

**Town of Bristol, Vermont  
Selectboard Meeting Minutes of  
Monday, May 23, 2022**

Selectboard members present: Chair Ian Albinson, Joel Bouvier (arrived 7:15 pm), Peeker Heffernan, and Michelle Perlee (arrived 8:55pm).

Members Absent: Vice-Chair Darla Senecal.

Staff present: Chris Bapp, Town Administrator Valerie Capels, Public Works Foreman Eric Cota, Town Treasurer Anthony Delmonaco, Board Clerk Sharon Lucia, Rec Director Meridith McFarland, Police Chief Bruce Nason.

Others present: Elizabeth Blair, Theresa Gile, Jill and Cyrus Marsano (VTUMS), Steve Palmer (VTM), Ben Skolazdra, Jim Quaglino.

**I. Call to Order. 7:16 pm**

1. Review agenda for addition, removal, or adjustment of any items per 1 V.S.A. §312(d)(3)(A). No changes.

2. Overview of Zoom meeting operation and procedures: rules for participation, mute microphone, recognition by Chair, etc.

**II. Public Forum.** None.

**III. Department Head Roundtable.**

Recreation Dept.: Meridith reported that Alex gave his two-week notice. His last day will be May 27, 2022. He started here in August 2018. She and Taylor will need to coordinate on what the summer programs will look like and maybe go in a new direction with the new person. They are also seeing who is available to fill in. The town-wide yard sale is June 25. The teddy bear picnic is June 14; summer programming starts June 15 and goes through Aug 19.

Police Dept.: Bruce reported that it is the start of the annual click it or tick it campaign through June 5.

Fire Dept.: Brett sent a written update that Ian read and is attached to these minutes. Topics included photovoltaic training for firefighters, calls for service reports, and hand sanitizer availability.

Town Clerk: Sharon reported on the upcoming election deadlines and election training. The Town Office will be closed on Thursday, May 26, so she can attend a training on the electronic ballot reader.

Water & Sewer Operators: Jill and Cyrus reported that they are turning on new service water connections; marking services on Spring and Laurents Lane; installing new meters; and working on the Consumer Confidence Report. The manhole covers for the Core area sewer system are done.

Town Treasurer: Anthony reported he will be meeting with Auditors on Thursday, May 26 to finalize the last few pieces. He has been looking at budgeting options and software. He has also been tidying up the payroll module and updating some of the information. He is also looking at improving the grants management program.

Public Works: Eric reported that they are working on routine things for now.

#### **IV. Public Hearing – Water and Sewer District Annual Meeting.**

Water Budget. Valerie explained that a goal of water (and sewer) budget is for the revenues and expenditures be the same so not generate a profit and to make sure there are enough revenues to cover the necessary expenditures.

Valerie explained the basis of her proposed 2% increase was from the revenue generated from recent additional customers and probable new connections rather than a rate increase. She suggested lowering the electricity expense from \$33,000 to somewhere in the area of \$26,000 or \$28,000. Jill affirmed that the new pump runs more efficiently and uses less electricity. Peeker noted the solar offset should also reduce the electricity cost. There was discussion about the proposed increase in contracted services. Regarding the FY2022 meters and touch pads expenses, Jill suspects they were probably coded to supplies. Jill added that a complete meter set is currently about \$750 including the touchpad. They purchased at least four this year. A 2” meter is \$2,000. That line probably includes hydrants, copper lines, and curb stops. Joel asked Anthony, Sharon, and Valerie to dig deeper into the supplies and meters and touchpads actual expenses. We should also account for increased prices of supplies. Jill offered to de-code the EJP bills.

The proposed decrease in the building and maintenance line was discussed. Many maintenance projects have been completed; others on the horizon are likely to be capital projects. Jill noted that the sewer building on Basin Street is used for cold storage of 2/3 water and 1/3 sewer materials. Cyrus reported he saw a crack developing on the left side of the building. Discussion shifted to whether a storage container could be used. There was agreement it could be a capital expense.

Valerie noted that the figures in the bond and note payments line need to be doublechecked.

Jill said she and Valerie agreed that it did not make sense to propose a rate increase this year. The increase in connected users is helping to increase revenues. The system design and financial impact of Firehouse Apartments was discussed. Jill recommended the meters and touchpads line be increased to \$5,000. If so, the water service and connection fees line should also be increased.

There was consensus to revisit these numbers after Anthony, Jill, Sharon, and Valerie have a chance to research the actual expenses.

