

Mount Holly Select Board Meeting
January 12, 2021
Minutes

In-Person with Zoom Meeting: 898 6126 5487

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

Town Officials: Jim Corven, Sue Covalla, Phil Crane, Francis DeVine, Diana Garrow, David Johnson, Annette Lynch, Jon McCann, Stephen Michel, Don Richardson, Renee Sarmiento, Jim Seward, Brigid Sullivan, Laura Swartz, Andy Tanger, Carol Woolley, Clinton Woolley

Members of the Public: Paul Barton, Dan Buckley, Ted Crawford, Zena Gates, Cheryl Hammond, Jim Heald, Craig Hutt Vater (Principal, Mount Holly School), Craig Jewett (Otter Creek Engineering), Paul Nevin, Paul Orzechowski, Christine Pratt, Judy Pryor Pullinan, Kelly Tarbell, Amy Turco, Kristin Veysey (Pres., MHVRS), and Donna

1. **Call to Order** by Mark Turco at 6:30 pm.

2. All recited the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

3. **Changes and/or additions to the agenda** - Jennifer Matthews asked to add an energy committee update from Don Richardson. It was agreed to add the update under New Business - Other.

4. **Approval of December 8th, 2020 Minutes**- Jeff Chase made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Turco, unanimously approved.

5. **Reports**

a. **Highways & Transfer Station Update - Clinton Woolley** said he didn't really have anything to report on Highways as it had been quiet lately.

i) **Food Scrap Disposal/Town Composting Operation** - Mr. Woolley reported that Rutland County Solid Waste District is looking into amending our agreement in order to include food scrap collection for composting right at the Mount Holly transfer station.

b. **Treasurer - David Johnson**

i) **Monthly Income & Expense Report** - Mr. Johnson reported State Farm Bank has now merged with US Bank, and US Bank is offering a much lower interest rate. Looking at the Profit & Loss, he noted: the \$2,772 Interest on Delinquent Taxes includes interest from the prior year and the tax sale which recently occurred; the \$7,920 State Aid Highway Grants amount offsets the expenses to repair the Shunpike Road bridge; the \$63,867 is the FEMA funds received for the April 2019 storm repairs, a payment which took quite a while to come in; the Solid Waste Labels Sold figure of \$16,198 is through December 15th and it is more than half of what was budgeted; the \$27,575 Digitization Grant Proceeds offsets the Cott digitization expenses; the \$6,600 for material to repair the Christmas Day wash-outs is included in the Summer Road Materials figure of \$27,007.

ii) **Proposed FY'22 Budget - Finalize & Approve** - Mr. Johnson reported we went through the proposed budget line by line at the Special Select Board meeting on January 5th. He then went through a few of the budget figures, noting some had increased slightly and many had stayed the same. He noted that the Select Board lowered the municipal tax rate by two-cents this year. For the coming year, he stated the taxes will be slightly more (about one-cent), but not quite as much as the year before, and the overall budget is \$80 less than two years ago. There was no discussion. Ms. Matthews made a motion to approve the FY'22 budget as presented, seconded by Mr. Chase, unanimously approved.

c. **Listers Update**

i) **Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) Rate** - Mr. Johnson reported the new CLA is down from 107% to 106% and the Coefficient of Dispersion is down to 16.6%. Neither is really good, but neither triggers a State order for a reappraisal. Mr. Johnson noted the last reappraisal was done 11 years ago, so another is coming sooner rather than later.

Mr. Johnson also reported the Listers are currently reviewing the new parcel maps. There will be a notice in the *Chit Chat* about the new maps. Property owners can make an appointment to come in and review them.

ii) **Appraiser** – Doug Lemire, the town’s appraiser, will be retiring this year. The Listers are discussing a new appraisal approach given Mr. Lemire’s up-coming retirement and the implementation of the new State Grand List management software.

iii) **New State of VT Property Tax Management & Grand List Software** – Mr. Johnson reported that the New England Municipal Resource Center (NEMRC) system will be utilized through this year with the option to continue to use it for another year. Once this year’s Grand List is complete, there will be training for the Listers on how to use the new State Grand List software.

d. **Mount Holly Planning Commission – Jon McCann** reported the Planning Commission clerk had sent out a bill for the one subdivision fee that had not yet been paid and that fee was received by year’s end. Also, all decision letters were mailed out by the end of the year, so the Planning Commission has no loose ends moving into 2021.

e. **Mount Holly Conservation Commission Update – Phil Crane** reported that the Commission continues to work with Castleton University to create a community-wide survey for use by both the Conservation and Planning Commissions. The survey will most likely occur during the spring, and some funds (\$1,000-\$1,500) may be needed. The Commission is also preparing a grant application to study Star Lake. The grant is through the VT Department of Environmental Conservation in an amount up to \$10,000 with no local match. The Select Board had no objections to the pursuit of the grant.

