Town of Panton Chartered 1761

3176 Jersey Street • Panton, VT 05491-9331
Ph: 802.475.2333 • Fax: 802.475.2785

www.pantonvt.us

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 13, 2025

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Member Teresa Boucher, Selectboard Member Zack Weaver Town Clerk-Treasurer Kyle Rowe, Charles Kennett, Kathy Kennett, Janice Moulton, Robert Moulton, Judy Stokes Weber, Steve Weber, Richard Jackson, Jeanne Jackson, Paula Moore, Mary Rudd, Jaime Dayton, Amy Masback, Skip Masback, Kevin Cooke, Cindy Cooke, Sharon Ashcraft, VARS Director of Operations Jenna Lindemann, Ferrisburgh Selectboard Member Wally Reed

Via Zoom:, M'lissa Dayton, Lorraine Kayser, John Viskup, Bob Groff, Terry Pelletier

1. Howard called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.
2. Additions/deletions to the agenda-**NONE**
3. The Selectboard moved to accept the minutes from 1/6/25, Teresa motioned to approve, Zach seconded, **VOTE-3 In Favor, 0 Opposed.**
4. The Selectboard reviewed and signed AP and Payroll warrants. Howard made a motion to approve the warrants, Teresa seconded. **VOTE-3 in favor, 0 Opposed**.
5. Jenna Lindemann, Director of Operations from VARS, was asked to speak and provide an update from VARS;
    a. Director Lindemann began by introducing herself and noting that VARS receives approximately 1100 calls per year, up from approximately 700 in 2019 and noted that the area of coverage is pretty sizable.
    b. She noted that recruitment for AEMT's and drivers is a challenge, wages and benefits are constantly assessed to be competitive. Currently, there are 2 FT, 2 PT, and 8 Per Diem staff. VARS is continuously advertising to recruit more staff
    c. She noted that Call Volume per month was relatively consistent with 2023. She noted that 2023 was tough in terms of Out of Service time, and they vowed to do better in 2024.

d. She noted that a small restructuring occurred in January 2024, and a larger restructuring was planned for 2025, including new bylaws and SOPs, as well as improve the communication with the community and Towns.
e. The largest increase in the budget was payroll, noting that the Budget for 2024 was $345,000, but the year ended with Payroll at $475,000. They have budgeted $550,000 for 2025. The increase in cost was the decrease in OOS time, and two increases in staff wages during the year. The Billing Rates for all services have increased, except for the subscription rate, which remains the same. It was noted that the subscription total is approximately 945, and the services covers more than 5000 people.
f. After reviewing their numbers, they are increasing their per capita to $25.00. Panton's share of this will be $16,600 (664 people multiplied by $25).
g. She then took questions;
    i. What does Out of Service mean?
        1. OOS means that VARS can't provide legal service, meaning a lack of either an AEMT, driver, or both. The amount of OOS given, 36 hours, refers to the monthly OOS. Staffing has remained challenging to provide a low OOS time. There will always be an ambulance coming, but it might be from a surrounding service if VARS can't respond, increasing response time.
    ii. What are the prospects for increasing volunteer members?
        1. VARS would like to see more volunteers, but over the years those numbers have decreased, and finding replacements is difficult.
    iii. It was noted that VARS isn't the only service experiencing issues, other services are having response issues as well.
    iv. How do we incentivize and recruit, as well as train?
        1. Many are trained at other services, as well as programs managed by VARS and other services, as well as schools and institutions. The age requirements mean that people have to be older than 18. There is a goal to increase working with local high schools to create programs to recruit.
h. Wally Reed, Selectboard member from Ferrisburgh, made a presentation;
    i. He began by noting the history of VARS successes
    ii. He noted that the Towns need to know where the money they contribute is going, and how it is being used.
    iii. Towns need to know OOS time
    iv. The 5 communities that make up VARS need to find new ways to work together with VARS. The community has brainstormed different ways

to do that. There is no problem generally with the cost as long as the service is there. But the communities need to work with them to achieve that.

v. Wally noted that he said no to an increase, unless we have that kind of agreement in place. However an agreement has been made, Ferrisburgh is going to approve it and urges other towns to do so as well. The agreement would give each town/city 1 representative on a committee with VARS, meeting quarterly to discuss an review budget, expenditures, revenues, and other issues.

vi. VARS needs help, but is working hard to show their eagerness to participate in making this work.

vii. He then took questions;

1. Kathy Kennett asked if there would be 1 contract for all 5 towns/city.
    a. Wally said yes, there would be 1 contract. Howard added that ambulance is essential, and that he and Teresa have been working hard to make this agreement work for Panton and the other towns. He noted we all want VARS to be successful.

