

Minutes of the October 27, 2008 Meeting of the Board of Selectmen.

Present: Neal Fox, Bill Richards, Joe DeFreitas, Delbert Cloud, and Ann Warrell of CVPS.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chairman Neal Fox. Chairman Fox welcomed Ann Warrell of CVPS who was there to present information regarding the Shareheat Program. The program is administered locally through Central Vermont Community Action Council and provides emergency heating assistance to residents in the form of electricity to power heating units or as oil itself. The program also provides assistance for repair of systems. Residents must be at less than 200% of the federal poverty level to qualify, although there are several exceptions to provide for particular needs. The program will pay for the minimum delivery for a family per season and can pay up to \$300 for electricity. The balance, if any, is applied to the minimum fuel delivery. Payments are made directly to the suppliers.

At 6:20 PM, the Board returned to the order of the agenda, first reviewing and approving the weekly payroll and payables. The minutes of the October 14, 2008 meeting of the Board of Selectmen were approved by motion of Joe DeFreitas, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried. The Constable's reports of October 12, 19, and 26, 2008 were reviewed and placed on file. The Planning Commission minutes of October 15, 2008 were reviewed and placed on file, as were the October 7, 2008 minutes of the Development Review Board and the August 21, 2008 minutes of the Town Hall Finance Committee. The Regional Planning Commission minutes of September 10 and 24, 2008 were also reviewed and placed on file.

The Board next reviewed the matter of the vacancy for the Town's representative on the South Royalton Area Senior Center Board of Directors. Since it is known that Carroll Ketchum is willing to accept appointment to the Board of Directors, motion to appoint Mr. Ketchum was made by Bill Richards, seconded by Joe De Freitas and unanimously carried.

The Board then took up the "Cemetery Rules and Regulations of Bethel, Vermont." After due consideration, motion to approve the revised ordinance was made by Neal Fox, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried.

The Board next examined a set of documents from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns pertaining to the proposed \$3 million cuts in local highway aid. The following resolution was then made by motion of Bill Richards, seconded by Joe De Freitas, and unanimously carried:

"Whereas, transportation infrastructure serves as the backbone not only of Vermont's economy, but also Vermonters' very lives, and

Whereas, local governments are mandated by state law to keep "in good and sufficient repair during all seasons of the year" 80 percent of all road miles in Vermont, and

Whereas, local governments are similarly mandated to serve the public by maintaining the vast majority of the bridges spanning 20' or greater to the same level, and

Whereas, local governments also own and are obligated to maintain thousands of bridges spanning less than 20' as well as an equivalent or greater number of large and small culverts, and

Whereas, despite being responsible for the overwhelming majority of Vermont's highway miles, bridges and culverts, funding for the state aid programs for local government have shrunk to just 15.5% of the state's transportation expenditures over the course of the past decade, and

Whereas, the legislative Joint Fiscal Office estimates that Vermont currently has an estimated gap of \$200 million annually between what it spends on transportation infrastructure and what it should spend, and

Whereas, the 2009 VLCT Municipal Policy, adopted by local officials, calls for a mixture of increased state revenue sources, bonding, and the cessation of the transfer of transportation monies to the state General Fund for non-transportation purposes to start closing that infrastructure spending gap, and

Whereas, any cuts in state funding for the local highway aid programs means that property taxes will have to be raised, and

Whereas, the administration has proposed and the Joint Fiscal Committee of the Vermont Legislature will decide in November whether or not to cut nearly \$3 million from the local highway aid programs, including \$1.85 million from Town Highway State Aid, \$700,000 from Class 2 Paving and Rehabilitation and \$350,000 from the Town Highway Structures Program; *Now therefore be it*

Resolved by the Town of Bethel:

That the town specifically opposes the nearly \$3 million in cuts to town highway aid under consideration by the Joint Fiscal Committee, and *be it further*

Resolved: That the town respectfully requests that the legislature not make up for the state's ailing transportation revenues and budget shortfalls by cutting funding for local highway aid programs and shifting the burden to local government and property taxpayers, and *be it further*

Resolved: That the town calls upon the state administration and legislature to return in January and make its top priority the resolution of Vermont's transportation funding crisis in a comprehensive and strategic manner after consideration of all potential remedies."

The following communications were then reviewed and placed on file: (1) a letter from All Metals Recycling dated October 10, 2008 advising that they will no longer compensate for their scrap metal service due to the drop in demand for scrap steel; (2) the October 2008 newsletter from Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission; (3) the Fall 2008 newsletter from the White River Natural Resources Conservation District; (4) an e-mail from John Klesch of Stitzel, Page & Fletcher dated October 13, 2008 re. notice to abutters; (5) an e-mail from Steven Stitzel dated October 21, 2008 re. the appeal of the Dunham Road litigation decision; (6) A lab report from Endyne dated October 21, 2008 re. the Bethel/Royalton Landfill; (7) Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation review documents pertaining to permits being sought by Mark & Janet McKinstry for development of land on Camp Brook Road; (8) the October 2008 newsletter from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns; (9) a letter dated October 22, 2008 from Steven Stitzel re. the appeal of the Dunham Road litigation decision.

