

Mount Holly Select Board Meeting
October 8, 2019
Minutes

Present: Select Board: Jennifer Matthews, Ron Tarbell

Town Officials: Susan Covalla, Carol Garrow-Woolley, David Johnson, Jon McCann, Bill McGrath, Brigid Sullivan, Mary Surething, Clinton Woolley

Members of the Public: Paul Barton, Robert Bryant, Judy Hyjek, Annette Lynch, Timothy Morton, Gannon Osborn, Don Richardson, Peter Smith, Ron Unterman, Joan Weir

1. **Call to Order** by Ron Tarbell at 6:00 p.m.

2. All stood for the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

3. **Consideration of any changes and/or additions to the agenda** – Requests made by Bill McGrath to make suggestions and Robert Bryant to make comments were agreed to under #7 New Business, Other.

4. **Approval** of the September 10, 2019 Minutes – Ron Tarbell made a motion to approve the minutes, Jennifer Matthews seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

5. **Reports**

a. **Highways**

i) **Update** – Clinton Woolley

Mr. Woolley presented a quote he had received for uniforms for the road crew. With only one quote, Ron Tarbell asked to table the proposal until additional quotes were received.

Mr. Woolley noted that Appalachian and Cargill have the same price on salt for the upcoming winter. Appalachian has the State contract to supply cities and towns in District 3, and given their proven dependability last year, it was thought best to stick with them.

Mr. Woolley reported that no items relevant to Mount Holly were discussed at the **Rutland Region Transportation Council** meeting (#5.d.Report).

Per the Rutland County Solid Waste District, Mr. Woolley noted that the costs for the Zero Sort operation were catching up to the costs of trash removal, which could mean a charge for recyclables in the future.

b. **Treasurer** – David Johnson

i) **Monthly Income & Expense Report** – Mr. Johnson reported that \$880,000 of the \$5,250,000 in property taxes was still to be collected; percentage-wise, this is normal at this time of year. He noted that the Discount on Taxes was higher than the budgeted amount this year by \$7900, and he noted that Interest Income received to date was already more than what was budgeted for the year due to the change in banks and a higher interest rate received. He also reported that there were not many municipal expenses so far this year.

ii) **School Payments** – Mr. Johnson explained the schedule he had prepared of payments to be made to the school in the amount of \$2.9 M per the State.

c. **Rutland Regional Planning Commission Report** - Jon McCann reported on an interesting presentation on light pollution and noted a growing trend in “dark sky tourism” that could be of benefit to Mount Holly’s tourist businesses. He noted that talks are underway with the US Forest Service to designate national forests as dark sky preserves. Jennifer Matthews commented on a conversation at a Select Board meeting with Tim Mueller of Okemo Mountain Resort in attendance back when Jackson Gore was in the early stages of development. She asked about noise pollution from snow guns and light pollution from impending development. She was assured neither would impact our side of the mountain.

6. Old Business

a. **Public Utilities Commission Update re: Phone Back-Up Battery Power Issues** - Jennifer Matthews gave an update on the last PUC workshop with the small towns (whose residents lose phone service and the ability to reach emergency services during prolonged power outages due to inadequate back-up battery power, and the lack of cell service, as a result of the changeover to fiber optic cable dependent upon electric power to operate from the former copper wires to carry phone service), the PUC, and the lawyers and lobbyists for the telecommunications companies. The telecom companies do not want to incur any additional expenses. The group of small towns (Shrewsbury, Mount Holly, Andover, Wallingford, Tinmouth, and perhaps Middletown Springs) is asking for “best practices” which include better customer education on back-up batteries, technical assistance, and no additional costs on the customer for said batteries. Questions were asked about the involvement of public health agencies and any statistics showing mortality rates due to the inability to reach emergency services in the State’s rural towns. The next PUC workshop is on October 21st.

b. **Swap Shed** – Jennifer Matthews reported that the swap shed had arrived, and it is now up and running. She thanked Clinton Woolley for dealing with its arrival at quite a late hour in the evening. Just a few rules exist for the shed at present: no electronics, no clothing, no junk. There are favorable reports as to its use at present with some good swapping occurring.

c. **Support Letter – VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation 345-Acre Acquisition**

