

Town of Royalton
Selectboard Meeting Minutes DRAFT
2/28/2023 6:30 PM
Virtual / In-person Meeting

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

Town Staff: Victoria Paquin (Town Administrator), Loretta Stalnaker (Police Chief), Rita Hull (Treasurer), Karmen Bascom (Town Clerk), Allison Fulcher (Moderator)

Public: 46 present in person, 11 present virtually. **At times, individuals joined or left the meeting at their convenience. Roughly 10 participants attended a portion of the meeting.

Meeting called to order @ 6:30 PM

Approve the Agenda: The agenda was approved by consensus.

Introduce the Moderator: Allison Fulcher was introduced as the moderator of the meeting and began by informing the attendees about the meeting procedures according to Robert's Rule of order. Allison then read the annual meeting warning.

Hear from Candidates from Office:

Stuart Levassuer is running for the three year Selectboard seat being vacated by David Barker. Stuart has served on the Planning Commission for a number of years and is looking forward to representing the people of Royalton.

Kate George is running for the two year Selectboard seat. Kate has been a Royalton resident since '96, raised four children here and now has time to give back to the community. She is willing to listen and come up with solutions that work for everyone.

Marc Preston is running for the two year Selectboard seat. Marc has previously held positions such as Health Officer, Constable and Royalton Police Officer. Marc noted that he still receives calls from residents concerning town matters, and encourages everyone to attend selectboard meetings. Marc notes that board members should listen to and act on the concerns of the town, not personal ones and that we should be able to disagree without arguing.

Tim Murphy is running for the two year Selectboard seat. Tim is running for reelection hoping to see through multiple projects that are underway such as bridges, railroad underpass and sidewalk project. Tim is proud of those who have served before and wants to carry on. Tim noted that the board works well together and that the town staff is talented.

Hear Report of Town Officers: Allison invited the board to comment before moving on to discussion of the articles. Tim acknowledged that that ATV ordinance is a hot button issue and described how the request originated and the process of developing the ordinance. Tim encouraged giving the ATV riders the opportunity to utilize the roads responsibly.

Chris discussed the budget, and noted that times are tough and may get tougher. Compared to 2019 the value of a dollar has decreased by 20% due to inflation. Comparatively, our budget is tracking with inflation. The shift to a Town Manager form of government is a big question. Lots of towns do

it and there are benefits, but there is also a cost. The knowledge, skills and technical ability required to run a town are increasing, and we need to start thinking about a town manager. He noted that the skills needed are not necessarily ones that you can learn while sitting on the board, and that interest in serving on committee has been declining. If we don't have the ability to run the organization well then services are going to suffer.

Discuss Articles for Town Meeting:

Article II: Town Manager for of Governance – Article II was discussed at length. Resident inquired as to how the question was placed on the ballot, what the job description of the position was, and the compensation that was added to the budget. There was also discussion regarding the lack of available information, with some in attendance indicating that they are interested in exploring the option, but don't feel prepared to vote yes at this time.

The board generally agreed that they should have supplied more information ahead of time. It was noted that the board spends a significant amount of time dealing with the everyday needs of the town, and that having a Town Manager would provide for efficiencies for residents and would allow the Selectboard to focus more on visioning, policy and strategic planning.

Discussion continued with the point raised that a traditional town meeting would have allowed for ample discussion ahead of a vote. Residents suggested that they are interested in researching the idea, but would be voting no due to lack of information available. It was noted that with a ballot vote the board doesn't receive that feedback. A suggestion was made to develop a committee to study the idea if the selectboard has too much to do.

Article III: Elimination of office of Constable – The question was raised why the Selectboard didn't communicate with the constable that they were considering eliminating the office. The board acknowledged that they should have done so, and have apologized to Todd. There was discussion of the responsibilities and duties of the office. It was noted that for many years there was not a lot of interest in the position and that the police department could handle the duties of the office.

Article IV: Authorize Treasurer to collect taxes – There was no discussion on this article.

Article V: Appropriate \$410,627 to Royalton Organizations – An inquiry was made as to the reason for the increase in the amount requested by the fire department. Paul Brock noted that the cost of maintaining the aging equipment has increased, along with utilities etc, and that they need to start setting aside funds to eventually replace equipment, similar to what the highway department does now.

Article VI: Appropriate \$24,924 to service organizations – There was no discussion on this article.

Article VII: Authorize General Fund Budget – The question was raised as to what happens to the budget for the Town Manager position if the Town Manager article does not pass. In the event that the Town Manager article does not pass, the budget for Town Manager salary would not be spent.

The question was raised as to why the police department budget had increased by 23%. Additional concerns regarding availability of officers and use of officer time and equipment in other towns were also raised.

Chris responded that we have given a 6% raise to all staff and that we have added 20 hours of patrol time to the police department budget. In addition, we have to start paying for dispatching which is a big portion of the increase. In addition, fuel and insurance costs have risen.

Discussion continued regarding the management of the department, with Chief Stalnaker explaining that the department participates in the Governor's Highway Safety grant which funds additional patrol time for the officers outside of the budget that is approved by voters. This grant work is performed above and beyond an officer's regular shift, and is fully funded through the grant. The officers do try to spend time in Royalton, however, the grant requires at least 2 stops per hour spent so an officer may go to a different town, most often Bethel, Randolph or similar, where there is enough traffic to enable the number of required stops. It was noted that on occasion we do also travel to other towns for mutual aid, especially during bad weather when there tend to be multiple accidents.

The discussion became contentious and the moderator reminded the attendees that the discussion was meant to be regarding the budget, not the operation of the police department.

The question was raised as to what happens if the budget is voted down. In that case, a special town meeting would need to be called with a revised budget presented. It was not clear whether a revote would need to be by ballot or if a floor meeting could be called.

Article VIII: Authorize Highway Fund Budget – The question was raised as to whether there was money in the budget for paving. Yes, the funds for paving would be drawn from the highway improvement reserve which receives funds every year. We are also working on identifying a segment to apply for a grant to cover some paving costs.

Article IX: Disapprove ATV Ordinance – Attendees in favor of a yes vote on article 9 to disapprove the ordinance and keep ATV's off the road raised questions and concerns regarding safety, environmental impact, liability, quiet enjoyment, and enforcement.

Attendees in favor of a no vote on article 9 which would allow the ordinance to stand noted that insurance and personal protective equipment are required, that the club would be responsible, and that there probably wouldn't be as much traffic as people are anticipating. Suggested giving it a try and the board can always revoke the ordinance if it doesn't go well.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Paquin
Town Administrator