

MINUTES REGULAR SELECT BOARD MEETING

6:00 P.M. Thursday, March 18, 2021

VIA ZOOM MEETING PLATFORM

Select Board

Eric Remick, Chair
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Vice Chair
Shari Cornish
Michael Deering
Gary Bellavance

Others Present

Shaun Fielder, Town Manager
Casey Rowell, Business Manager
Tom Fadden, Road Foreman
Aaron Cochran, Police Chief

Others Present

Doug McClure
Myles Tandy
Katie Tandy
Paul Fixx
Norma Spaulding

6:00 P.M. – Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the meeting to order.

6:01 P.M. – Set/Adjust Agenda – we need to add an Item #9 to authorize the USDA RBDG grant application

Upon motion by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted unanimously to adjust the agenda as stated.

6:02 P.M. – Select Board to approve minutes for the Regular Select Board meeting of March 4, 2021.

Upon motion by Shari Cornish, seconded by Gary Bellavance, the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of the March 4, 2021 regular meeting, as written.

6:03 P.M. – 6:09 P.M. Communication from the Audience –

Paul Fixx asked for transparency about the negotiation with Greensboro. He would like to understand what got us here and how we might fill the budget gap with the loss of revenue. Eric said we did attempt to negotiate several months prior but reached an impasse in December. Eric reached out to their Board directly. Greensboro wanted to be charged for services based on actual costs vs. budgeted costs. We also offered a mediator at our cost, but they did not agree to this. Paul Fixx indicated that he heard that some Greensboro residents indicated that Hardwick did not provide adequate regular reports to them. Eric said that the Town did move forward in good faith to try to move it forward.

6:09 P.M. – 6:28 P.M. Town Manager’s Report– Given by Shaun Fielder

The Town / HED were served lawsuit summons in late February. This was for a claimed stray voltage issue at a dairy farm in the service territory. The complaint was filed in Orleans Superior Court. The Vermont League of Cities & Towns is now representing the Town / HED on this matter.

Shaun is processing the source protection plan update for the Hardwick Public Water System with support of Ken LaCasse. This is typically processed every 3-years. With upcoming water bills, we will be including the 2020 consumer confidence report, so keep an eye out for that item. We were unable to do a full water system flush last Fall and have this scheduled for the week of April 19. We will post notices to residents and businesses around Town and in the paper. Shaun thanked the community for their vote of support on the bond vote. He will be continuing to work on planning the project with the support of A + E Engineers. Shaun wants to remind water or wastewater customers that you can enter pertinent contact information via the Town website for an instant alert system being developed at this time. On the Town homepage, click on water/wastewater instant alert notification button in upper left corner.

This week the Town received a 60-day advance notice for a proposed cell tower in the vicinity of Hopkins Hill. More information on this is posted on the Town of Hardwick website, including details of how interested parties can receive all and any information updates for this proposal the via Public Utility Commission. To access information, click on the Planning Commission button in the Government section of the Town website.

Roof replacement bids for the Public Safety and Historic Depot Buildings were posted today in three newspapers, Front Porch Forum, and the Town's website. Bids are due April 8. Any contractors interested can visit the Town website for more information.

With the implementation of The American Rescue Plan, Congress has recently approved funding allocations for local governments. Information on the VLCT website indicates Hardwick is eligible for \$280,000. We are waiting for more info to determine how and what funds could be used for.

The Town received notice this week from Congressman Welch's office indicating that each representative of Congress is eligible to nominate 10 projects in their Congressional District to be funding via a FY22 Appropriations Bill. Mr. Welch's office is seeking survey input with deadline of March 31. We are evaluating some options at this time and one project that came to mind was Highway Garage. Any other thoughts / suggestions would be appreciated.

Shaun wanted to remind everyone to keep following the recommended social distancing measures to include use of masks and encourage everyone to sign up for a vaccination when they are eligible.

Shaun reported that he has notified the Select Board that he will not be renewing his employment contract with the Town for personal reasons. He anticipates completing his work assignment on May 31.

Shari asked about crosswalk painting and reviewing the Pedestrian Task Force recommendations about what can be implemented this season. Shaun said that Tom would cover that in his report.

Eric thanked Shaun for his leadership over the last 2.5 years and the Town wishes him the best.

6:28 P.M. – 6:36 P.M. Road Foreman Report– Given by Tom Fadden

Tom reported that overall, the backroads are doing well. They have been filling in some rough spots with stamatt. They have also seen an increase in frozen water underneath mobile homes. There have been some sewer issues and a water leak, but the leak was on a resident's side. They have been using cold patch to fix potholes around town. The crew has been doing some maintenance on the trucks and have starting a little spring cleaning. The street sweeping will happen in mid-May before Memorial Day.