Ms. Matthews noted the fish die-off and poor water quality at Star Lake this past summer. She said that the town health officer used to test Star Lake’s water quality during the summer season, but the testing stopped once a charge for the water tests took effect. The fee is minimal. Ms. Matthews asked if we could ask the health officer to once again test the water at Star Lake during the season with the town covering the fee associated with the testing. The Select Board agreed to do so.

Ms. Matthews also noted that the Legislature had changed the tree warden Statutes in the last session to remove any conflicts in the Statutes and to expand the tree warden’s responsibilities. The Statute also gives towns the option to adopt a shade tree preservation plan. The VT Urban & Community Forestry Program is currently recruiting six towns to receive free year-long, technical assistance, with a 50-hour local volunteer match, to draft a shade tree preservation plan that would fit the needs and desires of the community. The application is due February 3rd, so it’s a tight timeframe. Ms. Matthews asked if perhaps the Conservation Commission might be interested in looking into the program. Mr. Crane said they would. Mr. McCann said the Planning Commission would also look into it, and Brigid Sullivan said the Mount Holly Conservation Trust would as well. Ms. Matthews thanked all for their interest.

f. **Mount Holly Volunteer Rescue Squad Update – Kristin Veysey** reported they were doing well with calls and that all rescue squad members who wanted to be vaccinated against COVID-19 had been. She also reported that the rescue squad building could be a possible vaccination station for community members. If this happens, she will get the word out to the community. Ms. Matthews noted the call log Ms. Veysey sent to Select Board members showing a 95% response rate to calls from July 1, 2020 to January 10, 2021. Mr. Turco commented he had heard lots good things about Rescue and thanked them for their service to the community.

g. **Mount Holly Animal Control Officer Report – Laura Swartz** asked if it would be possible to use a small space in the old recycling shed to house a found animal until the owner is identified. Mr. Turco said she should talk with Mr. Woolley about a space and access, and he was okay with it.

Ms. Swartz also asked if it would be possible to put a sign up at the transfer station listing the days and hours it was open; many out-of-staters are often stopped there unsure of its hours of operation. Mr. Turco said we could do that.

h. **Rutland Regional Transportation Council Update – Clinton Woolley** reported that they plan to set-up a website for the MRGPs for ease of access and updating.

i. **Rutland County Solid Waste District Update – Clinton Woolley** reported they are working on the budget. They still have compost bins available for those who would like to purchase one.

6. Ongoing & Old Business

a. **Mount Holly School/Town Garage Water System - Craig Jewett/Craig Hutt Vater** - Mr. Jewett stated he was here to answer any questions about the school and town garage water system consolidation and to go over the permits the town must sign. Mr. Chase asked about the time line for the project. Mr. Jewett replied the State would like to receive the permits as soon as possible even though construction would not begin until summer, once school is out. The turnaround time on the permits is usually 30-45 days, but probably 60-75 days at this point given the pandemic. Once the permits are in hand, they plan to solicit bids from two to three local contractors. Ms. Matthews asked about the three permits for a public water system and what exactly that meant. Mr. Jewett explained that the town garage well was currently a potable, non-public water system. Once it is tied in with the school and consistently serving a larger number of people on a regular basis, it becomes a public water system. The town will be named on the final permit for the public water system. Mr. Turco asked about town liability. Mr. Jewett explained that the school would be responsible for the water system with the school as its owner and operator. Ms. Matthews asked if there would be a contractual agreement between the school and the town spelling out those responsibilities. Mr. Turco expressed concern about taking on any liabilities for the town. Ms. Matthews stated she had called the town attorney but had not yet heard back from him. It was decided that once the town attorney reviews the applications, the Select Board will get in touch with Mr. Jewett re: next steps.

b. **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update** - Mr. Chase reported that there were no public comments on the plan. The plan has now been sent to VT Emergency Management for approval. Once that process is complete, the plan will need to be adopted by the Select Board, most probably in March.

c. **Independent Audit Update** - Ms. Matthews stated that the RFP packets were mailed last week to five firms: four in VT, and one in Maine to a firm which performs audits for a number of municipalities here in VT. The proposals are due on February 8th with the initial opening and review scheduled for the February 9th Select Board meeting. The Select Board will decide on a firm at the March 9th meeting, which provides a month for review of the proposals, the firms, their audit approach and procedures, as well as time to contact references. The RFP can also be found on the website. Ms. Matthews noted she had already received questions from one of the firms.

d. **Select Board Admin. Assistant Position** - Ms. Matthews noted the position has been advertised in the *Vermont Journal*, the *Rutland Herald*, the *Chit Chat*, and on the website since October with no interest expressed to date. She noted that those who do admin work might consider the job description and the number of hours provided to complete the work as unrealistic. The budget included an increased amount for the position based on 15 hours a week, up from ten, in the hopes of garnering more interest. Mr. Turco suggested contacting a temp service to fill the job.

