

TOWN OF STAMFORD
SELECTBOARD MEETING
July 20, 2023
(UNAPPROVED)

Present: Selectboard: Nancy L. Bushika, Chair, Pamela Tworig, Kurt Gamari and Marie Kelly-Whitney. Michael G. Denault was not present.

Visitors: Debra Burchard, Laura Champagne, Victoria Jefferies, Sheila Lawrence, Luke McKay, Marta Miller, Aaron Murphy, Lars Parrington, Sheila Pecor, Deborah Righi, James Righi, David Saldo, Tyna Senecal and Trevor Tatro.

Dara Zink, Bennington County Regional Commission

David R. Tatro, Road Commissioner.

William Levine, Emergency Management Director.

Lori Shepard, Selectboard Secretary.

Nancy Bushika called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., opened with the Pledge of Allegiance, welcomed everyone, and read a statement with procedural rules for the meeting. Additional correspondence was added to the agenda.

HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN GRANT

Dara Zink from the Bennington County Regional Commission spoke about updating the town's hazard mitigation plan. She has been talking with Bill Levine concerning the flooding and difficulties the town experienced. She suggested people apply for FEMA funds at disasterassistance.org and said information is also available at vem.vermont.gov/flood. She would like to send out a survey to gather community input for the hazard mitigation plan and the board felt a bulk mailing would be best. She hopes to have the hazard mitigation plan finished by November. The planning team, consisting of Paul Ethier, Dave Tatro, Bill Levine, and Lori Shepard, will meet next week. The public is welcome to attend.

LESURE ROAD TRAFFIC STUDY

Tyna Senecal asked about the Lesure Road study. Although 898 cars in a week sounds excessive, when she broke it down, each adult is only going out 1.89 trips per day, which is very reasonable. Kurt Gamari said it gives the town a good base to compare with future use or with traffic on other roads.

LETTER

Victoria Jefferies would like to write a letter to acknowledge all the people who volunteered their time toward the three community projects: the benches, the tile project and the new sign. The projects were funded by grants and donations. The board gave their permission.

WINDMILL PROJECT

Lars Parrington received notice that a windmill project has been started in the northwest section of town. He and Aaron Murphy are not happy with the project. The Selectboard received the notice from Norwich Technologies tonight and has not had time to review it. The town has 45 days from the date of the letter to prepare a response. Since the Selectboard's receipt of the letter was delayed, the Selectboard will request that the 45 days begin with the date it was received, not the date of the letter. Pam Tworig feels like the town and its residents are being strong-armed by the state.

MINUTES

1. MOTION by Marie Kelly-Whitney to accept the special meeting minutes of June 29, 2023 as written. SECONDED by Pam Tworig. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

2. MOTION by Pam Tworig to accept the regular meeting minutes of July 6, 2023 as written. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

SELECTBOARD ORDERS

The Selectboard reviewed and approved the following orders:

WARRANT #27 \$ 8,222.39 payroll

WARRANT #28 \$71,710.12 accounts payable

FINANCIALS

The Selectboard reviewed and confirmed financial statements for the month of May.

ROAD CONDITIONS

1. The town has sustained a fair amount of flood damage since the last meeting. Dave Tatro and Mike Brothers have worked very hard on the roads and had to purchase an extreme amount of materials. He also called on John Tietgens and Jon Bohl for help. Mill Road was damaged the most where the brook overcame the first bridge and they are in the process of rebuilding the road. He has been riprapping the banks, and rebuilding the shoulders and ditches. Dave Tatro estimated that the road repairs are about 80% complete and the town sustained approximately \$200,000.00 in damages. Nancy Bushika commended Dave Tatro and Mike Brothers for all of their hard work and extra hours and for cutting his vacation short to come back and deal with this. Nancy Bushika found it frustrating that even with road closed signs, people still travelled the road out of curiosity. Bill Levine stated if a road monitor was assigned, they could write tickets to people who should not be on the road. Bill Levine said the Fire Department was called out on Monday morning at 5 a.m. and continued pumping water out of basements all week. Nancy Bushika thanked residents who took it upon themselves to go out and unplug culverts near their homes.
2. Dave Tatro discussed the East Road traffic study which was done by the Bennington County Regional Commission. The results seemed reasonable for the road, although there were a few excessive speeds.

