

Minutes of the February 9, 2009 Meeting of the Board of Selectmen.

Present: Neal Fox, Bill Richards, Joe DeFreitas, Delbert Cloud, Geneva Gaiko, Kristin LaFromboise, David Eddy, David Allen, and Jose Lazo.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chairman Neal Fox, the Board first reviewing and approving the weekly payroll and payables. The minutes of the January 26, 2009 meeting of the Board of Selectmen were approved by motion of Joe DeFreitas, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried.

Delbert Cloud informed the Board that David Aiken has offered to again serve as the Town's representative to the Stagecoach Board of Directors. Motion to re-appoint Mr. Aiken to the subject Board was made by Bill Richards, seconded by Joe DeFreitas and unanimously carried. The subject appointment is done on an annual basis in accordance with the bylaws of the "Stagecoach."

Cloud then provided the Board with a brief update on various matters of business stemming from prior meetings. These matters included: (1) advice from the firm of Forcier Aldrich & Associates that the "Final Design Agreement" for replacement of the River Street Bridge water main has been approved by the Vermont Water Supply Division and can thus now be executed by the Town, (2) notice from the Stagecoach Manager, David Palmer, pertaining to the relocation of the Bethel stop, which henceforth is to be at the Church Street Common, (3) notice from the Treasurer of White River Valley Ambulance, Inc. of a billing discrepancy by which the Towns having a July 1 fiscal year underpaid for membership during 2008, a suggested remedy to be forthcoming in the near future, (4) notice from the regional planning commission Transportation Planner advising that he would be unable to assist the Town with a review of the Traffic Ordinance for several months due to an increased workload at the commission's office.

The Planning Commission minutes of January 21, 2009 were reviewed and placed on file. The Board members expressed interest in participating in the development of the public survey which is being proposed as a prelude to updating the Town Plan in 2011, it being in significant part associated with other planning efforts related to the Village Center designation and the efforts of the Bethel Business Association at improving economic vitality.

As the time was then 6:30 PM, Chairman Fox welcomed the following officials of the School District: Kristin LaFromboise, School Board Chair; David Allen, Business Manager; and David Eddy, School Board Director. Kristin LaFromboise introduced the discussion as being part of the effort by the Board of School Directors to promote communication and a greater understanding of school/education issues. The open discussion which ensued encompassed a wide variety of topics, inclusive of: the School District budget for FY 2010, tax rate implications of the same, notice of the budget informational meeting to be held by the School Board on February 23rd, several aspects of the Special Education program, bus/transportation issues, measures being taken by both the School Board and the business office to promote efficiency and frugality, teacher:student ratios, trends and planning associated with the future, and the potentials of consolidation and sharing of resources with other Districts. The members of both Boards agreed that the exchange of thoughts and information was very constructive, and that the Boards should plan to meet more regularly to share perspectives. The School District officials then departed, the time being 7:55 PM.

At approximately this same time, Jose Lazo arrived at the meeting, he coincidentally also being a member of the Board of School Directors, but in attendance to discuss a project being developed by the "Bethel Green Team." He advised the Board that the business he wished to discuss involved the potential of real estate acquisition(s), negotiations for which are on-going but which might involve public ownership; he encouraged the Board to enter executive session since negotiations are on-going and premature public knowledge of the matter would be detrimental to the public's interests. Motion accordingly to enter executive session was made by Joe DeFreitas, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried. Delbert Cloud and Jose Lazo were the only people who remained with the Board for the ensuing business; no minutes were kept. Upon return to open meeting at 8:50 PM, no action was taken by the Selectboard; Jose Lazo thanked the Board for its participation in the business covered, and he departed at this time.

The Board next reviewed the December 18, 2008 minutes of the Local Emergency Planning Committee. These minutes were then placed on file, no action being required or taken by the Board.

Delbert Cloud informed the Board that Amy Danley/White, formerly Health Officer for the Town, has apparently found a qualified person to become her successor in that office, subject to the Selectboard's concurrence and recommendation to the Vermont Department of Health. It is understood that the person having interest in the appointment is still considering the matter, but will contact the Town Office in the near future to further discuss the potential appointment. The Board members agreed that time should be made available at the next Board meeting to meet the individual if that would be helpful.

Budget status reports as of January 28, 2009 for the Town General Fund, the Water Department, the Wastewater Department, and the Alliance Solid Waste Program were then reviewed and discussed in depth, this interval marking seven months of the current fiscal year. This discussion led into the next agenda item, which was to consider how the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" might be useful to the Town and alleviate certain financial pressures in forthcoming years. Little is actually known about the methodology by which a federal economic stimulus package might be delivered, but five potential projects have been listed with the Vermont League of Cities & Towns as being "ready to proceed" if a program becomes available which would be useful for the Town's purposes. Details of the specific projects were briefly reviewed, most of these being of a necessity to complete, with or without benefit of any special financing provisions. The "listed" projects are: (1) relocation of the existing water main on River Street Bridge, (2) upgrading of the primary pump station in the wastewater system, (3) costs extraneous to presently available grants/matching funds as would be necessary to complete the Town Hall rehabilitation project, (4) replacement of the truck scales at the solid waste facility, and (5) resurfacing on several sections of class 1 and 2 Town highways.

In consideration of any other matters as might have fiscal benefit to the Town in light of the current economic climate, the Board concluded that the Town is operating on a frugal basis which does not allow opportunity for significant reduction in expenses. It was agreed that the level of services should not be diminished at this time, and that planned acquisitions/projects should proceed while remaining alert to options which might become available to keep costs reasonable. It was noted that tax collection efforts should continue on delinquent accounts to help meet the needs of the Town.

A letter dated January 15, 2009 from Senator Patrick Leahy was next reviewed. This was a response to the inquiry made by the Town re. the possibility of allowing increased weight limits to be approved on the Interstate Highway system. Several other Vermont Towns have joined in the request, and Senator Leahy's office is researching the subject.

At 11:15 PM, the motion was made by Bill Richards, seconded by Joe DeFreitas and unanimously carried, to enter executive session to discuss issues of litigation in which the Town is a party. Delbert Cloud was the only person remaining with the Board for the executive session; no minutes were kept. Upon return to open meeting at 11:38 PM, the only motion was that to adjourn, this being made by Bill Richards, seconded by Joe DeFreitas and unanimously carried.

Neal Fox

Bill Richards

Joe DeFreitas