In addition, cross walk and line painting will happen in May in advance of Memorial Day. The new highway truck has been ordered and will arrive around August/September. The new fire truck will arrive around July.

Gary complimented Tom and the crew on the condition of the backroads.

Ceilidh asked if we are on target with salt. Casey reported that we have not hit our budget yet.

Eric said that he had a call from a resident about snow fence on Center Rd. Tom indicated that we used to do that over 20 years ago there and a couple of other places. He is not sure specifically why we do not use it now.

Tom indicated that it is something that could be looked at, but it does get filled up during years that there is a lot of snow.

Shaun mentioned that the ice in the Village is out of the river, so we are hopeful that we have gotten past the ice blockage period.

6:36 P.M. – 6:39 P.M. Hardwick Police Department Report – Given by Aaron Cochran

Aaron reported that there were 128 incidents in February, with many being traffic crashes.

They are back to full patrols again based on CDC guidance. Cell phone use while driving has increased, and they have been issuing tickets. He encourages people to put their phones down.

They have had issues with cruisers recently and were down to one operating cruiser. At this point, they have all but one back. Getting parts has been challenging with the pandemic. One car is waiting for a part at the local dealership.

6:39 P.M. – 6:44 P.M. Hardwick Electric Department Report – No one from HED present

Eric spoke about the Town audit and the HED audit not lining up. It has been an issue that all departments of the Town were not being audited at the same time. Our auditors have confirmed that they are peer reviewed, which is something Mike asked about at the last meeting. This is still unresolved.

Paul mentioned that when he was on the Board of HED that they had passed a resolution to change auditors every 3 years. He is unsure if that is still in place.

Ceilidh asked if we have set a date for a joint meeting to follow up on these items. Eric said that we should initiate that on our end. Ceilidh she would take the lead on setting this up.

6:44 P.M. – 6:46 P.M. Item #1 Town Clerk Alberta Miller to present various liquor licenses for Select Board approval

Upon motion by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to approve the First-Class License for Hardwick House of Pizza, Inc. and the Second-Class Licenses for DG Retail, LLC d/b/a Dollar General Store #14093 and Keg of Glory, LLC d/b/a Birdsong Beer and Wine.

6:46 P.M. – 6:48 P.M. Item #2, Select Board to authorize Alberta Miller & Shaun Fielder to act on behalf of the Town in matters relating to its loan from the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank's 2021 Series 1 Bonds (Fire truck bond) ****Form to be signed by Chair****

Upon motion by Gary Bellavance, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to authorize Alberta Miller & Shaun Fielder to act on behalf of the Town in matters relating to its loan from the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank's 2021 Series 1 Bonds

6:48 P.M. – 6:49 P.M. Item #3 Select Board to sign off on VTrans Annual Financial Plan and Certification of Compliance with Road & Bridge Standards ****Both to be signed by all SB members****

Upon motion by Shari Cornish, seconded by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, the Select Board voted to approve the VTrans Annual Financial Plan and Certification of Compliance with Road & Bridge Standards.

6:49 P.M. – 6:54 P.M. Item #4 Follow up on the Agent to Convey Real Estate – Possible appointment

Shari Cornish nominated Elizabeth Dow as the Agent to Convey Real Estate. The Select Board voted unanimously in favor of Elizabeth filling this role.

We need to confirm with Elizabeth that she is also willing to represent the Town at Tax Sales and then this can be addressed at the next meeting.

6:54 P.M. – 6:57 P.M. Item #5 Select Board to review and consider candidate for the vacant seat on Hazen Union School District #26 Board (2 years remaining on a 3-year term)

Shari Cornish nominated Patrick Kane to fill the Hazen Union School District #26 Board seat for 2-years remaining on a 3-year term.

Ceilidh Galloway-Kane abstained. All others yea.

6:57 P.M. – 7:01 P.M. Item #6 Select Board to confirm term of Shari Cornish's appointment to the Planning Commission – term not noted in appointment on March 4

Ceilidh Galloway-Kane nominated Shari for a term of 3 years to the Planning Commission to end on 6/30/2023. The Board voted unanimously for this appointment.

7:01 P.M. – 7:25 P.M. Item #7 Select Board to discuss Greensboro's decision to not renew Police Services Contract

Eric recapped the negotiation process that started last Fall. Negotiations stalled and we tried to restart via a mediator, which did not happen. Then they notified us that they signed a contract with Orleans County Sheriff's Department. Eric said that the Board will need to address the lost revenue. Shaun indicated that we are disappointed that we were not able to get a renewed contract. He recapped the process and how we were notified that they went in a different direction with another agency. We did attempt to pick up the conversation with them several times. Shaun explained that we respectfully disagree that Greensboro was paying an unfair percentage. We were in no way trying to take advantage of the Greensboro community.

