

Starksboro Selectboard
Minutes of 6/6/23
Unapproved

Board members present: Koran Cousino, Carin McCarthy, John Painter, Nancy Boss, Eric Cota
Others present: Rebecca Elder, Josh Martell, Marin Howell

Koran Cousino called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m.

Visitor's Business- none

Road Foreman's Report

Gravel crushing – This annual work is performed by McCullough. The costs went up from what was anticipated in the budget.

- Loader rental is needed but will be in the next fiscal year, after July 1. It is necessary to use during the crushing process. Josh will call for quotes from G.Stone and others.
- Road crew will each need to work at least one Friday to help with crushing and transport. Discussion of having staff trade another weekday for a Friday to avoid overtime expenses given current budget constraints. Josh will speak with the crew about schedule.

Brown Hill East (FEMA project) – Formal bid process was managed by Otter Creek Eng. (OCE) The bids were reviewed by the Selectboard along with the recommendation from OCE to offer the award of the final bid to J. Hutchins, which was \$14K less than the other bid. Two bids were received: Parent Construction and J. Hutchins. Both are reputable companies that do a lot of work in the local area and in Vermont. Discussion about the bid amounts and a discrepancy calculation error that was noted in the OCE cover letter (difference between written numbers and the numeric column).

MOTION: Nancy Boss moved to approve the bid from J. Hutchins in the amount of \$444,660 as presented and recommended by Otter Creek Engineering for work on Brown Hill East Road Culvert Replacement. John Painter seconded. **Vote:** Approved by majority of 3 (NB, JP, CM). One no vote (EC). The chair did not vote.

Beaver dams and road maintenance – A letter authored by Jennifer Lovett of South Starksboro was received via email with an email petition stating the names of 20 co-signers who live throughout Starksboro.

Josh described a beaver dam along Robert Young Road that he has been monitoring since last fall. He was contacted via email by a resident who was concerned about the beavers in February. Josh and the town clerk's office staff also received calls from two other residents along the road who were concerned about the road stability and culvert. The road foreman determined no action was needed at the time and conveyed he would continue to monitor the situation. Once the snow and ice began to melt and produced more water, the water began flowing around and under the culvert causing infrastructure problems. There were rocks there to stabilize the bank, but the beavers had removed mud around/beneath the culvert and thus affected the flow and resulting impacts.

The dam was then removed, and a cage grate installed to prevent the beavers from building in the culvert where the mud and sticks cause damage. Stone was put around the culvert to prevent the beavers from continuing to get mud in that limited area and to prevent further destructive issues in the culvert. This work was timed to prevent the beavers and their young from being trapped and frozen in water.

For now, things are stable, but Josh anticipates the beavers will return and try to rebuild. There is ample room and space for beaver dam rebuilding in the surrounding area and is fine if it doesn't affect the road or culvert.

The letter from residents suggested a solution called the “Beaver Deceiver.” The device is similar to what Josh built. Though installation of that device can be done for free, it is preferred for all work in and around the town roads to be done by and/or under the direction of the road foreman. The primary resource the town needs to protect is the road and culvert to ensure safe passage for residents and emergency vehicles. There is the intention to protect wildlife and habitat to the extent possible while protecting town infrastructure. The board is being asked to weigh in on something that needs further research and consideration, and the board must rely on the knowledge of our road foreman who has experience addressing beaver situations on municipal roads in Bristol and surrounding towns. Josh and Eric said the solution used in Bristol works well, prevents the need to go inside the culvert to make repairs and remove debris (unsafe work), and has limited impact on the beavers, fish, or other aquatic life.

The petition presented was signed by members of the conservation commission. Carin said they may be able to provide additional information about the various impacts of different solutions. At the same time, the staff and board will be looking at the municipal and infrastructure impacts and will weigh the conservation goals. Koran stated she did not support making wholesale changes to our policy or approach at this time until further information is gathered and consideration for various impacts can be evaluated. Board members discussed how to gather information and agreed to pause and allow time for research including outreach and/or possible invitations to State wildlife experts, road experts, and Skip Lisle (Beaver Deceiver program) in the future.

The board and staff will do its due diligence to understand the situation, researching options that have been used in similar situations, and taking time pause and determine potential solutions. The intent is to balance the need to protect wildlife resources and the key infrastructure of our town.

Gran Fondo cycling event is on June 24. The director emailed Josh and Rebecca requesting that the roads on the route (Jerusalem Rd) not be graded in advance of the event as it has a negative impact on the riders. The board and staff regard this as an insensitive request: the town’s priority is to keep roads in good condition for daily travel by our residents and visitors. Regular maintenance will be performed as needed at the road foreman’s discretion.

