

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

Unapproved Minutes of the Select Board Meeting  
December 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; Gary Apfel, town moderator; Michael Pittman, fire department treasurer; Raymond Moulton and Geoffrey Hoots, cemetery commission; Holly Groschner, Corinth Fiber Initiative; Ginny Barlow, town forester

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 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 regular Select Board meeting of November 9, 2020 and the financial meeting of December 1, 2020 were unanimously approved

Road Report

Porter said Joe Blodgett had received a call from Topsham Telephone to inform him of the company's intention to run fiber optic line on portions of Center Road, Brook Road, and Richardson Road. Topsham Telephone told Blodgett they will contact affected landowners.

Holly Groschner reported that EC Fiber is building its plan for the town of Corinth for 2021, although the town may not get service in 2021.

Holly said she had a conversation with the president of Topsham Telephone, who informed her that although the company had received a grant to connect 350 houses in Corinth, Topsham, and Orange, it seemed likely they would connect only 55 households by the end of 2020.

Holly said there are many unknowns with Topsham Telephone's progress regarding the grant rollout. According to the original terms of the grant, the money had to be spent by the end of 2020.

Long asked if EC Fiber and Topsham Telephone would be cooperating, given that both are stringing lines.

Holly said there was a concern that Topsham Telephone would interfere with EC Fiber's build plan. The two companies are "not even close to collaboration as this point," she stated.

Holly noted that Washington Electric has decided to get into fiber service, keeping control of the poles and leasing to EC Fiber, which would keep costs down. This arrangement "should help insure that all households get fiber service," she said.

Holly said that it is hard to get crews to deploy fiber and that Topsham Telephone is using its own crews.

Chris Groschner asked Porter about mutual aid for road crews in nearby towns, should crews get sick with COVID.

Porter said a mutual aid agreement with surrounding towns has been in place since Hurricane Irene.

Ventilation System at Town Hall

Referring to studies done in China, Groschner said scientists had concluded that viruses can be transmitted long distances through airflow. He asked if having a ventilation system in Town Hall would be helpful.

Cawley said only if the system would bring in fresh air from outside.

Long said he had been in Town Hall this week and that the ventilation control in Nancy Ertle's work section is operational.

Long added that it is hard to get the thermostat fans blowing. He said he was not certain if filters are in place, or if the system is bringing in outside air.

Groschner noted that current work schedules have been arranged so that Nancy Ertle, Karen Galayda, and Dick Kelley are in the building at different times or in different spaces.

Pittman said if the system hasn't been serviced in a while, people in the office would be breathing a lot of dust.

Groschner said he would make inquiries to find a heating contractor to assess the system.

Green Burial

Barlow reported that she had received a response from Upper Valley Land Trust regarding green burials in the town forest.

UVLT presented three potential obstacles contained in the conservation easement: prohibitions against establishing new property rights, against dumping human waste, and against altering the topography.

Barlow said she doesn't believe green burial would violate any of the three.

Groschner asked Cawley to look into the property rights question.

Hoots said he does not believe a burial would require new property rights.

Barlow pointed out that green burials could also take place in a town cemetery.

Long noted that the UVLT stewardship director had expressed willingness to discuss the matter on a Zoom call with the select board, and Long recommended doing that.

Barlow said she doesn't think UVLT has serious objections to green burials in the town forest.

Hoots said the select board should initiate the meeting.

The board agreed to do so, and Groschner said he would like Barlow to be involved in the meeting.

#### Fire Station Update

Pittman reported that Hazen Hill Construction returned a week ago to install the washing machine. When the fire department ran the machine for the first time, there were severe problems with vibration. Pittman said members of the department would try to re-anchor the machine.

Pittman said they are waiting on a second quote for the pin-pad door of the handicapped accessible entrance. To keep the door accessible, Pittman they are expecting a cost of about \$1200.

Pittman said he and other department members are working on remaining interior projects, such as installing fixtures in the two bathrooms.

On a recent fire call, Pittman reported, getting the trucks in and out of the station in a timely manner went smoothly. The first truck was out of the station in five minutes, he said.

Pittman said the company that installed the bay doors still has to replace a damaged door panel.

Groschner asked about the truck decorated with Christmas lights seen on Sunday night in Cookeville.

