

SHARON SELECTBOARD
Australian Ballot Informational Hearing
Special Meeting Minutes FINAL
Thursday, February 22nd, 2022
6:00PM

*This meeting was held in compliance with 2022 Amendments to the VT Open Meeting law
for fully-remote electronic meetings due to ongoing pandemic conditions.*

Total Attendees: 48

Attending via Zoom: Selectboard Members: Chair, Joe Ronan, Vice Chair, Kevin Gish, Clerk, Mary Gavin; Town Staff: Margy Becker, SB Assistant; Nicola Shipman, SB Assistant; Deb Jones, Finance Manager; Participants: Holly Potter; Alex Bird, SB Candidate; Dee Gish; Cat Buxton, Resident; Sarah Pfeiffer, SB Candidate; Galen Mudgett, Lister; Margaret Raymond, Treasurer; Ken Wright, Delinquent Tax Collector; Laura DeCapua, Library Trustee Candidate; Helen Barret, Resident; Elizabeth Sowerwine, Resident ; Bob Ferguson, Downer Fund Trustee Candidate

1. Call to Order

Joe Ronan convened the meeting at 6:00PM.

2. Additions or Deletions to the Agenda

Joe Ronan asked if there were any changes or revisions to the agenda.

Mary Gavin made a motion to accept the agenda as written. Kevin Gish seconded.

Deb Jones then asked a clarifying question to see if there would be an executive session at the end of the meeting. Joe Ronan confirmed there would be. And Joe also took a moment to remind everyone that the meeting was being recording.

Kevin Gish made an amendment to the motion on the floor to accept the agenda to include the addition of the executive session at the end of the meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Introductory Remarks

Joe Ronan made introductory remarks explaining the purpose for the informational hearing and the format.

Joe also reminded the participants that he would be stepping down from the Selectboard and wanted to take a few minutes to appreciate some of the people he has worked with during his tenure on the Selectboard. He first wanted to appreciate Kevin Gish and Mary Gavin and thank them for their hard work and dedication.

Also, Joe extended a thank the town employees, starting with the Road Crew, Frank Rogers, Brad Howe, Allen Wight, and Joe Robinson. The road crew has done a tremendous job with the roads. Also, Joe extended a thank you to the current town clerk, Cathy Sartor and former town clerk, Debbie St. Peter. Joe also thanked the Town Listers, Galen Mudgett, Ken Wright and Helen Barrett. Ken Wright is also the Delinquent Tax Collector, Margaret Raymond Treasurer, Librarian Shana Hickman, Joni Lyman, Judi Kehoe, new Selectboard Assistant Nicola Shipman, and Town Health Officer, Alex Bird.

Joe also made mention of the importance of Sharon's volunteers: those who serve on the Planning Commission, the volunteer Fire Department, the Trustees of the Library, those who served on the COVID-19 Incident Command Board in response to the pandemic, the Conservation Commission, the school volunteers, the Historical Society Volunteers, Green Up Day volunteers and the combination of dedicated employees and great volunteers that make the town of Sharon such a great place.

Joe, Mary and Kevin also shared words of appreciation for two town employees who are soon to be retiring, Margy Becker, the Selectboard Assistant, and Deb Jones, the Finance Manager. There is a tribute to both Deb and Margy in the town report and Joe encouraged people to read it.

Joe shared that the town has been very fortunate to have such knowledgeable and dedicated staff members. Mary mentioned that Margy has worked for the town for close to 27 years. Both Mary and Kevin shared that Margy has a tremendous amount of knowledge not only about the town, but also state law and applicable grants available for the which has been a huge help to the entire community. Margy has done a great job keeping the selectboard organized especially given the wide variety of issues that come before the selectboard. Additionally, Deb Jones, who is also retiring this year, has been a partner working on budgets, as well as steering the town in a strong direction and has supported keeping the financial house in order. The town is in better financial shape due to the professional insights provided by Deb. Both Deb and Margy will be sorely missed.

Nicola Shipman presented an overview of how to fully participate via phone and computer.

Kevin Gish made a comment clarifying the title of the Town Report, which is for FY2021. Kevin Gish also referenced ARPA, which is not addressed, but pertains to the federal money that will be coming to the town of Sharon. Kevin wanted to encourage residents to get involved in conversation with the board as to how to spend this money. We also need two Sharon representatives for the Ashley Community Forest Committee.

Holly Potter asked about the Ashley Community Forest Committee job description. Kevin responded with an overview and Mary Gavin mentioned there is a job description available and is posted on the website and will be shared by email by request.

