

Town Of Groton, Vermont – Selectboard Minutes, January 14th, 2016 (Approved)

The duly warned budget meeting of the Groton Selectboard of January 14th, 2015 was held at the Groton Community Building, 1476 Scott Highway.

Attendance for the meeting included Linda Nunn, Lisa Hart, Carrie Peters, Roberta Dana and Dan Robinson.

The Following Selectboard Members were in attendance: Peter Lyon, Andrew Dorsett, and Mary Grant

The Meeting was called to order at 6:07 PM

Updates/Adjustments to the Agenda:

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

Peter informed attendees that once all three Board members were present, that the focus was entirely on the 2016 budget with no public input, just concentrating on getting the budget done. Peter confirmed with Lisa and Carrie that they were capturing the figures that the board sets.

2016 Anticipated Revenue:

The Board started by covering Revenue. Carrie brought up the recommendation from the professional auditor to create a line in the budget specifically for grants to more easily manage them and would not make the budget seem artificially high and the Treasurer would be able to post the revenue and expense for each grant. The Board agreed that was a good idea.

Peter explained a conversation he had with Efficiency Vermont about completing an energy audit for the Community Building. A previous audit report was not filed with them. The deal brokered by Peter was that the Town would hire an auditing firm at a cost of \$500.00, to complete an audit that meets their standards and file it with Efficiency Vermont as part of the energy efficiency work being done, and Efficiency Vermont would give the Town a rebate of between \$2300 and \$5000. Andrew made a motion to pay \$500 to the audit firm to conduct an audit that meets Efficiency Vermont's standards. Mary 2nd the motion. In discussion Andrew asked where the \$500 would come from. Peter and Carrie indicated that because it was grant related it could come from the 600 line. Andrew agreed. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

Discussion on revenue continued. Peter mentioned a discrepancy with the fee charged BMU. He had spoken with BMU and they determined that the 2014 rental fee had not been paid because the Town had not billed them. BMU said they will make both a 2014 and 2015 payment upon receipt of a bill. The Select Board thought the total Community Building revenue should be higher and increased that revenue line to \$2500.00.

Andrew asked what FAST Squad revenue was, Carrie said it was the payment made by Ryegate. Andrew asked if our FAST Squad was paid to respond to calls. Peter said no and asked Andrew if he wanted to follow up with them to see if there is a way they can bill insurance for their calls. Peter asked the Select Board Secretary to assist with the follow-up. It won't be included in this year's budget but should be followed up as a potential source.

Peter asked about cemetery revenue. Lisa said that the town had only sold a ½ lot. Peter said that there was historically revenue from interest and now there is none. The Board asked Lisa if she and Carrie could follow up on that. He also said the budget is locked, but would like them to follow up. Andrew asked if there was any interest in researching having a mausoleum constructed in the cemetery for those who wish to be cremated and have their ashes placed there. Linda added that families typically buy a lot because there can be multiple cremated remains placed there. The discussion was tabled.

Peter said that there would be another \$500 from Green Mountain Community Solar bringing the total of the Lease Option prepayment to \$1000 (\$500 from 2015 and \$500 for 2016).

2016 Budget:

Under Select Board Administrative, the Board set the Secretary's wages and training/mileage \$200/\$150 respectively for the Board.

The board discussed the Town Clerks training/mileage, accrued vacation, and insurance.

This led to the Board adopting a 5% employee contribution for their health insurance.

Mary said that State law requires written notice to everyone affected with a signature line for the employee to sign acknowledging the change before the contribution can be withdrawn from their pay. Andrew said with that in mind the policy would not go into effect until the 1st pay period in March. Andrew made a motion to send the notices and begin employee insurance contributions beginning with the March 2nd 2016 pay period. Mary 2nd the motion, and the motion passed unanimously. Andrew made a motion that employee pay be increased to offset the amount being contributed for insurance. There was no second to the motion, so Peter announced that the motion dies.

