

**SHARON SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, January 4, 2021**

MINUTES (Final)

Attending via Zoom: Selectboard members Joe Ronan, Mary Gavin, Kevin Gish; Town staff Margy Becker (SB Assistant), Deb Jones (Finance Manager), Frank Rogers (Road Foreman); Guest participants and listeners: Galen Mudgett, Lister; Debbie St. Peter, Town Clerk; residents Lizzie Curran, Marcy Marceau.

1. Call to Order:

Joe Ronan called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

2. Review/Approve Agenda:

Mary Gavin made the motion to approve the agenda without revisions. Kevin Gish seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Public Comments:

None received apart from agenda items.

4. Highway Business:

Frank Rogers, Road Foreman, shared brief reports. Joe Ronan and Frank will collaborate further on communications with ATG Westminster regarding the Meritor case. Town staff will follow-up with certain households on Beaver Meadow Road who are removing snow from their property and leaving dangerous berms of snow across the road. It is *illegal* to plow across town and state highways.

5. Town Meeting 2021:

Debbie St. Peter, Town Clerk, and Galen Mudgett, Lister and Town Moderator, joined the meeting to discuss what is known to-date about possibilities for conducting town meeting in March. Staff and officials expressed their desire to hold a town meeting in a manner that best protects public health.

Selectboards do not have authority to act alone to delay town meetings, unless the Legislature takes action. Staff learned in a recent VLCT seminar that Town meetings may not be conducted virtually, as they involve voting. Selectboards could take advantage of their temporary authority to adopt Australian ballot voting for 2021. But for towns like Sharon, which transacts the majority of business during the floor meeting, voting on all town meeting business by ballot and without the usual give and take of floor discussions, is a disappointing proposition. Should the SB agree to adopt the Australian ballot voting system

for Town Meeting 2021, Sharon voters would not only vote to elect its officers (moderator, Town Clerk, SB members, Constables, etc) as they do now, they would also vote by ballot to approve or disapprove the budget, elect trustees of the Library, Public Funds, and the Downer Fund, and they would vote to approve or disapprove any other articles presented in the warning. The only discussion of articles on the ballot would be during public information meeting(s), and which can be held via Zoom. Public information meetings to discuss Australian ballot articles must be held within 10 days of town meeting.

If the Town were to proceed with an in-person town meeting on March 2, it would have to meet strict COVID19 protocols and attendance would therefore be limited. But moving to an Australian ballot system for March 2nd also does not necessarily guarantee greater voter participation, because voters must request absentee ballots or vote in-person at the polls. There is no authority for a proactive town-wide mailing of ballots to voters as there was for the national election in November, unless the Legislature takes action.

SB members agreed with the Town Moderator and Town Clerk to wait to see if the Legislature takes swift action to affect the 2021 town meeting schedule. Further discussions on adoption of the Australian ballot system for TM 2021 will occur January 11.

Meanwhile there are several deadlines looming that residents and voters should be aware of, unless the Legislature intervenes to delay these dates:

January 14: deadline for petitioned articles for the town meeting warning; these petitions still must be signed by 5% of voters

January 25: deadline for submittal of ‘consent forms’ to run for a town officer position (*no signed nominating petitions are required for 2021*)

January 31st: last opportunity to warn town meeting for March 2nd

Margy Becker is collecting town reports as usual. There seems to be, at present, some discussion about a separate school annual report this year. Announcements will be made on the listserv and elsewhere concerning town officer vacancies.

Selectmen discussed potential articles for the **Town Meeting Warning** as follows:

a. Delay the assessment of the 8% delinquent tax penalty for one week?

Galen Mudgett inquired about delaying assessment of delinquent tax penalty for one week following the February payment due date. The voters would have to approve an article at town meeting to effect this change. The change in practice would go into effect the following year.