Kevin Gish read ARTICLE 1.**Article 1. To elect the following Town Officers:**

Town Moderator for a 1-year term	Galen Mudgett, Jr.
Town Treasurer for a 3-year term	Margaret Raymond
Collector of Delinquent Taxes for a 1-year term	Ken Wright
Selectboard member for a 3-year term	Alex Bird; Sarah Pfeiffer
Lister for a 3-year term	Ken Wright
1st Constable for a 1-year term	Vacancy
Trustee of Public Funds for a 3-year term	Vacancy
Trustee of Baxter Library for a 3-year term	Sandy Johnston
Trustee of Baxter Library for a 3-year term	Laura DeCapua
Trustee of Chester Downer Fund for a 3-year term	Bob Ferguson

There was a brief introduction by several candidates, including both Selectboard Candidates, Alex Bird and Sarah Pfeiffer as well as a Question-and-Answer Session with Selectboard Candidates.

Suzanne Jones asked what the strongest skill Alex Bird feels he brings to the selectboard. Alex responded that he gets along with people, and he tries to find a common ground. He also said that it is important to keep an open mind and listen and not become polarized.

Cat Buxton asked Alex Bird what he thinks about preparedness for future flooding and other rain events that will cause future infrastructure damage in town. Alex responded that Irene effected his business when the road failed and was closed. He would keep an open dialogue with the road crew and finding out what the budgetary needs are for the roads would be guides.

Cat Buxton asked Sarah Pfeiffer asked a question about climate change preparedness. Sarah responded that she was not in Sharon during Irene but is a member of the fire department and would turn to her chief, such as the other selectboard members. Sarah would want to be out helping in the best way she could. Climate change is an issue that Sarah cares about and would look into it in any way that she could.

Suzanne Jones asked Sarah Pfeiffer what she would be bringing to the town and what she would hope to improve. Sarah is apt to be interested in the local schools, the library, the fire department, and outdoor recreation. Sarah feels she brings a different lens as a younger resident of the town. Sarah has been active in the community and continues to be involved.

Mary Gavin read Articles 2, 3 and 4.

Article 2. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon appropriate the amount of \$1,861,675 for necessary Town expenses, including highways, of which \$1,320,000 shall be raised by property taxes?

Mary Gavin shared a brief presentation on the FY23 budget. She noted that the budget shows a municipal tax rate increase of just 3 cents. The Selectboard has worked hard to avoid big swings in the municipal tax rate.

Holly Potter asked if there were already ideas identified for the ARPA funding. Mary said there have been ideas generated and that those are available to view. Also Mary mentioned that there would be continued discussion in the near future, and the Selectboard welcomes ideas for how this funding could be appropriated. Mary also directed Holly to the website.

Elizabeth Sowerwine asked about the motivation for increasing the contracted hours for the police. Kevin Gish responded that the Selectboard was hearing that the community was looking for a little more policing. The town currently contracts 16 hours per week with the Windsor County Sheriff Department, and the Selectboard has increased that to 20 hours per week in FY23. Additionally, there will be an increase in the cost of \$2.00/hour

Article 3. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon authorize the Town Treasurer to collect General Fund, Highway Fund, and School District current taxes on real and personal estate?

No public questions or comments

Article 4. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon authorize payment of real and personal property taxes in two (2) installments for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, the first being on or before Wednesday, September 14, 2022, and the second being on or before Wednesday, February 15, 2023?

No public questions or comments

Kevin Gish read ARTICLE 5

Article 5. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon vote that overdue taxes shall bear an interest rate of one percent (1%) per month or part thereof for each installment until paid in full, and a late fee of eight percent (8%) following any delinquency after the second installment due date?

No public questions or comments

Joe Ronan read ARTICLE 6, ARTICLE 7 and ARTICLE 8

Article 6. Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to appoint a town treasurer as provided in 17 V.S.A. § 2651f?

Joe explained that this is an idea that still needs to be worked out at the selectboard level, but the position is important and would not be eliminated, but possible the role would evolve in concert with the Finance Manager position. Joe noted that Margaret Raymond is running for a three-year term, and if she is elected, as she likely will be, and if this article is approved, then the

Selectboard would potentially take action to appoint a treasurer and there is a process in the statute to appoint a treasurer with a waiting period in place.

No public questions or comments

Article 7. Shall the town provide notice of the availability of the annual report by postcard, mailed to registered voters, at least 30 days before the annual meeting instead of mailing or otherwise distributing the report to the voters of the town pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 1682(a)?

Joe communicated the details that a postcard would make residents aware that the report would be available in print at the town office and on the website. This could save the town both the printing and mailing costs.

Helen Barrett asked Joe to revisit Article 6. She asked that if the treasurer is appointed by the Selectboard, how does the town accomplish the constitutional checks and balances on the Selectboard. Joe Ronan responded that the process is contemplated by the Vermont Statutes. It is a valid concern that is addressed by the legislature and that residents elect the Selectboard members who serve the town. Also, visibility into the financial transactions and transparency of town records and transactions is critical.

