

**Town of Royalton
Selectboard Meeting Minutes DRAFT
2/27/2024 6:30 PM
Virtual / In-person Meeting**

Royalton Selectboard: John Dumville, Tim Murphy, Jerry Barcelow, Chris Noble, Stuart Levasseur

Town Staff: Allison Fulcher (Moderator), Victoria Paquin (Town Administrator), Brad Salzman (EMD), Karmen Bascom (town Clerk)

Public: 19 inclusive of: Hoyt Bingham, Kathy Hassey, John Dettwiler, Jo Levasseur, Nell Gwin, Suzanne Long, Ted Kenyon, Bonnie Kenyon, Harry Dodge,

Meeting called to order @ 6:31 PM

Approve the Agenda: The agenda was approved by consensus.

Pretown Meeting: Alison Fulcher is moderating the meeting. Began by reading the town meeting warning.

Selectboard given opportunity to introduce themselves. Chris Noble thanks all for coming. Notes that this year we are “almost back to normal” with how we used to do things. Today is important if there are things you need to know before voting next week. Introduced all board members: Jerry Barcelow, Stuart Levasseur, Chris Noble, John Dumville, Tim Murphy

Article I: Alison asks if there are any in attendance running for a seat. Nell Gwin, grew up in Royalton running for Selectboard seat. Is raising her family here, father was on the selectboard and set an example of being involved in your community. Thinks it is very important, and has been on the planning commission for a long time. Interested in checking out another facet of local town government. Would love to talk with anyone who has questions for her.

Jerry says he briefly thought about running again, but decided not to when he heard Nell was running. So glad to see her run for a seat.

It was noted that Chris Noble is also not running for his seat. There are no contested races.

Chris gives overview of current affairs– notes that the budget and the operations are about six months out of sync. Last year in July with the flooding we incurred significant costs. Right now, approximately \$2.7 million dollars. We have been working hard to keep on top of the paperwork. We hired a good team of contractors and administrative help to get the work done. FEMA will pay about 75% of our costs for repair, but the town will be left with some burden. Right now, we expect about \$300,000 in costs. That does not include costs that will be related to the full restoration of Broad Brook Road. The cost of those repairs are not yet known, we have hired DuBois & King to complete the engineering. It is a balance between what work will be allowed to be done in the brook and what the cost burden is for the town.

Last year the Chelsea St Bridge debt was paid off. We have a project pending for North Road, right now the road condition is not good. This will also be a costly project to complete. We have requested quotes from engineers to help develop the RFP. Tim notes that we have ridden the road with VTrans to get recommendations and have a grant for the project. The ditching and everything needs work. We will be working on this to hit the grant window and get the work done. In the meantime, some cold patching has been done. Tim says we have put approximately \$60,000 a mile into the dirt roads since the July flooding. Is proud to say that the team has restored roads about 90% back, with Broad Brook remaining to be repaired. Tim noted that we have also been working on analysis of our pit material since before the July event. It was discovered that the material has too many fines in it and so we have been purchasing in material in. Things are different than they used to be, instead of one January thaw we have been getting more mud which requires a lot more diligence. Our road crew is fully staffed and we are working to improve our practices.

Chris mentions that we are changing the way we are treating roads during mud season. Tim says yes, we can't produce the proper material with what is currently coming out of the pit, so we have purchased material to better maintain the roads. We were in the process of doing this before the rain event in July. The rain event maxed out most of our volunteer bandwidth, it is difficult to attend the many meetings that were required on top of making a living. Noted the help of employees and contractors who made it happen. Work included site visits to ensure that work was being completed appropriately. We're proactively working to have appropriate materials on hand to deploy as needed. Tim noted it is not going to be perfect and will never be perfect but we are working hard.

Harry Dodge – Mr. Noble said you were ashamed of North Road, I think you should be ashamed of every road in town. Drive through neighboring towns – they don't use woodchuck dirt on their roads, all that does is make mudholes deeper and raise the level of the road. It makes mud season worse and the mudholes deeper and we should have recognized that five years ago.

Ted Kenyon – asks if they have checked out Larry Severances Pit.

Tim says yes, they have looked at the material. He does not have all of his act 250 permitting in place yet. Would like to negotiate a price with him if it is an option. Would also like to have the material tested to ensure that it meets requirements.

Continued discussion from the board regarding the FEMA process for the July storms regarding the paperwork requirements and length of time to complete the process. It took longer than people wanted to get some things done, such as opening Broad Brook Road, however, we had necessary agreements in place to keep everyone safe – emergency services etc.

Ted Kenyon notes that it would have been cheaper if Broad Brook had been repaired 20 years ago.

Additional discussion on hauling material from local quarry versus having to travel to get it.

Chris notes that the state will be doing a project on Foxstand Bridge. The Town will have a small cost share for that project. Stuart notes that on March 26th the bridge will be closed for the day while the state performs an inspection.

Jo Levasseur – do you know how long the bridge will be closed while they work on it. Not yet, it will be an extended time.

Brad Salzmann – asks about discussion on articles 3 and 4. Chris says we have been trying to get recreation fund right for a while – meeting their needs versus setting aside a reserve fund that they can draw from. We have good people running the thing and looking to establish a fund to run the economics on that. Tim thinks that if the rec committee was to go away, there would be a big void. They do an awful lot for the town. We have a lot of solid volunteers that do the heavy lifting.