Shaun indicated that he and Aaron have been evaluating options, but do not have a proposal to present this evening. They are looking at how that might be able to bring in additional revenue during FY22. Opportunities may be available at the start of FY23. There is nothing that shows a direct offset in expense for the lost revenue as of now. Aaron and Shaun mentioned that the recent officer that left will not be replaced, and we have an officer on deployment until next March, which will represent additional savings during the year, since the budget was prepared on a "full staff."

Aaron wanted to address the comments made by Paul about the reports that were provided to Greensboro at their requests. He did provide regular reports to them. He or the Sergeant typically attended most meetings as well. Eric did remind everyone that Greensboro said they were not unhappy with the service.

Eric asked about coverage with 2 less Officers. Aaron said he does not plan to make changes until July 1. He may have to eliminate the swing shift of 2:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m. Worse case scenario would be to not have 24-hour coverage, but he thinks it can be managed with eliminating a shift as suggested. He also talked about utilizing some part-time help. Aaron said that they aim to provide the same level of service to Hardwick.

Ceilidh asked about the process of adjusting the budget after it has been approved by the voters. Eric explained that the voters approve the total budget, but there is flexibility in shifting expenses to cover any revenue losses.

Michael Deering asked about the net effect on the loss of the revenue. Eric said that sharing the costs equitably with Greensboro allowed us to maintain a higher staffing coverage for 24-hour coverage. The fact is that it does not represent a net decrease in expenses from the amount of revenue lost.

Shaun talked about the importance of maintaining our personnel and that it would create bad morale in the department to downsize the department. We will look at ways to generate revenue in the next fiscal year.

7:25 P.M. – 7:37 P.M. Item #8 Overview of new Eco. Dev. Loan request from Keg of Glory LLC

Eric reviewed the Eco. Dev. Loan program for the new Select Board members.

Myles Tandy explained that he and his wife Katie are looking to open a craft beer and wine shop on S. Main Street next to Front Seat Coffee. They both have experience in the industry. Their focus will be retail on Vermont made beers, but they will also have other beer and wine.

7:37 P.M. – 7:49 P.M. Item #9 Select Board to authorize the USDA RDBG grant application

Upon motion by Shari Cornish, seconded by Michael Deering, the Select Board voted to authorize the Town to apply for the current round of a USDA RDBG (approved February 4, 2021 via select board motion) for the purpose of supporting the pedestrian bridge replacement project. With an award notice the Town of Hardwick is prepared to administer the RDBG award and authorizes the Town Manager to sign related grant documentation. Passed by unanimous vote.

Gary asked for a little background on this. Eric explained the funding strategies that we are looking at. The project is estimated to cost \$500,000, but that is an educated guess at this point.

Select Board Reports:

Eric gave an overview of the Yellow Barn project. The financing package is complex, including several million dollars of grants. Groundbreaking is estimated to be this October. There will need to be liens on the property to obtain loans for part of the construction financing. Northeast Kingdom Development Corporation is the Borrower, not the Town. Vermont Community Development Fund and Vermont Economic Development Authority are both going to want to put liens on the property. Some of the grants also require liens. Bid documents are being prepared and the Economic Development Authority must approve the documents. This is the website with detailed information on the project http://nvda.net/yellow_barn/

Shari reported that at the recent NEKArts meeting, they talked about the Town House and how they hope to have distanced performances in the Fall. They are going to try to open the building in June and have it cleaned. They might be able to do open houses.

Ceilidh reported that the Hardwick Recreation Committee is doing an outside “safe” Easter Egg hunt event on Hazen ballfield at 10:00 a.m. on April 3. Masks will be required, and social distancing will be practiced.

New Business: Shari mentioned that the AARP Community Challenge grant application is out, and the deadline is April 14. She would like to see us apply for this, since we have not in past years. There was some discussion about the grants that the Town has currently and being able to submit for this application by the deadline. Shaun will check in with Geoff to see if there is a chance that we can pull this together in time.

Eric said that the Board is going to have to initiate a search for a new Town Manager. He has reached out to VLCT, since they helped the Town with their last search. They recommended hiring an interim Town Manager to give us some additional time. VLCT is unsure at this time if they can help us due to staffing. They can refer us to another agency that does similar work. Eric mentioned that there are people who specifically do interim work. Eric mentioned that they should have a special meeting next week to discuss a plan of action. Ceilidh will send out an email poll for a potential meeting time.

8:29 P.M. *Upon motion by Shari Cornish, seconded by Michael Deering, the Board voted to enter Executive Session for loan contract discussions pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A) to include Town Manager, Business Manager and Myles Tandy.*

8:52 P.M *Exited Executive session - no action taken.*

8:53 P.M. Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, adjourned the meeting.

Minutes approved by: _____
Eric Remick, Select Board Chair

Minutes taken by: _____
Casey Rowell, Business Manager