Discussion for the Treasurer's Office included insurance. Carrie said that Lisa doesn't take the Town's insurance, Mary said the amount listed was for a buyout. Mary said it isn't in the draft personnel policy, Lisa said that it is. Peter said that didn't include elected officials. Lisa indicated that it was and that she brought it to the Board's attention March 12th 2015 when Gary was still on the Board and the Board all agreed that it was still in effect. Lisa said that she would find the minutes of that meeting and provide a copy to the Board.

On accrued vacation, Peter expressed what he had been told by Bill Hall from VLCT that he rejects the idea of accrued vacation being for elected officials. Peter went on to say that he will go whichever direction the Board goes. The board decided to leave the accrued vacation amount in the budget. Peter moved to not support an insurance buyout for elected officials. Andrew 2nd the motion. During discussion Andrew mentioned that there should be more research into the policy to ensure they were being fair and in line with other town's practices. He asked for a copy of the personnel policy currently in effect. He asked when it was last updated, Lisa said 1997. Peter said that it would be appropriate to table the motion until more time could be set aside for discussion. The other Board members agreed.

Office of Town Clerk and Treasurer, Peter made a suggestion to reduce IT services to \$200 because of recent IT purchases, repairs and upgrades should be minimal.

Andrew said that he would support a reduction to \$300. The Board agreed. The Board discussed the Collector of Delinquent taxes budget and after reviewing the lines, agreed to level fund that budget, and as a follow-up look into measuring/reporting cash flow for delinquent taxes. Andrew suggested that VLCT may have a best practices policy that may help establish that report.

Auditors and Town Report. Peter said for the record, this year's distribution of the Town Report will remain unchanged, a notice has been added to the Town Report notifying residents that the distribution will change next year so reports will be mailed to residents on the voter checklist (one per household) and additional copies will be available at the Post Office, Town Offices and the Upper Valley Grill. This will help reduce the number printed and the postage to mail them saving taxpayer money.

Listers Office. Andrew mentioned the idea of hiring an independent assessing contractor to assess all of the Town's pick-ups and the Listers function more like a Select Board providing oversight of the assessments instead of actually doing them which would also eliminate any potential bias, limits liability and potentially provide a cost savings to the town. Mary said that may be a good thought in that Kitty will retire at some point and she has to pass along her knowledge to someone. Peter suggested that the Lister wages be reduced down to more closely reflect the actual to help Kitty get closer to level funding her budget. Peter said to bring it to \$17196, and that would give her a level budget. Carrie wanted to ensure that the tax map revenue was taken into consideration. All agreed that \$17196 was a good figure.

Town General, there was no questions on insurance. Peter asked if there were questions on professional services. Mary said there was \$6,000 in there for professional auditor services. Andrew suggested that they rename the line professional audit/services, the Board agreed. Andrew asked if the Board was ever going to have a work session to address and develop a response to close out the previous audits. The Board agreed and decided that it should be scheduled at a future regular meeting after town meeting. Peter moved on to dues for VLCT and NVDA, the board said those were fixed and Andrew commented that we were getting our money's worth from both organizations. Andrew suggested that the Zoning Administrator seek out some training to ensure he is on top of current zoning laws. Under Fields and Parks, Peter asked why the Mower/Blower wasn't moved from Fields and Parks into highway. Carrie said some of it is. Peter said under the Department of Public Works model, it should all be under one category. This would make more sense for managing maintenance and upkeep. Recycling has gone up because the value of recycled goods has gone down with the commodity price, the board agreed to raise recycling from \$3250 to \$4700. Peter suggested that the Community Building fuel oil be reduced to \$6500, down from \$9000. Chris Emerson is the new Tree Warden. Community and Economic Development Committee wages increase to \$600 for the Secretary and The Board added mileage for the committee chairman to attend training. \$2300 was added to the Recreation Committee as a stipend for a Recreation Committee Director feeling that the events would raise revenue making this a revenue neutral expense. The Board asked the Treasurer's office to update the revenue page to include revenue from this position.

