

Minutes of the July 23, 2007 Meeting of the Board of Selectmen.

Present: Neal Fox, Bill Richards, Eric Benson, Delbert Cloud, Geneva Gaiko, Joe DeFreitas, Verona Lund, and Jon Hodgdon.

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 Constable's reports of July 15, 2007 and July 22, 2007 were reviewed and placed on file. The minutes of the July 9, 2007 meeting of the Selectboard, and the continuation of that meeting held on July 18, 2007, were approved by motion of Eric Benson, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried.

Chairman Fox commenced the meeting's agenda by declaring that a Public Hearing was open, to receive any public comment pertaining to the reclassification or discontinuance of a public highway as may connect Vermont Castings Road to Bridge Street. This matter has been the subject of a previous Public Hearing on June 11, 2007. Given no members of the public present at this Hearing which was duly warned by publication in the "Herald of Randolph" on July 12, 2007, the Hearing was closed by motion of Eric Benson, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried. The Board members concurred that no additional considerations had become apparent than had been known at the previous Hearing, and that the same "Findings of Fact", and determinations made, should stand; the Town Agent will be asked to prepare the "Report and Order" for the Board's action.

At the request of the Town Agent, the Board members reviewed a corrective deed for lands conveyed at an earlier time, in the vicinity of Fort Fortitude, to Scott W. Putney. Neal Fox was authorized to sign the corrective deed on behalf of the Board, this by motion of Bill Richards, seconded by Eric Benson and unanimously carried.

By motion of Eric Benson, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried, Neal Fox was authorized to sign the "License Agreement" allowing the Town Listers to have use of the "Marshall and Swift Cost Tables" for the ensuing year.

A request for advice has been received from the Board of Listers re. a matter pertaining to a taxpayer's eligibility for a Veteran's exemption on his 2006 property taxes. The Board members agreed that the aggrieved party should have an opportunity to speak with the Board of Abatement, to see if a resolution can be made.

The Board then took up the matter of evaluating the type of "Emergency Response Card" which would be made available to the public, for provision of information on disaster preparedness. It has been suggested that more information than is on the present "yellow card" would be helpful. However, the Board members considered that the "Emergency Planning" data sheet prepared by the Planning Commission would not be utilized by the public at large because it has too much text and will not be regarded as a helpful thing to keep available for reference. It was agreed that Delbert Cloud should ask the Vermont League of Cities and Towns for advice on what other communities might have done, and to ask the Planning Commission if the essence of the data sheet could be re-formatted to become more of a "postable" card.

As the time was then 6:30 PM, Chairman Fox welcomed Verona Lund, and advised her that the Board has received her letter of July 12, 2007 regarding water drainage problems at her property on Findley Bridge Road. Discussion ensued as to causes and possible solutions to the problems she described. It was agreed that the Town Crew will clean the "swale" running from the road back toward the railroad corridor, which hopefully will intercept water before it reaches Ms. Lund's property. Delbert Cloud will ascertain what may be necessary to minimize erosion from recently excavated embankments in this same location.

Ms. Lund then departed, and Chairman Fox welcomed Jon Hodgdon, he being present by appointment to discuss the White River Valley Ambulance program. Mr. Hodgdon explained various changes recently made within the slate of officers of the ambulance program's Board of Directors. He also outlined various initiatives being taken which the Board of Directors hopes will help keep the program both financially stable and accountable to the Towns it serves. The ensuing discussion focused on areas of concern which still exist regarding the legal structure of the ambulance program, its accountability, and its financial standing. It was agreed that communication should be kept open and current, and that Mr. Hodgdon should plan to make periodic reports to the Selectboard, perhaps on a quarterly basis.

The Board next reviewed the "Dog Ordinance" for the Town of Bethel, to evaluate the appropriateness of fees and penalties in light of concerns raised by the First Constable. It was agreed that Delbert Cloud should discuss the structure of "Section 6. Penalties" with the VLCT Legal Department, to see if the provisions are enforceable as they are interpreted by the Board. Delbert Cloud will report back to the Board on this matter, and advise the Constable of the findings as well.

The Town's "Cemetery Rules and Regulations" were then examined. Delbert Cloud explained the survey his office has recently conducted regarding rates charged for purchases of lots at cemeteries in the towns nearby, as compared to the rates charged in Bethel. It was readily apparent that the rates in Bethel are considerably lower, and that the Town should raise them, particularly in light of the present costs to provide perpetual care by the Town. Delbert Cloud will do further review of the matter and present a recommendation to the Board at a forthcoming meeting.

Delbert Cloud then updated the Board on the status of various matters associated with the severe rains which had caused extensive damage on July 11, 2007. Damage incurred by private property owners has been logged and forwarded to the Vermont Department of Public Safety, with the hope that an assistance program for private property repairs may be set up. Some necessary work to restore access has been contracted to private contractors. Having restored access along the course of public highways, the Town crew is now awaiting instruction as to how to proceed with full repairs. Thus far, no declaration of disaster has been made at the federal level, and it is uncertain as to what form of public assistance will become available. It was agreed that the Town would be in a better position to plan repairs if the level of financial assistance were known. If such knowledge is not forthcoming during the current week, however, it was agreed that the Town would then proceed using its best judgement to get highways and bridges restored. Joe DeFreitas asked if private property owners/individuals could provide assistance in any way. It was agreed that phone calls/e-mails to government officials at the State and Federal levels might help by encouraging a more prompt response to the matters needing attention.

The Board then took up the matter of the Town Hall roof project. The low bidder in recently received bids is Summit/Catamount Construction in the amount of \$120,700.00. It was noted that the costs for bid documents prepared by the architect need to be provided for (\$7,319.74), as do the architect/engineer fees for construction phase services (\$12,170.00), and that a 10% contingency is also recommended by the architect (\$12,700.00.) The funds necessary to support a contract for the proposed work thus total at \$152,889.74; it is also noted that there may be some additional items that will have to be covered, such as treatment of exposed electric power cables sufficiently to enable the intended work. The Town Hall Rehabilitation fund presently has approximately \$120,000.00 available to apply toward the contract, so it is necessary to confirm that pledges made can be drawn upon to fully support the contract. Delbert Cloud will confirm that these matters are appropriately in place prior to awarding the contract. Motion to authorize him to sign the anticipated contract on behalf of the Town was made by Neal Fox, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried.

The following communications were then reviewed and placed on file: (1) water quality report for area streams, submitted by the White River Partnership, (2) proposals for upgrading equipment at the transfer station, which are still being evaluated before a recommendation will be presented to the Board, (3) a draft of the "Discharge Permit" being issued by the Agency of Natural Resources to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the hatchery on Route 107, (4) an article from the "Valley News" presenting the circumstances by which the Regional Plan has pre-empted local development permits in the Town of Bradford under Act 250 procedures, and (5) a memo from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to Congressman Welch questioning his position on labor relations issues.

At 10:07 PM the motion was made by Bill Richards, seconded by Eric Benson and unanimously carried, to enter executive session to review employee performances and the annual adjustments as might be made under cost of living or merit basis. Delbert Cloud was the only person remaining with the Board during the executive session. No minutes were kept. Upon return to open meeting at 10:30 PM, the motion was made by Neal Fox, seconded by Eric Benson and unanimously carried, to apply a 4.75% increase "across the board" to the Town's schedule of compensation, to be effective July 1, 2007 in coordination with the new fiscal year of the Town.

With no additional business to attend, the meeting was then adjourned by motion of Eric Benson, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried.

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Neal Fox

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Bill Richards

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Eric Benson