6. The C/T then gave his update;
    a. The C/T noted that the internal reconciliation of the bank accounts and NEMREC is down to approximately $26, and thanked the Town Staff and Becky Condon for their work on that, and that they hope to finalize that soon.
        i. The C/T noted that we had 3 quotes for new auditors for the towns, 1 out of St. Albans of $18,000, Sullivan and Powers in Barre/Montpelier for $35,000, and RHR Smith out of Buxton Maine at $13,500. The office is going to start work on preparing the pre-audit with RHR Smith ASAP. He additionally noted that while the audit won't be ready for Town Meeting, the town will prepare an "Internal Review of Financial Documents" for inclusion in the Town Report, and that the full audit will hopefully we conducted before the end of FY25, and be made publicly available.
            1. Kathy Kennett asked about the future audits.
                a. The C/T noted this would be an ongoing relationship, with a 3 year contract signed. Howard added that GASB recommends staying with an auditing firm for a number of years, to develop better relationships.
        ii. The C/T noted that the Town Report is being generated by Suzanne Snyder, and is progressing well.\
7. The C/T began to discuss the budget;

a. He noted that three things have changed since the last budget meeting. One was the VARS number, to make sure of the amounts billed by VARS and the Town agreed. One was the update to the auditing line item, to account for the new cost of auditing. The second was the Dump Truck Loan. The C/T was wrong is his understanding of the loan on the Dump Truck, and thanks Kevin Cooke for staying on top of this issue. The loan terms didn't change, even though the town paid off some of the principal with a MELF loan, so our payment will be the same, approximately $45k. This does however mean that the loan from Community Bank will be paid off in 2.5 years rather than 5. He has made the appropriate changes to the budget to reflect that increase, and noted that the amount in the budget for FY 25 will be adequate to cover the expense.
b. The C/T noted that he hopes to have a finalized budget for the next Selectboard Meeting at the end of January.

8. The C/T began a discussion on Town Hall audio/visual improvements;
    a. The recommendation from the C/Ts office is the purchase of new speaker/mic combos, the purchase of a new webcam, and the consultation of John from Vermont Production Company to set everything up and troubleshoot issues the total cost of which would be $925. He added that the layout of the room was important as well, and we were testing the layout to see what works best. He added that the quote came back from the acoustic panel company as well, at it was approximately $4625, not including installation, which the C/T would do. He noted that it wouldn't be worth it to reduce the number of panels significantly. The C/T recommendations is that we wait on the panels to see how the new speakers and layout worked.
        i. Kathy Kennett asked how will any of this help those physically attending the meetings.
            1. The C/T said that acoustic panels would help, but adding a PA system might be challenging.
        ii. Kathy Kennett suggested renting a PA system.
            1. The C/T noted that Ferrisburgh has one, and we could try to borrow theirs for the next SB meeting.
        iii. The C/T asked the selectboard for approval to continue pursuing these upgrades.
            1. Howard asked for the zoom computer to be directly connected to the server, to avoid WIFI dropping us.
            2. M'lissa Dayton asked how this would be paid for.
                a. The C/T responded out of the Town Hall Building Maintenance Fund, noting that it would have to be

approved by the SB at the next SB meeting, as per statute.

iv. Teresa made a motion to upgrade the town audio/visual system, Zach seconded, **VOTE 3 in Favor, 0 Opposed.**