e. **Lowery Property - VT Route 103** - Ms. Matthews reported that the mobile home in question is not in the State right-of-way. She also reached out to her contact at the Agency of Natural Resources, who suggested we start with a visit from the town health officer to investigate the discharge issue. Mr. Turco stated the mobile home is in a temporary position with no septic, no water, and no power hook-ups. Ms. Matthews will contact the town health officer and ask him to investigate and for a report at the February Select Board meeting.

f. **Junk Ordinance Letters**

i) **Bussino & Wyman - Shunpike Road**

ii) **Taylor - VT Route 103**

Mr. Turco reported on the email received from Grover Taylor, Jr. explaining that he and his bother run a business in MA and are unable to come to VT at present due to the pandemic and the quarantine requirements. He would like some additional time to do the cleanup. Ms. Matthews reported that Constable Paul Faenza hand delivered the most recent letters from the Select Board to both the Taylor and Bussino residences. The letter to Mr. Wyman was sent certified mail and the return postcard has been received. To date, there has been no response from either Mr. Bussino or Mr. Wyman. Mr. Turco will pull together a list of names of individuals who pick up junk vehicles, which can then be sent to the property owners. He will also contact Mr. Bussino.

g. **Other** - There was no additional Ongoing & Old Business this evening.

7. New Business

a. **Town Meeting Day & Election Info – Set Date to Sign Warning** – Ms. Matthews explained that the Legislature has given municipalities a number of options on how to hold this year’s Town Meeting in the age of COVID-19: all items can be voted by Australian ballot so there is no voting from the floor; the informational meeting can be held via Zoom; the date of Town Meeting can be moved to a later, and hopefully safer, date; all ballots can be mailed by the town clerk with funding available from the State to cover costs; and candidates for local elections do not need to submit a voter signed petition, just the completed Consent of Candidate form. Discussion ensued: on the date of the meeting and whether to push the date out to a time with a lower number of COVID-19 cases; the place of the meeting and the use of the current hybrid meeting model; whether all ballots should be mailed or just those individually requested by voters. After much discussion, it was decided to hold Town Meeting using the hybrid model of in-person and Zoom attendees on Monday, March 1st at 7:00 pm. All those who can attend by Zoom are encouraged to do so. The town garage can only accommodate 60, and those 60 should be residents who do not have the ability to attend via Zoom. The Town Meeting Day vote will take place on Tuesday, March 2nd. Voters can request a ballot to be mailed to them, or they can pick up a ballot at the town office, or they can vote in person on March 2nd.

It was decided to approve and sign the warning on Tuesday, March 19th at 4:00 pm.

i) **Retail Cannabis** – Ms. Matthews reported that the Legislature did pass the bill legalizing the retail sale of cannabis. Municipalities can vote to allow the retail sale of cannabis in town and/or to allow the activities of a cultivator, wholesaler, product manufacturer, retailer, and testing laboratory in town, or not. The vote by Australian ballot on these two issues must take place at an annual or special meeting. Retail shops selling cannabis to the general public can begin operations on April 1, 2022. Ms. Matthews asked if we wanted to discuss this issue at this year’s Town Meeting. Given the restrictions on gatherings imposed by the pandemic, it was decided to wait to address this issue until next year.

b. **Class 4 Highway Policy** – Mr. Turco stated a number of calls had come in about Class 4 road maintenance. He emphasized that Class 4 roads are not a highway maintained by the town; property owners along Class 4 roads are the ones responsible for maintaining the road. He said we should draft a policy stating this. Ms. Matthews noted VLCT’s model policy. Mr. Chase volunteered to draft a Class 4 road policy for the town. The Select Board will review this at the February meeting.

c. **Harry’s Restaurant Liquor License Approval** – Mr. Chase made a motion to approve the liquor license for Harry’s Restaurant, seconded by Mr. Turco, unanimously approved.

d. **Other** – Don Richardson reported on an initiative by the Cavendish Select Board to bring an electrical charging station into town. He will gather more information about this and present it to the Select Board at next month’s meeting.

8. **Concerned Citizens Comments** – Diana Garrow reported on area towns, some of which have their annual reports and audits on their websites and some of which do not. None had their monthly financials on their website. She also had questions about the Cott land records digitization contract and fees. Kelly Tarbell gave a shout out to the road crew for their work on clearing the roads during the Christmas storm. Paul Barton thanked town officials for remaining at their posts during dangerous times.

9. Announcements/Other Business

a. **Reminder: Town Office Closed on January 18th**

b. **Reminder: Town Officers’ Consent Form due in Town Office by 4:00 pm – January 25th**

c. **Other** – Ms. Matthews noted there was a new supply of paper masks available at the town office for those who need them. She thanked Brigid Sullivan and the Ludlow Rotary Club for the donation. Ms. Sullivan said additional masks would be dropped off at the town office in the next few days.

10. **Review & Sign Orders** – To be signed one Select Board member at a time at the town office.

11. **Executive Session: Title 1 V.S.A. S 313(a)(3) – personnel** – Not needed this evening.

12. **Adjourn** – Mr. Turco adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted: Jennifer Matthews

Approved: 2.9.2021