it has municipal water. The selectboard saw no issue with it.

Selectman Steinhour made a motion to extend the trash service to the end of Short Street and to notify our trash service. Selectman Fletcher seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Chair Pond said they were looking at hiring a debt collector for unpaid EMS bills. He said they will collect 33 percent of the unpaid bill for the service, and the town would recapture 66 percent. The estimate of total unpaid bills is $ 50,000 to $ 60,000. Selectman Steinhour was unsure if it was worth paying the collector for it. Chair Pond said they would only pay the collector if they were successful. The Town Administrator handed out an informational packet of a debt collector service to Chair Pond for review. Selectwoman Sheperd asked what happens to bills now? Chair Pond said they are written off. The selectboard had questions about debt collection they would like answered such as what is the compliance with Vermont law? Do they have to be licensed? Are there multiple collectors they can reach out to? Etc.

Selectwoman Paquette joined the meeting and gave her buildings report. The furnace in the post-office is completed, but not sure if it has been tested yet. She said she talked to a library director about the idea of putting the library on the second floor of the Post-Office. Rowena asked how the repairs are going to the library building? Selectwoman Paquette said she will have to meet with the directors about the repairs. Rowena said the front railing needs to be fixed.

Chair Pond went back to discussion of policing. Representative Lisa Hango, Representative Wayne Laroche, Senator Bod Norris, FCSO Officer Andre Labier, VSP Sergeant Mike Filipek, Lieutenant Jerry Partin, and Captain Shaun Loan joined the meeting and introduced themselves. Kathy Benoit, the CEO of Notch, discussed some issues she has seen on their property. Notch owns 53 Main Street and has had people sleeping in the stairwells, breaking windows, camping out, etc. She does not want to put the staff in a compromising position. Representative Hango said this is not limited to Richford, and suggested working with mental health agencies. Lieutenant Partin said VSP cannot enforce local ordinances, but he said to call VSP for trespassing if someone is not leaving when asked. Darlene explained the loitering is happening due to the neighboring building. Selectman Steinhour said the town tried to remediate the issue by clearing brush behind the building with owner’s permission. Senator Norris suggested consulting with the town attorney to identify what constitutes loitering and no trespassing. Beth is concerned about calling 911 and law enforcement not showing up. Lieutenant Partin said they are experiencing a significant staffing shortage. Selectman Steinhour asked what does the agency do to explain to a caller what will and will not be responded to? Lieutenant Partin said they determine what is and is not an emergency call, and the barracks can be called for explanation. Selectman Steinhour asked if it is a trooper who makes that decision or is it dispatch? Lieutenant Partin said a trooper will make that decision. Selectman Steinhour asked what the timeline is for someone to expect to hear back if it is deemed not an emergency? Sergeant Filipek said every situation is different. There is a threshold for what is determined as an emergency and what is not. It is prioritized as what is the most life threating / dangerous call. Selectman Steinhour followed up with it seemed like there are conflicting answers on who makes the decision on the prioritization of the 911 call. Captain Loan explained the dispatcher does not determine where the trooper will go, they just put it in the order of importance and the trooper decides from there. Joey Randall said on EMS they have had issues with getting assistance with calls relating to suicide. They have had to go through Border Patrol or Officer Labier. Selectman Steinhour asked what is the legislator doing to help the agencies? Representative Hango said they are fully funded, but VSP is down 50 troopers. Recruiting is very difficult. Selectwoman Sheperd would like to see incentives or resources for community policing positions like a town constable. Representative Lisa Hango said the trend in the state is to limit the power of town constables. Representative Wayne Laroche added the attitude towards police has changed in society and there is no magic bullet to fix these issues. Selectman Steinhour asked what is the purpose of a community having an ordinance if they cannot be enforced by a constable or by law enforcement? Senator Norris said bill S-4 will have a grant opportunity coming out for violence prevention. He explained the constable power has been limited so the town does not take on major liability. Lieutenant Partin wanted to address Joey Randall’s comments about emergency calls relating to suicide. He said VSP has received communication to not respond if it is a sole person to avoid escalating the situation. Chair Pond said as an EMT the first thing that is learned is scene safe. During a suicide emergency that is deemed unsafe, they cannot go in without law enforcement present. There needs to be a bridge between law enforcement and EMS during a suicide call. Sergeant Filipek agreed this is an issue, and explained a new use of force policy adjustment was issued from the Vermont Criminal Justice Council to not allow law enforcement to respond to a suicide emergency if it is a sole person. It is a liability on their part if something were to happen. Lieutenant Partin said everyone needs to be on the same page in this situation. Senator Norris said the Criminal Justice Council is its own separate entity. Representative Hango added these initiatives from the council are passed through the legislator, but their voting power on these issues is limited as their voices are not the majority. She continued saying the grant program from S-4 may come out in January.

Next the Rail Trail Extension was discussed. Selectman Steinhour said the town has been in this project for over twenty years and is looking to discontinue it. They are on a timeline to complete the project or else they will have to repay the grant funding that has been used up to this point. The board wondered if support could be given from the state representatives if they do pursue discontinuing the project. He explained the struggles of attaining easements, needing a new engineering contract to continue working on the plans, and the potential for paying back the grant funds (approximately $ 150,000). Representative Hango said she wouldn’t have any control to help determine if the town would have to pay back the funds or not. Darlene suggested for the sake of time, easements can be eliminated by ending the trail at Overlook Park. She thought three easements could be taken out. Rowena Brown suggested doing research on the properties where the rail trail extension starts (Freds Energy, Pat Stanley, Dave’s Auto). She thought the previous owner had easements for the whole property prior to its subdivision. Selectman Fletcher added they would like to know all their options.

Selectman Steinhour motioned to go into executive session for personnel at 8:05 pm. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

At 8:27 pm Selectwoman Paquette motioned to come out of executive session. Selectwoman Sheperd seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

As a result of the executive session Selectman Steinhour motioned to post the Town Administrator position with modifications made to the description. Chair Pond seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Meeting adjourned 8:30 pm.

Submitted by

Michael Olio – Town Administrator

Attest: