

Town of Ferrisburgh  
Selectboard Minutes – DRAFT  
October 15, 2019

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

**Town officials present:** John Bull, road foreman; Gloria Warden, town clerk.

**Visitors present:** Carolynn Blaise, Peter Briggs, Tim Buskey, Chris Campbell, Anne Cohn, John Eisenhardt Jr., Carolyn Griffin, Dylan Griffin, Chris Hill, Suzanne Hinsdale, Bill Houston, Connie Houston, Carol Kauffman, Chris Kayhart, Jeanne Kelly, Kristina MacKulin, Mary Neffinger, Nick Patch, Sue Rakowski, Christopher Ross, Bessie Sessions, Rae Sorrell, Raissa Venables, Matt Vogel, Rebecca Whitehurst.

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

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

**2. Approve minutes — October 1, 2019, regular meeting; October 5, special meeting; October 8, 2019, budget work session.**

Clark Hinsdale made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 1, 2019, regular meeting, as submitted. Jim Benoit seconded. During discussion Clark Hinsdale asked to amend the October 1, 2019, minutes by changing “school board” to “selectboard” on page 3, second paragraph from the bottom, last sentence. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

Jim Benoit made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 5, 2019, special meeting, as submitted. Clark Hinsdale seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

Jim Benoit made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 8, 2019, budget work session, as submitted. Clark Hinsdale seconded. Jim Benoit, Rick Ebel, Clark Hinsdale, and Jessica James voted in favor. Red Muir abstained. MOTION PASSED.

**3. Selectboard new business**

**(a) John Bull — highway operations report.** John Bull spoke about a road salt management course he hosted, which enforced that the road crew’s method is more efficient; by using modern equipment and calibrating salt spreaders more than \$26,000 is saved per year, while still providing safe town roads. He said the salt shed is full and it should be enough for the whole season. John described the current work schedule, which includes paving potholes, cutting culverts, adding material to road shoulders, and installing numerous signs. He stated with help from the Ferrisburgh Conservation Commission the crew would conduct an inventory of the ash trees in town. This is a proactive move to assist John and Cliff Mix, tree warden, to decide what to do about the trees. John mentioned Vermont League of Cities & Towns conducted a safety audit and just a few things need to be addressed. John advised the selectboard he would be coming in November to discuss an update to the speed limit policy. Rick Ebel asked John to invite the Addison County Sheriff’s Department to the meeting.

**(b) Round Barn Farm Homeowners’ Association — hall rental agreement for November 3, 2019, 4:00–6:00 p.m.** Red Muir made a motion to rent the upstairs community hall to Round Barn Farm Homeowners’ Association for an annual meeting on November 3, 2019, waiving the rental fee but

requiring a \$500 deposit and proof of insurance. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

**(c) Tammy Latrielle — hall rental agreement for October 20, 2019, noon–4:00 p.m.** Jim Benoit made a motion to rent the upstairs community hall to Tammy Latrielle for a children's Halloween party on October 20, 2019, for the rental fee of \$200, a \$500 deposit, and proof of insurance. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

#### **4. Selectboard old business**

**(a) Addison Northwest School District (ANWSD) — re: possible Ferrisburgh Central School (FCS) closure discussion.** Rick Ebel began the discussion by saying he had emailed Superintendent Sheila Soule and School Board Chair Sue Rakowski to invite them to this selectboard meeting to discuss the potential need to include a line item in the FY21 town budget if FCS should close. He said he wanted to get as much financial information as possible to the public prior to the November 5, 2019, vote. Specifically he asked for the bond principal and interest payments, utility costs, insurance costs, and the building and grounds maintenance costs. Discussion continued as additional financial information given to the board prior to the meeting was reviewed. In addition, Sue Rakowski read an email from Elizabeth Jennings, the school board business manager, pertaining to the FY21 Scenario 3 projections, which shows expenses of \$148,124 for maintaining Addison Central School (ACS) and FCS empty for the first year. It estimates the savings to be about 1/4 of the cost because FCS and ACS would not be used as schools, but would still need heating, cleaning, and maintenance, but not at the same level. To see the difference breakdown of the \$418,124 go to the district website and review the FY21 Scenario 3 Projections. Discussion continued as board members and visitors asked questions or made comments.