Carrie asked about the funding for Fire Department turn-out gear. Peter said that the Fire Department is in a “refresh” cycle and need to add that to their budget, however, they can also look to reduce that by researching grant opportunities. Board accepted the increase in the Constable’s budget increase due to increased dispatch fees.

In discussion over agency appropriations, the board determined that they would be listed separately. The Board wanted to ensure that the Town Clerk has forms from each of them and asked the Secretary to confirm that with Linda.

The Board reviewed reserve funds and accepted at current levels.

The Board went on to review Highway revenues. Peter thought the sand revenues should be even and not go down. He went on to say that we may be able to sell sand to Ryegate and possibly to other towns. Andrew commented that the lease is up pretty soon and Peter confirmed that we only have two more years. Peter wanted entered into the minutes that they want to know, from Brent, why State highway aid went down from \$72,000 to \$65,000, and asked the Secretary to send Brent a note to email the Board. Mary thought that it may have been to cover extra culverts. Peter pointed out that the Better Back Roads grant was in the wrong space, under 2015 and should be under 2016. Peter also wanted to discuss the Boulder Beach grant at another time, but wanted to give the Board a heads up. Peter expressed concern that the project isn’t on any priority list. Peter stated for the record that the Boulder Beach grant revenue of \$80,000, The Board would like to go back and understand the total cost to the town and where it falls on the priority list. The rest of the Board agreed. The Board went on to review expenses beginning with labor. Lisa went over accrued vacation. Peter said that he believes in accrued vacation for employees not elected officials. Andrew added that perhaps after a wage analysis, the Board re-look at it’s thoughts that the Road Commissioner be a salaried position. Peter said accrued was raised in the other departments, so to be consistent they should do the same in Highway. Peter asked about salt expenditures, Carrie said that money was taken back. Peter want a note taken to ask Brent why there are 2 chloride containers and the town only has one supplier. In reviewing gravel, Peter said that there was \$16,500 going into a reserve fund. Carrie said that the motion was to put anything up to \$16,500 and the total was about \$10,000. Peter asked what the \$6,500 spent on in the last week. Carrie said that they have paid bills. Peter asked if the Treasurer’s office could send a detail report so they could see the expenditures. Mary added that she would drop the gravel budget down to \$15,000 as she is sure that Brent could get the same work done cheaper. Andrew wanted to make sure that the work could get done, so the gravel budget was left at \$20,000. Peter commented on Equipment Repairs, that with the new truck and the money already put into the new truck, the repair budget should come down. The Board agreed to reduce the budget by \$2000. On fuel oil, Peter thought that fuel oil should not be any higher than \$2300. The board discussed sidewalks and asked the Treasurer’s office to make wage adjustments from Highway. Because sidewalks fall under Highway, any adjustments in sidewalks need to be reflected in the Highway budget. During the discussion about sidewalks, Mary covered he idea about creating a “property maintenance” that would talk care of mowing, snow blowing , cleaning, basic repairs, and painting, etc... that could be funded from all of the small amounts currently used and fund one position part-time to cover it all. This discussion was table until a future date to be set.

Next on the list was Transfers To Other Funds. Peter opened with the comment that there was some issue with the numbers. And at the best these figures should match this year's numbers. He added that the Board's overall goal has been to reduce the budget because there has been a lot of work done that would save money. Peter said there is no reason why we can't give the taxpayers a break. The Town has done a lot to reduce its overhead by paying off the cruiser loan, energy efficiency projects, and working on reducing electrical power costs, and he feels it's time to give them something back. Mary asked why highway reserve funds were up, Andrew asked if there was a project coming up. Peter said this is why the Capital Investment Plan is needed. It would show exactly where these funds are being spent. Carrie said it is for a paving project on Glover Road. Andrew said can't that section be ripped up and Carrie answered that there is no place for culverts and the pavement helps control the water. Peter said there was a proposal to level fund the reserve funds for Highway equipment infrastructure and paving. The equipment line was up and Carrie mentioned that he may be planning on an equipment purchase. The Select Board agreed to level fund.

