



Select Board

Town of Hinesburg
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Meeting Minutes – October 7, 2020

- Draft -

Attending the Meeting: Phil Pouech, Merrily Lovell, Jeff French, Mike Loner, Renae Marshall, Joy Dubin Grossman, Dawn Francis, Charlie Baker, Mike Bissonette, Eric S., Jason Reed, Christina, Katherine Schubart, Matthew Lapierre, Ed Waite, Andrea Morgante, Diane Barber, Maggie Gordon, Chris Rivard, Katie Charbonneau, Erik Bailey, Anthony Cambridge, Tom Ayer, Patrice Machavern

Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Merrily.

Additions/Deletions and Public Comment

There were no changes to the agenda.

Dawn Francis said she wanted to be sure Renae was acknowledged for her incredible service to our community. Dawn noted in her interactions with Renae, both as a citizen and as a municipal manager, she was consistently professional, compassionate, confidential, steady under fire, hardworking and knowledgeable. Often working more than 50 hours per week and returning inquiries after business hours. Dawn said she learned that Renae cares deeply about the Town and staff and the future of Hinesburg. She literally has poured her heart and soul into this community. Dawn noted Colchester is gaining not only a talented and impeccably ethical public manager but also a wonderful human being. She wanted to acknowledge Renae and thank her for her service.

Dawn said speaking from her own experience there are not a lot of people willing to take on the job of a municipal manager / administrator. Acknowledging that recently Renae was undeservingly attacked by a Select Board member and a member of the Fire Department for simply performing her job in a professional and unbiased manner. She also commended the Board for acting swiftly and professionally in censuring Jeff Tobrocke. She feels it was a critical action for the Board to take, though a tough one.

In looking to replace Renae, Dawn said the climate in Hinesburg will need to be improved in order to attract quality candidates. There is now an opportunity to think about a modernization of our government. Dawn offered help with this when the Board thinks it is ready. The mandates put on our Town require a qualified and professional staff. The departure of Renae, COVID, racial justice issues, and some of the occasional confusing information that has been put forth recently, for example the

ambulance issue, presents an opportunity to look forward towards a different way of meeting these challenges.

Dawn offered a couple of suggestions for the Board to consider in terms of improving our government structure.

- Looking at a Town Manager instead of a Town Administrator position.
- Look at an appointed vs. an elected Town Clerk/treasurer.
- Look at Australian ballot voting for the Town budget. Bill S-354 was passed in the recent legislative session, which will allow an Australian ballot vote in 2021.
- Clarification of the Fire Departments government structure with more accountability to the Board and Administrator.

Dawn finished by thanking the Board members for the time they give to the Town acknowledging it is not an easy task.

Phil thanked Dawn for her comments and added the Board has had some basic discussions about the opportunity to have a Town Manager and the Board can consider the other changes suggested.

Town Administrator Report

Renae said she and Chief Cambridge have both been in contact with the Howard Center regarding the Community Outreach Program. She hopes to have some information to share with the Board and potential budget numbers if they choose to participate in the program.

- Some of the Police Officer interviews have been done and the process is moving forward.
- Worked with the Grant committee on support of local businesses
- Continued communication with the solar contractors
- Crosswalk at Charlotte Road / VT Route 116 intersection painted

Select Board Forum/Correspondence Received

Merrily read the letter from CCRPC that they have posted notice of a Public Hearing to be held on Oct 21 at 2:30 p.m. for a Town Plan Amendment – Regional Determination of Energy Compliance.

Mike said he has been approached by some community members asking if the Select Board wants to weigh in on Halloween activities this year. Some concerns are neighborhoods that in the past have had hundreds of children participate. There was a suggestion of a possible Halloween parade down Mechanicsville Road. Phil suggested putting the document from the CDC about Halloween activities on the Town website. Ed Waite confirmed there will not be a Halloween party at the Fire house this year. Jeff said the Creekside neighborhood is a wonderful event. He would not go but does not want to tell others what to do.

