

Town of Corinth
Board of Selectmen
PO Box 461
Corinth, VT 05039

Unapproved Minutes of the Select Board Meeting
September 14, 2020

Meeting conducted on Zoom.

Present for the Select Board: Chris Groschner, Steve Long, Rick Cawley
Catherine Tudish, select board clerk

Others present: Lee Porter, road commissioner; Joe Blodgett, road foreman; Geoffrey Hoots, Norm Collette, and Raymond Moulton cemetery commission; Ed Pospisil, Fire Chief; Michael Pittman, Fire Captain; Zach McNeal, West Fairlee Fire Department

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

Groschner read a notice authorizing this public meeting to be conducted by remote access, in accordance with a special provision of Vermont's Open Meeting Law.

Minutes of the financial meeting of September 1, 2020 were unanimously approved. Minutes of the Select Board meeting of August 10, 2020 were unanimously approved, with this correction: Norm Collette did not request a town email list for notification of cemetery commission meetings.

Road Report

Blodgett said that two requests for road signs had been made: one for a Dead End sign on Jewell Lane and one for a No Dumping sign at the Meadow Meeting House.

Blodgett said there were a lot of tourists on Jewell Lane, especially when Beetlejuice posters were up, but he did not believe a Dead End sign would be effective.

Long agreed that a Dead End sign would not be effective.

For the Meadow Meeting House, Blodgett recommended a sign stating that the property was under surveillance and dumping was illegal.

Cawley said he was in favor of such a sign.

Long said he favored a surveillance sign, as long as it was not right in front of the church.

Groschner noted that the town has had fewer problems with dumping recently. "Somehow, we've made progress," he stated.

The select board unanimously approved the surveillance sign at Meadow Meeting House, and Blodgett agreed to install it.

Groschner complimented Blodgett and the road crew on the scope and quality of the major culvert project on Maplewood Road.

Blodgett said he has approached Ricker Excavation about seeding the grounds at the fire station, offering them use of the road crew's hydro-seeder, which would make the job much easier and produce better results.

Long asked if Ricker could take the value of seeding off his invoice for excavation work at the station.

Porter stated that he believed that would be in the best interest of the town and all parties involved.

Blodgett reported that he got an estimate from Limlaw to cut trees on Cookeville Road for \$4,550. The highway fund would pay \$2,550 of that amount, and the ash borer removal fund would pay the remainder.

Long said he was on board with Joe's tree cutting plan, which was also approved by Groschner and Cawley.

Blodgett said he wanted to add a little more to the road crew's uniform budget, as work on the Maplewood culvert had destroyed boots and safety vests. He suggested adding \$600 a year.

Groschner replied that he was in favor of providing good safety equipment for the road crew.

Blodgett noted that there would be a surplus of money coming from the culvert grant.

Long said that if money is available in the grant, he was fine with using it to purchase work boots.

Cawley asked how a mechanism could be set up for grant money to go directly into the highway fund.

Porter said that currently excess funds from highway grants go into the general fund.

Long said the grant money should really go into the highway fund.

The select board agreed to speak with the town treasurer about allocating funds for the road crew's safety equipment.

Porter said he has spoken with a landowner on Young Road about removing debris and vehicles from the roadway and that the situation is being resolved. He added that he and Blodgett are still working on property owner issues on both Backway and South America Roads.

Cemetery Commission

a. Forestry plan and revisions to conservation easement:

Hoots reported that the forestry management plan for the town forest has been updated to be sent to the Upper Valley Land Trust. The update includes a provision for green burials within the town forest.

Hoots noted that the updated plan requires approval by the select board.

Cawley said he is fine with the new form of the plan.

Long said now that the plan includes a provision for natural burial, the board can adopt it.

Long made a motion to approve the forest management plan for the town forest.

Groschner seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Cawley said the board needs to make sure they print out the plan and get it to the UV Land Trust.

Long said he would print it out, adding that he would compose a cover letter to go with it, and that all board members should review the letter before it goes out.

Long said he had a conversation with Ginny Barlow, the town forester, concerning the UV Land Trust and that she reported some pushback about green burial.

