



Town of Underhill
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SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, January 25, 2024, 6:00 P.M.
Underhill Town Hall

Present:

Selectboard Members: Dan Steinbauer, Bob Stone, Patricia Richards

Town Staff: Brad Holden, Russ Clark, Jennifer Silpe-Katz, Amanda Bosley, Sherri Morin

Committee Members: Kurt Johnson

Others: Cathy Weymouth

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

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

Dan called the meeting to order at 6:00. No changes to the agenda were needed.

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

No members of the public wished to comment.

3. *Dump Truck Tire Purchase (6:02)*

Russ said the highway department recently had some tires for the dump trucks recapped. The purchase was budgeted but the total was over \$1000 so he should have come to the board first. The invoice was included in the board packet. Having tires recapped is cheaper than buying new tires. Bob asked if our employees put the tires on. Russ said yes. Bob said we had previously discussed having someone come in to put tires on. Did we budget for that? Russ said he doesn't think anything was added to the budget specifically for that but it doesn't cost very much to have a tire company dismount and mount tires. It is minimal when you think about the amount of time it takes our employees.

Bob moved to approve purchase of recapped dump truck tires as presented, Patty seconded and the motion was passed.

4. *Radio Update (6:07)*

Russ said at the last meeting we talked about UHF vs. VHF radios. Radio North doesn't do much with UHF radios. Russ got some information from Andy Forsberg. The FleetWave program Burlington Communications offers is an economical way for us to get radios we could use to communicate throughout the town. The cost would be considerably less than the quote we got that included a repeater. Getting a repeater would also mean finding a location for it and getting power to it. Burlington Communications owns a tower on Mount Mansfield. We could lease use of the tower for \$21 per month per radio. Jennifer said she added that expense to the most recent budget version. Bob said for portable radios we should probably stay with VHF rather than UHF because with the number of watts those radios have UHF radios would probably have a hard time hitting the repeater. VHF radios would allow the crew to continue to monitor other agencies' radio communications. He thinks radios in the trucks or other equipment or at the garage should be UHF. For now, we can continue to use the VHF radios already in the trucks along with the UHF radios. As we replace vehicles we can get new radios that can use both UHF and VHF. He thinks FleetWave is good idea vs. leasing land for a repeater. It would give better communication with the road crew. He thinks we should have enough VHF portable radios for the road crew as well as a couple of spares at the garage and one or two at the town hall. Russ said the consensus of the road crew was to get VHF portables as well.

He doesn't know if it costs more to get a separate frequency that could be used for traffic control. Bob said there is something called a private line that is a channel at the end of the frequency.

Bob suggested getting 9 portables. Brad asked if road crew members will need portables if they have radios in their vehicles. Russ said with a portable someone could call for help if they were out of their truck and got hurt. Bob said if we had a weather event it might be handy for someone like Brad to have a portable radio. Maybe next year we can add more radios. Patty said she thinks with weather events becoming more common we should do it sooner rather than later.

Dan asked if this is a one-time purchase or if the technology needs to be upgraded now and then. Bob said he thinks these will last us at least a decade.

Dan asked if these radios will provide a guaranteed signal. Bob said the radios in the trucks, yes, but it could be difficult communicating over a large distance with the portable radios. Russ said in an emergency situation he imagines we could use the fire department channel.

Bob suggested we could budget for 5 portable radios and maybe get more next year. Brad said 5 radios would cost \$2385. The price for the UHF radios and lease of the tower is \$16,632. Bob suggested budgeting a total of \$20K for radios.

5. Storm Cleanup Update (6:22)

Russ said there is still a lot of mess from the recent storms. He hired Gordon Williamson with his log truck to help with cleanup on Irish Settlement and Pleasant Valley Roads. Brad said doesn't know if this will be declared a FEMA event. It may, but it is always best not to count on being reimbursed. Russ said he thinks the next area to work on will be Paul Cook Road. Then the crew will start working on other side roads as time allows.

