

**SHARON SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes (DRAFT)
Monday, January 6, 2020**

Selectboard Members Attending: Joe Ronan (**via phone**), Kevin Gish, Mary Gavin
Staff Attending: Deb Jones (Finance Manager), Margy Becker (Selectboard Assistant), Frank Rogers (Road Foreman)
Public Attending: Emily Grube, Pomfret Selectboard; Jon Harrington, P.E.; Alliance for Vermont Communities members Jen Hayslett, Warren Johnston, Michael Sacca; Ashley Community Forest Committee members Matthew Perry (Sharon), Dick Rubin (Sharon), County Forester David Paginelli; Peter Anderson (Sharon Planning Commission).

Meeting was called to order by Kevin Gish at 6:30PM.

1. Approval of Agenda

A motion was made by Mary Gavin to approve the agenda without changes. Kevin Gish seconded. Roll call vote: Ronan yes, Gavin yes, Gish yes. The motion carried.

2. Howe Hill Specifications and Bidding Process

Jon Harrington, P.E. met with Selectmen and staff for the final review of specifications for the 2020 paving projects, inclusive of Howe Hill. Jon Harrington presented his “engineer’s estimate” of projected expenditures to complete base preparations and to pave Howe Hill and the four side roads. His engineers’ estimate is \$100,000 over the figure presented to the voters for the bond information meeting. Selectmen discussed the volatility of oil and asphalt prices. After hearing additional comments from Road Foreman Frank Rogers, River Road culvert replacements were deleted from the scope of work. The Town will procure for and manage this work separately.

Project start and completion dates were reviewed and modified. The bid specs will be revised to reflect a start date of June 1 and completion date of August 15. The bid remains a ‘lump sum’ bid, with the Contractor to be paid for quantities in place. Jon Harrington was asked to amend the bid form to allow for bid totals for each road. A pre-bid meeting was agreed to and scheduled.

3. Horizons Engineering Contract Amendment: Paving CIP Implementation

Selectmen and Jon Harrington discussed Horizons Engineers’ proposed revision to an existing agreement for services with the Town for bid assistance, pre-construction and construction oversight in the amount of \$20,200.

Proposed revisions include additional bid phase services (\$7,000) and construction oversight services inclusive of daily inspections for up to 30 days of construction (\$16,000 - \$20,000). The proposed contract amendment totals \$23,000 - \$27,000. Selectmen indicated that costs of proposed services, while important to the success of the paving projects, were too high. Discussions followed about what project administration functions town staff could assume to help reduce the costs of the contract amendment. Selectmen then agreed with Jon Harrington that the Selectboard would agree to a final contract amendment at its January 20th meeting. This would give Jon time to hear from the Pomfret Selectboard regarding their expectations for engineering assistance.

4. **Ashley Community Forest:**

Michael Sacca, Alliance for Vermont Community (“AVC”), presented a status report on the AVC’s efforts to bring the vision for a new community forest, which would straddle the Sharon/Strafford town line, into being. Mr. Sacca was joined by other AVC members and members of the Ashley Community Forest Board for the presentation.

Michael Sacca and AVC member Jen Hayslett reported the AVC has raised \$523,000 for the purchase of the 256-acre tract. A full survey of the parcel has been completed. The survey has confirmed deeded access to the tract to within 50 feet of Clifford Farm Road in Sharon. Thus direct access to the tract from Sharon will be feasible with the consent of one or more landowners on Clifford Farm Road.

Michael Sacca indicated the AVC is now approaching the towns of Sharon and Strafford with a request that they accept the donated acreage as a jointly-owned community forest. The AVC has prepared an article for March town meeting warnings for both towns. Voters in both Towns will be asked *“to acquire the donated property, which will be encumbered by a conservation easement (co-held by the Vermont Land Trust and VT Housing and Conservation Board), and owned and managed in cooperation with the Town of Strafford under the terms of an interlocal contract”*.

Michael Sacca asked the Selectboard to place the article on the Sharon Town Meeting warning, following suit of the Strafford Selectboard. After further discussions the Selectboard agreed it would place the article on the Sharon town meeting warning, if it received a valid petition signed by 5% of registered voters. Petitioned articles for town meeting warnings must be presented to town clerks by January 16.

