

Starksboro Selectboard meeting
Minutes of February 2, 2021
Approved

Board members present: Koran Cousino, Nancy Boss, Carin McCarthy, John Painter

Unable to attend: Eric Cota

Others present: Rebecca Elder, Michele Gilbert (RiseVT), Pete Antos-Ketcham, Chuck Webber, Amy McCormick

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by Chair Koran Cousino.

The introductory statement regarding open meeting law and how public meetings are being conducted in the Town of Starksboro due to the State of Emergency declared by Governor Scott as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and pursuant to Addendum 6 to Executive Order 01-20 and Act 92, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

In accordance with Act 92, there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously, however the meeting was conducted with public access via internet or telephone with the ability to listen/interact contemporaneously.

Additions/changes to the agenda:

- Michele Gilbert from RiseVT
- Tony Porter was not available due to the storm.

Michele introduced herself and described the RiseVT program, which is part of the prevention arm at Porter Medical Center. She has chosen Starksboro as one of the focus areas. Rise VT tends to focus on working with communities with increasing physical activity opportunities and accessing nutritious foods as well as cultivating neighbor relationships. She and Rebecca had spoken a few times over the last year about some of the long term planning goals. Michele said the some of the ideas she has heard about from community members that could fall into an area for further study include: traffic calming efforts in the village center; developing an alternate ballfield and practice area to augment Cota field when flooding issues affect usage; contributions toward athletic equipment for the sports program; and access to healthy local food. She has worked with Pete Antos-Ketcham on food systems related projects with the New Community Project and the food share program.

For potential grant support, she would like to hear more about the vision of what might be in the future for Starksboro. Carin spoke about creating the forward-thinking lens that is needed to coordinate efforts and vision and to maximize grant funding. Michele noted that there is increased funding from the State of Vermont related to physical activity, which would give the community something to work on together that is positive and future oriented.

Through Rise VT support, Michele explained she will be working with an experienced urban planner who has done work in outdoor recreation, infrastructure, traffic calming, and other rural planning work that is related to some of our town goals.

Board members mentioned some of the efforts explored in the past (e.g. walking path along 116 connecting the school to the village center and possible the Brookside MHP to the south). Koran noted that there is now 14 acres behind the Robinson school that owned by the town. John said the

selectboard has spent time talking about planning efforts, including discussions with ACCT regarding MHPs, about re-envisioning affordable housing in the town to better serve the community and residents and improving quality of life.

Rebecca will follow up with Michele to arrange a discussion with the PC. After that, discussions with other committees including the Jerusalem Community Center Comm., Conservation Comm., and the sports program would be helpful. In addition to planning efforts, Rise VT is also interested in helping connect with small businesses and farms (future ventures could be a food hub, farm market, expansion of community garden, etc.)

Road report

Tony is working with Otter Creek Engineering and they are moving forward on the preparations for the work to be done on Ben Roberts and Brown Hill (to complete the FEMA repairs from Halloween storm).

Road Foreman review update: Nancy is coordinating the review and will speak with legal counsel for guidance on executive session discussion. The review will be completed in the next two weeks and discussed at the next meeting.

Current Business

Delinquent Taxes update – Amy McCormick

Delinquent Tax Collector Amy McCormick sent reports on the delinquent taxes from this and previous years for the board to review. Amy has contacted the finance dept. at Addison County Community Trust about the delinquent taxes for MHs within the 3 parks.

The procedure is generally to put property up for tax sale after a few years on the delinquent list. There is a 30-day warning for any property going to tax sale. Amy asked if the board planned to have a tax sale this year.

Koran asked Amy to describe the process she uses for communicating with delinquent tax payers. Amy stated she sends a monthly letter that includes the new interest, balance, and date payment is due. She includes a personal note about payment plan options. She tries to work with people to help them, arranging a payment plan even if a low amount but encouraging regular monthly installments. Carin asked if there are any mutual aid options to help people in need (like Winooski). Amy noted that staff and private citizens have tried to help by offering assistance with filing for the homestead exemption and connecting people with free services for tax filing.

