

TOWN OF STAMFORD
SELECTBOARD MEETING
August 3, 2023
(UNAPPROVED)

Present: Selectboard: Nancy L. Bushika, Chair, Pamela Tworig, Kurt Gamari, Michael G. Denault, and Marie Kelly-Whitney.

Visitors: Tammy Elias, Thomas Elias, Jed Gramlin, Lisa Gramlin, Victoria Jefferies, Matt Lefebvre, Sheila Pecor, Deborah Righi, James Righi, and Douglas Wright.
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.

LETTER

Victoria Jefferies provided a draft of the letter she wrote to recognize the people who volunteered their time toward the recent community projects. Pam Tworig said there were many others who helped out and asked that she add another sentence to acknowledge this. The tree planted in memory of Heather Torres was moved to the side in order to install the new sign. It looks like the tree may not have survived the move. Since there is additional grants funds in the community projects account, Victoria Jefferies would like to replace the tree. There was a memorial plaque that she will follow up on as well. MOTION by Mike Denault to post the letter on the town website with the corrections and the board's approval. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. 4 in favor. Pam Tworig abstained. Motion APPROVED.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS COMMITTEE

Victoria Jefferies stated that she has two binders of notes that were turned over to her from Pat Sullivan. Sheila Pecor asked if the notes were official documents and said that the committee did not file any minutes from their meetings for two years. Nancy Bushika stated that the committee should have been following the open meeting laws. The notes are not the same as minutes taken of a meeting.

WINDMILL PROJECT

Norwich Technologies received the Selectboard's request for an extension of time to respond to the notice. They filed a request for an extension for the town with the Public Utilities Commission but have not received a decision. The abutters present stated that they also received their notice late. Kurt Gamari has several questions. The Enhanced Energy chapter of Stamford's town plan calls for a one kilometer buffer between wind turbines and residences which this project does not meet. The chapter also outlines a preferred location in town for renewable energy and this project is outside of that area. It is unknown whether the town plan sets guidelines that must be followed or just sets ideas that are preferred. Pam Tworig noted that any comments received within the 45-day period must be addressed so the timeframe matters. Victoria Jefferies suggested the town look at Shaftsbury where the citizens organized and prepared a strong response to a solar array. The Planning Commission will meet on Monday, August 7, 2023 and everyone was encouraged to attend. It was suggested that the abutters send in their comments and the town will also prepare a response that reiterates its residents' concerns as well as its own.

MINUTES

1. MOTION by Mike Denault to accept the emergency meeting minutes of July 17, 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 20, 2023 as written. SECONDED by Kurt Gamari. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

SELECTBOARD ORDERS

The Selectboard reviewed and approved the following orders:

WARRANT #29 \$ 9,426.33 payroll

WARRANT #30 \$38,332.58 accounts payable

ROAD CONDITIONS

Pam Tworig noted that the highway crew has been working on Boulger Road. Dave Tatro is still repairing areas damaged by the flood. Marie Kelly-Whitney asked if there was other material that could be used on our roads so they'll last longer. The board felt that was a question for Dave Tatro.

FLOOD DAMAGE

1. The town clerk attended a FEMA class and needs authorization to access the FEMA portal.
2. The state is organizing Green Up Vermont volunteers to pick up flood debris. The board did not feel that was needed in Stamford.

RECYCLING

1. The recycling monitor asked for permission to buy bug spray to get rid of the flies around the compost and compactor. The board agreed.
2. Pam Tworig has not been able to talk with Dave Tatro about the compactor. He has been too busy with the road repair. Nancy Bushika felt it would be fine if they could have figures for budget season.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

1. Bill Levine advised that nine water test kits have been sent to the Vermont Department of Health to test water for some residents whose wells may have been compromised by the flood.
2. Nancy Bushika has contacted VTAlert to sign up for future town announcements. The representative has not yet responded.
3. Marie Kelly-Whitney showed Bill Levine a draft of a decision tree she started after he mentioned it at the last meeting.

HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN GRANT

Dara Zink from the Bennington County Regional Commission met with Bill Levine, Nancy Bushika, Dave Tatro and Lori Shepard to work on the town's mitigation plan.

MUNICIPAL GRANT-IN-AID

The Selectboard signed the grant agreement. The project is to add gravel and stone-lined ditches to sections of Boulger Road. Some of these areas were damaged in the flood so Dave Tatro is not sure whether the grant will be the same or if some of the work will be reimbursable through FEMA.