Deb Jones indicated the current approach to assessing the 8% penalty without a grace period means the Delinquent Tax Collector is able to collect the 8% on payments he or she has not billed for. Approximately 20 payments are received within two weeks of the February due date and include escrow mistakes that need to be reconciled with banks. Kevin Gish expressed support for delaying the assessment of the 8% penalty. SB

members agreed to further discuss this proposed change in assessment of the 8% delinquent tax penalty during its January 11 meeting. The Finance Manager was asked to present further data on the types and amounts of payments customarily received during the week following the February due date.

b. Separate articles for town and highway budget approvals?

Galen Mudgett suggested the voters be given the opportunity to adopt the town general fund and highway budgets separately. Mary Gavin expressed some misgivings about breaking the budgets apart. She reported on the rationale for the SB's decision in 2013 to report on the two budgets separately in the town report, noting the town meeting warning still calls for approval of one overall budget. She expressed support for having the warning further describe the tax amounts being raised in support of both budgets. SB members agreed to consider alternative language for the budget article during the January 11 meeting.

c. Consider changes in whether the Treasurer is elected or appointed? Consider a Clerk/Treasurer position?

Deb Jones noted that the status of the Treasurer position has been under discussion within the Town and with the School District for some time. She inquired whether this is the year to effect the change which would go into effect the following year (March 2022). SB members agreed to further consider a potential article. However, they also noted that there will be a change in Town Clerks at Town Meeting 2021, as a result of Debbie St. Peter's retirement. SB members wondered whether it would be prudent to wait another year for an article on the warning that addresses the Treasurer position.

d. Approval of Ashley Forest Ballot Language:

Kevin Gish made the motion to approve the Ashley Forest ballot language as presented. Mary Gavin seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Shall the voters direct the Sharon Selectboard to acquire from the Alliance for Vermont Communities approximately 149.7 acres of land (Sharon land parcel number R1758S2), contingent upon the Selectboard's subsequent agreement:

- **on the terms of a conservation easement for the property;**
- **on the terms of an agreement for the acquisition of the property; and**
- **on other terms relating to future management of the property with the Town of Strafford (owner of an adjacent land parcel in Strafford), the Alliance of Vermont Communities, and the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board?**

6. FY22 Budget Preparations:

Deb Jones led discussions and final review of general fund and highway budgets. Highway infrastructure and equipment budgets were reviewed. SB members agreed the priority was to

level-fund taxes to be raised and that the existing budget accomplished that objective. Selectmen will finalize the proposed budget on January 11th.

Lister Galen Mudgett reported the Town has received notice from the State that its common level of appraisal (“CLA”) has dropped considerably from 102 to 94. This will negatively impact the education tax rate, causing it to go up considerably. The State calculates the education tax rate, but Galen indicated he will estimate the impact of the CLA decrease on the education rate and share that information prior to the next SB meeting.

7. Local Hazard Mitigation Planning Services: Proposed Agreement with Threat Owl, LLC:

Lizzie Curran, resident on Moore Road, asked for clarification of the agenda item. After those brief discussions it was agreed Margy Becker will contact Threat Owl staff to clarify language addressing submittal of progress billings. The SB will entertain final approval of the agreement for services at the January 11th meeting.

8. Opioid Litigation:

Joe Ronan did not have any new updates.

9. Historic Preservation Grant:

It was noted the Historical Society’s grant application for repairs to the Old Town Hall was not approved for this year. The SHS will resubmit in FY22.

10. Finance Manager Reports:

Deb Jones reported her application for an LGER grant for reimbursement of COVID19-related expenses has been approved, earning the Town \$20,232 to cover mandated quarantine expenses for some employees, physical improvements to the Town Offices, and additional pandemic-related expenses. The BCBS of VT has transitioned to a new HRA plan administrator.

Mary Gavin made the motion to adopt the 2021 HRA Plan document as presented and to authorize the Chair to sign. Kevin Gish seconded. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

Kevin Gish made the motion to authorize the Finance Manager to sign the Service Agreement with MII Life Insurance Inc. d/b/a ‘Further’. Mary Gavin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Selectboard Assistant Reports:

Margy Becker explained she is proceeding with pulling together town reports. She continues to monitor water quality and odor in the town offices. She confirmed that Christian Electric had finished installation of bathroom fans in the Old School House.