At 6:50 PM, the motion was made by Joe DeFreitas, seconded by Bill Richards and unanimously carried to adjourn to Whitcomb High School Cafeteria to conduct an information meeting at 7:00 PM for the purpose of explaining the proposed rehabilitation plans for the Town Hall and the means of financing the project, this being in association with a scheduled bond vote to be held November 4, 2008, as has been duly warned.

At 7:00 PM at the Whitcomb High School cafeteria at 273 Pleasant Street, Selectboard Chair Neal Fox called to order the above referenced Informational Meeting. The following people were present: Bethel Selectboard members Neal Fox, Bill Richards, and Joseph De Freitas; Delbert Cloud; Nick Nikolaidis; Heidi Nikolaidis; James Abbott; Mary Floyd; Paul Feeney; Janet Burnham; Geneva Gaiko; Chris Masters; Winslow Ayer; David Umba; William Walker; Davis Dimock; Victoria Weber; and Chris Costanzo.

Chairman Fox read the following "Article" which will be the subject of a vote on November 4, 2008:

"Shall general obligation bonds of the Town of Bethel in an amount not to exceed One Million Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,300,000.00), subject to reduction from the application of reserves, grants, contributions and donations be issued for the purpose of financing the cost of renovating the Bethel Town Hall at an estimated cost of One Million Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,300,000.00)?"

Chairman Fox then provided a brief introduction for purposes of initiating discussion, referencing the rehabilitation project as being of great significance to the Town and one which the Selectboard supports, it now being necessary to see if the voters will support moving forward with the project.

Amy Bergamo, Chair of the Town Hall Finance Committee, summarized work done to date, not the least of which is the new roof and the associated structural work. She also noted the fact that reserves held for the project, and continuing fund raising efforts, will reduce the actual bonding requirement to a value below the \$1,300,000.00 which is used to specify the total project cost.

William Walker asked how secure the Town is with the estimated project cost. Neal Fox and Amy Bergamo referenced the input which has been provided by the architect and his subcontracted engineering firm in arriving at the value.

Heidi Nickolaidis asked when the project could actually be started. Joe DeFreitas replied that the architect would commence work on the bid package in November if the bond vote were favorable. Paul Feeney of the Town Hall Construction Committee gave a brief summary of the customary bid/award procedures which lead to a construction start.

Victoria Weber wondered if there would be a requirement for purchasing local goods and services. It was noted by several that general contractors often have their own procurement system which is part of the basis of their bid. Convenience is also a factor, Joe DeFreitas responded pointing out that if something needed can be obtained close by, it is usually an advantage to do that.

Chris Costanzo asked if one general contractor is expected to be used, the answer being in the affirmative from the Selectboard.

Davis Dimock offered his evaluation of the project's net impact on the tax rate of the Town, concluding that it would be approximately three cents after application of available reserve funds against the project cost, and eliminating the amount being annually appropriated to the reserve fund in recent years.

David Umba questioned the feasibility of rehabbing the present building vs. building a new one. He referenced the difficulty Randolph is having at this time in managing the business of Chandler Music Hall, and wondered if this project would be able "to make ends meet" or if it might be in the same straits as Chandler. Amy Bergamo replied that the project would provide "betterments" to the Town beyond the issue of supporting itself, it not being expected to be a "money-maker" once done. She noted the support the voters have shown for the project each year by approving appropriations.

Janet Burnham spoke of the value in preserving elements of history, this building having been designed by the noted architect George Gurnsey, and represents a part of his enormous contribution to the State of Vermont.

Victoria Weber expressed her optimism that money would be coming back to help support the building once it is usable to people.

David Umba said he is concerned about the high level of delinquent taxes, which he believes to be indicative of the hardships people are facing at this time, and questioned if the time is appropriate to incur debt for the project.

Paul Feeney said the question needs to be presented to the voters, he being hopeful that the project would be moved forward in the same fashion as many other Towns have chosen to do with similar projects. He noted that if it does move forward, it will help bring people and businesses into Town.

Heidi Nickolaidis said that the same uncertainties had been expressed back at the time the building was proposed to be built.

Davis Dimock stated his belief that the project would be beneficial in that if families with children were attracted to the Town as a desirable community in which to live, the formulas for State aid to education would favorably reduce the school tax rate. He added that the Town should move forward as an investment in its future, rather than doing nothing with the building.

Paul Feeney then presented a power-point slide show, this being the same format as the pamphlet which has been prepared by individuals in support of the project.

Chris Costanzo asked if the Town would be able to prepare for another vote at Town Meeting time for funds to match the "Save America's Treasures" grant in the event of a negative vote on November 4th. The Selectboard confirmed that such could be done.

At 8:00 PM, questions and discussion concluded, and Chairman Fox declared the informational meeting to be completed. Motion was then made by Bill Richards, seconded by Joe DeFreitas and unanimously carried, to adjourn the meeting, no further business remaining as would require the Board's attention.

Neal Fox

Bill Richards

Joe DeFreitas