[ARPA Committee Report Review](#)

The board members were provided with the complete committee report and recommendations to review in advance of the meeting. Koran suggested the group read through the list, summaries, and preliminary recommendations tonight to start the process. It was noted that from the initial meeting of the committee that Koran attended that there were priority projects earmarked by the Selectboard (e.g. land records digital archiving project, creation of town administrator position, etc). The committee charge was to make prioritized recommendations to rank projects with the final awards and amount to be allocated determined by the Selectboard. The committee recommended allocations based on the full disbursement therefore reconsideration of amounts will be made the board after review as described below.

Summary of proposals in ranked order by committee recommendation with notes from discussion:

- 1. Fire Dept. Equipment | \$61,868 request**
 - Full support from committee; selectboard agrees
- 2. Meetinghouse/Starksboro Cooperative Preschool | original request \$295,067; rev. \$222,067**
 - Committed recommended \$132,000 for direct program capacity expansion for preschool and improving safety.
 - Meetinghouse is not a town-owned building
 - Childcare and early education is a high priority vs. historic preservation and restoration
 - Selectboard will review complete proposal and consider additional details at a future meeting.
- 3. Jerusalem Schoolhouse Lead Remediation | \$6,100 request**
 - Committee recommended \$6,100
 - Proposal is to install temporary pipes to ensure safe potable water to allow the building to be open. It is currently closed for public use.

- Update: Water test results have not been received yet. The faucet has been replaced to help isolate the source of lead. Decision on hold pending information.
4. **Town Hall building/Starksboro Public Library | \$203,000 request**
 - Committee recommended \$122,032
 - Selectboard discussed briefly. The library is an important resource for the community that is currently open and ADA accessible on the first floor. While restoration and access to the second floor is a good vision for the future, there are other buildings in town that need priority attention. The group agreed that some seed money to help with matching funds for library specific grant funds would be appropriate. Further consideration at a future meeting.
 5. **Starksboro Public Library HVAC Improvement Project | \$40,000 request**
 - Committee recommended \$40,000
 - Selectboard discussion included request to review the complete proposal. Town purchasing policy requires multiple bids for consideration and that will be needed for pricing and comparative options to review before final decisions are made.
 - The committee recommends that the value of the project for the town is amplified by the installation of sufficient PV panels (proposed on the town pavilion) to power the HVAC system.
 - Further discussion at a future meeting.
 6. **Town Pavilion | orig. request \$20,000; rev. to \$33,000**
 - Committee recommended allocation of \$22,500 based on financial data from March 13, 2023.
 - Updated fundraising reflects \$17,500 remaining for the request
 - Selectboard discussion acknowledges the major effort to fundraise for this project. The community and volunteers have stepped forward and made the pavilion a priority through donations of all sizes and types of in-kind support. Funding for this project is likely to complete and provide this important resource for the town.
 7. **Project READ | \$25,000 request**
 - Committee recommended \$16,000
 - Selectboard reviewed the recommendation and will consider at a future meeting. The group agreed that the program is important and valuable to the community and is successful in connecting families with young children before they reach school-age.
 8. **Pavilion Solar Project | request Part I = \$20,000; Part II = \$10,000**
 - Committee recommended \$25,000
 - Selectboard discussion included information that was shared at the June 4 meeting about the option to have solar panels serve as the roof itself. The board wants to review the complete proposals and needs more information before considering further. Discuss information and follow up at the next meeting.
 9. **Jerusalem Community Center Architect Fees for revised site plan and fire station #2 design (Jerusalem #3 proposal) | \$6,800 request**
 - Committee recommended \$6,800
 - Selectboard agreed with recommendation. Work is needed to keep the project moving forward and meet the requirements of the DRB approval for a final mylar.
 10. **Safe Water Infrastructure for Starksboro Homes (SWISH) | \$110,000 request**
 - Committee recommended \$50,000 with conditional changes (details in the committee final report)
 - Selectboard discussion included history of the water co-op, how it came to be and its role in providing water to the village. It is a complicated system and proposal needs further discussion and information. The selectboard requested the full proposal and will discuss follow up at the next meeting.
 11. **Digitizing Land Records | \$29,000 request**
 - Committee recommended \$29,000 per the Selectboard and Town Clerk's request
 - Selectboard agrees and funds to be allocated.

12. Friends of Robinson Playground Equipment | \$22,000 request

- Committee recommended \$10,000; original request was \$12,000 and the committee requested a revised proposal with ADA accessible equipment. That increased the proposal to \$22,000.
- The request is from the Friends of Robinson, a parent-led group, that would be a pass-through for the project. The asset would become owned by MAUSD for Robinson school.
- Selectboard discussion included request for more information. The diagram of the ADA accessible structure was displayed. The board will consider further at a future meeting.