12. Coronavirus planning/updates:

Mary Gavin reported on the recent Incident Command meeting. Some of the South Royalton Rescue staff have received COVID 19 vaccines. IC meetings will be held on the first Mondays of the month at 5:00PM going forward. She agreed to cover the February meeting. Joe Ronan reported the pandemic is causing a rise in insurance rates for the Sharon Health Initiatives' Officers and Directors insurance coverage, which SHI is having to further consider.

13. Harlow Road – updates:

SB members reported there was no change in conditions. One person remains in federal prison, the other is home. Neighbors are reporting there is new traffic from New Hampshire.

14. Approval of Minutes:

Mary Gavin made the motion to approve draft 2 of the minutes of the December 14, 2020 regular meeting with addition as noted. Kevin Gish seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

15. Approval of Warrants:

Mary Gavin made the motion to approve the payroll warrant for the period ending December 19, 2020 with a cash draw of \$17,552.23 as previously signed in DocuSign on 12/21/20. Kevin Gish seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Kevin Gish made the motion to approve the payroll warrant for the period ending January 2nd, 2021 with a cash draw of \$14, 870.78. Mary Gavin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Deb Jones noted the SB has received a signed copy of the Notice of Decision to abate \$2,981.54 of taxes for FY2021. A warrant needs to be approved to enable reimbursement to Jeremiah McLane of \$1,795.32 in FY2021 taxes. **Joe Ronan made the motion, which was seconded by Kevin Gish, to approve Check Warrant #1107 in the amount of \$1,795.32 for reimbursement of FY2021 taxes. The motion carried unanimously.**

Motion by Kevin Gish to approve Check Warrant #1108 in the amount of \$740 for payment to Christian Electric as previously approved in DocuSign on 12/21/20. Mary Gavin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Mary Gavin made the motion to approve Check Warrant #1109 in the amount of \$9,468.67 for payment of 4 invoices from BB Chain/Chappell Tractor Sales, Inc. totaling

\$1262 for chains and small equipment; payment to **Cargill** of \$3126.21 for 45.17 tons of salt, **Chase Site Services** \$1800 for plowing sidewalks, School Street, building entryways and parking lots, **Compucount** \$156.25 for payroll processing fees, 2 invoices from **Consolidated Communications** \$328.58 for telephone service, 3 invoices from **Delta Dental** \$446.18 for January dental insurance premiums, and 3 invoices from **Evans Motor Fuels** \$2349.45. **Kevin Gish seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

Kevin Gish made the motion to approve Check Warrant #1110 in the amount of \$931.38 including payments to **EC Fiber** \$79 for library internet, **Foley Services** \$225.32 (4 invoices) for uniform cleaning, **Green Mountain Power** \$614.06 (7 invoices) for electricity for Jan 2021, and **Have Trash Will Travel** \$13. **Mary Gavin seconded the motion and the motion was approved 3-0-0.**

Mary Gavin made the motion to approve Check Warrant #1111 in the amount of \$7,279.40 including payments to **Health Equity** \$225.04 (2 invoices) for health insurance expenses, **Lincoln National Life Insurance** (3 invoices) \$223.24 for Life & Short/Long-term disability insurance premiums, **Mudgett Jennett & Krogh-Wisner** \$1400 for final invoice related to the FY20 audit, **ATG Westminster** \$90.29 for vehicle inspection, **Pike Industries** \$254.60 for 5” ledge to stockpile, **Sabil & Sons** \$879.76 (2 invoices) for supplies and F550 wheels, **Milton CAT** \$841.46 for Loader cut edges, **Vermont Dept. of Motor Vehicles** \$42 for CDL license records, **VMERS DB** \$3323.01 for December retirement payable. **Kevin Gish seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

16. Adjourn:

Mary Gavin made the motion to adjourn at 8:50PM. Kevin Gish seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Submitted by,
Margy Becker