Sewer Budget. Valerie explained that, like the water budget, the revenues and expenses need to balance out because this is an enterprise funds. Jill's proposed budget was reviewed. She is proposing a 5% increase because revenues have decreased due to decreased usage and are not meeting the expected budget numbers. A 5% rate increase would result in a revenue of \$52,706, but we should be aiming for \$54,024. The usage is not matching the billing rates to meet the revenue budget.

Administrative allocations were reviewed and adjusted down. There was a question if they were being allocated correctly.

Cyrus reviewed some of the maintenance matters he has planned for the septic plant, including and effluent structure to rebuild, splitter box to fix, and more. Valerie noted there is a little more than \$38,000 in the capital sewer reserve fund. Jill noted that the septic system will last another 10 to 20 more years with the structures that are there, with some operational parts needing to be replaced.

Valerie noted that she originally proposed reducing the maintenance & septic tank line to \$15,000 (from \$20,091) because so much work is being done now. Jill said that would be dangerous because septic pumping costs \$6,500 per pumping and there are years when it needs to be pumped three times.

Joel asked what the difference would be with a 3% rate increase? Jill calculated revenues would be reduced by \$1,054, which would need to come out of the capital reserve fund line.

Ian asked how Bristol's sewer rates compare to other systems of similar size? Jill said she has never seen a comparison of sewer rates, only water rates. Valerie noted that in addition to RCAP, which provides free assistance to small water and sewer systems, there is another organization which is a collaboration of Syracuse University and the University of North Carolina that also provides free technical assistance to small water and sewer systems and provide a wide range of training opportunities. Ian raised the concern about the system revenues not meeting the budget and we cannot get more customers. How can we afford to keep the system going without raising rates? Jill noted that \$54,000 divided by 34 customers amounts to \$1,588 a year for a restaurant. Jill said it is as inexpensive as it gets compared to the cost to maintain individual commercial septic systems. Consensus evolved to agree a rate increase of around 5% will be needed, especially to improve the capital reserve fund. Jill noted that entire splitter box structure will need to be replaced.

Peeker asked if we are worrying too much about it because we have had a surplus each year where actual revenues exceeded actual expenses. There was further discussion about capital and maintenance issues. Jill noted that the Town pays for grease trap pumping.

There was consensus to hold the next water and sewer hearing the second Selectboard meeting in June so the last water and sewer reads might be available to finalize the budgets.

Water Ordinance Review. Valerie wanted to remind viewers, attendees, and the general public that a completely new Water Ordinance was adopted in October 2021. It was restructured and new sections were added. She provided a general overview:

- New regulations for applications for service;
- New details about what the water service needs to be;
- Construction specifications;
- More information about enforcement;
- Information about fire hydrants and sprinkler systems;
- Town responsibilities and limitations of liabilities;
- And other miscellaneous things.
- It emphasizes the need to contact the Water Operator at least 48 hours in advance of any service work.
- There is an application and approval process for any work in the road right-of-way, including new installations and repair.

The Ordinance changes were advertised and posted around town.

Joel asked if the Ordinance specifically says that any new water line must be inspected from water main to the house. Ian found the specific language in Section 4.10 of the Ordinance.

Joel said he would like to talk about Alan Huizenga's report from two years ago regarding a lot of 1905 pipes in the ground. He is concerned it is going to take another 100 years to get them out.

## **V. Regular Business.**

1. Consider request by the MAUSD Board that a few Selectboard members join them at their May 24 meeting to discuss Bristol candidates for the vacant Board seat.

Valerie reported that Dave Sharpe resigned from the MAUSD board. The MAUSD Board advertised for interested candidates and is hoping some members of the Selectboard will join them at the May 14 School Board meeting at 6:00pm to discuss the candidates. Peeker Heffernan offered to attend.

2. Consider request by Tom Wells to establish a grace period for late property tax payments. Valerie explained that Tom Wells would like the Selectboard to consider establishing a grace period for taxpayers. She reported that VLCT responded that the Selectboard does not have authority. The question would need to go to voters. Peeker and Ian spoke in favor of the post mark as a basis for determining timeliness but not grace period. There was agreement to discuss this at a future meeting.

3. Consider new contract with VTM Engineering for the DWSRF Step II loan for the Pine Street water line replacement project.

Valerie reported that the proposed contract is almost identical to Green Mountain Engineering's contract. The contract includes the Final Design phase that was included the original GME contract. Asked how far along the design plans are, Jill said she believe the drawing were close to 100% complete but that Steve will need change all the title blocks, put his stamp on the plans,

and write all the specifications and put them under his name. To utilize the existing \$12,000 that had not been spent by GME and increase by the other \$7,700 to write an entire set of specifications is quite reasonable. In order to remain eligible for the DWSRF funds, the Town needs to move forward quickly.

