



Town of Underhill
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SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, January 11, 2024, 6:00 P.M.
Underhill Town Hall

Present:

Selectboard Members: Dan Steinbauer, Bob Stone

Town Staff: Brad Holden, Russ Clark, Jennifer Silpe-Katz

Committee Members: Rick Heh

Others: Pete Czaja, Jay Austin (remote)

Absent: Patricia Richards

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call Meeting to Order / Adjustments to Agenda*

Dan called the meeting to order at 6:01. No changes to the agenda were needed.

2. *Opening Public Comment (6:01)*

Pete Czaja said he hopes there will be an opportunity to ask for clarification on the wording of the report from the Class 4 Roads Study Committee. Bob said his thought is that once the selectboard accepts the report they would likely hold a public hearing to give the public an opportunity to give feedback to the board. Dan suggested that Pete put his questions in writing and send them to the board so that board members can have them when they discuss the report.

3. *Review and Consider Magnesium Chloride Package from Innovative Surface Solutions (6:05)*

Russ said we have been using calcium chloride for dust control on dirt roads. Our distributor has tried in the past to get us to change to using magnesium chloride, with no success. Magnesium chloride is less corrosive and becomes even less corrosive if we add an inhibitor. It is better for our equipment, vehicles, pets, and people running on the roads. The highway crew is very interested in switching to the new type of chloride. Our chloride tanks are outdated. They do have a life expectancy. And our spray unit is on an older trailer that has to be pulled with a pickup. Its size requires a lot of trips back and forth. Innovative Surface Solutions has a program where we can get new storage tanks and a new spray unit if we sign a 3-year contract. The price of calcium chloride has gone up. Calcium chloride is \$1.53 per gallon and magnesium chloride with an inhibitor is \$1.28 per gallon. The price includes new storage tanks and spray unit. The spray unit is under warranty for the 3 years of the contract. Russ would like to sign the 3-year contract to get storage tanks and a spray unit and switch to magnesium chloride.

Dan moved and Bob seconded to enter into a 3-year contract with Innovative Surface Solutions for magnesium chloride, storage tanks and a spray system.

Bob asked if there is any sense in referring this to the Conservation Commission to see if they think it is a wise decision. Dan said he thinks the discussion indicates magnesium chloride is better. He thinks the Conservation Commission would be happy.

The motion was passed.

4. Road/Weather Updates (6:08)

Russ thanked the members of the road crew – Jed Abair, Scott Kilpeck and Ken Blodgett – as well as Gordon Williamson, Wade Bosley and Brad Holden for their work during and after the recent storm. The Underhill Jericho Fire Department helped out by cutting trees and monitoring the situation. He thinks it all went very well. We had a lot of road closures due to downed trees and power lines. All roads are passable now.

5. Final Report of the Class 4 Roads Study Committee (6:11)

Dan said this is a non-binding report. The selectboard will have a public hearing to get public input. If someone has a question about the report they should put it in writing so the board can evaluate it.

Rick Heh listed the committee members: Rick Heh, Andrew Blodgett, Ben Butler, Karen Davis, Jon Thomas, John Viggato, Barbara Yerrick, Nori Geary (who left the committee early because he took a sabbatical in Europe), and Craig Lassiter (who left the committee early when he moved out of town.) Several members of the committee lived on Class 4 roads. The committee started its work August 22 and completed it November 23. In their first meetings they identified their mission and a strategy for assessing and reviewing roads. They did site visits of all Class 4 roads. That took the first couple of months. They made detailed observations about location, condition and signage. They discovered that signage differed between roads and was often random and inappropriate. They provided recommendations on signage. They considered whether there were any roads that it seemed obvious should be discontinued. They also considered whether money should be allocated to Class 4 roads even though the town is not obligated to maintain them, and if money were to be allocated, how it could be allocated in a fair manner. They considered how the town could simplify requests of residents to do maintenance on Class 4 roads. Town ordinance indicates that any work, including plowing and grading, requires an application to be submitted to the town. That is rarely followed. After the site visits the committee did review and analysis. Then there was considerable debate among the committee and some outsiders. They considered physical constraints affecting ability to maintain roads, condition of the roads and potential cost to upgrade the roads to reasonable standards. They considered whether there were benefits or necessity to maintaining some roads vs. discontinuing them. The cost of everything is increasing and the highway department is challenged to maintain the roads we have. The committee created a data driven matrix showing rationale for potential future status of each road. They identified roads the town would absolutely want to keep vs. roads that are not essential. They looked at the possibility of allocating dollars for maintenance, allowing residents to purchase materials at town cost or using some town contracted services at town cost. They had at least one public meeting. They documented their conclusions in a report.

