

Starksboro Selectboard meeting
April 7, 2020 Minutes
Held via conference call
Unapproved

Board members present: Nancy Boss, Eric Cota, Koran Cousino, Greg Hahr, John Painter
Others present: Rebecca Elder, Cheryl Estey, Amy McCormick, Celine Coon, Tony Porter, Robert Turner, Charlene Phelps, Eric Kallio, Norman Cota

The meeting was opened by Chair Koran Cousino at 5:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted via audio conference call with information provided to the public for the ability to participate. She began by reading the following statement about why the meetings are being held this way:

As Chair of the Starksboro Selectboard, I find that, 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 to this meeting. However, in accordance with the temporary amendments to the Open Meeting Law, I confirm that we are:

- a) *Providing public access to the meeting by telephone conference call, with additional access offered through video conference means for future meetings. We are using Waitsfield/Champlain Valley telecom conference for this remote meeting. All members of the Selectboard have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if desired, participate in this meeting by speaking up during the call and being recognized by the Chair;*
- b) *Providing public notice of instructions for accessing the meeting. We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing this meeting, including how to access the meeting using telephone means in our posted meeting agenda. Instructions have also been provided on the town website at: www.starksborovt.org.*
- c) *Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access. If anybody has a problem, please contact Rebecca Elder via phone or text at (802) 917-4425; and*
- d) *Continuing the meeting if necessary. In the event the public is unable to access this meeting, it will be continued to a time and place certain.*

Please note that all votes taken during this meeting that are not unanimous will be done by roll call vote, in accordance with the law.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance of all members participating in the meeting.

Review of agenda for additions or adjustments: NONE

Road Foreman's Report

- Tony Porter reported that the roads are starting to dry out. The typical spots throughout town are muddy and the crew is working to address those.

- An emergency culvert repair on Big Hollow is needed when the materials arrive. The project on Brown Hill was delayed. Tony said he will have to hire a contractor as the crew does not have the capacity to do the work right now. The board said okay to proceed if it is essential road maintenance and CDC guidelines can be followed. If the weather doesn't cooperate, the work will be postponed as long as possible.

Koran asked about road crew general operations and if the crew can continue work while practicing CDC recommendations? Tony stated that each crew member is using one piece of equipment and not sharing. They are disinfecting surfaces and equipment during the day and at the end of the day. They are not in the garage at the same time for the most part and everyone can maintain more than 6' distance. Office is not open to the public and deliveries are arranged.

The crew is focused on essential road maintenance through mud season and keeping roads passable, especially for emergency services. VT AOT has shut down grant related work and have asked for all current work to cease. Their recommendations are to do as little as you needed to do for public safety. Crew would need to be distanced and wearing masks outside of vehicles per the Governor's orders.

USDA-NRCS grant discussion:

Koran asked for updates from the landowner conversations. Eric said all those he spoke with were in favor of the work being done and would sign consent forms. John reported the same. One landowner asked if there would be any required contribution. The grant specifies 75% payment from USDA/NRCS and 25% from the town. Tony said he doesn't believe the grant will allow for use of equipment or machines in/near the Lewis Creek. He thinks the contract reference is to small equipment such as chain saws and hand equipment. The board did not wish to proceed until confirmation about what types of equipment and work would be allowed. Tony will call Mike LaPointe to clarify and report back to the board. No action taken.