Michael Sacca called Selectmen’s attention to the proposed inter-local agreement (“ILA”), prepared by Attorney Dan Grossman, and asked that it be submitted to the town’s attorney for review prior to Town Meeting. Joe Ronan confirmed he and Strafford Selectboard Chair Toni Pippy have discussed using one attorney to perform this legal review on behalf of both towns.

Michael Sacca reported the AVC has been working very hard to educate the public about the value of the forested tract as a community asset. The AVC intends to hold public

information meetings in both towns prior to March town meetings to hear public comments on the proposed article.

Joe Ronan expressed some confusion about the 20-year projections for income and expenses associated with management of the community forest, which Michael Sacca had prepared. He and Mary Gavin then asked for further documentation of how the AVC was spending monies received from the VT Housing and Conservation Board earmarked for Ashley Community Forest, \$20,000 of which is to be granted to the towns as 'seed' money for the future management of the forest.

5. FY21 Budget Preparation:

Selectmen took action to adopt a final FY21 town budget, after consideration of the final modifications presented by Deb Jones, Finance Manager and after evaluating three options for reducing property taxes.

Motion by Mary Gavin to approve FY21 general operating and highway budgets based on Option 3 in the Comparative Budget Summary presented January 6, 2020. Roll call vote: Kevin Gish yes, Joe Ronan yes, Mary Gavin yes. The motion carried.

The Selectboard's proposed general fund budget includes \$668,034 in expenses, reflects a 5.81% increase over the prior year. The proposed highway budget includes expenses of \$988,163, which is a 3.19% increase over the prior year. The combined budgets total \$1,656,197 in proposed expenditures, which is a 4.23% increase over FY20.

The June 30, 2019 audited fund balance of the general fund was \$358,121. Selectmen agreed to apply \$21,037 of this fund balance to reduce the amount to be raised in taxes. The June 30, 2019 audited fund balance of the highway fund was only \$64,296. Selectmen agreed to apply \$15,378 of this fund balance to reduce the amount to be raised in property taxes to fund the highway budget.

The amount to be raised in property taxes to fund the FY21 general fund budget is \$417,649 and the amount to be raised in property taxes to fund the FY21 highway budget is \$842,970. The total amount to be raised in property taxes is \$1,260,619. This represents a \$30,470 increase (2.48%) over the property taxes raised last year.

The potential tax impacts of approval of this town budget at March Town Meeting is to increase municipal taxes on a home valued at \$200,000 by \$37.59 to \$1,554.79 based on the current grand list. Selectmen only have the authority to adopt a town budget and to set the tax rate to fund this budget. The amount of education taxes to be raised is determined by the State.

6. Selectboard Report – Town Report:

Selectmen agreed to forward their comments to Joe Ronan. Joe Ronan will produce the final report to be submitted for the town report.

7. Finance Manager Reports:

At the Finance Manager's suggestion, wage review will be added to the January 20th agenda. Selectmen confirmed their meeting schedule for employee 'stay' interviews.

8. Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Kevin Gish, seconded by Mary Gavin, to approve the December 16, 2019 minutes as modified. Roll call vote: Joe Ronan yes, Mary Gavin yes, Kevin Gish yes. The motion carried.

Motion by Mary Gavin, seconded by Kevin Gish, to approve the December 20, 2019 special meeting minutes without changes. Roll call vote: Joe Ronan yes, Mary Gavin yes, Kevin Gish yes. The motion carried.

Motion by Kevin Gish, seconded by Mary Gavin, to approve the January 2, 2020 special meeting minutes without changes. Roll call vote: Joe Ronan yes, Mary Gavin yes, Kevin Gish yes. The motion carried.

9. Approval of Warrants:

Joe Ronan discontinued participation in the meeting via teleconference.

Mary Gavin and Kevin Gish reviewed and approved check and payroll warrants.

10. Adjournment:

Mary Gavin made the motion to adjourn at 9:53PM. Kevin Gish seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Submitted by,
Margy Becker