

**Sharon Selectboard
Regular Meeting Minutes
November 21st, 2022 FINAL**

This meeting was held in compliance with the January 2022 VT Open Meeting law amendments regarding fully-remote electronic meetings.

Participants attending via Zoom: Catherine Sartor, Town Clerk; Nicola Shipman, Selectboard Assistant; Sarah Pfeiffer, Selectboard Clerk; Lucy Pierpont, Finance Manager; Kevin Gish, Selectboard Chair; Marcy Marceau, Resident; Alex Bird, Health Officer; Mary Gavin, Selectboard Vice Chair; Deb Jones, Treasurer; Tom Lober, Sharon Fire Department

Participants attending via Phone: Frank Rogers, Road Foreman

Call to Order:

Kevin Gish called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

1. Review/Approve Agenda

Mary Gavin made a motion to approve the agenda. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Public Comments

Catherine Sartor asked the Board to consider a liquor license renewal. Chateau Industries LLC has applied for a renewal due to changes in the way the State processes liquor licenses. Mary Gavin asked if the State notified the Town of the change. Cathy said that she received the application, and she is also navigating the changes the first time.

Kevin Gish did say that a liquor license approval is an item that should be a warned notice. Alex Bird and Marcy Marceau noted that the new process added a new challenge to the renewal process. Rather than applying for a renewal as they have done in the past, at this point, they are applying for a new license. Both Marcy and Alex understood that the Board would rather have this as a warned item on the agenda to allow for public comment should anyone wish to have that opportunity.

The liquor license application submitted by Chateau Industries LLC will be added to the agenda for the December 5th meeting for review.

3. Review/Approve Minutes: November 7th

Mary Gavin made a motion to approve the November 7th, 2022, minutes with minor changes. Kevin Gish seconded. Motion approved.

4. Selectboard Member Reports: Members

Mary Gavin is the Sharon representative serving on the GUVSWD Board of Supervisors. Mary reported there are changes to the GUVSWD appropriate which will be reduced from \$10 per capita to \$9 per capita in FY24.

Sarah Pfeiffer reported that the AED devices are on order and there is a plan to install the three devices, with one each at the Library, the Town Offices and the Town Garage.

Kevin Gish said that the DRB and PC are busy right now with the Town Plan and upcoming site visits and hearings.

Kevin Gish also said that the Memorandum of Agreement for the Baxter Memorial Library Drainage Project was approved by the Sharon Elementary School Board at their last meeting, and the joint project looks to be moving along. Nicola Shipman will apply for an extension from the State for 1111 Permit allowing access to the catch basin on Route 14.

5. Finance Manager Reports: Lucy Pierpont

Lucy Pierpont said the taxes due for first payments has been reduced to \$28,000.00 owed to the Town. Lucy said she has sent the Board the financials for October. Lucy highlighted that the Fund Balance sheet included an additional \$10,000 payment to the Town due to an error with School Taxes owed to the Town. This brought the FY22 Fund Balance up since the last time she reported to the Board.

Lucy said it looks as though the revenue for property taxes this year was \$22,000 higher than October last year, but Lucy thinks otherwise all numbers look roughly equivalent to 2022 for the monthly financials.

Mary Gavin asked if Lucy could provide a high-level recap in writing in advance of meetings, particularly making a note any unusual variances or any numbers that stand out from the previous comparable reporting period. Lucy said she could do that.

6. Highway Business/Road Foreman Reports: Frank Rogers

Frank Rogers said that there was nothing particularly alarming. All the trucks are ready for winter since the Town Road Crew has already plowed the first snow of the season.

Mary Gavin asked if there was a sufficient salt supply. Frank said there is a contract in place with Barratt. The State contract price is \$86 per ton, which is an increase from \$78 per ton from 2022. Frank said the new sander is set up on the truck and is better calibrated which should make a difference with the salt application.

The Road Crew is back to the five day a week schedule.

Nicola Shipman also added that Frank will be hosting a mandatory pre-bid meeting for the culvert replacement on Downer Road on Wednesday, November 23rd at 8:00AM.