Jennifer said she thinks property owners should do some cleanup on their own properties if they can.

Russ expressed appreciation for the help the road crew got from Brad and town office staff, Jed Abair, Wade Bosley, Gordon Williamson, John Angelino and the fire department. Bob asked if we paid these people. Russ said Jed was part of the crew that week anyway because Dwayne was gone. We paid others but not Wade. Amanda said Wade volunteered his time.

6. Beaver Dam – Corbett Road (6:30)

Brad said the board packet included an invoice from Skip Lisle and some correspondence between Kurt Johnson and Tyler Brown from state Fish and Wildlife. Kurt said Skip feels we should fix the dam now. Others feel we could wait until spring. Skip is concerned that high water in spring could damage the Beaver Deceiver device he put in.

Bob said he hasn't been out there yet to see it. He would like to see it. Patty said she took a look at it. She is concerned about the rock that has been put in. She feels we should not be putting material into the wetland. We are working in a waterway and adding rock requires permission from the state.

Kurt said we are trying to rebuild the dam to the way it was functioning. The dam was taken down so Skip could put his device in place and then we rebuilt it. We did as good a job as we could, but we could not do it as well as beavers do.

Patty said she thinks Skip is missing the major point that we have to be in compliance with the state. Dan said he would like us to schedule a look at it. We could involve the state at some point but we do not

necessarily need to wait until they are available. Brad said he agrees with Patty. He has a good rapport with the state and he would hate to see us lose that good rapport.

Cathy Weymouth asked what Patty would propose to put there instead of rock. Patty said she is not an engineer but dumping rock there is not correct. She thinks we could get fined by the state. Bob said he thinks we need to look at it and engage people who are qualified to answer our questions. Some of the stakeholders are from the state. We may need to involve an engineer.

7. Consider Text Messaging Add On From CivicPlus (6:42)

Amanda said for a small fee we can have mass communication texting. She was thinking we could have several types of communications people could sign up for – general office reminders, general road crew updates and maybe emergency notifications. People could sign up for one or all. Jennifer said she thinks it would be a good idea. It is not expensive. Amanda said there would be a link on the website for people to sign up. It would cost \$550 per year for 20,000 texts. The prorated cost for the rest of this year would be \$262.32.

Bob said he wants the selectboard to approve the rules for using the text messaging.

Patty moved to approve adding the texting feature from CivicPlus for \$262.32 with protocol for using it to be approved by the selectboard, Dan seconded and the motion was passed.

8. Review/Accept FY 2025 Final Budget – Version 6 (6:49)

Jennifer reviewed the differences from the last version. She said we are going to recoup some of the deficit from 2023. We don't have to budget for the whole amount because it is correcting itself in FY 2024 with the \$100K the voters approved to go into the highway reserve, which will be increasing our unassigned fund balance. She has moved that to a different line since the last version.

This version includes the cost of the Microsoft 365 cloud-based email program: \$10,500 for setup and \$898 per month.

She added money for post office maintenance.

We have had \$30K on and off in our capital budget for town hall work. We took it out the last 2 years but for FY2025 we budgeted to take \$30K from reserve for the project and the corresponding expense is also in the budget.

She added in the fee for using the Mt. Mansfield repeater for radio communications and added expense for culverts for Casey's Hill.

Russ said the lease proposal for the truck we are going to be leasing expired. The interest rate went up a little so the new amount is \$13,952.40. It was agreed to budget \$14K.

Russ said we had talked about permitting for the work on the fuel tank building. Brad said if it is less than 200 sq. ft. it doesn't need a permit from the town. Russ said it is 24 ft. x 12 ft. Bob said he would guess the state construction permit would be \$50. Jennifer asked if we want to add anything to building and grounds maintenance for FY 2025 for this building. Brad said he doesn't think anything needs to be added.