RECYCLING

1. The permanent household hazardous waste facility in Bennington will be open by the end of the month. Appointments are required.
2. Dave Tatro advised that the compactor equipment is very archaic. He has called an electrician several times in the past and it is becoming difficult to get parts. He suggested the town look into renting a compactor from Casella. They will probably increase the monthly hauler charge but it should be much cheaper than buying a new compactor. Pam Tworig will look into buying new and renting.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

1. Bill Levine advised that town officials had an outreach meeting with two National Guardsmen today. They will help to obtain guardrails and other materials the highway department needs after the flood. He suggested people report to FEMA as well as Vermont's 211. Nancy Bushika noted that the state's response this time to the flooding event is better than after Hurricane Irene.
2. Bill Levine prepared the beginnings of an emergency procedure policy which should encompass several points:
 - a) Residents should sign up for the state's free communication network, VT-Alert at vtalert.gov.
 - b) Residents should dial 9-1-1 to request aid if they are in need. Several people had flooding in their basements and the 9-1-1 dispatcher could call out the fire department to provide assistance. Leaving a message at the fire house or the town office won't get people the help they need.
 - c) A decision will have to be made as to who will be authorized to use the VT-Alert's messaging system. Nancy Bushika contacted the VT-Alert office to get the town set up and trained.

- d) The town should consider notifying the Emergency Operations Center. Their watch officer is available 24/7.
- e) The town should notify the Regional Emergency Planning Commission in North Adams. If Stamford needs to close a road, it is important that the ambulance and fire department know.
- f) The town should increase communication between emergency management and the highway department. When Dave Tatro needs to focus on the roads, perhaps the highway liaison can facilitate that communication.
- g) Bill Levine would like to create a decision tree, which identifies the situation and determines who should be notified, or not notified.
- h) Priorities are important. Keeping people safe is always the top priority, then the situation.
- i) Discuss if the town has what it needs and where to get additional supplies.
- j) Some will need education, such as volunteers for flagging.

3. Paul Ethier sent a letter to the Selectboard with a detailed report of the fire Department's involvement during the flooding event. Paul Ethier raised the question of how much authority the Fire Department has to enter private lands during an environmental emergency. The Fire Department has full authority during a fire, but it is not so clear during a flood event. Bill Levine noted that the Fire Department obtained Memorandums of Understanding with landowners along the river after a bad ice jam one year. Marie Kelly-Whitney stated that these weather events are going to continue to come so the town needs to have a plan. Development of higher areas in town could change the water patterns in lower areas. Kurt Gamari felt the Planning Commission could talk about curtailing expansion in town.

STAMFORD SIGN

Deb Burchard, the Zoning Administrator, responded to the complaint that the town should have obtained a permit for the new Stamford sign in front of the school. She consulted with both the Vermont League of Cities & Towns and the Bennington County Regional Commission. The consensus is that the municipality should have been the one to apply for a permit. However, the Community Projects Committee representative says that the former Zoning Administrator advised verbally that no permit was required, so, in good faith, they moved forward. Deb Burchard reviewed several other southern Vermont town signs and most of them do say "Town Hall". Some are placed perpendicular to the road and some are parallel, although she noted that most of the parallel signs are closer to the building. Deb Burchard requested permission to consult with the town attorney. Pam Tworig said she spoke with Darryl Pecor who would like the old sign for sentimental purposes and asked the town not to throw it away. Marie Kelly-Whitney would like to find a better location for the Stamford Historical Society records and felt the old sign could be kept there. The town could have two more signs made designating the town office and school. Deb Burchard said if she interprets the By-laws literally, the town should have gotten the permit, but because the committee was told they didn't need a permit, it is very difficult. She asked the Selectboard to make the decision whether they want to apply for the permit or not. Lori Shepard felt names should be removed from the situation when making the decision. Sheila Lawrence recalled that when Ron Plock was the Zoning Administrator, he always required permits to be filed. Sheila Pecor stated if the town doesn't follow its own By-laws then what's the sense of having them. Sheila Pecor searched for the Community Projects Committee meeting minutes and minutes from several meetings were never publicized.

MOTION by Nancy Bushika to have the Community Projects Committee file for a permit. Without a second, the motion failed.