Steve Palmer, P.E., explained he did the GME water design and Alan did the stormwater design. This loan application is specific for the water system. The state has had a complete turnover in personnel. The additional \$7,700 is for the redundant work that will need to be done. Joel asked if the application was approved by August 1, Steve said state needs to review the contract, which could be the holdup. If we miss the winter window to get it out to bid, on top of the wait time for materials, we could be looking at construction beginning in 2024. Construction time could be just 90 days. Valerie added that a bond vote will be required and factored into the timeline. Steve said he would like Jill and Cyrus to review all of the water design plans.

Joel Bouvier made motion to sign the contract with Steve Palmer of VTM Engineering and accept the increase in fees. Peeker Heffernan seconded. So voted.

4. Discussion on IT hardware/networking updates to Town Office and additional Zoom licenses.

Ian provided an update on his IT plans for Town Office. He has been meeting with Waitsfield-Telecom to explore options to increase Internet speed and other IT improvements. There are questions about the Dominion Tech equipment and annual licensing. Following discussion, there was agreement to proceed with the additional Zoom licenses. Peeker asked if we have looked into Teams. Valerie noted that more and more state agencies are moving toward Teams. Valerie will reach out to the ACEDC to ask why they switched to Teams. Ian expressed caution about switching from Zoom to Teams or any other platform. It is going to take some time to research the alternatives. Ian noted the Web site also needs improvement and the ability to accept credit cards.

5. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding update.

Valerie reported that a letter was received by Treasury urging local governments to use the funds for expanding the work force, affordable housing and keep families safe. We also received an e-mail from VTrans clarifying that ARPA funds can be used as matches on projects funded through the VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau. The Basin Street project would qualify. Peeker asked if the Lincoln Road project through VTrans would be eligible.

The ARPA Funding Advisory Committee is organizing four focus groups to meet with town, youth, business, and non-profit agencies. Next meeting is the first Monday (June 6).

6. Appointment or reappointment of Town officers. Both submitted letter of interest. None.

7. Review and approval of the August 23, September 13, 2021 and January 17, January 24, February 7, February 21, February 28, March 14, March 28, April 11, April 25, and May 9, 2022, meeting minutes. Joel Bouvier made motion to approve the January 17, 2022 minutes with one correction and the changes Michelle sent in. Peeker Heffernan seconded. So voted. There

was discussion about the need to bring all of these minutes up to date and post them on the Web site. They should be posted online even if only in outline form.

8. Authorize accounts payable warrant and any liquor licenses. \$98,546.37. Minifactory (formerly Bristol Bakery) liquor license (new).

9. Selectboard roundtable.

Joel asked if R&L is doing Main Street twice a week yet for picking up trash. Ian is monitoring for overflowing trash. Bruce is monitoring as well.

Peeker reported that the ash tree in front of George Vince's apt on North Street is completely dead. Eric will look into it.

Ian reported that the Welcome signs were all installed today. Greg Cromis will scrape and repaint the posts. He and Selectboard members thanked the designers for their work. Ian noted that they donated \$2,500 for the signs; Ian's donated time was \$1,500.

Michelle. None.

10. Town Administrator's report.

Valerie reported that West Hill slope project is starting next week. The utility lines at 25 West Street lines are too low so access will be through 27 West Street. Waitsfield Champlain Valley Telecom was able to raise the lines high enough for equipment to go under. Alan Clark has agreed to allow that to happen.

There will be an East Street sidewalk project site visit tomorrow morning. The project will begin this week. Valerie said she hung notices on residents' doors this afternoon.

## **VI. Other Business.**

1. Correspondence, reports, correspondence received.

- RLF status
- Alex's resignation
- Ped/Bike committee
- Informal PC member resignation
- Charging station project.

## **VII. Executive Session. Contract negotiations per 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(A) and personnel matters per 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(3).**

At 10:09pm Michelle Perlee made motion to go into executive session for personnel matters per 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(3) and to invite Eric Cota. Peeker Heffernan seconded. So voted. The Selectboard met in executive session from 10:09pm to 11:20pm. Upon returning to open session, the following actions were taken:

- Peeker Heffernan made a motion to include cell phone reimbursement at \$50 per month for the Town Treasurer and the Town Clerk. Joel Bouvier seconded. So voted.
- Eric Cota presented two candidates for consideration for the Public Works Employee and Assistant Foreman positions. The Selectboard authorized Eric to make employment offers to both with various terms.

**VIII. Adjourn.**

At 11:23pm, Peeker Heffernan made a motion to adjourn. Joel Bouvier seconded. So voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon A. Lucia  
Board Clerk

Valerie Capels  
Town Administrator