

Starksboro Selectboard
Minutes of 10/6/20
Approved

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

Others present: Robert Turner, Cheryl Estey, Amy McCormick

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

The board reviewed the agenda for any changes or additions:

1. Add the post office lease to discuss and consider signing

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.

Visitor's business: none

Road Foreman's Report

Tony sent an email summary of current road topics (he was unable to attend the meeting).

- Post office lot repairs: Funds aren't available for repaving; Tony provided a quote for immediate repairs for hot-mix patching. The lot is in bad shape and this was not anticipated cost for this fiscal year. Eric noted that if a plow truck were to hit one of potholes and be damaged, the repairs would be more costly than paving investment. The board gave Tony authorization to proceed. The board still wants to schedule the paving and this should be noted for the budget discussion.
- FEMA: Storage of materials at the pit requires a long-term permit. The State has issued a temporary permit for the work that was done for the Halloween 2019 storm.
- Brown Hill East reimbursement funds have been released to the State. We may want to reach out to the State delegation to help facilitate fund reimbursement. Discuss at future meeting.
- Crushing of gravel is on schedule.

ACRPC grant letter of intent:

Motion: Nancy Boss made a motion to authorize Eric Cota as the signer. John Painter second.

Motion passed unanimously.

Reserve Fund discussion

Robert met with Tony and Eric to discuss the reserve fund projections. The goal is to project out 30-40 years to continue making recommendations at town meeting that will keep the fund solvent. To do so, estimated amounts are needed for new equipment and # of years for useful life. Tom Estey and Tony have been clear that keeping equipment too long results in more repair costs. Tony mentioned programs used by other towns: trading in equipment sooner to get more value towards new equipment. Tony collected information about the current fleet and current values for the trucks, grader, and loader for trades. Robert says annual depreciation is 3-4%. The grader estimate was accurate. Loader estimate was lower. Truck estimates are accurate as we have been replacing regularly.

The Town could stop financing and instead pay for equipment outright. Robert stated it would be nearly twice as expensive to go with the early trade approach (3 years of use instead of 8). Tony and Eric will look at the data. The curve is steep, and value lost is greatest in the initial 3 years. The best fiscal plan is likely to stay with the current projections. If there is a shortfall in the fund, the Selectboard can change from a solvent fund to an insolvent fund and then transfer funds back to make whole.

Tony said the last town report showed a 9-year useful life vs. 8-year. He stated that 8 years is what should be used for projections. The board agreed and charts should be updated accordingly. The board needs to consider adding funds to the equipment fund annually so there is more flexibility. It is likely needed for this coming year.

Robert, Tony, and the board members need to look at the emergency fund again and evaluate for November. Robert will speak with Celine about this as well.

Minutes of 9/15/20

Motion: John Painter made a motion to approve the minutes of 9/15/20. Nancy Boss second.

Motion carried unanimously.

Snow removal service: Pete Antos-Ketcham is willing to continue this year for removing snow and ice for the town office, library path, and the side lot area for pedestrians. Salt supply should come from the salt shed. The board needs to confirm compensation and then confirm with Pete.

Pottery Studio lease – Insurance binder is still outstanding. Letter was received on 9/21/20. The rent has been paid in full through the lease term.

Green Lantern Solar

The board reviewed the request from GLS for a revised MOU. There are minor adjustments in the MOU. Board members preferred to have legal review prior to the next meeting. Koran to contact Jim Carroll.

Warrants/Bills

Koran noted there were some regularly occurring bills that were paid out of cycle due to the SB meeting schedule. There is one warrant for these items that were paid and is separate from the regular warrants for approval.

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to approve the warrants for bills/order as presented by the Treasurer. Nancy Boss second.

Motion carried unanimously.

Selectboard vacancy

There is a current board member vacancy with the resignation of Greg Hahr, who moved out of Starksboro on September 15, 2020 and was unable to continue serving in the role.

The board agreed to post the opening and interview people who may be interested in filling the position until the next town meeting (March 2021). Rebecca will post on FPF and plan to have interviews at the next meeting on 10/20. Depending on the response and number of people interested, the board will determine appointment.

Zoning Administrator position

Dennis Casey was present for the conversation and presented the perspective and recommendations from the Planning Commission. Koran asked the board to consider whether the position should remain at 24 hours including administrative support for the PC/DRB or whether to consider a different model with a split position. Eric spoke with potential candidate who would be interested in +/- 15 hours a week.