Pittman said that truck was a recent purchase and not in official use yet. He said the department wanted to do something celebratory for Corinth children and that Santa Claus has been riding on the truck, giving out candy canes. The department will take the truck out two or three more nights.

Cawley said there may be extra bond money left over from construction of the new fire station and suggested exploring the possibility of installing solar panels on the roof of the station.

Long said he was looking into a solar installation with Hazen Hill.

Groschner asked if some of the money could be used to make the handicapped access door operable.

Long said he would also talk about that with Hazen Hill.

Cawley noted that it would be good to shop around for pricing of a solar installation.

#### Annual Meeting

Groschner said the select board does not want to have an in-person meeting at Town Hall in March.

Cawley said there would be no way to have an in-person meeting and maintain social distancing.

One option, Cawley noted, would be to conduct the meeting by Australian ballot.

Cawley said the state legislature might approve a delay of Town Meeting for 2021. If the meeting could be held in May, for example, it could be held outdoors. He recommended waiting to see what options the legislature offers.

Long said the legislature will take the matter up immediately at the new session in January.

Apfel reported that the present options include proceeding by Australian ballot, in which case the select board would have to convene a virtual informational meeting to be held 10 days before voting by Australian ballot.

Cawley said that right now there is no authorization or funding to send out mail-in ballots. Otherwise, people would have to come to Town Hall to vote in person.

Apfel said a disadvantage of the Australian ballot system is that the vote is either up or down, without benefit of discussion.

Groschner asked how a vote would be tallied from the floor in a virtual meeting.

Apfel said there is a way to do that on Zoom.

Apfel added that Act 162 and Act 92 encourage participation by telephone. But he noted that if a person doesn't have an internet connection, calling into Zoom is a long-distance call, which could be expensive.

Groschner said he favored waiting to see if the legislature would authorize a delayed meeting, as an outdoor meeting seems like the simplest, best way to proceed.

Apfel asked if there could be a way to solicit comments from the community prior to the warrant.

Apfel said the select board should relay questions and concerns to the state representatives. He offered to contact the Secretary of State's Office to pass along questions related to Town Meeting.

Cawley asked if an anonymous vote could be conducted virtually. At an in-person meeting, he pointed out, voting can be done by paper ballot if seven participants request it.

#### Budget

Long said he has gone through the proposed 2021 fiscal year budget with treasurer Dick Kelley.

Cawley noted that the school budget is zeroed out, then asked why there was a revenue figure under the school for \$5,000.

Long said that number should be on the line above, under the emerald ash borer project.

Cawley made a motion to approve the budget as presented, pending agreement on a couple of minor discrepancies. Long seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### Other business

Moulton asked if invoices for bookkeeping services to the cemetery commission could be split with the select board.

Long stated that he has never fully understood the cemetery commission's financing.

Groschner said his understanding is that the select board has no oversight of cemetery commission finances.

Moulton said the town treasurer has always handled the books for the cemetery commission.

Moulton said the 2020 audit could not be completed because data was not entered by the town treasurer.

Groschner stated that cemetery commissioners have to maintain more financial oversight.

Moulton asked who determines the number of hours the town clerk and the treasurer work.

Groschner said their change of hours came about because of COVID safety concerns, and that they will probably change again when the situation changes. He added that the town is working with its third treasurer since Susan Fortunati retired.

Long noted that the job is very complex and that the most recent two treasurers did not get much training.

Cawley said that relative to the number of hours, neither the clerk nor the treasurer feel they have enough hours because of COVID concerns.

Groschner brought up a meeting of the Corinth Community Coalition held on December 13, at which there was a discussion of the East Corinth store providing meals to community members and a question of whether the town could contribute to the effort.

Long, who attended the meeting, said Jeff Spiegel said Renee Salomaa has been using the Pay It Forward program to fund preparation and delivery of meals. Spiegel said a contribution from the town would be helpful.

Cawley said the town budget does not have a discretionary fund.

Long said he would be in favor of donating \$100 from the health officer's budget of \$200.

Groschner said he would go back to Spiegel to find out more, then come back to the select board for approval of a donation.

The select board went into executive session at 9:10 PM to discuss a personnel matter.

The board came out of executive session at 9:18 PM, with no action taken.

The meeting adjourned immediately thereafter.