

TOWN OF STAMFORD
SELECTBOARD MEETING
January 16, 2020
(UNAPPROVED)

Present: Selectboard: Nancy L. Bushika, Chair, Michael G. Denault, Daniel J. Potvin, and Carol A. Fachini.
Christopher Warren was not present.
Visitors: Laura Champagne and Trevor Tatro.
Sally Bohl, Assessor Clerk.
David R. Tatro, Road Commissioner.
William Levine, Emergency Management Director.
Tyna Senecal and Heather Tietgens, Finance Committee.
Lori Shepard, Selectboard Secretary.

Nancy Bushika called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., opened with the pledge of allegiance, welcomed everyone, and read a statement with procedural rules for the meeting. The agenda was changed to add correspondence and a mapping update. There were no changes to its order.

HEARING OF VISITORS

Laura Champagne requested that the name of Brown Brook Road be changed back to Old County Road. The board originally changed the name because the center of Old County Road was discontinued long ago and it created two roads with the same name. To resolve confusion in the event of an emergency, the state 911 board required the change. Since the 911 numbers were originally calculated from the Main Road up to her house, when the town changed the road name, it made the 911 numbering backwards. She does not want to change her address. Mike Denault wanted to be sure that changing the name back to Old County Road wouldn't cause more problems. Laura Champagne and her family now own the Bopp/Newkom property and have been working to open the road. It was decided that when the road is completed, they will come back to the board to discuss the best way to approach the state to change the road name back.

MINUTES

MOTION by Mike Denault to accept the regular meeting minutes of January 2, 2020 as written. SECONDED by Carol Fachini. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

SELECTBOARD ORDERS

The Selectboard reviewed and approved the following orders:

- WARRANT #3 \$ 9,329.42 payroll
- WARRANT #4 \$78,498.08 accounts payable

FINANCIALS

The Selectboard reviewed and confirmed financial statements for the month of December.

ROAD CONDITIONS

1. We have had weather from all four seasons this past week. There were only a few muddy spots the highway crew had to repair. Mike Denault noted that our town roads are much better than the state roads.
2. Dave Tatro has been exploring a replacement for the small truck. He is considering a second hand deuce and a half. They are heavy duty and less expensive than buying a Ford or Dodge. They are also fixable in house because they are all mechanical. Bill Levine suggested checking the Federal Surplus Allocation. Dan Potvin thought he could pick up a nice used one for around \$20,000.00.
3. The trial of giving the highway employees alternating Friday afternoon/evenings off has worked out so far.

RECYCLING

1. The 2020 hauler registration forms need to be sent out.

2. Nancy Bushika attended a recent Alliance meeting. Nancy Bushika reviewed the progress made by the Outreach Program Coordinator, a position required by state mandate. One of the things she did with kids at Hiland Hall School in Bennington was to throw the trash out on the lawn and show the kids how much could have been recycled. She wants to do it again next year and hopes to find less recyclables. Helen Fields said they did something similar in Stamford.
3. Michael Batcher from the Bennington County Regional Commission applied for a grant for a permanent household hazardous waste site in Bennington. If he receives the grant, it could save the Alliance a lot of money. Each event costs around \$20,000.00 and the Alliance holds three to four events per year. The permanent facility would be open one day per week all year long.
4. Michael Batcher also applied for a grant for a facility to collect asphalt shingles. It will probably not be used very much, but the state demands that we accept them.
5. The Alliance also discussed how contamination of recyclables is becoming a big problem. The Outreach Coordinator will prepare some information to educate the public.
6. Helen Fields said they still have one more recycling activity to plan here in town.
7. Helen Fields stated that the school has stopped using the Jura composter and will use the composting bins again. She tried to call Casella to set it up but didn't get anywhere. Nancy Bushika asked that she come to the Selectboard instead. Helen Fields commended the children for their great work.

BENNINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S CONTRACT

Mike Denault contacted Sheriff Chad Schmidt who said they are willing to get some radios in order to monitor the town's emergency frequency. They are willing to patrol however the Selectboard wants: in the center of town or on the back roads. Mike Denault was frustrated after reviewing the latest sheriff bill included in tonight's warrant. The state police asked the sheriff's office to handle a matter in town. Because the incident occurred in Stamford, we paid the bill for two days worth of paperwork, investigation and follow up. The town also paid for numerous hours to investigate and complete the paperwork for a car accident that happened in town. Dan Potvin felt we shouldn't pay for time incurred at the request of the state police and we should write a letter to the state police. Mike Denault thought we should include something in the sheriff's contract with the town that unless it's an actual emergency, the town will not pay for the sheriff to perform other duties without talking to the Selectboard first. The town shouldn't be paying for sheriff's time to handle a matter for the state police.

