

Town of Ferrisburgh
Selectboard Minutes – DRAFT
September 3, 2019

Members present: Jim Benoit, Jessica James, Michael “Red” Muir.
Clark Hinsdale participated by phone.

Absent: Rick Ebel

Town officials present: No town officials were present.

Visitors present: Matt Birong, Gail Blasius, Chris Campbell, Kristin DeBellis, Judy Elson, George Gardner, Laurie Gutowski, Chris Hill, Steve Huffaker, Chris Kayhart, Kristina MacKulin, Jeremy Ouimette, Sunshine Ouimette, Bessie Sessions, Jenille Smith, Jim Warden, Shannon Warden, Kate Yarbrough.

1. 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting — call to order.

Jessica James called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Approve minutes — August 20, 2019, regular meeting.

Red Muir made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 20, 2019, regular meeting, as submitted. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

3. Selectboard new business

(a) Addison Northwest School District (ANWSD)-Ferrisburgh School Board Representatives — re: possible Central School closure. Discussion ensued when Bill Clark, one of four Ferrisburgh representatives to the unified district school board, reviewed the reasons why closing Ferrisburgh Central School (FCS) and Addison Central School (ACS) is the option the school board is considering pursuing. He said with declining enrollment the school budget will need to be cut by almost \$1,000,000 to not exceed the state’s threshold for per-pupil spending, thus avoiding paying a penalty. Bill explained that if the option to close FCS and ACS is chosen at the next school board meeting then students from ANWSD would attend a new preschool–4th-grade elementary school in the Vergennes Union Elementary School building, and the 5–6 grades would join the middle school in the Vergennes Union High School building, along with the 7–12 grades.

Discussion continued with visitors and board members asking questions of and voicing concerns to the town school board representatives present (Bill Clark, George Gardner, Laurie Gutowski, Kristina MacKulin). Some of the issues included the delay in receiving the overall school budget until the day of the vote by the school board on September 9, 2019, the urgency to make the decision now, cuts to personnel (the number one cost in the budget), continued year-to-year budget increases raising property taxes, and the consequences of voting down the option proposed by the school board. Clark Hinsdale questioned the method of projecting student enrollment, which led to a discussion about student capacity and future town plans. Judy Elson, a member of the community engagement committee and FCS teacher, said she wanted the selectboard to know that the school board should have presented more than one option.

Jessica James began giving the board’s views by saying the school is a central part of our community and generations of families have attended. She also said the closure of FCS would negatively impact businesses on Route 7, as parents no longer stop for items such as coffee. Jim Benoit expressed

concern that the proposed option is being pushed hard in a short period of time. He said the selectboard is being asked to make a decision without being able to review the budget until the September 9, 2019, meeting. Stating he is not against the option, Jim said he would like more information from the school board, such as projected savings from the closures and increased costs for busing students farther. Jessica agreed with Jim, saying the selectboard is feeling a bit rushed and needs more financial information. Red Muir said he would like to know the cost of any upgrades to the elementary school and high school. He also questioned whether or not the state legislature would extend the deadline for the closure decision. Echoing Jim and Jessica's concerns, Red suggested the school board put off the vote to get more information and community input. Jessica said we have to work together to bring families here. She questioned what the future of the town would be and how would it be able to draw people to live here without the school.

4. Selectboard old business

(a) Building maintenance updates.

Red Muir said there were no updates.

(b) Vorsteveld tree cutting in ROW update.

Jessica James said there was no update.

(c) Review/approve letter re: new Vergennes Economic Corridor. Jessica James read a portion of a letter addressed to Joe Flynn, Vermont secretary of transportation, which stated, "the town is ready to work closely with all stakeholders, and the first order of business will be to update boundary lines between Vergennes and all of its neighbors including Ferrisburgh." Clark Hinsdale made a motion to accept the letter, as written. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

5. Selectboard general business

(a) Ferrisburgh Historical Society — hall rental agreement — October 29, 2019. Red Muir made a motion to rent the upstairs community hall to the Ferrisburgh Historical Society for a meeting/workshop from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on October 29, 2019, waiving the rental fee but requiring a \$500 deposit and proof of insurance. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

6. Public comment

There was no public comment.

7. Other business

There was no other business.

8. Correspondence

(a) AT&T wireless communications facility at 3980 US Route 7. By letter, the town was given a 60-day advance notice stating that AT&T intends to submit to the Vermont Public Utility Commission a petition for approval to construct the facility on the property owned by Timothy K. Van de Weert. Jennille Smith was in attendance representing AT&T Wireless and stated that the tower is expected to be 140 feet in height and gave her contact information.

(b) Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) — Municipal Budget Workshop — September 18, 2019. By mail, VLCT notified the town about this workshop for officials responsible for budgeting, accounting, borrowing, and general financial management of government operations. The meeting will take place at the Capital Plaza in Montpelier, Vermont.

9. Selectboard to approve or sign

(a) Selectboard warrant. After review, Red Muir made a motion to approve the selectboard warrant, which details town expenditures, for a total of \$100,364.98. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

10. Adjourn

Red Muir made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Silveira