Suzanne Long – asks about what the recreation fund and why a \$2,000 contribution.

Harry Dodge – asks why we pay the Rescue Squad that money and we get no benefit from it. Why do I pay to support them when I get nothing out of them and now they want a new building. Why don't we build the firehouse on the Hope Property where we agreed to build it.

Jerry says that the Rescue Squad provides a lot more services than what they get reimbursed for and that's what the town is picking up. Cannot speak for the fire department, they have not asked for a new building. The rescue squad housing is far from adequate.

Harry notes the squad only has one ambulance, and there is a lot of room in the firehouse. When we bought the Hope Property we were going to build a firehouse on it.

Tim notes that the Fire Department did say that if the rescue squad were to move out that the fire building would be sufficient for the building.

Harry brings up the entrance onto Route 14 and whether it will need a stop light.

Chris Maybe – more worried about Rescue's man power than housing – what is the latest?

Jerry is just getting back from being away on vacation. The rescue squad was getting up to staffing level and then one of the individuals who was hired passed away. Staffing is an issue statewide and that is why the budget request is up – need to increase pay and provide benefits to increase staffing. Chris asks if there has been discussion of going to WRVA etc or if we are still holding strong at 2.5 towns.

Jerry says we are holding strong for now. There is not a good track record with going into an agreement with another service and maintaining our current level of service when it comes to keeping an ambulance in our area.

Aaron Sellars – sees that the town manager wages is back in the budget – what's the latest on that.

Victoria clarifies that it was in the budget for FY24 and that's what is being shown there. There are no town manager wages in the FY 25 budget.

Aaron asks about the 22% increase overall in enforcement. Chris notes that a portion of that is in wages, in order to provide a better wage. Continued discussion on police staffing needs. Noted that

VSP has also stopped dispatching which requires us to now pay for the service. Tim notes that one of the things we are working on is developing a public safety commission. Discussion on the current state of policing and the judicial system in Vermont. Discussion on Tunbridge Fair Contract as well as grant work. Victoria clarifies that the primary driver of the increase in the police department budget. Discussion regarding dispatching and costs, used to be provided by Department of Public Safety, now is a paid service from the Town of Hartford.

Suzanne asks Tim to talk more about the public safety committee. Tim adds additional detail that it is a liaison working with police chief, local & state resources to work towards more lasting solutions to crime issues. We're early in the process, there will be public meetings forthcoming.

Kathy Hassey – thanks the selectboard for all of the work they've done. Came before the board a few times in the last year and appreciates the support. One thing Kathy suggests for those who don't read all of the minutes is that Jo covers the board meetings in the Herald. Kathy asks about what else the material can be used for – Tim says it can be used as base / fill material. The other thing about gravel pits is that there may be different / better material in a different location.

Chris Maybe – post pandemic is there any consideration about moving town meeting back to normal. Yes – we are voting from the floor with the exception of the officers which are voted by ballot.

Discussion regarding legislation in the state that would require a hybrid (offering of a remote option) meeting in the future. Karmen notes that many clerks went to Montpelier to discourage this type of legislation. There are many towns without the type of internet that this would require. It does not appear that this legislation is going to continue forward at this time.

Aaron asks if there is a consideration of some kind of digital communication to the town. If there is a way to opt in to digital communication. Stuart says there are about six different ways of contacting people, we would need to find out what is going to work for everybody. We can have a discussion.

Mike Hogan – asks about the delinquent taxes of \$192,000 – what is the plan to collect that money? Tim notes that some of this has probably been collected since publication.

Suzanne – is on the board of tax abatement, I think if you look at the years you can see that there is a trend that the taxes might be collected after multiple years. In general, the taxes just take a while to get collected. You can see the column that specifies abatements and what is still outstanding. If you look more in detail you can see the trend.

Suzanne – Before the pandemic, we had a whole meeting about should we vote from the floor or all from Australian ballot. Suzanne had proposed getting folks together to think about how to engage more. Thinks it links to Aaron's question about how to find the information and find out what is going on. How to get community members more actively involved in the town.

Jerry moves to adjourn at 7:48 PM

Hoyt asks if Karmen had success in getting someone to provide food at town meeting. Karmen says Yes – the PTO will be there between 8 and 10 to provide coffee, donuts etc.

Suzanne – was curious after the consideration of having a town manager last year if the board moved forward with thinking about that or?

Chris says we were overwhelmed to a great degree with fixing our roads. It is still of interest – eventually we are probably going to have to do it due to increasing requirements etc. Is that time now – we don't know. Up to the town to decide how to go. Several towns that have done it recently. The job of Selectboard is changed by having a town manager. Is a learning curve for all. It is a good discussion to have, but this year was tough to have it.

Ted asks if school reports have gone out yet. Some discussion was had regarding report availability and the schedule of the meetings for the school.

Tim says thank you very much for being so civil. Appreciates the conversation. Wants to acknowledge Chris and Jerry for being such great community members. No matter how the conversation went – agree disagree etc we always leave as friends.

Warrants were reviewed by the selectboard and approved.

Pretown Meeting Adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Paquin
Town Administrator