

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

January 22, 2024

Present: Doon Hinderyckx, Frank Severy, Pat Harvey

Guests Present: Kristen LaPell, Julie Smith, Rob Gardner, Nancy Woolley, Tony Goupee, Orca Media

Guests Present on Zoom: Orca, Norman Cohen, Bob Harnish, Troy LaPell, Jeff Gephart, Marie and Keith Dupree

Doon called the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Doon confirmed the open meeting law conformity.

Doon moved to approve the December 21, 2023, selectboard meeting minutes. Pat seconded. All in favor. So, approved. Doon moved to approve the January 8, 2024, selectboard minutes. Pat seconded. All in favor. So, approved.

Declaration of Inclusion discussion: Doon introduced Norm and Bob to speak on behalf of the Declaration of Inclusion. Norman spoke to follow up from his last visit to the selectboard meeting to see if anyone had questions pertaining to the declaration. He introduced Bob Harnish who is the founder. Bob shared a short presentation. He shared 132 towns have already adopted the Declaration of which 70% of Vermont's population live in those towns. He shared that he is asking towns to endorse a statement that basically says they reject discrimination, welcome people to our town, we want residents even those we would call marginalized groups such as people of color or disabilities. Anyone we would think of in a marginalized group. We want those residents to feel included and safe in our communities and ask the town to fair and equal treatment of those folks and employees. He added there is nothing political simply a call for respect toward everyone. He shared this is citizen driven and self-funded. He shared the backing of the local organizations such as Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Vermont State Chamber, the Vermont Council of Rural Development, the office of Racial Equity and the Governor, himself. In closing he shared the key statements of the suggested declaration are the town rejects discrimination, encourages its inhabitants and residents to reject discrimination, to welcome people of diverse backgrounds, we want residents to feel like they are truly belonging and are safe in our community. Pat asked what the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the inclusion. Bob said the advantages are you add to the statewide effort. They want to say to the world at large Vermont is a welcoming state. He shared that Vermont needs population. We need workers. The 2020 census shows the population growth is stagnant and an aging population. The youth are finding better opportunities outside the state. Doon asked if the governor signed on about the time, he offered \$10K to anyone who would move to Vermont. Bob said it was about 3 years ago the Governor endorsed the idea. As a proclamation, the Governor named the second week of May as Inclusion Week. Bob said it had no connection with the offer the Governor made for the \$10K. Doon asked about disadvantages. He said the caution that will create more paperwork for us now and in the future. Bob said there would not be any reason. He said there

would be some implementation but that you could look over town documents to make sure there isn't any bias. Pat said at the last time they spoke; they were satisfied to be under the umbrella of the Governor's Declaration and wondered what there was to gain. He said there was value in numbers when it comes to the number of towns who have endorsed. He feels there is tremendous value for the towns to adopt individually. Pat asked if this is the only state with the Declaration. Norman said the town of Franklin, ME was the first to adopt and it was a relative of Bob's who sent it down to look at. Doon felt that it should come up in a town meeting and not to be decided by the board members alone. Doon suggested to add the item as a article on the Town meeting warning. The board agreed.

Town attorney tax sale engagement letter: A letter of engagement was presented to the board for approval to engage with the town attorney to begin the process of tax sales for delinquent taxpayers. Doon moved to sign. Pat seconded. Letter of engagement was signed by Doon. Follow up to Declaration of Inclusion discussion.

Approve Fee Schedule: The updated fee schedule was approved by the board. The new fee amounts will begin in July 2024.

Approve VTrans Milage Certificate: Doon moved to approve the milage certificate. No changes have been made. Pat seconded. All in favor, so approved.

Approve the FY25 Budget: The FY25 budget was presented to the board for approval. The budget and finance committee worked diligently on reducing the tax rate to a final tax rate of 7.99 %.

Sign LHMP Local Match Commitment Letter: The town's local hazard mitigation plan will be expiring in March of 2025. The town will need to start the process of updating their current plan. The first step is to apply for the grant program through the state. Doon moved to sign the commitment letter to begin the process. Pat seconded. All in favor. So, approved. Julie explained a steering committee will need to be established to begin the work that could take up to 2 years. The committee would include the Emergency management director, fire chief, town road foreman, a planning commission member and selectboard member. Julie explained that she and Kristen were available to assist with any of the process as needed.

Approve December Treasurer's Report: Doon moved to approve the December Treasurer's report. Pat seconded. All in favor

High School Discussion: Kathryn spoke to the board and said they have completed phase 2 and nothing was found. Doon asked if it included the PCB inspection. Kathryn confirmed. Pat said it was everything except the underground oil tank. Kathryn explained that was not removed because the cost of installation of interim above ground was going to be \$175,000 so Jamie asked if we could keep the underground tank in place and we had a discussion with Sarah from Two Rivers that the certification of completion would just have the exclusion of the underground tank and when it is removed, Jamie said the school will pay for the cost of the removal and any kind of mitigation clean up should leakage be found. That of course if the vote is yes then the purchase and sale agreement would be included. The transfer of liability as far as the state is concerned goes on the town. It would be best to get in wring if the town acquires the building.

Vic shared the biggest point or question was if the building and grounds were in acceptable condition around the environmental standpoint. He said the flood way has been addressed. The flood plain was addressed. The assessment of the interior contamination has been resolved. This building is now a developmental asset besides housing. Doon said this brings it closer for the town to bring to vote. Rob asked if they would have a town informational meeting. Vic said they are putting it all together. Vic was concerned about the difference between information and promotion. He hoped the information would share the good with the bad. Pat asked if they would proceed the vote without the formal approval of the Congressional Grant. Kathryn said the selectboard said once the results from the environmental study was announce they would go to a vote. The vote is determined to happen April 30th. Information should be mailed out to taxpayers with heavy discussion at Town Meeting.

Library Updates: Tony shared that the new Library Director, Maya has many new programs coming up. He also said there will be a trustee meeting tomorrow evening.

Highway Updates: Frank shared the trucks are having breakdowns. The Ford 550 truck is still waiting for a new transmission. The Western Star has some issues right now and John is taking care of that.

Energy Coordinator Updates: Jeff shared the MERP application he submitted on behalf of the town was awarded to the town. The Town will receive a free level 2 audit which will look at the real energy use through bills and looks at the buildings themselves. The towns two building that were chosen for the energy audit. The town office and the town garage building. In the next coming weeks Jeff will be

Grant Updates: Krisen updated the board with the West Hill Bridge reimbursement amount of \$175,000 from the VTrans Structures Grant for West Hill Bridge Replacement and the final amount of \$3,420.10 for the West Hill Design Grant was also reimbursed. She is working with the US Forest on the remaining \$260,000.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Smith