Hoots said he had an email exchange with a representative from the Land Trust, concerning an easement that included "unforeseen uses in the future."

Long said he would like to see the emails, and Hoots agreed to send them.

Collette asked if providing information about green burials could be considered educational, and thus in line with the mission of the town forest.

Hoots said he believes that Barlow made a point about the educational value.

b. Possible expansion of East Corinth Cemetery

Collette reported that there was a possibility of buying land from the Tillotson property to expand the cemetery. He said that Tillotson had expressed interest in possibly selling 5 acres of pasture out of a 28-acre parcel.

Collette described the site as "on the knoll, a nice area," adding that would provide "a beautiful set-up for green burials up in the wooded area." He said the site would be easy to maintain.

Collette said the price was \$25,000 for the 5 acres, and that Tillotson would be agreeable to a five-year note on the sale.

Groschner said the expenditure would have to go through a vote at Town Meeting. He suggested that it would be helpful for select board members to walk over the property.

Long agreed that it was important to look at the property to see what the access would be.

Moulton said the property is directly behind the new section of the cemetery and would need a right of way from the other property owner (buyer of the remainder of the 28-acre parcel).

Moulton said, "I don't know if we will need an expansion anytime in the next 15 years. We might not need to spend the money now."

Collette said they would have to run a road up from the existing cemetery. He suggested selling green burial lots in the wooded area as a way of raising money for the purchase.

Groschner said he would like to arrange a property viewing as the select board's next step.

Long said he would circulate an email to set up a date for next week.

Groschner concluded, "This will be a process, and nothing will happen fast."

Fire Station update

Long and Cawley reported that they had met at the fire station recently and that the project is coming along well.

Long said he needed approval for the purchase of a generator transfer switch in the amount of \$690.

Cawley made a motion to approve, Long seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Long noted that Pittman and other firefighters have been painting the interior. "It looks great," Long said. "And we're still within budget."

Fire Department lease

Groschner expressed concern about the response time of the fire department when a call goes out. He asked Pospisil how many volunteers the department has and whether they are all certified.

Pospisil requested an executive session, stating that he preferred not to discuss the matter in open session.

Cawley noted that the law on executive session is limited to five categories.

Moulton said the request would fall under "personnel."

Groschner said it did not involve town personnel, as the fire department is not a municipal entity as such.

Cawley said if it is a sensitive issue, involving one or more individuals, it could be handled in executive session rather than general fire department business.

Long asked who would be involved.

Pospisil said the select board and fire chief only.

Groschner said the board would table the executive session to the end of the meeting and proceed with other agenda items.

Long said that with other members of the fire department present, the board could begin discussion of the lease arrangement.

Long said the lease would be between the Town of Corinth and the Fire Department and asked who the town would be dealing with.

Pittman said the town has a copy of the fire department's current bylaws. He explained that the department has a board of trustees, made up of two community members and three elected from the department.

Long asked if, in the interest of transparency, the fire department would be open to having a select board member as a trustee.

Pittman replied that such a change would have to go before the fire department's board for a vote.

Cawley suggested that a select board member could attend meetings as a guest.

Pittman said the fire department board usually meets quarterly and that he would notify the select board of future meetings.

Groschner asked how many members the fire department has.

Pittman replied approximately 20, with 4 certified at level two.

Groschner: "Does that mean 16 members can't go to a fire?"

Pittman: "No. It just means different levels of state training. Any member can answer a fire call."

Pospisil said the state is increasing the requirements for training hours and that training occurs in Pittsfield, a two-hour drive away.

Pospisil added that the department is trying to do a lot of in-house training, which will be easier with the new fire house.

Long asked if the department has a plan for recruiting more people.

Pospisil replied that they are trying to bring back former members. "This is a problem everywhere with volunteer fire companies," he said.

Cawley asked if the current volunteer model is running its course.

Pospisil said a lot of departments are moving to paid personnel.

Cawley asked about the relationship with the Vershire fire department.

Pospisil said that Vershire has teamed up with West Fairlee.

