

Town of Vershire Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 25, 2022 at 6:30pm at the Vershire Town Center.

There will be a remote option for this meeting via Zoom or by phone.

Attendance: Vernal Stone-chair, Nicole White-Fogarty, Ken Bushey, Gene Craft-clerk/treasurer, Alan Lyford-highway foreman, Gretchen Harvey-secretary, Tonya Gunn, Steve Atwood, Mark Fogarty, David Hooke, Reva Seybolt, Dale Ricker, Steve Ward, and Earl Robinson,

Call to Order: V. Stone called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Agenda Review & Modifications: the regular meeting will be followed by a discussion about ARPA funds beginning at 7pm.

Public & Staff Comments: None at this time.

Highway: Road Report: A. Lyford reported that a radio has been installed in the new backhoe. Also, the overhead door at the town garage needs a new spring, however, parts for this older model are unavailable. They are ready to work on the culvert on Ayers road, but are waiting for a callback from Pat Ross to move ahead. They have been preparing the roads for winter and most are in good shape now. The blower the town purchased with grant funding has proven to be very helpful with road maintenance. Towns are being encouraged to make sure they have a good supply of road salt in place before a potential railroad strike holds up shipments from out West. The blacktop on SVR is worn and the highway crew would like a clearer timeframe for when the federal contractors in charge of the Ely mine remediation are going to make some road repairs and install a box culvert there. He also wants them to know there has been an uptick of activity at the site ever since the gate has been down.

Approval of Last Meeting Minutes: K. Bushey moved to approve the minutes of 10/11/2022, as well as the minutes of the two special meetings of 10/6/2022 and 10/20/2022. V. Stone seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Town Health Officer: S. Atwood requests permission to arrange a mini clinic for flu shots and covid booster shots on November 9th from 3-7pm at the TCB. He is concerned about a predicted early flu season, children contracting RSV, and the potential for a new wave of covid disease now that cold weather is fast approaching. Action: N. White-Fogarty moved to allow Steve Atwood-THO to schedule a free mini-vaccination clinic in the town center building on November 9, 2022 from 3-7pm. V. Stone seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Current Period Warrants Approval: V. Stone moved to approve the current period warrants. N. White-Fogarty seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Holiday Fair: T. Gunn on behalf of Vershare requested the use of the TCB on December 3, 2022 to stage a holiday fair. The primary purpose of the fair is to showcase as many local makers/home businesses as possible and to give area residents opportunities to shop local this holiday season. There will not be a vendor fee charged Action: V. Stone moved to allow Vershare to host a craft fair in the Town Center Building on December 3, 2022. K. Bushey seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

ARPA public discussion: 7:00pm: V. Stone asked those in attendance for input about where the ARPA funds (approximately 220,000) might best be utilized by the town. R. Seybolt wanted to reiterate her interest in having these meetings well advertised and having a process in place for how the town intends to prioritize ARPA allocation(s).

D. Ricker on behalf of Vershire Fire and Rescue (VFR) suggested that an infusion of \$25,000 into its capital fund would help the organization keep address ever-rising demands on its services. He noted the increasing number of calls (primarily medical) they received, the supplies and training required, and the expected vehicle replacements as some of the high priority needs facing the all-volunteer VFR.

S. Atwood as Town Health Officer requested some of the funds be used as seed money to establish a community health fund. Such a fund could support an annual health fair, pay disposal costs when properties need cleaning up, conduct a health survey to create a baseline of the community's health, and fund public health initiatives that educate residents about the benefits of prevention. These initiatives are in the public interest but require some resources.

D. Hooke on behalf of the Energy Committee suggested spending some of the funds on a thorough energy audit of the town office. On an earlier walk-through by Efficiency Vermont, a number of areas in the building were identified for upgrades The audit cost would be \$2400 and there could be significant savings that come from upgrades over time. G. Craft noted that improving the ventilation is a top priority but also wanted to make it known that the town is running out of record storage space. M. Fogarty supported the need to expand the storage and working space in the Town Center. There followed some discussion of how grants might become available to fund the type of renovations that the TC requires. And D. Hooke withdrew his request for ARPA funds for this purpose given his expectation that VT-Act 172 will be funding energy assessments as part of their program effort in the near future.

V. Stone asked about the status of a grant application that would fund a sand and salt shed for Vershire. K. Bushey reported that the competition for these funds is very stiff and there are a lot of challenging requirements connected to proving need, arranging the timing of construction, paying costs up front, and, if awarded, accessing the reimbursement funds.

G. Craft proposed using some of the ARPA funding to bring in a grant writing specialist to help the town compete for grant funding for the garage, sand and salt shed and other infrastructure projects.

R. Seybolt asked the Selectboard to establish a process for utilizing the ARPA funds. This would include setting criteria for evaluating project ideas. She supports targeting the population most impacted by the pandemic and using funds to increase resiliency (food security, energy needs, etc.) and choosing projects with a track record of success or ones that would otherwise be hard to fund with taxes. She referred to Hartland and Tunbridge, towns that have developed these processes.

G. Craft suggested that the SB consider using ARPA funds for a long-term benefit. Although it's very hard to eliminate worthy projects that will benefit the town in the short term, the town needs to consider the lengthy effort that has gone into planning for a new town garage, a building that will serve the town well for approximately 30 years. Mark Fogarty also reminded the SB that the current garage will need some work to remain viable until a new garage is built.

G. Craft offered a summary of the financial considerations facing the town and how the decision to go forward with a garage is now linked to the town's ARPA funds. The town has received one bid for the town garage. And, although the bid is competitive in this market, it came in higher than the town-approved bond amount of 1.52M. After two rounds of value engineering and cost-cutting decisions, the project budget has settled at approximately 1.8M. This means that if the town wants to go forward with this project in a way that best protects the taxpayers, they can only do so by tapping the ARPA (approximately \$220,000) funds to help cover the shortfall.

Questions were asked about why the earlier due diligence effort to right-size the project costs did not more closely match the bid received. The answer noted that with respect to materials costs, the numbers did match up. The unexpected cost increases were embedded in the rising costs of labor since the estimates were drawn up. It is still possible to start the process over and put the project out to bid again, however, it is unlikely that these estimates will change in the near term and the project would be much delayed.

Adjourn: N. White-Fogarty moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:32pm. V. Stone seconded. The motion passed unanimously.