Red Muir expressed his concern saying the resolution of the mold/moisture issue is only in the discovery phase, and if the school were to close in June 2020 the cost to fix the problem, which could be over \$100,000, would be added to the debt the town will have to assume. He commented that Ken Sullivan, director of buildings, grounds & safety, has been proactive and very transparent about posting information in the file about the work to monitor the situation. When asked for an update, Kristina MacKulin, a Ferrisburgh representative to the unified school board and member of the district facilities committee, said a facilities report from October 14 stated the air quality passed the testing. She said Ken is doing his due diligence and is getting a second opinion from another engineering company. She also said the results of a Vermont Worksafe audit will be put in the file. Jim Benoit asked for the selectboard to be copied on all emails pertaining to this issue.

Clark Hinsdale said he received a flyer from the Mount Abe school district indicating a series of meetings to start discussions about the same reconfiguration issue. He said it seems that the November 5 vote is a step in a larger process that may end up with changes and possible mergers of districts. Sue Rakowski said any further merger would need a formal process along the lines of a new Act 46. When pressed by Rick Ebel about conversations regarding mergers she answered saying the district is in conversations with the Mount Abe district in terms of maximizing efficiencies and sharing resources, such as sports and food services. She stated the school board has no authority to allow students to attend schools in other districts.

Rick Ebel spoke about the role of the selectboard, saying it makes significant decisions that impact people's lives and the school board does the same thing. He said each is trying to do the best for our kids and the community. He asked that residents ask school related questions to the school board. He said the selectboard would continue open communication with the school board, and added that Deb

Healey, town treasurer, would be meeting with Elizabeth Jennings, the school board business manager.

Jessica James said Ferrisburgh pays almost \$8M of the school budget, and she is concerned about what taking back the property would do to the municipal tax rate. She said she does not want to see our taxes go up more for having an empty building, plus the pressure of having additional costs if we want to try to sell it privately. She spoke about the effect of tax rates on the growth of the town, saying taxes may be too high whether or not we have a school. She questioned what could be done to make sure this is a fiscally responsible decision for taxpayers who pay a very large chunk of the school budget. She concluded her comments by saying the budget cannot be increased without effecting everyone.

Clark Hinsdale began his remarks by describing the current conditions of the Vergennes Elementary campus. He said those who went to the last public meeting there had the difficult experience of having to park six blocks away to get there on the one-way street. He remarked if the school goes to 98% capacity a lot of the local kids can still walk to school but all of Addison and Ferrisburgh kids will be driven, plus parents will return for things such as sports. He said he worries about getting into a situation where we buy properties at a huge cost and tear down a house to get grounds. He said he also worries about the capital expenses that would be required to remake the Vergennes Elementary campus into something equal or superior to what the kids have now. He questioned what the additional tax burden for those capital improvements would be compared to keeping a school or schools that have 25 acres of land to work with, a street light on Route 7 with a turn lane and a turn signal. He said he realizes he is asking questions beyond what there are currently answers to since the school board is unwilling to make five budgets with that detail and wants to wait for the outcome of the vote. He said if you look at the capital improvements for scenario 3 a lot them have a star with tbd (to be determined). He went on to say when he looks at the overall resources of the Vergennes Elementary campus (location, land, traffic flow accessibility) he is concerned it is going to take a lot to make that school adequate. He said he would hate to see FCS close and have the same school tax rate as now plus an extra five cents on the town rate to show for it. He said he agrees with Jessica who said taxes may be too high whether or not we have a school.

Carol Kaufman, an Addison resident, presented several ANWSD financial documents to the selectboard pointing out issues she has with the school district's financial reporting. She noted that projections should be compared against actual amounts for the same period of time.

**(b) Building maintenance updates**

**Kerosene tank on town property at 3245 US Route 7 (former Sisters property).** Jim Benoit said the tank must be removed per state regulations. The board will ask Gloria Warden, town clerk, to contact Jackman Fuels to remove the tank. A second issue regarding a small leak from the kitchen ceiling was discussed. The board will ask Gloria Warden to contact the renter to get dates when Red Muir can go to the home to check the leak.