The criteria for putting up for tax sale is: over 2 years delinquent and not making regular payments. At that point, information is sent to attorney David Sunshine. At that point, the taxpayer is provided with the legal information for navigating the process. If a payment plan is agreed to and then not abided by, the property goes back to tax sale.

The board discussed the difference for delinquent taxes owed on rented lots in the ACCT-owned parks. In those cases, ACCT is the landowner but the resident who leases the lot pays the property taxes on their own home. For those that are delinquent, the town has no recourse for tax sale unless the town steps in and purchases the mobile home. The town is left in a difficult position, unable to recoup delinquent taxes owed and without a viable option to recoup costs via a tax sale. The Planning Commission has been researching this issue and planned to speak with legislative delegates about possible options for the town.

The selectboard wants to ensure the process is clearly understood regarding how and when a property may be put up for tax sale to ensure the procedure is fair and equitable. John said it is prudent to

consider some leniency, this year due to extenuating circumstances related to the pandemic, but not if there has been no communication from the delinquent taxpayer to the notices sent from the Del. Tax Collector. Carin asked to see the rubric about how decisions are made and would like to know how information is communicated to people who owe. She wants to ensure people are well informed long before reaching the point of an imminent tax sale. Koran agreed that equity is important. She said the town has been lenient in the past. She is concerned about the financial impact for the town as a whole—there is money owed to the town, the bills continue to grow with interest, and there is the unfortunate end-result of people possibly being removed from their homes. It is also true that the Town cannot continue to bear the weight of unpaid taxes with the limited municipal budget. Even without the amount owed from 2020, the town has \$56,000 owed from previous years.

The board suggested adding another mailing with additional information to guide the process and be clear about the implications of ignoring back taxes. The longer the town waits to decide on tax sales, the greater the amount of taxes that will need to be abated.

Board members agree that all those who owe should receive a letter from David Sunshine demanding payment and indicating the town will hold a tax sale by July 15, 2021. A letter will be included in the April correspondence from the Del. Tax Collector explaining the process. Amy concurred and said David will need the list of delinquent taxpayers by mid-March to prepare for the notices. It costs the town \$25/letter. He then gives recipients 2-3 weeks to make payment.

Town buildings

- Post office - Repairs are needed on the interior; CVPH needs to come and vent the area when mail is sorted; an estimate for the lights was provided to change to LEDs; some sheetrock may need to be repaired in the process; estimate ~\$1500.
- Pottery studio and food shelf building: opportunity for a conversation to involve community members to think about the future uses of this building.

Animal Control ordinance discussion

Nancy spoke with attorney Kevin Kite at Carroll, Boe, and Pell, PC, regarding the town's animal control ordinance seeking guidance on improvements for the board to consider in the next revision. ACO Chuck Webber was present for the discussion. The group reviewed the various points from K. Kite. Rebecca will send information to John and Carin about the drafting of the policy and the recommendations from VLCT that were considered. The board will think about the information from K. Kite and consider revisions at a future meeting. Rebecca will distribute notes from the drafting of the current policy and the VLCT model policy for reference.

Town meeting preparations:

Koran asked board members to think of any people who are retiring and moving on who have not been mentioned in the town report. These folks are usually recognized at town meeting. The board needs to plan for the virtual meeting and include these acknowledgements.

There will be a practice session at the next meeting using the webinar platform so everyone can be familiar with the tools for 2/27.

Koran asked about the plan regarding ballots. Amy stated that the town clerk's office will receive requests for ballots only. There will not be a mass mailing of ballots to all. More information will be distributed via FPF and mailed flyer.

Bills/orders

Motion: Carin McCarthy made a motion to approve the bills/orders as presented. Nancy Boss second.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

Minutes of 1/19

Postponed to next meeting.

Mail and correspondence. None

Motion to adjourn at 7:16 pm: John Painter, Carin McCarthy 2nd.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Elder
Selectboard Assistant