Trails Committee Applicant Interview

Chris Rivard was present to express his interest in serving on the Trails Committee. Chris and his family have lived in Hinesburg for five years. They enjoy use of the trails and he felt it would be a fun and interesting way to get involved in the community by being on the committee. Chris has attended a committee meeting.

Phil moved to appoint Chris Rivard to the Trails Committee to fill out the balance of the opening term expiring 1/01/2023. Second by Mike and approved with 4 yes votes.

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) FY 20 Annual Report Presentation

Charlie Baker, executive director of CCRPC, reviewed Hinesburg's activities that CCRPC provided assistance for.

Merrily asked regarding the transportation demand management and transportation planning if they have explored use of smaller buses like vans. Charlie said Green Mountain Transit has been moving to some smaller vehicles. They are doing a pilot program in Montpelier on "micro transit" that would not have a fixed route but more flexibility for passengers.

Building homes together is a regional activity with strategies to get affordable housing up to 20%. Merrily asked what the strategies are to attain 20%. Charlie this is a regional effort between CCRPC, Champlain Housing Trust and Housing Vermont. Charlie said it will take public investment, also encouraging building density where there is water and wastewater supplied.

Phil asked to let Hinesburg know if there is any way to better use opportunities of CCRPC that we are not taking advantage of.

Mike B noted the information in the monthly newsletter. Mike mentioned the I-89 study looking at a potential exchange at Route 116 / I-89.

Consider Approving Resolution to Create a Highway Garage Improvement Bond Sinking Fund

Rena explained this is a result of the savings due to finishing the Highway Garage under budget. This will be used exclusively for repayment of principle and towards the debt retirement. By doing this now we can apply the principle payment for this fiscal year which is due November 1.

Phil moved to adopt the resolution to create a highway garage improvement bond sinking fund and apply those funds towards principle payments on the highway garage debt service. Second by Merrily.

Phil asked about next year. Rena said this year we will apply payment of the principle only, not the interest. The Board can make a decision next year on how to apply funds.

Andrea Morgante asked if this will reduce the amount of years of the bond payment or is it just paying less in interest due to reducing the principle. Renae said it will depend on the bonds and when they are re-sold.

Motion voted and approved with 4 yes votes.

Public Q&A Opportunity for Wastewater Upgrade November 2020 Bond Vote

Renae said the mailer is done and will go to the post office Friday. Phil said people can reach out to the Select Board with questions.

There will be a Public Meeting on October 28.

Renae shared a question that has been asked by a few people asking what a NO vote will mean. Is the Town still required to make the upgrades and will the cost go up? Renae replied that the current funding package is only good till June 2021. If the bond does not pass in November the Town will have another vote in March. If it does not pass in March the Town risks losing a portion of the funding package and reaches a point where the State could begin to issue fines for not meeting the discharge permit. There will be representatives from the State at the October 28 hearing.

Eric S asked how the payments will work and who will be billed? Phil explained it is structured for the users to pay the bond over the 30 years. The yearly cost of this would be roughly \$360.00 per user. The Select Board will continue to search for additional grants. It is expected to apply \$75,000 from allocation fees. They will also look at potentially increasing costs for industrial users that put more of a demand on the system. The increased costs would not show up till 2025.

Renae said the original cost of the project is 11.7 million. It is now down to under 5½ million the maximum the Town will ever pay due to the 30 year no interest loan.

Andrea said she appreciates the information flyer but thinks it is important especially for users to understand that the operations and maintenance of this new facility will result in increased costs, such as the need for additional staff.

Phil agreed they need to get information and do have estimated associated costs.

Public Q&A Opportunity for Ambulance Question on November Ballot “Shall the Town of Hinesburg Establish and Manage an Ambulance Transport Service?”

Patrice review items that Renae has questions on concerning the proposed budget. Patrice said the current proposed budget only contains one full time EMS/firefighter. Renae said the amount she provided for benefits was what the Town is offering for the current benefit plan. Patrice said they can correct the amount in the budget.