7. Selectboard Assistant Reports: Nicola Shipman

Kevin Gish made a motion to sign the Brook Field Service Contract to renew the preventative maintenance agreement for Program #1 with Annual Major Service for Contractual Year 2023 in an amount not to exceed \$419.00. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Nicola Shipman said the RFP for the Sharon Historical Society Building ADA-accessible ramp is complete, but the RFP release is on hold due to the permitting requirements for the building. Any construction, including the removal and installation of the replacement ramp, requires a permit from the Division of Fire Safety. Nicola Shipman reached out to Jay Moody to find out if the building has ever been inspected and what requirements there might be to move forward with the Division of Fire Safety before going out to bid for the replacement ramp. Nicola thought it would be best to first start with the Fire Marshall before going out to bid for the Ramp so the Town would be aware of any deficiencies that may need to be corrected in advance of the work on the ramp.

Kevin Gish asked about the Contract for Jack Jones. Nicola said it was drafted and she was waiting for the go ahead from Jack. Once she has that, she will forward it to the Board for review.

Nicola Shipman also asked if everyone had received the photos from the Old Town Hall building. Mary and Sarah had not received them, so Nicola will send those.

Mary Gavin suggested it might be worth evaluating the use of the building and strategizing with regards to the mounting costs.

Kevin Gish agrees that it is worth starting with the Division of Fire Safety but the issues the Town is facing with the Old Town Hall are common to most old buildings.

8. Approve Warrants: Selectboard

Sarah Pfeiffer made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1396 in the amount of \$7,344.50 Aubuchon Hardware \$239.37, Blue Cross Blue Shield \$4,534.61, Casella Waste Systems \$82.31, Evans Motor Fuels \$2,456.17, Fastenal Company \$32.04. **Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

Sarah Pfeiffer made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1397 in the amount of \$20,001.55 with payments to Foley Services \$61.14, Future Supply Corp \$649.00, Jet Services \$90.30, Magee Office Products \$223.27, Community Bank \$8,608.35, Mudgett, Jennett & Krogh-Wisner \$9,000, New England Truck Tire \$1,141.13, Royal Auto Parts \$228.36. **Kevin Gish seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

Sarah Pfeiffer made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1398 in the amount of \$16,589.37 with payments to De Lage Landen Financial \$94.53, Sabil & Sons \$270.27, Sanel Auto Parts \$10.29, Sharon Health Initiative \$1,686.00, Tarrant, Gillies & Shems \$3,409.20, Twin State Sand & Gravel \$4,657.09, VLCT Employment Resource \$221.00, WB Mason \$.99, Windsor County Sheriff's \$6,240.00. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Kevin Gish made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1399 in the amount of \$129.99 Samantha Potter \$129.99. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Sarah Pfeiffer made a motion to approve AP Warrant 1401 in the amount of \$398 with payment to Brook Field Service \$398. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Mary Gavin made a motion to ratify the HRA Reimbursement for the period 10/1/2022 through 10/31/2022 in the amount of \$394.37. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Sarah Pfeiffer made a motion to approve payroll for the period 11/6/22 - 11/19/22 with a cash draw of \$15,374.18. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS: Action Items:

9. Health Officer Update

Alex Bird noted that he has followed up on four complaints so far this year. Two of those complaints remain open. Alex referred one inquiry to the State, and he responded to one report of a dog bite. Alex said he has been unable to contact the owner of the dog, but Alex said the dog is licensed, and its rabies vaccinations are on file.

One of the two complaints that remain open includes a property that was inspected by the State Plumbing Inspector and State Fire Marshal so far, but Alex anticipates there will need to be additional inspections by the Department of Environmental Conservation due to undersized wastewater capacity for the size of the property and the number of people living on the property.

The second open complaint is related to a property on Route 14 with a failed septic leach field. Rather than address the issue and retain ownership, the owner has put the property on the market. The DEC has yet to receive a new plan for the septic system as that would likely be a plan submitted by the prospective new owners of the home. The house is uninhabited and cannot be inhabited due to the septic failure. Alex said he won't be able to close this case until the DEC has the new plan which will be contingent on the sale.