There were 5 roads they felt would need to be retained by the town: Covey Road (because it is connected to Cambridge town roads), English Settlement Road (a through road that has been used in the past for emergency purposes), Stevensville Road (because it provides access to a state park), Krug Road (because the Class 4 portion is the only logical place to have a town turnaround), and Fuller Road (because it provides the sole access to two town parcels and a portion of a third parcel, as well as secondary access to the Crane Brook Trail.)

They suggest that maintenance be minimal. They suggest adding \$2500 to the culvert budget. They outline some specifics on the roads they suggest be maintained. They noted that most roads did not have a legitimate turnaround for the road crew. They were using private driveways in some places. The committee feels adequate turnarounds are a necessity. They strongly recommend pushing for greater state funding for Stevensville Road, as well as extending the Class 3 portion to the current turnaround at the top of the hill. The committee recommends that the following roads be discontinued: Tupper Road, TH-32, Howard Road, Corbett Road, Deane Road, Downes Road and Butler Road.

The committee recommends that the selectboard annually “grant all abutters to Class 4 roads blanket individual permission to grade, maintain, and plow Class 4 roads in accordance with the current Road Ordinance.” Their report says, “Permission to modify, alter, or dramatically change roadways (replacement or addition of culverts, addition of material beyond topcoat, etc.) should be granted on an individual basis upon application to the Select Board, in accordance with the current Road Ordinance and proposed Road Policy.” The committee recommends that “Class 4 road abutters be granted approval to procure road construction materials and associated vendor services at Town of Underhill tax exempt pricing, and be entitled to repurposed used culverts and road materials at no cost, if these commodities are to be used exclusively on Class 4 town roads.” The committee recommends that these be documented in a road policy as opposed to the Road Ordinance as a policy is easier to update.

Bob thanked the committee for their work.

Dan moved and Bob seconded to accept the Final Report of the Class 4 Roads Study Committee and to discharge the Class 4 Roads Committee with abundant thanks.

Bob said he would like to have a letter drafted to committee members thanking them for their service. Brad thanked the committee members. He said Nori Geary had valuable contributions even though he had to leave. Craig Lassiter joined the committee on all the site visits and had some good input. Brad enjoyed working with the committee. He feels they all learned a lot. Rick agreed that a lot of learning took place. Dan said the report was very comprehensive.

Rick said there are some clerical and spelling errors in the report that the committee would like to correct

The motion was passed.

6. *Review Fiscal Year 2025 Draft Budget – Version 4 (6:35)*

Jennifer reviewed 4 items that have changed since the last draft. The amount budgeted for traffic calming was increased, because not only are we purchasing 2 new signs but we also pay \$1500 for the software each year. The fire department budget line reflects the finalized budget, which is an 11.2% increase over last year (about \$36K.) The amount budgeted for gravel has been reduced to \$90K and the amount budgeted for chloride is now based on the contract discussed earlier this evening.

Bob said the board got correspondence from Alan Morse with recommendations for Veteran’s Park. He doesn’t think any of those recommendations are incorporated into the budget. He would like to talk about that. Brad said there is a petition circulating on the number of selectboard members. It is very possible it will be presented to the selectboard next week. There may have to be a short special meeting next Thursday. He can contact Alan and see if he can pull something together for that special meeting. Jennifer said if Brad can pull the numbers together she can have them in the next budget version.

Russ said there are issues with radio communications in Underhill. When he is on Irish Settlement Road he cannot contact other highway department members in other parts of town. He also doesn’t have cell service on that side of town. He is concerned about radio communications and feels we should do something to enhance our communications ability.

