

TOWN OF FAIR HAVEN, VERMONT

Selectboard, Water & Sewer Commissioners, Liquor Commissioners, Cemetery Commissioners

REGULAR MEETING -- Tuesday, January 23, 2024 -- 7:00 PM

Zoom Meeting Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85646551688>

Phone: 1 929 205 6099 | Meeting ID: 8564 655 1688

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Glen Traverse, Bob Richards, Chadd Viger, Jason Coupal, Rich Greenough

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Town Manager Joe Gunter, Recording Secretary Claire Stanley, Peg TV, Rose Anne Van Lew, Mike Stannard, Lillian E. Billewicz, Johnathan Billewicz, Mike LaDuke, Maggie O'Brien, Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC)

Call to Order: Chairman Bob Richards called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led the assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Public Hearing – Closing Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) Town Hall Grant:

Manager Gunter prepared a brief history of the Town hall renovation project. In 2009 the Town reached out to USDA to research adding an elevator to the municipal building built in 1861 (no action taken). In 2018, the Selectmen prioritized Town Hall rehabilitation and Adams Street bridge as priorities. In 2019, the Board approved a \$100,000 grant match for a new furnace. In 2019 and 2020, the Town received two grants from VCDP totaling \$450,000 (VCDP was the largest project funder); bids came in at \$569,000; adjustments were made, and construction was imminent. March 2020 COVID shut down everything, though fundraising continued. Construction began in 2021 -- all was slowed with supply chain delays. Detailed construction timeline and financial information is available at the Town office. February 2023 the project was within budget and securely funded. While other expenses are likely, the Town has \$242,000 "surplus" to spend on items cancelled at the beginning. The project includes a new furnace and an elevator that makes the upstairs space accessible to the public for meetings and activities; a sprinkler system, bathrooms, storage, electrical upgrade. Ms. Van Lew understood there was need for more support for second floor. That had nothing to do with this project -- it was when a fire truck backed into a support column. Those repairs were made, with other than this project funds. At Ms. Billewicz' inquiry, the knob and tube wiring was replaced. There is no asbestos. The building is now safe, efficient and meets regulations. Chairman Richards noted there is still cleaning and organizing to be done. It is expected that in near future, the space will be decorated with historical objects provided by the Historical Society.

The **Public Hearing** was closed at 7:13 p.m.

Mike Stannard -- Ash Tree Survey Report: Mr. Stannard presented a written report detailing the work done by himself and his students from Stafford Technical Center Forestry and Natural Resources Program on November 30, 2023. He started by offering special thanks to the Town Clerk for her talk with students about Town government, voting and elections; to Town Manager Gunter for entrusting them with the project and for his pep-talk about the importance of technical education in municipal government; TJ Covino who discussed with the students his education background that prepared him for the DPW job; and to Jim Heller who allowed weighing the bus and crew at the Transfer Station (10,580 lbs.). Mr. Stannard reported that the Ash Tree survey does not include Scotch Hill or Swamp Road that he expects do not have a high concentration of Ash trees. There are no trees of concern nearest the fire and rescue related buildings. The great majority of trees are not yet affected by the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) or other diseases. There is a bi-annual injection (100% effective) that can prevent the invasion of the EAB in culturally important trees. He recommends this be used on the shade tree at the Mary Canfield softball field dugout. Bolger Road and Sheldon Road have a very high density of Ash trees that most likely will affect the Town right of way and travel including fire, rescue and utility vehicles. Many of these trees are on private property. The Grade School parking lot and driveway are a close 3rd in density of these trees. Mr. Stannard said the EAB will degrade even the high number of Ash trees in good condition in less than a decade -- that 90 to 95% will be destroyed. His priority recommendations include to decide which trees are significant to save with injections; discuss problem trees with sited residents; reach out to GMP re: Grade School driveway and parking lot; develop a plan for removal on Bolger and Sheldon roads; remove medium to poor quality trees from the survey asap. Mr. Stannard forwarded contact information of a person that can safely remove problem trees. Detailed site information can be reviewed at the Municipal office. Members thanked Mr. Stannard and his Technical School students for their time and effort.

Maggie O'Brien -- Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC): The Board heard from Ms. O'Brien who stated that the Regional Plan must be updated every 8 years. Since this was not done, they must start over, expecting it to be two (2) years' worth of work. Priorities reflect a vision to a collaborative guide to establish such as where homes and businesses are located for best economic development. She asks that the Board "spread the word" at community events, on social media. Your ideas and community needs can be posted on the RRPC website. It was suggested that this survey also be made available in print for those without computer access. It was noted that such a discussion can be included at the March 2nd **Meet the Candidates** event at the Library. Members thanked Ms. O'Brien for her time and effort.

Amendments to the Agenda: Mr. Traverse **made a motion to add to Executive Session:** Personnel, 1 VSA ¶ 313 (A)(3); seconded by Mr. Viger and passed.

Approval of Minutes: Mr. Traverse **made a motion to approve the minutes** of the January 4, 2024, meeting as written; seconded by Mr. Viger and passed.

Mr. Traverse **made a motion to approve the minutes** of the January 9, 2024, meeting as written; seconded by Mr. Greenough and passed with Mr. Viger abstaining.

Five Minutes for Public Comment: Ms. Billewicz presented a handout and stated that the Town Hall was cited twice by VOSHA re: presence of asbestos. She further stated that Manager Gunter was aware of the asbestos. Chairman Richards said that is a lie.

Mr. LaDuke inquired how is it saving money to retrofit a truck for plowing at the water plant instead of DPW plowing there. Manager Gunter stated that DPW is responsible for plowing public streets and sidewalks for safety and that every minute spent doing the water plant, the transfer station or sewer plant locations is time not spent for the safety of the public.