Support materials for several proposals were printed and distributed at the meeting for review in advance of the next meeting on 6/20. At that time, the board will have a brief discussion, identify projects requiring more information and follow up with invitations to selectboard regular meetings in July.

Current Business

1. Warrants

Motion: Nancy Boss moved to approve the warrants for A/P and payroll. Eric Cota seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

2. **Delinquent Tax Collector:** Request from Amy McCormick (DTC) to wipe out amounts owed under \$1 and to waive interest that accrued at the first of the month on 2 payments received in one month but posted in the next totaling \$13.24.

Motion: Eric Cota moved to approve the request from the Delinquent Tax Collector as presented. Carin McCarthy seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

3. Jerusalem Fire Station and Schoolhouse requests:

Motion: Nancy Boss moved to approve the proposed architect fees to adjust the final site plan for the approved Fire Station 2 project. John Painter seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Motion: Eric Cota moved to approve the wastewater permit amendment as presented and authorize Rebecca Elder and Koran Cousino to sign on behalf of the town. Carin McCarthy seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

4. Purchasing Policy Update

The updated draft reflects a list of persons/positions with permission to make purchasing decisions was updated and some minor edits. Carin asked if in-kind and donated labor and services should be covered in this policy. The group agreed language needed to be added to this policy or point to a stand-alone policy for that type of work. Rebecca will research and bring language back to the board for consideration in July.

5. Minutes

Motion: John Painter made a motion to approve the minutes of 5/16/23. Nancy Boss seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Town Administrator Update

1. **Financial Audit preparation** – The external audit process continues. Additional materials were requested by RHR Smith and staff has been collecting and providing documents as needed. A follow up meeting will be scheduled in the next 2 weeks followed by another on-site visit.
2. **Building maintenance plans**
 - Post office – Koran and Rebecca following up for site visit for contractor
 - Food Shelf – Purchase new toilet, request quotes for new exterior door and lock, consider other minor repairs for energy efficiency and to prevent rodent and insect issues.
 - PO parking lot – gravel to be added to smooth transition from new pavement to ground level. Road crew will do the work this summer.

3. **Zoning updates:** Nancy has been in the office 3-4 days per week for training and to review permits. There are several complex zoning requests and enforcement issues that are time consuming and require research from multiple staff members. Site visits have been completed to various locations too. Nancy, Rebecca, and Amy are working to ensure the flow of zoning work is being managed in a timely manner with the resources available. 25 zoning permits have been issued since 1/1/23.
4. **Finance position:** advertised for three weeks in the Addison Independent and online. One application was received today will be reviewed. The board agreed to expand advertising to attract additional candidates before conducting interviews. Julie's last day is July 13.
5. **Fixed Asset Service options** – Fixed asset client database management service is \$250 annually with RHR Smith and is recommended. Non-attest accounting services are not needed at this time. Rebecca to complete contract for annual service.
6. **ARPA fiscal recovery funds** – There are additional funding opportunities available to municipalities for specific areas including flood resilience, stormwater management, renewable energy, and rural water systems. Projects in town may be eligible for these funds and options are being evaluated by staff and various committee members. Rebecca is sharing information with various stakeholders and committees and the library board so opportunities can be considered.
7. **Digitization expenses** – Rebecca asked the board to consider release of ARPA funds for the land records digitization to help reflect actual expenditures for FY23 as we approach the end of year.

MOTION: John Painter moved to approve the transfer of \$29,000 from the ARPA recovery fund account to the general fund for the expense to digitize the town land records. Eric Cota seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Mail Review

See above re: letter about beavers and Robert Young Rd.

Selectboard Roundtable

- Carin stated she had been contacted directly by S. Starksboro resident Charlotte Sullivan about the beaver issue.
- June 4 event was a success. There were nearly 200 people who attended the various portions of the day including the pie contest, the Meetinghouse lawn sale, fire truck demonstrations, live music and hot dog BBQ, information tables from the Energy Committee and Planning Commission and other town groups. A major highlight was showing off the progress on the pavilion structure with framing complete. Another community event will be planned for the fall/harvest time. Appreciation was expressed for all the volunteers and groups that helped make the event happen.

Executive Session

Motion: Carin McCarthy moved to enter executive session per 1 VSA §313a3 personnel with Rebecca Elder present. Eric Cota seconded. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Motion: Eric Cota moved to exit executive session at 8:35 p.m. John Painter seconded. **Motion approved unanimously.**

No action was taken as a result of executive session.

Motion to adjourn at 8:36 p.m.: Nancy Boss moved, John Painter seconded.
Motion approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Elder, Town Administrator