POLICE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Maura Hawkins contacted the Selectboard with an interest to serve on the committee. Helen Fields asked why this is being initiated again. Mike Denault responded that they received a letter from a citizen who wanted to bring it back up, and said there would be several people interested. Mike Denault was concerned that the price of starting a local law enforcement team is too high. Our choices are 1) stay with the sheriff, 2) plan to spend \$200,000.00 for our own constables, or 3) cancel the sheriff and call 911 for emergencies. The board will wait to see if there are other volunteers willing to serve on the committee.

DEBIT/CREDIT CARDS

The town office is unable to accept payments by debit or credit card. The town contracts with Satellite Biz for this service and Satellite Biz lost the contract with their card processor. Although Satellite Biz is working to secure a new contract with Easy Pay, the town clerk plans to see if there are better services available. Heather Tietgens suggested the town consider using the square. The square would charge the town a percentage of each transaction, but many vendors pass that charge onto the customer as a convenience fee.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

1. Bill Levine attended the regional planning meeting in North Adams. They discussed some upcoming courses.

2. Bill Levine is proactively preparing for town meeting. Vermont Emergency Management will send 100 copies of their Be Prepared booklet. He has also requested some Disaster Preparedness booklets from the Red Cross. Nancy Bushika asked if he was also getting some updated 211 pamphlets.

2019 AUDIT

MOTION by Dan Potvin to sign an engagement letter for the firm of Love, Cody & Company to conduct the 2019 audit of town accounts. SECONDED by Carol Fachini. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. This confirmation agrees to provide the auditors with all information necessary to conduct the 2019 audit at a cost of \$10,450.00. Last year the cost was \$10,200.00. They will begin the week of January 27, 2020.

DOG ORDINANCE

The ordinance has been published in the paper and will become effective March 2, 2020 unless a petition is received.

BUILDING COMMUNITY GROUP

Pat Sullivan is seeking a grant through the National Life Group Foundation to fund a new town sign and ancillary projects. The Fiscal Sponsor Form needs to be signed by the Selectboard Chair. The board was in support and the form was signed. There are no matching funds for this grant. Nancy Bushika asked about the Seeds Savers funds. Helen Fields stated that the Seed Savers is not a municipal organization under the town. It is an independent community group organization. Pat Sullivan wanted to apply for a grant to obtain a tent for the Stamford Harvest Festival Day but the organization did not grant funds to municipal organizations. The Seed Savers, since it is independent, could apply for the grant. Mike Denault thought he could help with tent rental in the future.

TOWN PARCEL MAPPING

Sally Bohl, Eunice Rice, Nancy Bushika and Lori Shepard met with Lisa Wright, the town's new assessor. Lisa Wright also received the bid to conduct the town-wide reappraisal. Lisa Wright stated that it is imperative that the town obtain parcel maps and said she would not contract with Stamford if we do not get them. Dan Potvin does not like tax maps. In his experience they're usually wrong. Sally Bohl said out of 715 parcels, the town has 360 surveys. Mike Denault wants to do what is best for the town, but doesn't want to place the burden on our taxpayers to have to get a survey to prove their acreage if there's a discrepancy between the grand list acreage and the tax map acreage. Nancy Bushika noted that the tax mapper discovered a couple parcels and acreage that the town has not been assessing and should be. Neither the state nor the mapping company will stand behind their maps and defend them. They are not surveys and have no official stamp. They will not hold up in court. Helen Fields felt having tax maps that someone has scrutinized over is a move toward cleaner, more accurate information. Dan Potvin suggested holding a special town meeting to have the townspeople vote on whether to use tax maps. There are many deeds in town with very detailed and accurate information that could be used to correct discrepancies, but many deeds have no good boundary descriptions. Dan Potvin is against using tax maps and feels we should push back and tell the state no. Tyna Senecal acknowledged that many towns are beginning to push back because of the forced school mergers. Helen Fields said our goal should be to obtain the most accurate mapping and property information. Mike Denault was concerned that if someone doesn't grieve their acreage discrepancy, it doesn't mean the tax map information is accurate, it might just mean that the taxpayer can't afford a survey to fight it. The maps can be viewed at <http://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/anra5/>. At this point, the state's website does not show the GIS calculated acreage, only the town's grand list acreage, but the outlines of each parcel are available. Nancy Bushika talked to the mapper and the town can hire her for a few days to review properties with discrepancies. If we refuse to get tax maps, we probably won't be able to find a reappraisal firm to conduct the reappraisal. The board will question the state as to what the consequences would be if the town refuses to obtain tax maps and cannot hire a reappraisal firm.

