

Town of Ferrisburgh
Selectboard Minutes – APPROVED
January 7, 2020

Members present: Jim Benoit, Rick Ebel, Clark Hinsdale, Jessica James, Michael “Red” Muir.

Town officials present: Chris Campbell, delinquent tax collector; Deb Healey, town treasurer.

Visitors present: Art Cohn, Carl Cole, Doug Fletcher, Dylan Griffin, Richard Morin, Jean Richardson, Bessie Sessions, Nadia Smith, Sally Torrey, Kate Yarbrough.

1. 6:36 p.m. Regular meeting — call to order.

Rick Ebel called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Approve minutes — December 17, 2019, regular meeting.

Jim Benoit made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 17, 2019, regular meeting, as submitted. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

3. Selectboard new business

(a) Approve 2020–2021 budget for town meeting vote. Rick Ebel announced that this agenda item would be tabled until a special meeting on January 14, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. He said there are a few items to be worked on from the budget meeting held earlier.

(b) Appoint new town clerk. Clark Hinsdale made a motion to appoint Pam Cousino as town clerk. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

(c) Determine town clerk’s salary. Following remarks by Pam Cousino, Red Muir made a motion to set her salary at \$25/hour. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

(d) Marilyn Evans — hall rental agreement — February 22, 2020. Jim Benoit made a motion to rent the upstairs community hall to Marilyn Evans for a baby shower on February 22, 2020, from noon to 3:00 p.m. for a rental fee of \$150, a \$500 deposit, and proof of insurance. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

(e) Sand Road Water Line Association — hall rental agreement — March 26, 2020. Sally Torrey addressed the board asking to waive the deposit, rental fee, and insurance. Rick Ebel said the board does have a provision for waivers on this matter. Clark Hinsdale made a motion to rent the downstairs meeting room to the Sand Road Water Line Association for an annual meeting on March 26, 2020, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. waiving the rental fee, \$500 deposit, and proof of insurance. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

(f) Gage Cemetery Association — hall rental agreement — April 9, 2020. After Sally Torrey addressed the board, Jim Benoit made a motion to rent the downstairs meeting room to the Gage Cemetery for an annual meeting on April 9, 2020, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. waiving the rental fee, \$500 deposit, and proof of insurance. Red Muir seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

4. Selectboard old business

(a) Jean Richardson — Rental Agreement and Facility Use Policy — discussion of proposed changes. Listing types of events which could potentially be held at the town offices building and community center, Jean Richardson spoke about how the present rental agreement and policies present barriers to getting more community use of the public space, by asking people to go before the selectboard for approval and give a deposit and proof of insurance upfront. She recounted the history of fundraising to restore the building, saying by using the first grant of \$40,000 they were able to leverage another \$200,000 grant because it showed the need for community space. Discussion ensued. Referring to her drafts of a new facility use policy and two rental forms—one for large events and one for small—she described how the town clerk would be the first contact for rentals and decide what is required; the town would reserve the right to ask for a deposit and insurance. Red Muir questioned if the town is currently insured enough to handle events if insurance is waived. Jean replied it is. He also asked about liability if alcohol is permitted. She said a good lawyer could sue any potentially liable party. Discussion ensued further when Nadia Smith spoke about the original effort to raise funds, stating \$255,000 came from the community. She spoke about other things to consider when revising the policies, such as a distinction between residents and nonresidents, fees for nonprofits, and the use of sliding-scale fees. She offered all of her records for review. Rick Ebel asked the current group working on this—Jean Richardson, Jessica James, and Red Muir—to review Nadia’s materials and work with Pam Cousino, town clerk, to draft a new rental agreement and facility use policy; he requested these documents be presented at the next regular selectboard meeting on January 21, 2020.

(b) Addison Northwest School District (ANWSD) — re: possible Ferrisburgh Central School (FCS) closure discussion. Kate Yarbrough, a member of the Rural School Alliance, stated the two petitions, which had been seeking signatures to amend the Articles of Agreement, were submitted to Tara Brooks, district clerk, who will pass them on to the school board. Kate said once the signatures are verified a ballot to vote for or against the amended articles will be included at town meeting; if passed, the amended Articles of Agreement will allow town input into school closures and reconfiguration decisions.

Jessica James said that at the December 9, 2019, school board meeting the board reviewed two preliminary budget options: the “repurpose Addison Central School (ACS)” option and the “below-the-threshold” option. She gave a synopsis of both options. Repurposing ACS decreases expenses by \$695,080, which is approximately \$197,396 below the per-pupil spending threshold. With this option, there would be no changes to K–6 at Ferrisburgh Central School (FCS) or 7–12 at Vergennes Union High School (VUHS) for SY 2020–2021. ACS students would be reassigned to Vergennes Union Elementary School (VUES); ACS would be repurposed for special education programs.