There was also confusion on inclusion of the backup ambulance. Patrice said the benefactor of the new ambulance has increased their pledge to include a used backup ambulance.

Eric S, on behalf of the Department and himself, wished Renae good luck in her new job.

Eric addressed the comments about false and misinformation being put out. He wanted to make it clear that any information he has posted for the Department has been verified, checked and is factual. Private posts on FPF are the views of the person posting, not the Department. Eric said the building is not dependent on the Department getting an ambulance. The building will be based on the development that is before the DRB. They are looking at building some dorm rooms in the current building at this time.

Matthew L wanted to know why a statement has not been put out by the Hinesburg Fire Department that they understand a vote of NO does not mean people who do so do not support or appreciate the Hinesburg Fire Department. A message of unity at this time would be extremely helpful, as division and negativity for those that might not agree on this question seem to be the order of the day.

Eric said they understand no everyone is in agreement. He understands a NO vote is not negative toward the Department. He can put out a statement to this effect.

Eric asked Renae about not including dispatch fees in the contract cost information. Renae said Richmond pays the dispatch fees when an ambulance is called. Phil added that we are charged now. Renae noted in the spreadsheet she prepared for comparison is the cost for Richmond to cover all of Hinesburg and St. George. She did not deduct the savings in dispatch fees Richmond offered so it could be a true comparison.

Matthew L asked why more information, such as was done for the wastewater upgrade, is not provided in the question. Describing in detail what the tax impacts are on residents with an ambulance and with contracting out. Renae said information on the tax impact is included on the Town website as well as in the comparison spreadsheet in tonight's meeting packet.

Andrea also commented that Renae posted this on the Town website. There is a spreadsheet and supporting documents that gives this comparison.

Ed Waite asked if Renae included the \$66,000 cost for EMT response. Renae said that would not be an increase to the contract. That is currently in the Fire budget.

Tom Ayer mentioned there is a lot of confusion around the community about the ambulance and the cost going forward and asked to poll the Board members.

Renae said Board members can share facts about what they feel is or is not included in the budget, and feelings about the current financial climate. Keep the personal opinion on how to vote out of the conversation.

Jeff said he appreciates all the hard work; he looks at the future of the Town and how it is growing. He thinks an ambulance is something people moving into Hinesburg would like to have. On the other side,

he sees a lot of towns struggling with this. There is a lot of push to go to regionalization such as we share fire and police and are we moving too fast with this.

Eric addressed regionalization. He said we never see it in Vermont as it requires county government and we do not have county government in Vermont.

Phil said we have been talking about an ambulance for two or three years. He feels we now have good numbers to look at for costs now and we know things always increase over time so it is hard to nail down those numbers. For the short term we are looking at the next few years before a new building is needed, and it will be needed but not because of the ambulance. A benefit he sees is it would attract volunteers and retain volunteers. If this passes you will never take it away, the same as with the Police Department. He noted that if this does not pass, we can look at it again in a year or two. He feels Richmond is a reasonable alternative that comes with some pluses and maybe some minuses.

Mike said his thoughts are as we heard tonight the Fire Department will need a new building at some point. This becomes a matter of priorities vs. money vs. what people can continue to afford. Right now, from looking at the comparisons it will be more costly to run our own ambulance than to contract with a neighboring town that has capacity to share with us. He is concerned that if the neighboring towns have capacity to share, we would have an underutilized ambulance as well. Regionalization might be difficult but he would like to better understand how to better share resources across towns. He does not hear of anybody who does not support the Fire Department and EMS services but looking at almost ¼ million increase on Town's budget it is difficult to suggest spending that while exploring where we need to go as a Town regarding our growth and other needs we have. Plus, the wastewater bond which we have no control over.

Merrily said her thoughts are similar to Mike's. She appreciates all the work the Fire Department has put into this as well as being grateful for the Fire Department we have. We realize 2021 is going to be a difficult year regarding the budget with so many unknowns which indicate this is not the right time.