The request for a letter of support from the Select Board for the Town of Mount Holly was made by the Mount Holly Conservation Trust, the Vermont Land Trust, and the Vermont Division of Forest, Parks and Recreation. The letter of support is needed for the state of Vermont to make a large grant (\$440,000) to assist with for the acquisition of this private parcel as an addition to the Okemo State Forest. Brigid Sullivan for the Mount Holly Conservation Trust made the main presentation outlining the parcel’s wildlife, environmental and recreation (fishing, hunting, snowmobiling) value to the town; the value of the conservation easement that will prevent any residential, industrial or commercial development; and, the State’s Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILLOT) that will reimburse the Town for any loss of municipal taxes. The loss of education taxes are borne by all property owners across the state with a projected cost of eight cents per parcel. Ms. Sullivan noted that over \$200,000 of the \$813,000 price tag for the acquisition had come from local residents. She also presented the Select Board with a petition signed by 80+ residents in support of the project. Gannon Osborn with the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation further explained the PILOT program, noting that

the taxes paid currently on the property would remain at the same amount until the State Legislature reassesses the PILOT payments in 2022. He noted that those payments had been at 1% of the assessed value of property, but are now at .6% after the Legislature's last reassessment of PILOT payments. Joan Weir of the Vermont Land Trust noted that the conservation easement on the property is on in perpetuity. The conservation easement is a requirement of the VT Housing & Conservation Board, which made a sizable grant to help with this acquisition. The property is doubly-protected from development with this conservation easement. Peter Smith pointed out that the numerous beech trees on the property make for prime bear habitat, which also ensures that the Department of Fish and Wildlife would oppose any sort of development on the acreage.

David Johnson reported for the Board of Listers and as Treasurer. He reiterated the eight cents per parcel increase in the education tax and the current PILOT program payments, which have been decreasing with each reassessment by the State Legislature. He noted that currently 5718 acres in town, or 23.8% of the land in town, is in State and Federal hands. This acquisition will increase that to 25.65% of the land in town in State and Federal hands. Ms. Matthews reiterated Dennis Devereux's concerns about balancing conserved land with the need to keep housing and land costs affordable for young families in town or wanting to move to town for our excellent elementary school.

Ms. Matthews noted that she was impressed by the range of the discussion provoked by this subject in last month's Select Board meeting and this one also: the intersection of land values, conservation, affordable housing, the needs of young families, and Mount Holly's excellent elementary school were among topics that she hoped could be discussed in the future. Ron Tarbell made a motion to approve the 345-acre acquisition of the two properties off Route 155 and Government Road by the VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, seconded by Jennifer Matthews, passed unanimously. The Select Board will write a letter to the State as requested. The Select Board thanked those making the presentations for all the information shared and for the significant work done to acquire the land for this project.

7. New Business

a. VLCT/PACIF Insurance Renewals – Time for the policy renewal for property, vehicle, dam, and worker's comp insurance, with the rates either staying flat or with a slight decrease.

b. Mount Holly Planning Commission – One Term Expires November 2019 – Ms. Matthews noted that in the past when a term was expiring, letters of interest were requested from both the incumbent, if still interested in serving, and others who might be interested in serving. It was agreed to post the position in the *Chit Chat*.

c. Other

Bill McGrath (Chair of the Planning Commission) rose to say that he had been called "an embarrassment," wanted the statement withdrawn or he would resign. Unsure of what he was talking about, the Select Board did not respond, and Mr. McGrath walked out the door.

Robert Bryant rose to discuss the complaints he had made to the Select Board at the last two meetings. He complained about conditions around town that had not been addressed and about town officials who do nothing. He stated that the State considers Mount Holly to be the

“wild, wild west” full of a bunch of hillbillies, and the town doesn’t want to put its foot down and take care of anything. He said he thought it was time to do something for the town, and that he did not come to complain but to help. Judy Hyjek stated that she thought a disagreement between Mr. Bryant and Archie Bussino at the last Select Board meeting had not been accurately represented in the meeting minutes. She also stated that she and Mr. Bryant were stating facts about environmental and safety issues in town that need to be addressed. Ron Tarbell thanked Mr. Bryant for bringing his concerns to the Select Board.

8. Announcements/Other Business

a. **Transfer Station Fall/Winter Hours** - Last Wednesday, 10/9; First Sunday, 10/13

b. **Mount Holly Cider Days:** Saturday & Sunday, October 12th & 13th w/ Maple Hill Road Closure

c. **Public Information Session & Hearing on Proposed AT&T Cell Tower**, Tuesday, October 15th @ 7:00 pm at the Town Office @ Special Select Board Meeting

d. Other

Ms. Matthews noted that a number of new requests had been received for funding from Social Service organizations. Was there a policy in place regarding these? In discussion, it was noted that the request must be accompanied by a petition signed by residents to be placed on the ballot. There was additional discussion around how to remove a request once incorporated into the annual line item list of social service requests.

Ms. Matthews also inquired about whether the Select Board and the town might want to begin discussions about the pending legislation on the retail sale of marijuana. It was agreed to have some information presented at one of the next Select Board meetings.

9. **Review & Sign Orders** – Reviewed and signed.

10. **Executive Session: Title 1 V.S.A. S 313(a)(1)** – Jennifer Matthews made a finding followed by a motion to enter Executive Session at 7:18 pm, Ron Tarbell seconded both, passed unanimously. Mr. Tarbell made a motion to exit Executive Session at 7:39 pm, seconded by Ms. Matthews, passed unanimously. No actions were taken.

Respectfully submitted: Jennifer Matthews

Minutes Approved: 11.12.2019