

Strafford Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 25, 2023, 6:00 pm
Town Office, 227 Justin Morrill Hwy, Strafford, 05072

Members participating: Toni Pippy, Brian Johnson, Jeff Solsaa, David Paganelli. Mary Linehan via Zoom.

Other participants in person: Lisa Bragg, Curt Albee, Mike Mann, Nellie Pennington.

Via zoom: Cindy Stableford, John Freitag, Rocky Fuller, Wenhan Sun, Shelby Coburn.

Meeting called to order at 6:00 pm

1. Public Concerns. Mike Mann, representing VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers) local chapter, Justin Morrill Drift Skippers, told the Selectboard that recent landowner trail closures have resulted in a break in the VAST trail. He requests temporary use of Alger Road from near the junction with the Justin Morrill Highway up the hill until the “Manning Camp”. He assured the Board that if permission was granted, the snow machines would keep to the right, follow the speed limit and enter and exit Alger Brook Road at locations with good visibility. Jeff made a motion to allow temporary access until April 19, 2023. Toni seconded the motion and the vote was approved 5-0. Mike left the meeting and returned later with a formal permission slip, that Toni signed. He will bring a copy of an insurance binder to the Town Office tomorrow.

Wenhan Sun, a student at Dartmouth College, is working on a community nursing project and asked for contact information to Strafford Community Nurse, a local group supporting community nursing. Cindy Stableford was present, is a member of that group and offered her email address.

2. Highway.
 - a. Jeff reported that the crew has been busy plowing and sanding after recent snowstorms.
 - b. There is an interview scheduled tomorrow for the road crew vacancy.
 - c. Discussion of plowing damage to signs at historic marker on Mine Road. Jeff met with Steve Wilbanks and PD Hardy to learn the facts, assess the damage and discuss solutions. One of the signs had been knocked off it's support post and has since been re-attached. Jeff told the Selectboard that with the placement of the signs and the protective rocks in front of the signs, the pulloff is now difficult to plow and there is no easy place to push excessive amounts of snow. He suggested that it might be possible to remove two sections of fence to allow room to push snow off the parking area. He also suggested that the small rocks designed to provide protection for the signs, might be replaced with bigger rocks. Or possibly that the signs could be moved. No changes are practical before Spring.
 - d. Jeff recommended that any member of the public that may have concerns about plow damage, should direct those concerns to the Road Foreman first, before talking with the Selectboard.

- e. Jeff reported that the buildings at the Stanley property have been crushed by Eric Thorp, and the town will be billed \$1,500. Jeff responded to a call from a Valley News reporter regarding the work to improve safety at the site.
 - f. Mary reported that she had attended an ARPA meeting in Bradford and had inquired if there might be grant funding available to clean up the Stanley site. The State Hazard Mitigation Planner, Lisa Kolb told her that it was possible, if there were water quality concerns that could be justified.
 - g. PD had looked at a proposed driveway on Alger Brook Road and recommended that the Selectboard approve the application with certain conditions to improve visibility. Toni motioned to approve the access application with conditions, Brian seconded the motion and the motion was approved 5-0.
3. Motion by Toni to approve the minutes of the 1/11/23 regular meeting. Jeff seconded the motion. Approved 3-0 by Toni, Jeff and David, with Brian and Mary abstaining since they were absent from that meeting.
 4. Cindy Stableford, Treasurer of Strafford Community Nurse, spoke in support of the town paying \$4,000 to assist with the funding of a Community Nurse. She explained that the Community Nurse would be a Registered Nurse, would work 6-8 hours/week in Strafford and would be available by phone and for home visits at no direct charge. The nurse would assist with medication consults and general wellness counsel. A petition has been submitted to add this article to the warning for annual Town Meeting.
 5. Mary explained that FEMA has audited our town policies and finds four policy documents out of compliance. Our policies must be in compliance with FEMA standards in order for the town to receive federal funding or State funding that includes federal money. One policy document, conflict of interest, has been edited to expand those covered by the policy and to reduce exclusions from the policy. Toni made a motion to accept the revised policy. Mary seconded the motion and the motion was approved 5-0. Mary and Lisa will work on draft revisions to the other policy documents and all revised policies need to be submitted to FEMA and accepted by FEMA, by March 9, 2023. Complete review of all town policies is required by FEMA every two years. Nellie suggested that it would be good practice for the Selectboard to conduct routine policy review at the first meeting after Town Meeting each year.
 6. Town Office Renovation project update from Curt Albee and David. Curt explained that the Town Office Committee had met with the Development Review Board on January 18th to discuss a possible zoning variance that would allow the town to purchase 0.05-0.06 acres from a neighbor to allow a modest expansion of the Town Office. Curt's impression was that the DRB was not supportive of the concept. David suggested that it is possible that the DRB may not have been fully informed about the proposal prior to the meeting and this may have resulted in the impression of a lack of support. It was suggested that with the permission of the neighbor, who is party to the request for zoning variance, the Town Office Committee should make a formal application to the DRB for an official hearing on the proposed zoning variance. All necessary supporting information would accompany the application, the Selectboard would send the DRB a letter of support for the proposed variance and members of the Town Office Committee and the Selectboard would attend the DRB meeting to support and fully explain the proposal. Toni motioned that with the permission of Morgan Smith to proceed on his behalf,