TOWN MEETING START TIME

Bill Levine asked about an email from Cindy Lamore about the start times of the March town meeting. The town meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. and the town always goes first. The school meeting is warned for 7:30 p.m.

and always follows the conclusion of the town meeting. Cindy Lamore asked if the School Directors and Selectboard would consider including a warrant article for both meetings to begin at 7 p.m. and then they could alternate.

MOTION by Dan Potvin to include a warrant article to warn the town meeting at 7 p.m. and alternate start times with the school. SECONDED by Nancy Bushika. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. Nancy Bushika will contact Cindy Lamore about the wording and alternating by even/odd years.

BUDGET WORK SESSION

1. The Selectboard and Finance Committee reviewed the budget. Nancy Bushika tried to contact Dan Denault about the cost of mowing the school yard but could not reach him. In 2018, Yard Work by Dan completed 14 mowings. In 2019 his bid was for 18 mowings, but he mowed the lawn 19 times. If he feels the lawn needs to be mowed more than the 18 times included in his bid, he should contact the town.

2. Heather Tietgens noted that if the other town departments stay about the same, the budget as a whole is up 15%. The Finance Committee asked about the salary increases in general. There was a large spread in the raise percentages across the board. Mike Denault said several of the town employees have been underpaid for some time. They are still lower than the state-wide average. Some employees were promised amounts by previous boards or reviews that were forgotten. Heather Tietgens suggested the board require the employees pay a portion of health insurance costs or look into plans with higher deductibles. Mike Denault felt our employees could leave for better-paying positions but one of the reasons they stay with the town is the benefits. Perhaps the town could negotiate with Berkshire Health Group for better rates. Mike Denault felt the board could investigate better alternatives this coming year, but at this point it's too late to change health insurance carriers. The board reduced the amount of hours budgeted for the Assessor Clerk position since the town can't move forward with the reappraisal until the tax map issue is resolved. Tyna Senecal said the goal of the Finance Committee is to be transparent and she is willing to talk to any taxpayers who have questions about the budget.

The board will have a quick meeting on January 23, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. to sign the warrant.

MOTION by Mike Denault to adjourn. SECONDED by Nancy Bushika. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Carol A. Fachini
Clerk

CAF/las

REMINDERS

1. Anyone interested in serving on the Fire Department roster committee should contact the town office, a Selectboard member or Paul Dupuis.

2. Anyone interested in serving on the Sheriff/Constable/State Police research committee should contact the town office, or a Selectboard member.

3. Please visit the town's new official website: townofstamfordvermont.org.

4. The town clerk's office hours are: Monday: closed; Tuesday: 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.; Wednesday 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.; Thursday 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.; and Friday: 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

PETITIONS FOR WARRANT ARTICLES & ELECTED POSITIONS

The deadline for filing petitions with the town clerk for warrant articles to be included in the town meeting warning is Thursday, January 16, 2020. These petitions must be signed by 5% of the registered voters or at least 33 signatures. V.S.A. 17:2642(a)

The required signatures on a petition to run for an elected office are 1% of the registered voters or at least 7 signatures. The deadline for filing these petitions with the Town Clerk is Monday, January 27, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. Nominating papers may be picked up at the Town Office. V.S.A. 17:2681(a) (b).

Elected positions to be filled this year are:

Town Moderator - 1 year term (*William Levine*)
School Moderator - 1 year term (*William Levine*)
Town Clerk – 3 year term (*Lori A. Shepard*)
Treasurer – 3 year term (*Lori A. Shepard*)
Selectboard member - 2 year term (*Daniel J. Potvin*)
Selectboard member - 3 year term (*Carol A. Fachini*)
School Director - 2 year term (*Barbara Malinowski*)
School Director - 3 year term (*Cynthia Lamore*)
Auditor - 1 year term (*vacancy*)
Auditor - 2 year term (*vacancy*)
Auditor - 3 year term (*vacancy*)
Collector of Delinquent Taxes - 1 year term (*Sally A. Bohl*)
Cemetery Commissioner - 3 year term (*Sally A. Bohl*)
Library Trustee - 5 year term (*Danielle Smith*)

Voting will be held on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Stamford Elementary School. Applications for addition to the checklist will be accepted during regular town office hours and throughout election day.

Absentee ballots will be available until 5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 2, 2020. Please call the town office at 694-1361.

Anyone interested in serving as an appointed board member, please review the expiring appointed positions in the town report and contact a member of that board or the Selectboard.