Alex said he will let the Selectboard know when he gets an update from DOH regarding the open complaints.

10. Review Request for Extension of Deadline for Clearing Town Right of Way

After hearing from the Road Foreman and the Selectboard Assistant with regards to the request, the Selectboard discussed and subsequently denied Mr. Grover's request for an extension for the removal of large items from the Town Right of Way adjacent to 3755 Fay Brook Road in Sharon.

These items are in violation of the Town's Highway Policy Section and need to be removed. Nicola Shipman will notify Mr. Jones and Mr. Grover of the decision.

11. FY24 Budget Discussions and Action as Needed

Fire Department

Tom Lober provided an update on the financials for the Fire Department including Budget-to-Actuals for 2020-2022, as well as 2023 and 2024 budgets. Tom provided the Board with explanations for the requests for additional funding from the Town. Primarily, the budget increases tie directly to the increase in heating fuel and diesel. Tom shared that the Department, on the recommendation of the Selectboard, switched to EC Fiber for phone and internet service. Tom said the Department is saving money due to a switch to EC Fiber with better service. Overall, the budget is similar to last year, with differences in the budget predominately accounted for by increased heating and dispatch costs. Tom also raised the idea of the possibility of repaving the parking lot, but he said first there are some drainage issues that will need to be solved. The Department would like to run underground power from the Main Fire House to the Storage Building so that there could be power in that building. Kevin Gish asked about the drainage. Tom Lober said he would put together a proposal per Mary Gavin's suggestion probably next year. The paving estimate alone was about \$95,000 but that doesn't include solving any drainage issues. Frank Rogers said there is a catch basin on the Fire Station side along Route 14 near Sandy's, and there could be a possibility to tie into that catch basin in the future.

Appropriations Requests

Nicola Shipman identified two organizations with appropriations requests that increased by a significant amount since last year, including South Royalton Area Senior Center and the Sharon Health Initiative. Nicola Shipman will invite the Sharon Health Initiative to join the Board for the December 5th meeting, so the Board can ask clarifying questions about the SHI appropriations request. The Board does not feel it needs to hear from the South Royalton Area Senior Center.

Continued Discussion of Departmental Wages

Lucy Pierpont presented the Board with three additional proposals for Departmental Wages with variations to apply increases to different departments. At this point, there are six proposals available. Lucy pointed the Board to the Wage Breakdown by Department.

There was some discussion of the new proposals, and the Board felt that they had plenty of proposals from which to work.

Kevin Gish noted that if inflation is currently 7.2%, and he feels if wages are not adjusted in accordance, it works out to be a de facto pay cut. Kevin doesn't think there is any expectation that inflation will go down any time soon, and inflation affects all employees.

Kevin noted there is about a 4 – 4.5% variance between the six proposals presented by Lucy Pierpont.

Sarah Pfeiffer said that she was leaning towards Proposal 5 with an eye towards employee retention. Sarah thinks that proposal seems the closest to what the Road Foreman has brought forward to the Board.

Mary Gavin said she was processing the implications of the wage increase. She reiterated that it is important to take the increased requests for funding, rising costs and the effect of a wage increase in aggregate and to consider the effect of increases on the tax rate. She also noted that many of the residents of the Town will not be experiencing an increase in wages that matches the rate of inflation.

Mary Gavin also said she is not against paying people a fair wage, but she feels there needs to be a threshold that the Town shouldn't be willing to cross. Mary Gavin also isn't sure that pay increases are necessarily the best way to ensure employee retention.

Deb Jones also said the Board could work on other parts of the budget now and focus on wage decisions later in the budget process.

Mary Gavin asked if it would be worth considering a one-time payment representing the 7.2% inflation rate to address the short-term need in FY23 which would give the Board time to consider the impact of the wage increases on the FY24 budget. Deb Jones wondered if it might not need to be an either/or scenario, but rather it could be a combination of one-time payment and a wage increase. Deb Jones doesn't think there should be just a one-time payment with no wage increase. Mary Gavin and Kevin Gish agreed that a one-time payment wouldn't be the only solution.