the Town Office Committee should file a formal request for a hearing before the DRB on the proposed zoning variance, and that the Selectboard would send a letter of support to the DRB. David seconded the motion and the motion was approved 5-0.

David provided a draft letter of support to the Selectboard for review and comment. Toni instructed the members to offer any suggestions for change directly to David. Appropriate changes will be made and approval of the letter will be considered by the Selectboard at the next regular meeting.

7. Lisa suggested to the Selectboard that the previously approved pay increase for town employees should be increased. The Selectboard had previously approved an annual salary increase of 4% for town employees, a \$1,000 bonus and an additional contribution to employee health insurance. Lisa provided information that 20 other towns in Vermont had increased worker salary by an average of over 6% for 2023. David made the point that the percent increase in salary does not tell us much if we do not know the starting salary. And further, that 20 towns is not necessarily a representative sample. David contended that the approved salary increase, bonus and assistance with health insurance was generous and no additional salary increase was necessary. Lisa said that a 1% increase in salary for all town employees would cost the town only \$3,446. Since the amount proposed for annual gravel purchase had been increased from approximately \$37,000 to \$125,000, she suggested that the cost of an additional 1% pay increase could come from a corresponding deduction in the proposed increase in the amount allocated for gravel. Lisa indicated that after health insurance rates went up and the pay increases, she received just a little over \$20 a week increase in pay which does not even start to cover the cost of food increases. Toni talked about taking a cheaper health plan and while that all sounds good a cheaper health plan means a higher deductible and more out of pocket expenses that just does not work as you get older. Toni made a motion to increase the approved salary increase for Strafford town employees from 4% to 5%. Brian seconded the motion. Toni, Brian, Mary and Jeff voted to approve. David opposed the motion. Motion approved 4-1.
8. Budget discussion - Toni and Nellie Pennington provided the Selectboard with an 18-page draft budget, explaining various line items. The budget is up due to a variety of factors, including bridge work, higher costs for materials and fuel and the very difficult mud season of 2022. Use of ARPA funds will help to reduce the effect on taxes, but Toni projects a 5.78% increase in taxes required.
9. The Selectboard scheduled a special meeting for Monday, January 30, 2023 at 7:00 to approve the warning for Town Meeting.
10. There was discussion of the merits of Australian Ballot and it was agreed that it is appropriate that this should be discussed and voted on at Town Meeting, and that the warning for Town Meeting should include three Australian Ballot voting options. Further, it was agreed that an informational letter discussing these Australian Ballot voting options, will be mailed to all residents.
11. David made a motion that the Selectboard approve the proposed Ashley Community Forest budgets for fiscal years 2023 and 2024. These budgets are self-funded from the Ashley Community Forest management fund and do not request or require any direct town funding. Jeff seconded the motion and the motion was approved 5-0.

12. Toni tabled discussion of an Ordway Committee appointment letter to a later time.
13. Toni and Mary briefly discussed a recent announcement by the Governor that he has budgeted money to help towns access available ARPA funding. Details of how that will work are not yet completely clear.

Motion to adjourn was made by Jeff Solsa. Second by David. Approved 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

David Paganelli