Telecommunication Tower Proposal - Eric Kallio – Industrial Communications

- Eric Kallio gave a site visit report: he met Tony Porter at the proposed site (former town landfill area) and identified an idea that would be ideal for the tower. The location is in the area to the left of the solar panels, north/northwest.
- E. Kallio asked about the beginning of the driveway accessing the parcel. There is a survey plat dated May 3, 2006 with some information. Is the entry still owned by the Huber family and is there any existing agreement for access? Would an access easement be required? Koran stated that the access issues were sorted out in the legal review of the lease signed with Green Lantern Solar.
- E. Kallio noted that the proposed lease area for the tower would go right up to the property boundary line, therefore a waiver would be needed through a DRB review.
- E. Kallio stated his company wants to continue moving forward and would like to schedule another site visit. After that site visit, he could send a copy of the lease for board review. The town will follow up on how the access issue was resolved for the solar project and notify Mr. Kallio.
- Koran asked Tony if he had any input on the site plan proposal about road crew access and use of the site. Tony said there were no issues other than a stone pile that can be moved if needed. John Painter asked about the approximate size of the proposed tower: roughly 140 ft ; fenced area of 80x80; general visibility would only be of the top part of tower, which would be lattice type rather than a mono-pole to better blend with the landscape.

Emergency Management Discussion

Review of essential functions – The board asked Cheryl and Amy to report on general office operations. They have kept the office staffed Monday through Thursday, 8:30-4:30. Email and phone service for the public has been good and needed. There have been a lot of requests and inquiries. Most researchers are understanding about limited hours. Staff can scan most documents and email them. If an extensive search is needed, then an appointment is made: *all entering the building must wear gloves and face mask*. With the April 1 deadline for dog

licenses, there was a lot of activity related to dog registrations. Nancy Boss asked if people coming need to bring their own PPE—Cheryl stated she has a stock available to provide if visitors do not come with their own.

Delinquent Taxes – Amy McCormick updated the board about questions related to delinquent property tax collections and accrual of interest and fees. She and Celine believe the authority for waiving interest lies with the Board of Civil Authority. There has been conflicting information on the muni-net forum. Amy will follow up with VLCT for guidance about the legal authority and next steps and contact BCA members. The selectboard agreed in theory with the concept of relief for a few months, in line with the banking industry's steps to help people.

Payroll and HR considerations – Celine updated the board about current staffing and payroll. All staff are continuing to be paid and are working remotely or on site as much as possible given the CDC guidelines. One part-time library employee has not been working due to reduction in services and essential needs. The board is encouraging any employee who has reduced hours to file for unemployment as state guidelines allow. It is up to individuals if they wish to apply.

Celine asked for clarification regarding pay if the roads clear up and crew doesn't have essential work to perform. The board discussed what other towns are doing, including Bristol. Most are designating a special line on timesheets for Covid-19 related hours. This is a fluid situation that the board will continually monitor.

Continuity of Operations Plan – The town staff is assembling information into the recommended emergency management document entitled "Continuity of Operations Plan." This is a key resource for knowing essential town operations and services and who serves in back-up capacity for various key roles.

Tax due date – Property taxes for town residents are due on Nov. 1, 2020 (voted on and approved). The State and Federal governments have extended filing dates from April 1 to July 1. The State takes roughly 6 weeks to process homestead declarations and that date has been moved to July 1 as well. The town staff does not want to have to resend corrected tax bills so they will be determining when to send bills to get them to residents as soon as possible without creating extra work.

Cheryl and Celine stated people need to be reminded many times about any due dates and changes. As soon as the town knows more information should be communicated in a variety of ways (town website, FPF, Facebook, postings in town, and postal mailing). Many reminders will be needed.

Social media policy discussion – Two recent discussions on Facebook prompted the board to think again about the various tools available for sharing information with the public and the goals for using the different platforms. VLCT has a model policy as a starting point for the board. VLCT advises keeping it clear that all modes are one-way communication methods and there are official ways to have two-way communication with the town about policies, complaints, and questions. Social media is simply another tool for sending out information, but not a place for discussion or replies. The board will consider resetting the communication boundaries with the new policy. The Facebook page permissions can be set so that only the town can post on the page and no messaging feature is enabled.

Board members will review the VLCT draft policy and discuss further at the next meeting before making system changes. John Painter will be added as an admin on the page along with Celine, Cheryl, and Rebecca.

Regarding the complaint about the trash services offered by Starksboro, town staff has communicated that the rates have not changed in a few years. The town will ensure the regular rates are posted on the website and will post the information to FPF for clarification and reminder.