The below-the-threshold option decreases expenses by \$326,389, which is approximately \$80,723 below the per-pupil spending threshold. All four buildings—ACS, FCS, VUES, and VUHS—would continue to operate with the same students as current, with the following changes:

- Elimination of elementary sports programs
- Elimination of afterschool programming not required by our 21C grant (FCS, reduction of Fusion)
- Elimination of Vergennes crossing guard
- Elimination of VUHS Director of Guidance position
- Elimination of .3 VUHS World Language position
- Elimination of 1.0 VUES Intervention Services position
- Elimination of 1.0 elementary school administrator (share two administrators between the three elementary buildings)
- Reduction of front office reception/summer office support
- Reduction of VUHS fieldtrips and supplies (one year only)

Reduction of bus transportation (one bus)
Reduction of clinical services provided by Counseling Services of Addison County

For the January 13, 2020, meeting, the school board asked the administration to incorporate some of the cuts in the below-the-threshold budget into the repurpose ACS budget in order to reduce it further.

The statewide teacher healthcare negotiations are going on; there is an anticipated 13.9% increase in premiums, which will likely edge up even higher. The district will continue to be responsible for 80% of all employee premiums.

(c) Building maintenance updates

i. Union Meeting Hall update. Red Muir said Miles Jenness of Vermont Heavy Timber is still working on shoring up the roof and estimates he will be finished by the end of next week. Red said he is going to get bids for fixing the windows and repairing the tower.

ii. Town offices building — roof. Red Muir said he asked Clover State and Hawthorne to give estimates to fix the roof leak in the tower at the town offices building. Discussion ensued after Carl Cole read his emails to and from Paul Wyncoop of Bread Loaf. Jean Richardson said she had agreed at the last selectboard meeting to draft a letter to invite Bread Loaf to come to a selectboard meeting. She said she did not write the draft after speaking with attorney friends who advised that the town have its attorney work on this issue instead of any further contact by the building maintenance committee. Carl Cole said the committee does not want to spend money on an attorney. He added he is waiting for a reply from Paul to learn the scope of the work and which repairs will be paid for by Bread Loaf. Rick Ebel said the board would make a decision for next steps after an update from the building maintenance committee at the regular selectboard meeting on January 21, 2020.

iii. Other updates. Red Muir said he asked Clover State to go to the Sisters property to figure out where the roof leak is coming from so the company can give an estimate to fix it. He said he will also ask Hawthorne for an estimate.

(d) Vorsteveld tree cutting in ROW update. Rick Ebel said there will be a status conference on January 9, 2020.

5. Selectboard general business

(a) Discuss creation of an Ethics Committee per Article 10 of town Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policy. Rick Ebel read a portion of Article 10. Creation of an Ethics Committee from the town's policies and procedures manual. Red Muir suggested amending the current language to allow for a committee to be formed if the need arises. Clark Hinsdale suggested creating a pool of volunteers and choosing three that do not have conflicts to review an issue. When Rick Ebel solicited volunteers from the visitors present, Dylan Griffin, Richard Morin, and Kate Yarbrough agreed to participate. Jessica James suggested putting a post on Front Porch Forum to get additional volunteers. Rick Ebel asked Town Clerk Pam Cousino to draft a post.

6. Public comment

Jean Richardson said some towns have a zoning administrator who spends up to 12 hours per week writing grants; she suggested the board think about this when building a budget for next year.

7. Other business

Discussion ensued when Clark Hinsdale talked about forming an ambassadorship or delegation to start a dialogue with the town of Vergennes regarding proposed charter changes to its borders, the proposed Economic Corridor, as well as planning and zoning and water and sewer issues. Following discussion, Rick Ebel said he would contact the new town manager of Vergennes to set up a meeting. Clark Hinsdale agreed to attend.

8. Correspondence

(a) State of Vermont Department of Taxes — 2019 Equalization Study Results and Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). The town received by mail the 2019 Equalization Study Results from the State of Vermont Department of Taxes. The results show the CLA is 99.52%.

(b) Assistant Judges of Addison County — January 17, 2020, annual public meeting. By mail, the town received notice that on January 17, 2020, there would be a meeting at 10:00 a.m. at the Judge Frank Mahady Courthouse in Middlebury, Vermont, to discuss the final county budget for FY 2020–2021.

9. Selectboard to approve or sign

(a) 2019 EEPV Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) Appeal Letter to Property Valuation and Review. Rick Ebel read a draft letter dated December 31, 2019, to Jill Remick, director of property valuation and review, requesting a redetermination of the 2019 EEPV CLA. Carl Cole addressed the board saying Justus DeVries, the town's appraiser, feels there are two or three assessments that he disagrees with the state's value, which could affect the CLA. Carl added there are a couple of sales concessions Justus would like subtracted from the gross sale price. Following discussion, Red Muir made a motion to authorize Rick Ebel to sign the appeal letter addressed to Jill Remick. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED. [Note: This agenda item was discussed as part of agenda item 8. (a).]

(b) Selectboard warrant. After review, Jessica James made a motion to approve the selectboard warrant, which details town expenditures, for a total of \$72,172.24. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

10. Adjourn

Jim Benoit made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 p.m. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Silveira