Brad said the budget figure on the warning needs to be updated because we are rounding the amount budgeted for radios up to \$20K (an increase of \$3368) and we are rounding the truck lease amount up to \$14K (a \$300 increase.)

Bob moved to accept the Version 6 budget with the changes discussed as the final budget to present at town meeting, Patty seconded and the motion was passed.

Jennifer said with the changes the tax rate will be .5655, which is .0170 (3.09%) higher than FY 2024. That is equivalent to about \$65 on a \$500K house for a year. There are some articles on the town meeting warning that will add some expense if they pass.

9. *Review, Edit as Necessary and Sign 2024 Town Meeting Day Official Warning (7:10)*

Jennifer said Article 4 now says “Shall the voters approve total highway fund expenditures of \$1,691,639, of which \$1,576,639 shall be raised by taxes, \$115,000 by non-tax revenue pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §2664?”

Bob said he thought we were going to have an article about new members of the board (if the board is expanded from 3 to 5) getting the same stipend as the current board members. Brad said no, we can't have an article like that. Bob asked how those positions will get funded. Dan said the money would get added to the budget afterwards. Their stipend would be the stipend already approved for selectboard members. Bob said there is \$15K in there now, \$5K per person. Are we saying if there are 5 people on the board each person gets \$3K? Dan said if the article passes the additional \$10K would be added to the budget. Patty asked if the article needs to state the budget implications. Brad said no. The stipend was set at town meeting last year.

Bob said he doesn't know if people realize the vote will cost \$10K. Brad said it can be brought up during discussion. Patty asked why Article 13 wouldn't include the price tag. Brad said he asked Sherri that and she said we couldn't even entertain it for some reason. He called Sherri to ask her about it. He stepped into the next room to speak to her. Bob said he felt the questions should be asked on the record as part of the public meeting. Brad came back and said Sherri said the wording of the article cannot be changed because that is what was on the petition.

Sherri joined the meeting by phone at 6:53. She said the money will be added to the budget if the article is approved. It can't be added now because the two seats are not available. Patty said the question is about the wording for Article 13. It has no clarification that it has an impact to the budget. Sherri said it can't. Patty said the vast majority of articles have a price tag. Can Article 13 include reference to the cost of \$10K? The average person doesn't know that the article will have an impact on the budget. Sherri said we can't change the wording because that is how the petition came in. Brad asked if there could be an additional article saying, “If Article 13 passes . . .” Sherri said she thinks that would be possible. Patty said she thinks that is muddy. She thinks we will have to educate people outside the articles. Dan said that is what the hearing is for. Sherri said she will bring up at the hearing that if this article passes it will add \$10K to the budget and she can craft something for Front Porch Forum. She suggested she and Patty could work on the wording together and Patty agreed. Sherri left at 7:30.

Dan read the entire warning. **Patty moved and Dan seconded to approve the official town meeting warning with Articles 1 through 13 as read by Dan Steinbauer. The motion was passed with Bob opposed.**

Brad said he thinks the board should be united in approving the warning and if Bob has issues with it they should be worked out. Patty asked if his opposition is about having no price tag on Article 13. Bob said that has a lot to do with it. He believes there should be some workaround. Brad said he believes Sherri is right that the article can't differ too much from the petition. Bob said he feels voters have a right to know the budget implications. Patty said she agrees it would be better but the petition doesn't include that. Jennifer said we can have discussions about all the articles. She thinks people will be confused about some of the

others also. Bob said he doesn't understand why we can't have a footnote on the impact of passing the article.

Patty said in the future articles should have a price tag. Jennifer said she doesn't know if town officials can tell citizens what to put on their petitions. Bob said we could have a policy that if there is a budget implication it has to be on the petition.

It was agreed to move on to the next agenda item while waiting to speak to Sherri again.

10. Schedule Public Kickoff Meeting for the Underhill Sidewalk Scoping Study (7:46)

Brad said the scoping study will have a kickoff meeting to get input from the public. The board discussed potential dates and agreed on February 22.