Dog licenses: Cheryl asked if the board would waive the dog license late fee for April and May. Many people rely on the rabies clinic, which was cancelled, and most vets are closed.

Motion: Greg Hahr made a motion to waive the late fees for dog licenses until May 31, 2020. Eric Cota second.
Motion carried. (unanimous)

Back-up power for Town Clerk's office: Celine asked about the status of purchase and installation of the alternate back-up power service for the town office. It is needed. If the power were to go out during this pandemic, all communication to the office would be halted (phones, internet, heat). Eric Cota will contact Jackman's to see if they are able to do the installation soon (if it qualifies for essential service and could be done within CDC guidelines).

Town wide reappraisal

Norman Cota attended for the board of Listers to discuss the need for a town-wide reappraisal in the next few years. Koran and Norm gave a short summary of why a town-wide reappraisal is needed and how it affects local tax revenue. Starksboro has been doing a reappraisal roughly every ten years. The process takes two years to complete and the town needs to get on the schedule with a reappraisal team.

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to authorize the Starksboro Listers to begin the process required for scheduling a town-wide reappraisal. Greg Hahr second.

Motion carried. (unanimous)

Amy will contact NEMRC to find out how far out their reappraisal team is scheduling and if they are available. They did the previous reappraisals in town. If they cannot, Amy and the Listers will research other options.

Other lister work: Current Use filing and follow-up administrative work will be needed soon. Norm is still training the newer members, Chuck Webber and Larry Shepard on the process. They need to be in the office together for training as it is hard to do online given the materials that need to be reviewed and the work that must be done together. Norm will discuss options with Chuck and Larry. They may be able to alternate doing some work in the office on Fridays when it is completely closed.

Animal Control update

Koran updated the board on an animal control related issue regarding communications with another town. Rebecca will draft a formal response from the Selectboard and send to Koran to review.

RE: Trombley/Bell dogs: no additional information has been reported. If another complaint is received, the ACO and Sheriff will act accordingly.

Seasonal contracts/mowing

Following up from the last meeting conversation, Rebecca researched information about the current recommendations from VLCT regarding hiring of contractors. The suggested language for labor agreements with contractors was shared with the board for consideration.

Board members discussed the mowing contracts and scope based on size and amount. The town contract for public buildings and for the sports fields are larger contracts and work is performed near parking areas and roads. There are small mowing jobs in the town cemeteries that are limited scope, don't require larger mowing equipment, is often done by hand mower/equipment, and are on properties that secluded and away from residents and roads. The board agreed that a waiver form and agreement will be required for anyone performing services.

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to approve the proposal from Scenic Valley for mowing services for the municipal buildings and areas for the 2019-2020 season. Greg Hahr second.

Motion carried. (unanimous)

Motion: Greg Hahr made a motion to conditionally accept the proposal from Dan Gebo for mowing of the Starksboro sports fields in an amount not to exceed \$3445 annually for three years given that he provides proof of liability insurance. Eric Cota second.

Motion carried. (unanimous)

Maintenance updates

- Town clerk's office – See above; Eric will follow up with Jackmans re: back up generator installation.
- Post office - Rebecca requested shingle roof quotes for the replacement roof from two contractors.

Selectboard Concerns: none

Action Items

Warrants for Bills and Orders

Motion: Nancy Boss made a motion to authorize payment of the bills and orders as presented by the Treasurer. Greg Hahr second.

Motion carried. (unanimous)

Minutes of 3/3/20

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to approve the minutes of March 3, 2020. Koran Cousino second.

Motion carried. 3 votes: E. Cota, K. Cousino, N. Boss. G. Hahr and J. Painter abstained.

Minutes 3/24/20

Motion: Eric Cota made a motion to approve the minutes of March 24, 2020. Greg Hahr second.

Motion carried. (unanimous)

Mail review: Email received regarding sign damage and whether restitution to the town is needed. Refer to Tony for follow up.

Motion to adjourn:

Motion: Nancy Boss made a motion to adjourn at 8:25 p.m. Greg Hahr second.

Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Elder, SB Assistant