Denny noted that Rebecca took on more support for the PC and coordinating efforts to bring in speakers, and expanding conversations related to planning. She also provided DRB support, writing of the findings and conclusions, and preparing hearing materials. Amy shared some of the perspective from working with Dave Wetmore (previous ZA) and when he left, the feedback he offered about the number of night meetings, and comparisons with the zoning office work in New Haven and Starksboro. (Amy worked with Dave Wetmore in both towns.)

The board will consider placing an ad with two models – 24 hours/week (does not offer FT benefits) or divided responsibility between a ZA/AZA with fewer hours per position. Eric noted that Starksboro may be reaching the point of needing a full-time administrator in the same way Bristol and Hinesburg have.

Jeff Keeney is willing to fill in as Interim ZA for 1-2 months until the hiring process is complete. Amy McCormick agreed to provide some support from the office for research and administrative work.

Motion: Nancy Boss made a motion to hire Jeff Keeney and appoint as the Interim Zoning Administrator until a permanent hire is made. John Painter second.

Motion approved unanimously.

Put together a couple different ads that could be put and the next meeting decide. Think about the options in the meantime.

Amy said that the DRB and PC responsibilities are heavily involved with the ZA daily work.

John: trying to clarify the

Mail review: The United Way sent a letter about requesting a waiver for petitions to get on the town meeting agenda. Due to the pandemic, it is harder to gather signatures as would be done in other years. The Sec. of State's office may be issuing guidelines. Currently, petitions are due by end of January. Town clerk has received at least 4 letters of request already.

BCA meeting to be scheduled prior to Election Day.

Selectboard concerns:

Meeting structure and agendas: John asked about the length of meetings and what is the norm, both in Starksboro and elsewhere. He wondered if non-essential/urgent items could be addressed once a month instead of at each meeting. Is energy being spent on things the board does not need to review or weigh in on? Nancy agreed and said she has struggled with the length of meetings as well. Eric reported that Bristol SB meetings are generally 3-3.5 hours. Cheryl said some board's will use a timer to keep things moving and not allow discussions to run on. Koran said as chair she wants people to be included and offer their input, but that needs to be balanced with keeping the meetings on topic and decisions being made on a timely basis.

Agenda development: The board asked to have the regular list of standing items circulated when creating the agenda draft. If there are no new updates, then item will not be included on the final agenda. Eric will talk with Tony about road foreman updates and frequency and decide if the update should be monthly with email updates in between/as needed.

The group discussed various ways to help make meetings proceed efficiently and adjust the agenda to help facilitation of topics. The board would like to set a timeframe and deadline for completion/resolution when new topics are added to the agenda.

Workplan review: Postpone; some items to be scheduled once in-person meetings can resume including policy review. Rebecca will provide an updated draft for the next meeting.

Building & maintenance

Town Clerk's office: Tom Estey is willing to be the repair/handyman for town buildings. The ramp was evaluated, and Tom suggested replacing the boards with pressure-treated wood. Tom will complete the work. A new drop box was installed on back porch for secure drop off for items such as mail and ballots.

Post office issues: Koran spoke with Bill Vincent, Huntington Postmaster, who also oversees the Starksboro PO. He said there is a rat infestation problem at the Starksboro P.O. outside the building in a hole. All bird seed, feeders, etc. have been removed. Koran will speak with Tom about the possibility of setting traps to address the problem before calling an exterminator.

Post office lease: Koran has worked with the lease negotiation contact person (Janet Hopkins) and reached compromise on some issues including snow removal and use of air conditioners and made a map of what is being rented (not the whole property); termination notice from USPS was extended to 120 days—this is not reciprocal; this is a standard USPS lease. Eric stated his only concern was the termination period. The commission fee was discussed, and Koran will confirm that it was either added to the rent or removed entirely. If answer received, then the lease will be ready for signing at the next meeting.

No executive session was needed. Discussion to occur at next meeting regarding scope of Selectboard Assistant's work and other projects when Rebecca is present.

Motion to adjourn: Nancy Boss made a motion to adjourn at 7:25pm. Eric Cota second.

Motion carried (KC, EC, NB)

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Elder
Selectboard Assistant

Next meeting: Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.

November meetings: 10th and 17th (no meeting on Election Day 11/3)