



SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 19, 2023

Members: Judy Bickford, Don McDowell, Chris Palermo, Laura Streets, Travis Sabatase

Absent:

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Eric Dodge, Town Administrator; Kevin Barrows, Highway Superintendent; Dennis DiGregorio, Fire Chief; Jason Luneau, Police Chief; Tina Sweet, Finance Director; Paula Beattie, Human Resources Director; Sara Haskins, Town Clerk/Treasurer; Bill Mapes, EMS Chief; Anna McCormick, Recreation Coordinator; Mitzi Fleming, Assistant Town Clerk/Assistant Treasurer*, Stacey Ferriman, Assistant Finance Director*, Tricia Follert, Community Development Coordinator*

PARTICIPANTS/GUESTS: Tom Cloutier, Cynthia Cloutier, Dennis Smith, David Campbell, Daniel McLaughlin, David Ring, Gary Briggs, Sheila Tarbox, Tony Cote, Kristin Marriott, Charles Burnham, Prudy Newton, Joanne Godfrey, Christy Snipp, Richard Craig, Stephanie Craig*, Nancy Banks, Evelyn Throne, Jerry Throne, Brent Labree II, Richard Cote, Tyler Machia*, Joanne Davis*, Kathy Chaffee*, Jamie Jaret, Jamie Brewster, Stephanie Hoffman, Robert Bortree, Ed Lowenton

**participating via Zoom*

CALL SELECTBOARD MEETING TO ORDER

Judy Bickford called the Selectboard Meeting to order at 5:35 PM at the Tegu Building. She introduced and welcomed new Board member Chris Palermo. She also thanked Sara Haskins, Mitzi Fleming & Elizabeth Chase in the Town Clerks Office, Shap Smith as moderator, the Board of Civil Authority, Peter Guihan, Green Mountain Access and the staff at Peoples Academy for their hard work in running the final floor town meeting the night before.

AGENDA CHANGES/ADDITIONS

Add approve warrants

NEW BUSINESS

1. Reveiw LEMP for Approval

Eric Dodge presented the annual Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) that outlines how the municipal government will coordinate support from an Emergency Operations Center in case of an emergency. Updating the plan is a standard annual process and there are typically no major changes made to it unless directed by the Vermont Emergency Management or Lamoille County Planning Commission. Only small tweaks have been made to last year's plan as suggested by community members surrounding changes in personnel, a change in a business name, and adding an additional

utility company. Judy Bickford asked for pronouns to be updated in section 4.4. ***Motion made by Don McDowell to approve the Local Emergency Management Plan as presented with updates to section 4.4 . Motion seconded by Chris Palermo. Motion carried. (5/0)***

OLD BUSINESS

1. Finalize Budget

Stephanie Hoffman gave a presentation on behalf of the Morristown Centennial Library and their 2023 town appropriation request. The library recognizes the current financial climate but urged the Selectboard and voters to support fully funding the library. Stephanie shared that the proposed budget cuts for the library are not sustainable for their financial resources and the difference would need to be taken from their endowment. If the library continues to remove money from its endowment at this high rate, then it will disappear and the town will need to fully fund the library. There are five categories where the library budget is increased; four of which they have no control over, which are: electricity, propane, phones, and postage. The fifth category is payroll and there are no grants to get assistance with payroll. Stephanie also shared information regarding the value of the library and how its funding compares to other libraries in the state. The Board asked clarifying questions regarding the library and its endowment, including asking if they could have a copy of the library endowment policy. Laura Streets shared that if Morrisville Water & Light customers have solar credits that are going to expire, they can donate them to the library. Various community members spoke in favor of the library and their funding request.