Peter announced that the Board should have a good budget. He asked the Treasurer's office when they could have it updated and back to the board for review. Carrie said looking at the General Fund it is under so the rest should be as well. Peter said for the record the Board is working very hard to come back to the community a budget that is lower than the previous year. Peter asked if the budget could be updated by the weekend. Lisa said at best, not until Tuesday.

Peter said the Board has to ask a generic question, they need to know, Nathan Hawley, (of Pace & Hawley Inc) in one of his notes, talked about cash flow and all of that stuff. He also raised a question about reserve funds. Peter said he is trying to determine if there is a problem there or not. Lisa responded that she is not ready to answer that question yet. She went on to say they are still in the very beginning, and Nathan may be able to come next week and maybe once more the following week but then Nathan is beginning his busy time because of tax season. Lisa also added that she is still working with NEMRC but she has not gotten back to her on the latest support request. Peter commented that we have got to get this recorded somehow. Andrew said that it doesn't seem like we are going to get an answer any time soon. Lisa agreed because of Nathan's limited availability. Mary added as long as NEMRC is giving her support and Nathan is able to provide assistance, then hopefully Lisa is able to understand what needs to be built into NEMRC to make it function. We all know that Roberta spent 2 years getting it to work this far and used spreadsheets to get to the end result. Now we are expecting you to use it 100% and some of this isn't set up in the system to do what you need it to do and this is where he is finding some of the issues with the reserve funds, because they were on a spreadsheet. Mary added that she thinks she had the issues with the bank statements not balancing in the system because of those transfers. So once Nathan gets those straightened out, then you can figure out how you put them in and take them out through the system, then that will make a whole lot of difference. Mary told Lisa that she has come a long way in learning a cumbersome system, taking over from a person that used spreadsheets and not the system. She also said that Nathan is working hard getting the right information for Lisa to enter into the system and working with NEMRC to make the system balance. Peter said there are two questions in his mind as we are headed into a budget closure. Is there a cash balance problem that we need to incorporate a solution into the budget?

Lisa and Carrie said that they can't answer that question. Andrew said they need to have good numbers for their report and if there is a deficit, then they would need to raise money. Peter said he thinks they need that and the second question is the reserve funds, are they funded appropriately? It doesn't sound it. Lisa that is correct, they are not able to prove it. Peter said he isn't sure how they can go into Town Meeting without a response. Andrew agreed that they need the actual reserve numbers. Lisa said she has been working on this since July. Andrew said we don't know what they are supposed to be or we just don't know. Lisa said that there is just so much going on. Andrew said we're trying to balance out, Lisa said we're trying to reconcile. Andrew asked if we know what is supposed to be in there. Lisa said yes we know what we should have. Nathan said at the end of the day they were going to have to put it on a spreadsheet manually. Lisa added that she has been working on this endlessly, and NEMRC said they would take it over and they have continuously missed deadlines. Peter said let me over simplify the issue because it's easier this way. For reserve funds, we know what we had at the end of last year. We also know what we contributed as a result of the budget last year. We clearly should know what we spent out of it, so why wouldn't we do the math and generate a worksheet that has those sets of numbers on it? Get that to the Board so we can figure out how to incorporate it into the Town Report. Peter added that the math should be crisp and clear and reconcilable by doing that and it puts you in control for the moment. Andrew said we can go over this stuff next week. Peter said that Linda will be creating the warning for the Town Report. Lisa said she found all the reports that she needs to submit for the Town Report and ask if the Board reviews them first, Andrew said that they were her reports not the Board's. The discussion continued around submission timelines.

Peter added this to the record, He set a note to Deb Johnson asking her to send the mailing list to the printer, the hard copy has to be at the printers by the 26th.

The next meeting will be on the 21st. Peter announce that the Board will be working on a story to put in the paper.

Select Board Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Minutes prepared by Dan Robinson, Select Board Secretary