

Starksboro Selectboard Meeting
Minutes of 6/21/22
Unapproved

Board members present: Nancy Boss, Eric Cota, Koran Cousino, John Painter

Unable to attend: Carin McCarthy

Others present: Rebecca Elder, Amy McCormick, Nancy Cornell, Herb Olson, Dennis Casey, Susan Klaiber, Alan Quitner, Patrick Reen, Marikate Kelley, Dawn Griswold, Krista Siringo, David Fontaine,

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. by Koran Cousino at Town Clerk's office and via Zoom.

MAUSD withdrawal process

Sup. Patrick Reen, MAUSD Board chair Dawn Griswold, Merger Study Committee Chair Marikate Kelley, and MAUSD Community Engagement committee member Krista Siringo joined the meeting seeking to understand the point of view of the town as the withdrawal process proceeds.

K. Cousino stated that Starksboro has taken a different stance than the Town of Lincoln. The selectboard has advocated in a different way. The Selectboard feels they exist to do town business and they wanted to stay out of the political aspect. Each member has his or her own personal opinion; the board as a body wanted to address the town residents' concerns that were voiced and presented via petition.

Sup. Reen: The MAUSD board has work to do however the Starksboro selectboard has the authority based on the 2nd passed article to stop the process. Does the SB intend to exercise that authority? If so, then MAUSD doesn't have the responsibility to educate the other towns to make a decision. However, if there will be vote by all the towns, the MAUSD needs to know.

K. Cousino: Unless the requests made by the Save Our Schools group and by the Town have been met, the Selectboard will not change course. They are acting on the will of the voters. If those conditions are met, then they would change course.

M. Kelley asked if the Selectboard is up to date on the current article language – no school closing for 4 yrs and a closing would require 2/3 vote of the board and all the voters in the newly formed district.

M. Kelley stated the Merger Study Committee likes small schools and agrees that they meet the needs of students; the group doesn't want community schools to close absent something unforeseeable, however, a firm commitment cannot be made promising they will stay open indefinitely. H.176 statute provides some off ramps and she suggests talking to legal counsel about the details. A summary of the legislation and the complete text (180 pages) is available online.

The MAUSD group said the Agency of Education conveyed that if Starksboro moves forward with withdrawal then the AOE would recommend the whole district be deconstructed.

E. Cota asked if the committee would guarantee protection from closing for the Town for Robinson School.

K. Cousino asked what the fear is from the merger committee regarding providing that guarantee for Robinson to stay open? The town wants to stay in the district if our needs can be met and they are not trying to hold the district hostage. M. Kelley said the committee fears "what is best for mine vs. what is best for all" when thinking of the entire district. A large piece is declining enrollment.

K. Siringo asked how can we sustain the schools and the district. The merger would capitalize on the middle and high school collaboration. The towns need to come to some common understanding. There is a really keen interest in compromise and she sees the merger as the best way so that we don't chip away at programs and can keep town schools. Re: mistrust and fear – thinks it is unfortunate that folks are focused on specific language instead of potential and opportunities. She thinks there is still room to make

different decision and was hoping for a slice of daylight. She stated she thinks we are better together; want to figure this out and perceives this discussion as a distraction from our goals.

K. Cousino – When [the town] voted to come together, we had the right to vote. It is easy for members of other towns to say we are not compromising. But the proposal from Sup. Reen puts certain towns on high alert for closure. It could have been Monkton instead of Lincoln or Starksboro. She asked folks to put yourself in our shoes and think of how much you care for your community school and the role it plays. We are doing what the voters asked of us.

J. Painter – We don't have the freedom to change the will of the town and vote. Those who said no on #2 was because they didn't want an "off ramp"; regardless of what the selectboard thinks, we are bound by the voters.

N. Boss – In response to Krista Siringo, we are still very hopeful the district can stay together; hopes Lincoln will come back. The Levenson report offers some serious ways to come together that enables us to collaborate and preserve the opportunities with middle and high and without needing to change governance. This is the district we have and we still think it can be financially viable.

H. Olson – Agrees. We are better together. He stated to Dawn Griswold and Patrick Reen that the SOS group would like to reach out and work together for the district and town; whether or not Starkboro withdraws, the boundaries are one thing but community is still here regardless of the outcomes.

M. Kelley – She is glad to have the clarity about the decision; in terms of trying to provide opportunities, saving \$ on admin to move money to programs; people at Mt Abe and Vergennes are looking out for their kids; without having shared governance there are going to be personal interests that affect decisions.

P. Reen – Projections on the saving is \$5M annually that at least maintains programming or can potentially expand; if the two districts remain separate, don't find the efficiencies. If the savings don't come, there will be limited savings, reduced programs, or simply not enough students.

Lincoln lost 40%, Robinson lost 30% - this lower population will work its way through the HS.

Road Foreman Report

- Paul is requesting another raise. Board will consider.
- Josh to meet with ACRPC Transportation Coord. Mike Winslow regarding Better Back Roads/ACRPC grants. The crew will continue ditching on hydraulically connected segments that have been identified.
- Culvert on States Prison Hollow that will wash out soon. Crew will be replacing ASAP; the road will need to be closed for a couple days. The issue was discovered when mowing.
- Varney Hill Rd – A big culvert needs replacing. It is too deep on one end to access with town equipment. Crew will need to have work contracted or rent equipment. Ditching is needed; more than 8% grade so needs stone lining. Josh will see what funds are left in July.
- Pete Bouvier has been working 2 days a week, which has been good for progress.
- Note to discuss Unifirst contract. Cost is \$5K/annually for uniforms and rags. Amy/Rebecca will research when contract is up. Get costs for purchasing washer/dryer for the garage instead. Consider stipend or reimbursement for work uniforms; possibly order tshirts/sweatshirts. Rebecca can work with Josh on orders.