Bob said storms like the one we just experienced make us all realize how important communication is. Leasing a repeater on Mt. Mansfield is a possibility. He would encourage finding out if we can use the state antenna on Mt. Mansfield and if the equipment we have is adequate. He can work with Russ and Brad to contact The Radio North Group and get more cost information. Then the board can talk about it next week.

Bob said Brad does not have 2-way communication or a hand-held portable in his vehicle. He doesn't think Russ does either. He thinks that would be really important. Maybe a spare at the town offices would also be helpful. Maybe everyone on the road crew should have 2-way radios.

Jennifer said she thinks this is important. She thinks we should get numbers and see how the cost affects the budget. If we don't want to see it affect the tax rate maybe we can use reserve money. It was agreed that Russ should reach out to Radio North.

Dan asked if there is anything else we could have used that we didn't have during the storm. Jennifer said the highway department could have used a generator. One is on order. There still is no power at the town highway department.

Bob said we need to contact the utility that services the garage. The garage is critical infrastructure. It is more important for it to get back online than many other places. He can reach out and ask if restoring power to that building can be made a priority.

Bob said he is amazed at the level of dedication and service the town employees give to this town. Jennifer and Dan agreed.

Russ said the highway department could also have used some chainsaws that ran. He would like to upgrade a couple of the older chainsaws. They would probably cost \$700-800 each. He doesn't believe electric chainsaws are the thing to have in a storm. We have one battery operated saw that works great for trimming a couple of things but would not be as helpful in a big storm. He probably could buy some saws within his budget.

7. *Review 2024 Town Meeting Warning (Draft Only) and Discuss Town Report Progress (6:58)*

The board reviewed the draft warning. Brad filled in \$290,000 for the article about authorizing borrowing for a dump truck, as that was the amount agreed upon at a previous meeting.

Bob asked Russ how many saws are in need of replacement. Russ said we have 5 saws. One is 2-3 years old and he doesn't know how old the other 4 are. A couple work well. He would say at least 2 new ones would be great.

Bob moved to authorize purchase of 3 saws for an amount not to exceed \$6,000, prior to the upcoming weekend if possible. He said hopefully we can defray some cost by selling some of the used equipment.

Dan seconded. Bob said he thinks we need to give the highway crew the equipment they need to do their job efficiently. Dan said he wonders if it makes sense keep the old saws as backups. Bob said he thinks after we buy new ones we can figure out what to do with the old ones. He would rely on Russ and the highway crew to make the final decision.

Russ said we have one pole saw and he would ideally like to get another one.

Bob moved to amend the motion to "authorize purchase of 3 saws and any additional equipment needed for an amount not to exceed \$6,000." Dan seconded and the motion to amend was passed.

The amended motion was passed.

Brad said staff are working on the reports for the town report. He still needs to finish his. He is looking for one from Dan and the selectboard.

There was discussion about dedicating the town report to the ARPA funds, with pictures and information showing how the money was used.

8. Closing Public Comment Period (7:14)

No members of the public wished to comment.

9. Warrants and Minutes (8:31)

Dan moved to approve payroll warrants for January 24, 2024, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

Dan moved to approve automatic payment warrants for December 1, 2023 to January 31, 2024, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

Dan moved to approve the AP warrants for January 11, 2024, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

Dan moved to approve the minutes of December 21, 2023, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

10. Member Items, Correspondence, Announcement, Schedule (7:20)

It was agreed to schedule a special meeting for January 18.

11. Executive Session (7:22)

Dan moved to go into executive session under 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3) for the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, Bob seconded and the motion was passed at 7:23.

Dan moved to exit executive session, Bob seconded and the motion was passed at 8:42.

Dan said in the executive session the board discussed compensation but no decisions have been made. A decision will be made when the full board is present.

12. Adjourn (9:17)

Dan moved to adjourn, Bob seconded and the motion was passed at 8:42.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

Read and approved as submitted/amended:

Dan Steinbauer, Chair

Date Signed

Date Approved