CELL PHONE SERVICE

The Selectboard received a letter asking the town for help in getting a cell phone tower at the north end of town. The board will look into the request. The new fiber optic internet might improve the resident's ability to communicate. Kurt Gamari noted that all this technology is going to make Stamford a very desirable place to live.

STAMFORD SIGN

The Selectboard received a letter asking the Zoning Administrator to require a permit for the sign and asking the board to apply for the permit. Although Carolyn Brooks was told verbally that the sign didn't need a permit, Deb Burchard at the last meeting said a permit should have been applied for and recommended that the town do it. The board questioned whether, being a municipality, they needed to get a permit. Marie Kelly-Whitney reviewed the By-laws and said the municipality still needs a permit and she suggested they do the permit to set a good example. Kurt Gamari agreed, but said not only is the size of the sign in violation, but it also violates the setback requirement. The sign is only 35 feet from the center of the road, but it should be 50 feet. Kurt Gamari also questioned whether there was 150 feet of road frontage. Kurt Gamari felt the board should be honest about all the violations and feels the Zoning Board of Adjustment will make the town remove the sign. The sign was supposed to bring community together but unfortunately, it's had the opposite effect. Victoria Jefferies was bothered by the amount of people who were involved and not one person came forward to say the sign was too big or too close to the road. Nancy Bushika felt that now that the town realizes the mistake, it should be corrected and move on. Mike Denault asked about other errors that have been made and if there was any statute. He feels the Selectboard needs to hold people accountable from now on. It doesn't make sense to pay the money to move the sign back 15 feet. Victoria Jefferies felt the Zoning Administrator said the sign was allowed, as the town's agent. Kurt Gamari said the Zoning Board of Adjustment would not hear the complaint concerning the building on the corner of The Lane. Mike Denault asked if you get away with it if time passes. Does the town even need a permit since 14 days have passed? People could build without permits in remote areas, like on the back roads, and the town would never know. Lori Shepard said the 14 days start when the permit is issued; since there was no permit issued, there is no 14 days in this instance. Ron Plock would require building permits to be filed for buildings were built the previous summer or fall. Bill Levine suggested before the board decides to apply for a variance, they should amend the By-laws and exclude the town from needing permits for any projects. The board discussed the legality of verbal advice. Mike Denault would like to have a policy to review all appointed positions and their jobs. Kurt Gamari was frustrated over the amount of time the sign has consumed when they have other things the board should be talking about.

MOTION by Marie Kelly-Whitney to have the Zoning Administrator provide quarterly reports so the board can see the work being done. Without a second, the motion failed.

Kurt Gamari said he thinks Deb Burchard will be good and will report to the Planning Commission. Lori Shepard suggested that building permits could be emailed to the Selectboard and perhaps posted on the website. Nancy Bushika said the letter is asking the town to follow its own rules. She felt the Zoning Administrator should issue a violation notice to the town requiring that it file a permit. Kurt Gamari agreed the town should file for the permit but is worried about what the Zoning Board of Adjustment will do. Mike Denault said it all comes down to taxes and the town loses tax money when people build without a permit.

MOTION by Mike Denault to refer the complaint to the Zoning Board of Adjustment and ask for their opinion on whether the town needs a permit, or since fourteen days have passed, if no action is necessary. SECONDED by Kurt Gamari. 4 in favor. Pam Tworig abstained. Motion APPROVED.

VLCT FIRE DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

In a letter to the Selectboard Paul Ethier asked 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. Nancy Bushika contacted the Vermont League of Cities & Towns for its opinion, but it was not very clear.

MOTION by Pam Tworig to forward the VLCT response to Paul Ethier. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

2023 AUDIT

The treasurer provided a draft Request for Proposal to find an auditing firm for the 2023 audit and a list of firms. The board will review for the next meeting.

BENNINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF

The sheriff will be invited to the September Selectboard meeting. Kurt Gamari said paying \$50,000.00 for ten hours of patrol time is not sustainable. Mike Denault does not know if the town can hire the sheriff periodically. Pam Tworig feels a lot of people want to hear from the sheriff. The board will look into the automated speed signs and whether they can be placed on the state highway. Some signs can take pictures of license plates and issue tickets. Grants may be available.

TAX BILLS

The town office has been preparing the tax bills and they will be mailed out.

MOTION by Mike Denault to adjourn. SECONDED by Marie Kelly-Whitney. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting ended at 8:35 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.