11. April 8, 2024 Solar Eclipse Discussion (7:51)

Bob said there will be a total solar eclipse on April 8. State emergency management has been having meetings to discuss it. A large number of people are expected in our area to witness it. The state is trying to determine where they will all go. There is only so much capacity. They are talking about opening state parks early. He is concerned about the effects if the park in Underhill is opened. There is usually a lot of snow up there at that time of year. He thinks we should close the road at the bottom of the hill to all but local traffic. He thinks we should purchase signs and educate residents about what we are planning to do to limit out of town traffic on the road.

Dan said he thinks we should not make a decision on our own until we hear what the state wants to do. Maybe we could have someone from the state come in or call in to a meeting. He would want to do something in concert with the state. Bob said he is concerned about the lead time to order signs. Brad said they can make signs quickly in Barre.

Brad noted that the winter ban on parking on town roads will still be in effect at that time. Bob said he will continue to update the board on this and we can ask a representative from Forests, Parks and Recreation to join us and tell us their plans for opening the state park in Underhill. Patty asked if we can discourage them from opening the park. Brad said he can talk to his state contacts. Patty said if all the state parks are open people will want to go up there and there will be snow on top. It is a safety issue.

12. Closing Public Comment Period (8:00)

No members of the public wished to comment.

13. Warrants and Minutes (8:00)

Dan moved to approve the payroll warrant for January 18, 2024, Patty seconded and the motion was passed with Bob opposed.

Dan moved to approve AP warrants for January 25, 2024, Patty seconded and the motion was passed with Bob opposed.

Dan moved to approve the minutes of January 11, 2024, Bob seconded and the motion was passed with Patty abstaining.

Dan moved to approve the minutes of January 4, 2024, Patty seconded and the motion was passed with Bob opposed.

Dan moved to approve the minutes of the joint meeting with the Jericho selectboard on January 4, 2024, Patty seconded and the motion was passed 3-0.

14. Review, Edit as Necessary and Sign 2024 Town Meeting Day Official Warning (8:04)

Sherri joined the meeting in person. Dan explained that there was a difference of opinion about approving the warning. Bob said he understands that we can't make modifications to the wording on the petition, but can we have a letter from the selectboard on the next page after the warning in the town report stating what the financial implications are of moving from 3 to 5 selectboard members? Sherri asked, why not put that information in the selectboard report? Bob said he thinks it would be more meaningful right after the warning. Brad asked, there can't be a separate note with this information on the warning? Sherri said no. Sherri said she doesn't see why we can't do as Bob suggests. There was discussion about the wording to use.

Patty moved to rescind the previous action on the official warning for town meeting day, Dan seconded and the motion was passed with Bob abstaining.

Patty moved and Dan seconded to approve the official town meeting warning with Articles 1 through 13 as read by Dan Steinbauer. Bob said he agrees as long as the letter explaining the financial implications of Article 13 is in the town report. **The motion was passed 3-0.**

15. Member Items, Correspondence, Announcement, Schedule, Dates for Special Meeting (8:17)

Brad said correspondence from a family with a camp on Deane Road was included in the packet. It was a response to the Class 4 road study committee recommendations.

Patty said the Class 4 road committee made a recommendation to discontinue several roads. Does that mean delisting them as Class 4 roads? Brad said their report with recommendations is non-binding. There are a couple of ways roads can be discontinued – by petition or by motion of the selectboard. Then there is a procedure under statute that must be followed. Patty said she wants to understand what “discontinued” means. Brad said it would mean relinquishing all public interest. The public would no longer have the right to be on the road.

The next regular meeting is February 8. Board members discussed what days they would be available for a special meeting.

16. Adjourn (8:23)

Dan moved to adjourn, Patty seconded and the motion was passed at 8:23.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

Read and approved as submitted/amended:

Dan Steinbauer, Chair

Date Signed

Date Approved