Warrants for Bills, Orders, and Payroll

Motion: Nancy Boss made a motion to approve the warrants as presented. John Painter second.

Vote: Motion approved (EC was absent, KC, NB, JP voted)

Finance Updates

Danielle Hubble (consultant) met with NEMRC accountant to evaluate the current accounts for corrections needed, priority items for end of year clean up, and system improvements. Danielle is the Town Treasurer for the Town of New Haven and is well-versed in the accounting systems needed for municipal offices. She has shifted IRS payments online, payroll systems have been streamlined. She will

work with NEMRC to ensure procedures are updated and account statements balanced. She noted that the bank statements have been reconciled but she did not find info on balancing. This should be added to internal audit procedures.

- Discussion of use of reserve funds and reimbursements to general fund
- Danielle recommends making fixes and then get an audit this year, if possible.
- Amy and Danielle closed down the grand list and they sent back over-payments. This should be done in January each year. Ensure procedure is written and put on calendar.
- Danielle is available to help the town through December as needed.

Town Clerk Updates

Flag pole for old town office needs lighting – Amy asked if it can be solar based. The board will ask the energy committee for cost effective recommendations and to get bids.

ARPA Committee

- Carrie Austgen, Laura Nugent, and Katie Kuzio joined to talk about the newly formed committee's charge and to seek guidance on timelines and considerations. Katie had talked to Porter Knight about the process in Bristol so far. The group asked about desired public involvement in the proposals. Passive involvement from public at this point since it is the committee's role to vet the proposals and give feedback when more information is needed from applicants.
- The Selectboard advised that the committee think about how they wish to receive a proposal and what info they want to see. Proposals should include a cover sheet summary. Give applicants the rubric as a guide. Give a list of items to include in the proposal.
- This will be an iterative process; if a proposal doesn't meet the requirements, committee can go back to the group and ask for more info, make recommendations to develop viable proposal.
- Rubric – Use it to grade the proposals but it is not a total score model; not a grading system; a tool to use but not exclusively
- Subjective interpretation - the committee should use collective judgement and have flexibility in consideration of proposals
- Vetting costs of projects – The town policy needs to be adhered to for any project chosen. Rebecca will include in the committee binder located at the town office. Committee needs to know what triggers bidding and what is required. Applicants will need to do the bidding process.
- Timeline – Dec. 2024 commitments – contracts in place at that time.
- Discussion of back out schedule for the committee to review proposals and make recommendations to the Selectboard.

Jerusalem Schoolhouse Roof

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to approve the increase in cost for Jerusalem Schoolhouse roof replacement up to \$1700 as quoted. Nancy Boss second.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

Fire Station #2 proposal to DRB

Susan Klaiber summarized the last DRB hearing outcome and then 5/14 memo from the committee to the selectboard. The JCC recommends going back to the DRB with the application as it is. If the DRB decides not to approve, then the Town can decide how to proceed as additional funds would need to be spent on architectural drawings for changes. Decision is up to the Selectboard at that time. Another option if the project is not approved would be to shelve the project and wait for zoning bylaw changes that may be considered in the next year that could affect the requirements for the project. JCC says this is the best proposal and they want to complete the process with the DRB. The Selectboard will request hearing be scheduled as soon as possible.

Clerk of the Works – The board discussed appointing Tom Estey and providing a stipend. Koran will talk to Tom before making formal appointment.

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to approve the KnowBe4 security contract for 3 years for a total of \$1309.37 and authorized Koran cousin to sign on behalf of the board. Nancy Boss second.

Discussion: The contract is partially reimbursed by VLCT PACIF insurance for years 1 and 2.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

Energy Committee Appointments

Motion: Nancy Boss made a motion to approve the slate of nominees to the Energy Committee. Eric Cota second. **Vote:** Motion approved unanimously.

Richard “Digger” Faesy – 3 years

Jeff Dunham – 2 years

Megan Nedzinski – 2 years

Pete Antos-Ketcham – 1 year

Robyn King – 1 year

DRB appointment process

Rebecca summarized the current status of interest from FPF post. There are two regular 3-year seats up for appointment held by Richard Warren and Arnell Paquette. Both are interested in continuing. Two new folks expressed interest as well. The selectboard will invite all to the next meeting or ask that an interest statement be submitted. Appointments to be made following that discussion.

Selectboard Roundtable

New Hinesburg store – John mentioned that he spoke with the new store owner who is community-minded and looking to have a local presence. There may be collaboration opportunity and it is new local business that needs community support. They will be getting more local products, setting up a deli, etc.

Executive Session

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:23 pm to discuss personnel matters. Nancy Boss second. Rebecca Elder was invited into the session.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to exit Executive Session at 8:45. Nancy Boss second.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

No decisions were made as a result of executive session.

Motion to adjourn: Eric Cota made the motion at 8:46 p.m. John Painter second.

Vote: Motion approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Elder
SB Assistant