MOTION by Kurt Gamari to keep the sign and save the town thousands of dollars. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. 2 in favor. Pam Tworig abstained stating she has a conflict due to her volunteer work with the sign. Nancy Bushika said she would not vote. Motion failed.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR

Deb Burchard said that paying a Zoning Administrator through a fee schedule is woefully antiquated. She reviewed several other towns and most Zoning Administrators are paid either hourly or salary. Deb Burchard also said several websites had fillable forms online which made it much easier for the applicant. She also encouraged the board to create a new permit fee schedule with penalties. Nancy Bushika asked her to provide the board with an excel spreadsheet to review.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD

Deb Burchard suggested the Selectboard consider establishing a Development Review Board which would streamline the permit appeal process. Our current By-laws call for site plans to be reviewed by the Planning Commission and appeals to go before the Zoning Board of Adjustment. A Development Review Board would handle the whole process in one hearing. Deb Burchard suggested appointing the Zoning Board of Adjustment members to the Development Review Board.

FIRE TRUCK FINANCING

Bill Levine reviewed the various types of financing and interest rates the Fire Department has been looking at. He feels it is too soon to begin the loan process now because the truck won't be ready until late 2024 or early 2025. They will revisit the financing at a later date.

SET TAX RATE/SIGN WARRANT

1. The proposed homestead rate will be 2.2667 (town rate: 0.3731, highway rate: 0.5751 and homestead rate: 1.3185). Last year's homestead rate was 2.0400. The proposed non-homestead rate will be 2.7288 (town rate: 0.3731, highway rate: 0.5751 and non-homestead rate: 1.7806). Last year's non-homestead rate was 2.3868. Nancy Bushika noted that the board was within \$300.00 of the amount they estimated in the Town Report tax rate table.

MOTION by Nancy Bushika to approve the tax rates as presented. SECONDED by Pam Tworig. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

2. MOTION by Pam Tworig to approve and sign the warrant to collect taxes. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

TAX BILL INSERT

The Selectboard felt after the recent flooding event, it is important to encourage people to sign up with the VT-Alert system. The board also wants to encourage people to sign up for the Selectboard email list and provide their contact information to the town. Several changes were made to the tax bill insert.

TOWN WEBSITE

Marie Kelly-Whitney would like to create a new page on the town website for Stamford history. Kurt Gamari said he has a lot of information at home he could share. He suggested making a fun guessing game with it. Marie Kelly-Whitney will send the documents to the board first for review before posting anything to the website.

FEMA FLOOD MAPS

Nancy Bushika noted that FEMA is revising the flood maps again. A FEMA representative will be in touch with the board to schedule a meeting. A new study showed that old maps listed about 1400 homes in the flood zone, but there are really about 5500 homes in danger of flooding.

DOG UPDATE

Luke McKay reviewed the delinquent dog list with the board. Last time there were 27 dogs, now the list is down to 14 dogs. Luke McKay will continue to contact dog owners to bring them into compliance and will be issuing \$50.00/dog penalty notices to people who do not respond.

MOTION by Nancy Bushika to adjourn. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting ended at 9:05 p.m.

Marie Kelly-Whitney
Clerk

/las

REMINDERS

1. Individuals who sustained damages during the July flooding event should report their damage to vermont211.org or call Vermont 2-1-1 at 866-652-4636 or 802-652-4636.
2. Townspeople should sign up with the state's free communications network, VT-Alert. You can sign up at vtalert.gov to receive notifications. You can choose how you would like to be alerted (phone call, text or email) and can choose what type of alerts you would like to receive, i.e. weather, road closures, public health, etc.
3. Residents who sustained flood damage are encouraged to apply for FEMA funds at disasterassistance.org. Information is also available at vem.vermont.gov/flood.
4. All dogs 6 months and older must be licensed by April 1st of each year. State law requires a valid rabies vaccination certificate to be filed with the Town Clerk's office. Licensing your dog is very easy. Rabies certificates can be faxed to the town office at 802-694-1636 or emailed to the town office at townclerk@stamfordvt.net. Once the current rabies certificate is on file, license renewals can be handled in person, by mailing a check, by utilizing the mail slot in the back wall of the town office or by telephone with a credit card. License fees are \$9.00 for each spayed/neutered dog or \$13.00 for each intact dog. Checks should be made payable to the Town of Stamford.
5. The town office is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and on Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. Closed Mondays.