9. The C/T noted that we needed to approve a liaison to the State Municipal Ethics Committee. Teresa made a motion to appoint Kyle Rowe, the Town Clerk/Treasurer to be the liaison to the State Municipal Ethics Committee, Zach seconded, **VOTE- 3 in Favor, 0 Opposed**
10. The C/T began discussion on the Public Records Policy;
    a. The Town asked the Clerk's office to prepare a Public Records Request Policy. The C/T developed one after consulting VLCT, other towns and cities, and publicly available versions.
    b. The C/T added that this provides the Clerk's office with the ability to charge for records requests above and beyond the normal course of business, and creates a record of those requests. The Clerk's office would have discretion, and would publish the policy, exemptions, and other related documents on the town website. The C/T discussed various other aspects of the policy, including the fact that the C/Ts office won't create records that don't exist, and will document the requests to create a better record of requests.
        i. Kathy Kennett asked if it would be available for review before acceptance.
            1. The C/T noted that it doesn't necessarily have to be, but could be if the SB so chooses.
        ii. Jaime Dayton asked why this, why now? He further noted that he'd like hear more information on the request.
            1. The C/T noted when requests become onerous, its still necessary to comply, but makes it difficult to fulfill other aspects of their duties. This creates a mechanism whereby at least the C/T will be compensated for their time in this process, if the requests take an undue amount of time. The C/T added that he'd be happy to have this matter taken under advisement, for the review of the towns people and the SB.
        iii. Jaime Dayton stated a concern that the town is already "paying" for this via taxes.
            1. Howard added that its after a certain amount of time expended, the C/T also reiterated this policy wouldn't be necessary for the normal course of business in answering the requests of the public in the town. Teresa added that it would be for things outside the norm, in terms of compensation.

iv. Sharon Ashcraft noted that this was a request of the previous Town Clerk to help better compensate the Clerk's Office for time spent.
v. Judy Weber noted several concerns;
    i. The definition of onerous
    ii. Generally coming down on the side of we need to see the policy before it is agreed upon.
    iii. She also wanted to know on the way that this would be charged, and what types of fees would be associated.
vi. Skip Masback noted that he heard the C/T say that this could be taken under advisement. Zach agreed, and said we won't rush it, but will place it on the website and make it available for folks to look at before a decision was made.
vii. It was generally noted that the town needs a clearer understanding of the details, e.g. timing, costs.

11. The C/T began discussion on the VTRANS mileage certificate;
    a. He noted that nothing has changed from last year, and that we need to sign off on this for grant money, compliance.
        i. It was asked if this listed types of roads.
            1. The C/T responded that it did, mileage and types.
        ii. The C/T also noted that he and Rick Cloutier were discussing the future possibility of converting the town's Class 4 roads in to Class 2 or 3, thereby making them eligible for funding.
12. The C/T began discussion on the proposed charter change;
    a. The C/T began by stating this was an amendment by addition to the Town Charter to allow for the recall of elected town officers. He noted that this was only a notification for the SB, not an official hearing. He described the process by which this charter change would be heard and discussed. He added that this petition was reviewed by the Town's attorney, who proposed a technical change to the language surrounding timing. He then read the charter change;
        i. "Subchapter 5. Recall of elected town officers
            1. Any elected town officer may be removed from office subject to the following conditions and procedures:
            2. (a) A written petition, signed by not less than 15 percent of the registered voters of the town, seeking the removal of such town officers, and requesting a vote of the town at a regular or special town meeting called for the purpose, shall be filed with the Selectboard and the Town Clerk.
            3. (b) The Selectboard shall call a special town meeting, to be held within 45 days of receiving the petition, to vote on whether the

elected officer shall be removed, the vote shall be by Australian ballot.

4. (c) When such a petition is approved by a majority of the ballots cast at said special town meeting, the town office(er) named in the petition shall thereupon cease to hold their office.
5. (d) A vacancy resulting from the recall of an officer shall be filled in the manner prescribed by law.
6. (e} A recall petition shall not be brought against an individual more than once within 12 months.

b. The C/T then read a piece of the proposed technical change;
    i. "If the petition is filed no more than 60 days and at least 47 days before the next regular town meeting, the Selectboard shall place the question of whether the elected officer shall be removed on the warning for the next regular town meeting."
c. Sharon Ashcraft read the relevant state section i.e. the SB can't modify the language of the petition, and that the proposed technical correction doesn't qualify.
d. Bob Moulton asked if this would have to be signed off by the legislature.
    i. The C/T explained part of the process, which would include a vote by the General Assembly.
e. Sharon Ashcraft noted that the language was drafted by a lawyer for another town, and is now in their town charter.

13. Howard added the selectboard updates;
    a. The SB is putting together their information for the Town Report. Teresa added they have to put together their presentation for Town Meeting.
    b. Howard added that there will be another meeting with VARS in February.
14. Howard asked for Public Comment;
    a. Kathy Kennett thanked the C/T for being prepared for the SB meetings.
        i. The C/T thanked her, and asked for everyone to keep the open communication going, it makes the town a better place.
15. Teresa made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:55 p.m., Howard seconded- **VOTE- 3 in Favor, 0 Opposed.**