Red Muir presented estimates from Hawk Creek Fence for fencing around the generators at the fire station and at the town offices building. After discussion, Jim Benoit made a motion to approve a \$2300 down payment to Hawk Creek Fence to construct and install the privacy fencing. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

Red Muir said Katie Hill of Sellers Treybal Structural Engineers would make an initial visit to the Union Meeting Hall to determine the condition of the roof rafters. He said he signed an agreement for \$750 for this initial consultation. He commented that Kate Yarborough and Ashley LaFlam have toured the building and have ideas to open it up to the public again. He said Jean Richardson has been asked to see if funds would be available from historic preservation grants to renovate the hall.

**(c) Vorsteveld tree cutting in ROW update.**

Rick Ebel said there have been communications with the town's attorney regarding motions to dismiss and denials of those motions.

**(d) Hall rental agreement — discuss suggested changes to requirements for non-profit resident groups.** After mentioning this was a follow-up agenda item from the last selectboard meeting, Rick Ebel read draft language of a waiver. After discussion, Clark Hinsdale made a motion to adopt the waiver, which reads, "Under certain circumstances the Selectboard has the authority to waive any requirements of this hall rental policy as it pertains to: renter fees, security deposits, or comprehensive liability insurance for a small group meeting." Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

**(e) Discuss forming subcommittee to develop parameters for job description of town clerk and town treasurer.** Rick Ebel stated that when the town charter was adopted the town clerk and town treasurer positions became appointed/hired positions. The board is still seeking volunteers to form a subcommittee to add parameters to sample job descriptions from various clerk organizations.

**5. Selectboard general business**

**(a) Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) — worksheets for insurance renewals.** Board members reviewed VLCT PACIF insurance applications for town property, vehicles, equipment, etc.

**(b) Information from Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) Annual Meeting.** Rick Ebel said he attended this meeting and saw several presentations. He spoke about the requirement of transparency per Vermont's Open Meeting Law. He said since electronic communication includes email the town's IT company is looking to assign separate email accounts for each selectboard member instead of using personal email for town business.

**6. Public comment**

Bessie Sessions asked if there has been any communication from Bread Loaf Construction regarding the slate roof of the town offices building. Red Muir replied that he and Carl Cole would be meeting with Paul Wyncoop of Bread Loaf on October 22 for a site visit.

The board was asked if it knew about a continual garage sale at 3717 Route 7. Rick Ebel replied someone establishing a regular business it is a good thing, as long as the proper zoning process is followed.

**7. Other business**

There was no other business.

**8. Correspondence**

**(a) Age Well — thank you to town for support of services.** By letter, Age Well thanked the town for its allocation of \$1100 and continued support for services provided to residents of Ferrisburgh.

**(b) Vermont Center of Independent Living (VCIL) — letter of appreciation for town's donation.** By letter, VCIL expressed its appreciation for the town's donation of \$250 for FY19.

**(c) Open Door Clinic — thank you to town for continued support.** By letter, Open Door Clinic expressed gratitude for the town's continued support of its clinic and patients.

**(d) Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) — Fall Planning and Zoning Forum — October 23, 2019.** By email, the town was notified by VLCT of this workshop for local officials involved in the planning and development review process. The forum will be held at the Comfort Suites Sunset Ballroom in South Burlington, Vermont.

**(e) FEMA—Risk Mapping, Assessment, Planning Discovery Meeting for the Otter Creek and Lake Champlain Watersheds in Vermont — October 29, 2019.** By letter, the town was informed of this upcoming meeting, which is part of a FEMA program that helps communities identify, assess, and reduce their flood risk.

**(f) End of Life Services f.k.a Hospice Service — letter of appreciation for the town's support.** By letter, the town was thanked for its \$500 gift by End of Life Services.

#### **9. Selectboard to approve or sign**

**(a) Selectboard warrant.** After review, Jessica James made a motion to approve the selectboard warrant, which details town expenditures, for a total of \$112,395.51. Jim Benoit seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

#### **10. Adjourn**

Jim Benoit made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m. Jessica James seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION PASSED.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Silveira