Cat Buxton asked about the potential changes to the method of delivery for the Town Report. Cat has struggled to get her town report for many years. Cat noted that it is worth considering who has and who may not have access to the website and wanted to offer a word of caution. Joe Ronan responded that there would be copies available at the town office as well as on the website.

Helen Barrett commented that she concurred with Cat Buxton and feels this would be a “pennywise and pound foolish” change.

Article 8. Shall the town no longer elect or appoint a second constable?

Joe Ronan noted that the first constable position is hard to fill, and the second constable seems to be vestigial at this point. Kevin Gish added that the Selectboard was advised that this did not have to be on the ballot, but they chose to add it so residents would be aware.

Holly Potter asked what type of support would be offered, such as job description and compensation.

Joe Ronan clarified that there is a description of the position but no compensation currently. Kevin Gish mentioned that compensation would be considered if there were a qualified candidate, and if the candidate had a certain level of police training. Traditionally a constable with no police training is extremely limited in what they can accomplish in the role.

Holly Potter then asked for clarification of the purpose of a First Constable with no training. Kevin Gish replied that the position is statutorily required despite being a difficult position to fill and is possibly outdated but required. Joe Ronan responded that is why the elimination of the Second Constable position is on the ballot.

4. Discussion of other non-binding business

Kevin Gish noted that current Chair, Joe Ronan, is stepping down at the end of this term, and he thanked him for his service to the town over the past four years. Joe's legal expertise has been valuable particularly during the opioid settlements, the Ashley Community Forest settlement and Joe is a soothing person in the face of conflicting points of view.

Mary Gavin expressed her gratitude and thanked Joe for looking for good solutions and feels she has learned from him in that regard.

Dee Gish offered her thanks to Deb Jones and Margy Becker for their dedication to the town.

5. Entertain Motion to adjourn Australian Ballot Information Hearing

Mary Gavin made a motion to adjourn the information hearing and move into the Special Selectboard Meeting. Seconded by Kevin Gish. Motion unanimously approved.

6. Convene Special Selectboard Meeting

7. Approve Minutes

Kevin Gish made a motion to approve the minutes from February 7th as published. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Kevin Gish made a motion to approve the minutes from February 10th as published. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

8. Approve Warrants

Kevin Gish made a motion to ratify the Payroll Warrant for Period ending 2/12/22 for \$20,136.27. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Mary Gavin made a motion to ratify the AP Warrant 1373 for \$574.71

With payments to Eyemed \$70.42; Nicola Shipman \$504.29 reimbursement for Town Report Mailing. **Kevin Gish seconded. Motion approved unanimously**

Mary Gavin made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1276 for \$14612.66

With payments to: BCBS of VT \$4700.20; Business Tech Management \$1432 for new computer and monitors for Town Clerk; Cargill \$2382.35; Casella Waster \$150.30; Evans Motor Fuels \$2924.17; Foley Services \$115.86; GUVSWS \$2475 for 50 punch cards; Indelible \$117.50 web service; Kofile \$315.28 Binder. **Kevin Gish seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

Kevin Gish made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1277 for \$34608.54 with payments to:

Magee OP \$233.85; Royal Auto Parts \$54.62; Sabil & Sons \$686.80; Sharon Firemen's Association \$25925.00; So Ro Rescue \$6824.50; Suburban Propane \$696; Tarrant Gillies & Shems \$187.20 for Town Plan readoption assistance. **Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

Joe Ronan made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1278 for \$13754.79 with payments to:

Chase Site Services \$3000; Delta Dental \$467.64; Madison National Life \$207.16; Valley News \$464.40; VMERS DB \$3641..59; Windsor Cty Sheriffs \$5974.00. **Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

Kevin Gish made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1279 for \$9225.00 with payments to:

COTT Systems Inc \$9225 for prepayment of RecordRoom for digitizing land records to be paid with SLFRF funds. **Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

9. Executive Session

Kevin Gish made a motion to enter Executive Session at 7:28PM for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter. Seconded by Mary Gavin. Motion passes unanimously.

Selectboard members lost connection to the Executive session meeting room. Executive Session reconvened at 7:38 PM.

Kevin Gish made a motion to exit Executive session at 7:49PM. Seconded by Mary Gavin. Motion passes unanimously.

10. Reconvene Open Meeting

Mary Gavin made a motion to approve a wage increase for the Finance Manager to \$30/hour effective beginning Feb 27, 2022. Seconded by Kevin Gish. Motion passes unanimously.

Kevin Gish made a motion to approve a retirement bonus for Finance Manager and Selectboard Assistant in the amount of \$2,000 each to be paid with the pay period ending Feb 26, 2022. Mary Gavin seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

11. Other Business

No other business

12. Adjourn

Kevin Gish made a motion to adjourn at 7:55PM. Seconded by Mary Gavin. Motion passes unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by Nicola Shipman