Ms. Van Lew thanked the Dept. of Public Works for keeping the crosswalk at the bus stop cleared on both ends during recent snow events.

Department Head Reports: Water Dept. Chief Mike LaDuke reported:

- * New roof will be done in the Spring
- * In the process of rebuilding pumps
- * Doing well with water -- no problems with the cold
- * Our intern is doing well; it is an excellent program; are including him in the weekend rotations
- * Price of chemicals continues to increase
- * The electrical upgrade is about three quarters done

Town Manager Report & Communication: Manager Gunter reported:

Police: Detailed report in members' packets

- * 37 traffic violation
- * 3 car crashes
- * December 2023 revenue is \$17,029

- * The DPW position is still open -- have candidates
- * The Transfer Station demo pad will be open on Thursday
- * Have a property for sale on River Street
- * A **Candidate Night** is scheduled for Saturday, March 2, 2024, 7:00 at the library.
- * Met with Peter Schneider re: architect for the Skyline building
- * The Skyline grant has been submitted
- * Received \$2000+ from insurance re: playground damage
- * Working drywall upstairs in Town hall
- * Carl Scott continues painting Park fence rails -- doing an excellent job; Manager Gunter also painting rails
- * Sold a property on Dutton Ave.
- * Received one bid for the downtown watermain project
- * Installed a culvert on Highway 69
- * There are no funds to install the .GOV website
- * The general fund and water plant funds are 62% and 63% spent (should be about 50%); Sewer and DPW are at or below 50%

OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Van Lew inquired re: status of the Adams Street bridge. Chairman Richards reported they continue trying; it is cost prohibitive -- up to 3 or 4 million with no help from the State. With costs continuing to increase, Mr. Traverse noted he does not see it getting done.

NEW BUSINESS

Road Inventory: Mr. Traverse **made a motion to sign** the Certificate of Highway Mileage; seconded by Mr. Greenough. No changes were made; Munger Road still needs to be reclassified as a class 4 road. The motion carried with Mr. Coupal dissenting.

Mitigation Grant Application: Mr. Traverse **made a motion to apply** for the \$54,852.84 Hazard Mitigation Grant; seconded by Mr. Greenough. There was lengthy discussion re: use of paving funds; doing all of Scotch Hill at once; some other streets as well; seeking funding from Dept. of Parks as Scotch Hill is used by vehicles, campers going to State park(s); from Dept. of Agriculture as heavy tractors use the road. Mr. Greenough stated that if all of Scotch Hill is done, some other roads can't wait; also that before Scotch Hill is paved, the prep work, ditching brush cutting, etc. must be done so the road will hold up and future Fair Haven people will not have this same problem. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Traverse **made a motion to authorize** Manager Gunter as Agent to write and submit the Mitigation Grant Application; seconded by Mr. Viger and passed unanimously.

Water/Sewer Mutual Aid Agreement: Mr. Traverse **made a motion to approve and sign** the water/sewer Mutual Aid Agreement; seconded by Mr. Viger and passed unanimously.

Property Tax Reduction Efforts -- Discussion: Setting Goals: Manager Gunter asked, how can we bring down taxes; what are the goals. Suggestions included: discussing Options Tax again; possibly selling water; dump punch card issues; open the Park to vendors bringing in people helping businesses. Mr. Viger suggested creating 3 new revenue streams in one year. Chairman Richards said this will be included in the Town Plan. Mr. Greenough said there is a lot of property in Fair Haven that is not generating a cent in taxes; look at what some other Towns have done. Mr. Coupal noted he agrees with developing every revenue stream possible, keeping in mind a concern about the cost to property tax rates. Revenue might not compensate for the tax rate change. Chairman Richards said he would like this discussed at every meeting. Mr. Coupal asked what is the feeling about a 1% Options Tax, is it time? Mr. Viger noted that in the past, not a lot of knowledge was put out to voters. If it is done again, he would like to have a tax expert make a presentation to inform voters re: what can and cannot be taxed; that it includes taxing on-line purchases collected by the State; that cannabis and alcohol are taxable.

Parking Lot: Can remove Zoning Regulation Updates.

Local Accomplishments: No discussion

Board Round Table: Mr. Greenough reiterated the need to continue ditching; shout out to DPW, doing a good job.

Mr. Viger wants to continue dialogue with Mr. Stannard re: Ash tree injections cost; also to preserve the Ash shade tree at the Mary Canfield softball field.

Chairman Richards reported that numbers show the Town is very close to reappraisal. Ms. Van Lew noted that the School Board discussed this at their meeting last night, maybe could coordinate. Need to reach out to the State to find out just what will trigger a reappraisal.

Review of Financial Reports: The **checkbook status is \$793,884.45.**

Mr. Traverse **moved to pay the 1/11/24 Payroll Warrant, \$715.58;** seconded by Mr. Viger and passed unanimously.

Mr. Traverse **moved to pay the 1/22/24 Payroll Warrant, \$34,365.96;** seconded by Mr. Viger and passed unanimously.

Mr. Traverse **moved to pay the General Fund Warrant, \$98,319.98;** seconded by Mr. Viger and passed unanimously.

Executive Session: Mr. Traverse **made a motion to enter executive session,** including the Town Manager at 9:20 p.m. to discuss Real Estate Sale, VSA ¶ 313 (a)(2) and Personnel, 1 V.S.A. ¶ 313 (a)(3); seconded by Mr. Greenough and passed unanimously.

The recording secretary was excused at this time.

The Board came out of executive session at 9:44 PM. No actions taken

Mr. Traverse motioned to **adjourn** at 9:45; Mr. Coupal seconded.

Board **adjourned** at 9:45 pm

Respectfully submitted: Claire Stanley

Glen Traverse, Board Clerk