Sara Haskins, Town Treasurer, presented ESTIMATE tax figures based on the proposed budget and tax rate, including an estimated 2% grand list growth prepared by Tina Sweet, Finance Director. There are two calculations, one including funding the library at their full request and a second reducing the library budget by \$74,369. The proposal for keeping the library's full funding request represents a 14.1% budget increase and an estimated 11.16% tax rate increase, whereas the second proposal for partially funding the library request represents a 13.0% budget increase and an estimated 10.07% tax increase. An estimated increase in the town tax bill for a house now appraised at \$300,00 would be an estimated \$353.10 or \$320.70 respectively with the two proposals. Tina Sweet explained that both proposals include using \$240,000 of unallocated funds. She further explained that at the 2023 annual town meeting the voters approved establishing a reserve fund in an amount not to exceed 10% of the prior year's operating budget. This amount would be roughly \$616,000 and there is close to \$900,000 in unallocated fund balance. Therefore, she, with the approval of the auditors, recommends applying \$240,000 of the unallocated fund balance to this year's budget, which would bring the fund balance down to 10% and comply with the article approved by voters, while offsetting the increased tax rate.

Paula Beattie, Human Resources Director, gave a presentation on current wages compared to other municipalities in Vermont. Paula used the 2022 VLCT Benefits & Compensation Report for comparison and found that many of the Town of Morristown employees are underpaid compared to other communities of similar size. Benefits and years of service were not taken into consideration in these figures. Paula shared that there is only one other town of a similar size that has a town administrator. All the rest have town managers, so she used a town manager payscale in her analysis. Chris Palermo shared that the major difference between the two positions is that a manager has hiring and firing authority and acts as a buffer between the Board and the staff, otherwise most of the duties are similar. Community members posed questions regarding the budget. Questions were about using the emergency funds, reducing cola, waiting until January to fill positions and the effect of reassessments and homestead payments. A community member that works for a different town spoke in favor of the importance of retaining employees, saying he had recently been offered more money to leave his

municipality and move to another one after only 6 months of experience. Anna McCormick, Town Recreations Coordinator, spoke on behalf of the Morristown Recreation Department. Anna shared that she is currently working on redesigning the summer camp program and hiring staff. She is also holding monthly safe sitter programs and a let's go fishing program. Increasing the recreation coordinator position to full-time would allow her more time to apply for grants and create revenue programs to help offset the recreation budget. Discussion also followed regarding scholarship money for summer programming. Chris Palermo shared that not only is cola part of union contracts, but it is also part of the longevity policy that all non-union employees sign upon hiring. Eric Dodge offered the additional suggestion of not funding one highway position in the budget for this year only, as it has not been filled for two winters and Kevin Barrows has been acting as a working manager covering the open position. This would save about \$80,000 from the budget in salary and benefits and reduce the estimated tax rate increase to a little under 10% if the full library request was added back to the budget. Board debate followed surrounding whether the Board should reduce the budget by not funding the highway position or if they should use an additional \$80,000 from the unallocated reserve funds to help lower the tax impact. After much debate, ***Travis Sabatase made a motion to approve the budget as presented in the packet with two changes; the addition of \$74,369 to fund the library and the reduction of the salary and benefits of one highway department personnel. Motion seconded by Chris Palermo. Motion carried (5/0).***

2. Review draft warning for budget revote

Sara Haskins presented a draft warning for the budget revote meeting. She is recommending a date of June 6 for the vote as the school will be having a special election that day. By having the budget revote on that same day, it will save taxpayer dollars and make it easier for the voters. The Board will have a special meeting on Thursday, April 27 to sign the warning with the finalized budget figures and will also discuss creating FAQs and budget communication and outreach.

APPROVE WARRANTS

Motion made by Don McDowell to approve the warrants as presented. Motion seconded by Travis Sabatase. Motion carried. (5/0)

ADJOURN

Motion made by Travis Sabatase to adjourn. Motion seconded by Don McDowell. Motion carried. (5/0)

Meeting adjourned at 9:24 PM.

Submitted and filed this April 24, 2023.

Sara Haskins, Scribe

Please note all minutes are in Draft form and are subject to approval at the next Selectboard meeting.