Katie Charbonneau said she appreciates board members sharing their opinions but feels the Board is kind of swaying the vote by answering the way they answered it will make people think if the Board does not support it why should they. It does not look good as a Select Board to publicly make these statements after Renae just said they could not appear to sway the vote. Renae clarified what she pointed out the Board was that they can out fact based information related to the costs, if they feel the budget includes everything or not, and the current climate with COVID and that is what Board members shared.

Dawn Francis said, even tonight, there are still bits of missing information and questions. She submitted a list of questions on September 5th to the Select Board. A lot of those questions were the result of the ambulance committee meetings she was a part of. She is still not hearing responses to those questions. Questions from how many actual transports are there, how many of those are critical incidents. Are the capital budget costs included in the costs and the estimated per capita cost because the capital budget also impacts the taxpayer. Will there be a mailer with this information? Are dispatch costs included or not as questioned tonight? She has concern about the management and oversight of a new department including full time staff as well as the volunteers. Who is doing the hiring and background checks and who is doing the training? Concerning Eric's comments on regionalization. It

does not have to be a regional government or special purpose government; it can be an intergovernmental agreement such as what we have now with St. Mike's and for dispatch. During this uncertain time with revenue projections unpredictable can we explore for the next year or two sharing a service with an intergovernmental agreement between Richmond and or Charlotte and see how that goes. We can then have a discussion about sharing services more, Hinesburg has so much to offer for sharing; a free ambulance, and excellent police force. The Fire Department is asking for one additional staff person besides the one in the current Fire Department budget, but isn't it desirable to have three (a driver and two in the back). The costs go up pretty quickly over 4 years, the village resident will be paying an additional \$360 to retire the sewer bond and in 4 years \$174.40 for the ambulance. This is significant with a high unemployment rate and people who may not be able to pay the ambulance bills, she is concerned about the effect on the Town with establishing this ambulance service.

Town Administrator Transition Process / Timeline

Phil said work on this has been going on for about two weeks. He, along with Renae, Alex, Missy, and Joy got together to discuss the challenges and what has been done in the past. They discussed whether Joy is capable and willing to step into the position of interim Town Administrator. All felt she was capable and Joy said she is willing to consider it. This past week they have looked at all the tasks and potential support. Phil is requesting the Select Board authorize him to move forward the contracts.

Merrily moved to accept the recommendation of the committee that Joy Dubin Grossman take on the role of interim Town Administrator starting no later than 11/09/2020. Second by Mike and approved with 4 yes votes.

Merrily moved the Select Board chair continues to work with Joy Dubin Grossman in negotiating the terms of her position as interim Town Administrator including any support and mentoring. Second by Mike and approved with 4 yes votes.

Select Board Vacancy / Process

Phil said there is a process which is for the Board to solicit qualified applicants and to come up with a date for applications to be submitted by. It was agreed applications should be submitted by 10/16/2020 to include a resume and answers to the questions on applications for Town committees. The interviews would take place at the 10/21/2020 meeting.

Merrily added this needs to be publicly posted by tomorrow, 10 days after the resignation. Renae will help with that.

Merrily moved the Select Board seek out applicants by public postings following the process of appointment the same as for those applying for Town committees and to submit applications by 10/16/2020. Second by Mike and approved with 4 yes votes.

Review First Draft of FY 22 Capital Budget and FY 21-FY 26 Capital Improvement Plan

Renaë wanted to be able to have this ready for the Board as they start the budget process to allow them to ask her any questions they have.

Review Minutes from 9/16/2020 and 9/28/2020 Meetings

Phil moved to approve the minutes from 9/16/20 as amended. Second by Merrily and approved with 4 yes votes.

Phil moved to approve the minutes from 9/28/20 as amended. Second by Merrily and approved with 4 yes votes.

Consider Approving Warrants

Phil moved to approve the warrants, including payroll, as submitted by the Town Treasurer. Second by Merrily and approved with 4 yes votes.

Phil moved to adjourn at 9:48 p.m., second by Mike and approved with 4 yes votes.

Respectfully Submitted,
Valerie Spadaccini, Clerk of the Board