

Mount Holly Special Select Board Meeting

September 29, 2020

Minutes

Zoom Meeting: 830 2087 2645

Present: Select Board: Jeff Chase, Jennifer Matthews, Mark Turco

Town Officials: David Johnson, Annette Lynch, Jon McCann, Don Richardson, Jim Seward,
Brigid Sullivan

Members of the Public: Stephen Michel, Robin Nelson, Paul Nevin, Michael
Smelser

1. **Call to Order** by Mark Turco at 6:31 pm.
2. All recited the **Pledge of Allegiance**.
3. **Changes and/or additions to the agenda** – None were necessary.
4. **Select Board Meeting Site** – Mr. Turco stated he had received multiple calls to return to in-person meetings with the town garage as a site which could support social distancing. He made a motion to hold the Select Board meetings in a public fashion at the town garage temporarily. Jeff Chase seconded the motion. Brigid Sullivan asked if the meetings would also be held via Zoom for those uncomfortable attending a large gathering. Okemo Valley's Eric Chatterjee said it was possible with some coordination. Robin Nelson asked what the problem was with an in-person meeting if all were wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Annette Lynch remarked that calling for a vote before any discussion was out of order. She stated that she was part of a group of residents who are more susceptible to the coronavirus and so she goes out infrequently, noting it is possible to catch the virus from those without symptoms who don't even know they are ill. She considered Zoom meetings to be a much safer option and the only way residents susceptible to the virus could participate in town meetings. Mr. Chatterjee said having a Zoom option worked best for access by many groups. Stephen Michel stated there could be greater participation with a Zoom option. Jennifer Matthews reported on the Governor's press conference today during which he warned against complacency, especially in regards to large gatherings. There is concern about a second wave of the virus as temperatures grow cooler and people move indoors, causing greater susceptibility to the virus. She stated that she updates the coronavirus page on the town website just about every day and that the number of positive cases has been increasing every day for weeks in Vermont with positive cases now in Mount Holly. As an older resident and thus more COVID-susceptible, and as a mom, Ms. Matthews stated she prefers to err on the side of caution when it comes to health & safety measures, just as the Select Board did at the start of the pandemic with all the health & safety measures put in place for town staff and at the town office. Paul Nevin said he was not a fan of Zoom as it lacked the personal touch, and he stated that the museum board and others in the State were meeting in person without any problems. Ms. Matthews added that the Governor extended the State of Emergency to October 15th and the VT League of Cities and Towns continues to recommend that town boards and commissions meet remotely, again erring on the side of caution. Mr. Michel noted that some residents do not have access to Zoom and would like to participate in person. Jon McCann asked that the motion contain the rationale for the change and why the change was worth the health risk. He also stated that a town meeting really could not bar residents from attending (due to capacity limitations), so a hybrid model was probably best. Michael Smelser said that residents without computers or Zoom access could not participate in the meetings. Mr. Turco said he had received calls and a petition to return to in-person meetings, which is how this meeting transpired. Mr. Chase said his kids were in school with masks, temperature checks, and health questions required. He also said other towns were meeting in person, so he thought returning to in-person meetings was not off base. Additional discussion ensued about

temperature checks, contact tracing logs, social distancing, health & safety requirements and guidelines, requests to return to in-person meetings and requests to stay with Zoom, lack of access to computers and/or online platforms, the Governor's State of Emergency directives. Ms. Nelson commented on the need for all to work together for the good of the community without conflict and to try to please everyone. Mr. Chatterjee recommended the Select Board have remote access available for meetings. More discussion ensued on how to make that happen.

Mr. Turco made a motion to move to in-person meetings with Zoom availability, seconded by Mr. Chase. Mr. Turco and Mr. Chase voted in favor of the motion. Ms. Matthews explained her reservations to do so given the current State of Emergency, VLCT's recommendation for continued remote meetings, concerns about older residents and those with underlying conditions. Mr. Turco asked if that was a 'yea' or 'nay.' Ms. Matthews said it was in between as she found herself between a rock and a hard place as some in town wanted in-person and some wanted Zoom meetings. She thought it best to stick with Zoom so as to err on the side of caution. Mr. Turco said he would take that as a 'nay.'

Discussion followed on how to set up the in-person and Zoom meeting and the various components involved to make that happen. Guidelines for in-person attendance – contact tracing log, temperature checks, masks, social distancing – will be drawn up. Select Board members and residents have the option to attend in-person or remotely. Ms. Sullivan said she thought this was a very accommodating solution. Mr. Turco stated the solution should accommodate everybody and make both sides happy. He thanked the Board for their input and he thanked everyone for attending.

5. **Adjourn** – at 7:09 pm.

Respectfully submitted: Jennifer Matthews

Minutes Approved: 10.13.2020