McNeal, a lieutenant in the West Fairlee fire department, said, "We go to everything together." He said West Fairlee has 13 members in its department, 8 of them certified for interior firefighting.

McNeal noted that Corinth has teamed up with Tri-Village.

McNeal said that some areas are regionalizing, rather than having separate departments, or else going to paid calls.

Long asked if non-certified Corinth members are working toward certification.

Pittman said training has been delayed because of COVID.

Cawley pointed out that the select board needed to talk about specifics of the lease.

Long asked if there are models to consult.

Groschner said the only one he knows of is the Historical Society's lease agreement for use of the Academy building.

Cawley said he would be willing to put a leasing document together. Essentially, the fire department gets to use the building in return for providing fire protection to the town, he said.

Cawley said he would be in favor of an automatically renewing one-year lease, with the option to renegotiate if conditions change significantly.

Pospisil asked what the department's responsibilities are regarding the building.

Pittman said the department gets the town rates for electricity, propane, and oil. Those bills are paid by the fire department and reimbursed by the town. The insurance payment would be a line item under the town's general fund, and the town treasurer would make insurance on the building part of the town's policy.

Cawley said there could be no alterations to the building without approval of the select board.

Cawley said he would circulate a draft lease contract and people would have a chance to comment.

Cawley asked who owns the Cookeville fire station.

Pittman replied that the town owns the land, and the department owns the building.

Pittman asked for the insurance amount in order to get it into the budget.

Groschner said he would get an appraiser to view the building and come up with a number.

Library attorney's engagement letter

Cawley made a motion to approve the appointment of Andrea Gallitano of Barre as the library's attorney.

Long seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Anti-racism resolution

Cawley made a motion for the select board to adopt the following resolution, which he read aloud.

Resolved that we, the select board for the Town of Corinth, stand in solidarity with Blacks and all people of color. This year racial tension in the United States again reached a tipping point in the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, and more recently the shooting of Jacob Blake. These horrific events caused an uprising against the long-standing racial violence, senseless murder, incarceration and disenfranchisement of Black people. As the town select board, we join the efforts of people around the world in the process of dismantling systemic racism and working toward true equality.

The residents of Corinth are predominately white, and we are aware that making this kind of statement is largely a gesture and that there is actual work to be done in the fight against racism here and around the world. We are committed to educating ourselves and encouraging the inhabitants of our town and society at large about the hows and whys of this work. This is the beginning of a larger conversation, and we strongly encourage the residents and neighbors of our town to support each other in doing this vital work.

Long seconded the motion, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

Cawley thanked Kenya Lazuli for her significant contribution to the resolution's language.

Janitor's position

Groschner reported that he has had two inquiries about the position of building cleaner for the Town Hall. He said he advised both to contact the current cleaner for a fuller job description and to look over the building. Groschner noted that the current cleaner's position ends on September 25.

Posting locations

After discussion, the select board agreed that the town notice board at the new transfer station is not ideally situated.

Two alternates were suggested: moving the official notice board to the Blake Memorial Library lawn, adjacent to the parking lot, or moving it to the East Corinth post office property.

Tudish agreed to talk with someone from each location to determine their willingness to accommodate the notice board.

Porter asked about the public notice board that remains at the old transfer station.

Long suggested moving it to the new station and placing it by the redeemable bins.

Porter said he would contact the Conservation Commission about repairing the board and moving it.

Sheriff's contract

Cawley pointed out that the select board still has not signed the annual contract with the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

Long said they had been holding off until they had a discussion with Sheriff Bill Bohnyak.

Groschner said he would invite the sheriff to the next meeting.

Cawley noted that the Sheriff's Department has been sending invoices and the town has been paying.

Other business

Groschner said he had spoken with Karen Galayda, who reported that property tax revenues had been coming in better than expected. "Maybe we won't have such a bad year, after all," Groschner said.

Groschner made a motion for the select board to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter and to invite Chief Pospisil to join them.

Long seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

The board went into executive session at 9:45 PM. They came out at 10:02, with no action taken.

The meeting adjourned at 10:04 PM.