Kevin Gish said the meeting he and Frank attended a meeting regarding hiring and retaining highway employees hosted in the Town of Norwich, and during that discussion pay rate was highlighted as an effective strategy when recruiting, but when it comes to retention, often benefits, vacation and the work environment and culture are also important, perhaps even more so than base pay.

Mary Gavin noted that the Town has been working consistently to ensure that employees are provided appropriate wage increases, and she said the Town provides a strong health benefits package which also included an increase in the HRA contribution effective January 2023. While Mary thought there could be room for improvement with vacation offerings, she also feels the Town is generous with Holidays and has shown itself to be a reasonable and fair employer that values its employees.

Kevin Gish asked that the Departmental Wages discussion be continued. Nicola Shipman will add it to the agenda for December 5th meeting. Kevin asked that the Board consider making it a goal to decide about FY23 at that meeting.

12. TAP Scoping Study Grant Application

Nicola Shipman provided an update on the Transportation Alternatives Program Grant Application which is due in December. Nicola Shipman shared that she attended a webinar hosted by the State, and it was her understanding that if the Town gets grant funding, the Town will need to be prepared to go to construction with the project, or the Town would be on the hook for balance of the grant funds.

Mary Gavin said it sounds outrageous to expect the Town to commit to construction after not knowing if scoping study would outline a cost of construction would outmatch the Town's capacity.

Nicola Shipman provided some projected costs of the construction for a sidewalk project using the VTrans actuals for cost to construct in 2014 – 2019 and the linear footage in the Designated Village district.

There was significant discussion about the costs of construction if the Town were to engage in a sidewalk project. The deficiencies of the current sidewalk and the safety concerns for pedestrians in the village, particularly the Route 132 crossing from the Park and Ride to the Town Offices/TSA Middle School, are focus points. Ultimately, the Town would like to ensure a higher level of pedestrian safety.

Sarah Pfeiffer wondered about reducing the scope of the study or the value of phasing construction over time and if that would help the Town could absorb the cost over time. Nicola thought it would be best to do the full scope of the Designated Village District, but the question about phasing construction would be difficult to answer without consulting a professional as to the best way to phase.

Nicola Shipman noted that the VTrans Park and Ride is also slated for upgrades in 2025 and the timing of a sidewalk project could be good for the Town as those projects could dovetail nicely.

Deb Jones also made a note that the allocation of ARPA funding has deadlines, and the Town portion of the scoping study would be funded using ARPA money.

Mary Gavin asked if there are other funding opportunities for small town like Sharon to help pay for the construction of sidewalks since the cost is so high. Nicola Shipman said the TAP Program and the Bike/Ped Grants are the best options for towns according to TRORC, but she will ask if there are other funding opportunities.

The cost of construction for sidewalks is expensive, and the Town will have some significant projects in the next few years, but the conversation about sidewalks has been ongoing for some 20 plus years.

While there was a significant amount of discussion about the project, there was agreement that a scoping study that includes the Designated Village District would likely be the next best step to determine whether transportation alternatives would be feasible for the Town.

Nicola Shipman will ask some clarifying questions of TRORC and the State to find out the best way forward for the Town and report back to the Selectboard. The Grant Application Letter of Support will be added to the agenda for December 5th.

13. Executive Session

Kevin Gish made a motion to enter executive session at 8:43PM for the purposes of discussing the “employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee” specifically the Road Crew as per [1 V.S.A. § 313\(a\)\(3\)](#). Participants to include Frank Rogers, Lucy Pierpont, Mary Gavin, Kevin Gish and Sarah Pfeiffer. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Mary Gavin made a motion to exit executive session at 9:09PM. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

No action was taken.

14. Adjourn

Kevin Gish made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:13PM. Mary Gavin seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Submitted by Nicola Shipman