

Vershire Selectboard minutes for 2/2/21 (Groundhog Day!) approved

In attendance via zoom: Vernal Stone-Chair, Marc McKee, Ken Bushey, Gene Craft-Admin. Asst., Debra Kingsbury-Sec'y. Guests: Joan Waltermire, Eleanor Zue, Tonya Gunn, Earl Robinson, Reva Seybolt, Ethel Pike, Laura Craft, Nicole White-Fogarty

Craft stated that the meeting was being recorded. Vernal Stone called the meeting to order at 7:06pm. Craft asked if there were any changes to the agenda. It was suggested that Waltermire and Zue go first about the EAB topic, then discussion about the garage project, and McKee asked that discussion about communications be added.

Waltermire, Zue and Bushey all attended a recent Zoom meeting offered by the Dept. of Forestry, Parks and Recreation. The statute guidelines and responsibilities for a Tree Warden were explained. Waltermire stated concerns over the safety responsibility of the Town to manage fallen trees in the right of ways and noted that some towns are taking a proactive approach and removing the ash trees before they die. She added that if Vershire doesn't have a tree warden, the burden falls to the Selectboard. Zue proposed an incentive to remove trees while healthy to avoid costly and dangerous removal once the tree has been infected and is dying. Craft shared a recent incident when a family member had taken down an infected ash tree and upon hitting the ground it exploded into pieces. Robinson asked what the Town was legally responsible for, and both he and McKee asked that a copy of any recent State statutes be provided for the Board's review. Craft shared his screen for all present to review articles 12 and 13 on the Town Warning. Article 12 asks the voters to establish an EAB fund. Article 13 asks for \$5K to be raised to start the fund. All present acknowledged the wording for those articles was acceptable. Zue shared that she had sample letters to alert land owners to the dangers of the affected trees and how to deal with them. Fogarty reminded the group that Mark Fogarty, a highway crew member, is a licensed forester and would be knowledgeable about trees along Vershire roads. Discussion followed about compensation for the potential position and under whose authority would a Tree Warden operate. Fogarty added that Thetford has a Tree Warden and offered to reach out to them for info. Waltermire will contact Corinth about their Tree Warden job description and get a copy of the State statute regulating the role.

Garage update: Craft spoke with P. Bania at Morton Buildings to review costs and material standards. They also reviewed the advantage of erecting a sand/salt shed at the same time as it will require a concrete base. Bushey shared structural support aspects for the shed's retaining wall/substructure, and having the concrete done while the building was being done would be a cost saving. Craft will send the "Farm Tech" link to Stone for his research on potential shed coverings and costs.

Craft stated that Michael Lew-Smith was working on the wetlands permit and expected a draft for the Board's review soon. Bushey interacted with Greg Dixson who is completing the site engineering design and layout. He stated it wasn't at the stage to pass along to potential excavation contractors for bids as yet.

Conversation followed about having an architect or a project manager and what that role entailed and/or the need for both or neither depending on what the commercial construction company package offered. The importance of having the division of Fire and Safety permit was also discussed. Krebs and Lansing Engineers are working on the storm water aspect while Arrow-wood Engineering is dealing with ANR. Stone stated that having the State permits in place is the next step.

Gunn raised the question about hiring a project manager. Craft and the Board described the history, the research process, and the progress that the Board and the Garage committee had accomplished thus far, and where the engineers were at present. Plus, there had been visits to other municipal garages. Plans for a building design that worked well had been acquired from a project done in Glover, VT in 2017. Many decisions have been made already, and even a visiting architect stated that much of the initial project work had been completed through the Board's and the committee's efforts.

The Board emphasized that high quality materials and a long term warranty were essential aspects for any recommendation the Board would put before the voters. The new highway garage will be an asset for the Town for generations to come. Energy efficiency and functionality are factors that weigh heavy on the decision as well. Craft has reached out to Mascoma Bank to review potential costs for the project, adding that the Town has been setting aside \$35K per year for several years toward this goal. The annual payment with interest for a 30 year mortgage is estimated at \$35K so there will be little need to increase tax requests for that budget item. Discussion about going with a State bond versus a local savings bank was reviewed, and the deadlines for applications. If it was decided to go through a local bank, a construction loan could be acquired at 3% for the first year. The advantage is that interest only accrues as the funds are taken for each construction phase. Upon completion of the project, the bank would then convert to a fixed rate long term note, currently at 4%. More research will be done to compare rates using the Bond Bank option.

Craft stated that the Delinquent Tax Collector has scheduled a property tax sale for 2/24/21 to be held in-person at the Town Center Building. The Collector will post the time and offerings.

McKee wanted to address how people communicate with the Board, adding that the Board meetings are open to the public (via zoom at this time) and the minutes are posted. Seybolt expressed her concerns that more transparency was needed as there are some in Vershire who don't have access to the internet and felt the minutes were posted late. Craft stated that drafted minutes are available at the Town office. Kingsbury stated that the minutes aren't posted until they are approved at the following meeting as that is what our Board and most other Boards do. Kingsbury always sent them to the Journal Opinion, but since Covid, the paper has discontinued that service due to monetary constraints. Kingsbury does send them to the Randolph Herald and also posts them on the Vershire list-serve once approved. Seybolt stated that people might want to ask questions and need to see what's being addressed at the meetings. Everyone agreed that Covid has presented everyone with unique challenges and that the elected officials are doing their best. Bushey asked Seybolt if she had suggestions to get

information out to the public. Seybolt said she appreciated seeing the Board's agenda being posted on the Vershire.org website to be viewed ahead of time so people could decide if they wished to attend. She enthusiastically offered to assist Craft with mailing out the newsletter.

Stone moved to approve the town warning as written. McKee seconded and all were in favor. Stone moved to approve the orders and each Board member will go to the Town office to sign later this week. Bushey seconded and all were in favor. Stone moved that the meeting be adjourned to a date specific of 2/9/21 at 7pm for final budget reviews prior to the town report going to print. Bushey seconded and all were in favor. Minutes for 1/19/21 were approved as amended.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03pm