Town of Panton Chartered 1761

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Selectboard Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 26, 2024

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Member Zach Weaver, Emergency Management Coordinator Bob Groff, Assistant Town Clerk Donna Oliver, Richard Jackson, Jeanne Jackson, Sharon Ashcraft, Wendy Knight, Jamie Dayton, M'lissa Dayton, Genevieve Smyth, Mary Rudd, Kevin Cooke, Denise Strona, Kathy Kennett, Chuck Kennett, John Viskup, Dave Rheaume

Via Zoom: Dave Hazel (FreePoint/SunEast)

1. Howard called the meeting to order 5:31 p.m.

2. Additions/deletions to agenda. None
   There were no additions or deletions to the agenda.

3. Approval of minutes of 8/12/24 meeting.
   a. Noted there was no date on the minutes and there were several material omissions.

4. Approval of the minutes was tabled until changes can be made for the next meeting.

5. Emergency Management Report.
   a. Bob announced that Addison County received a Major Disaster Declaration for the July 9-11 storm. This will make federal resources available. However, FEMA funds are not yet available due to a holdup in Congress.
   b. Public Assistance briefings will be held later this month to discuss the process for requesting funds. Bob will attend.
   c. The National Weather Service and VT Emergency Management are concerned about more storms in the future.

6. Replacing contracted lister.
   a. We are in communication with a list of contacts and will keep looking.

7. Vergennes-Panton Water District Representative vacancy.
   a. We have not received any applications to date.

b. Kathy Kennett said she asked for a packet at the last board meeting but has not received it.

8. FY24 Audit.
   a. Telling & Hillman cannot guarantee they can perform our audit on our timetable. We have an ongoing understanding that they will work with us and have done so for the past 6-7 years. It has normally been done by November, but they are projecting getting to us in January. Kathy suggested contacting them in January each year, not in June.
   b. M'Lissa noted that the auditors spend much time adjusting our reports before they can finalize the audit. This increases the cost of the audit significantly causing us to go over budget.
   c. Several wanted to know what the plan is going forward. Howard said we need to find a new auditor next year.
   d. John questioned processes in place for keeping tabs on the budget and expenditures. He said that the selectboard should be reviewing the budget and expenditures line by line on a monthly basis.
   e. Sharon pointed to the statute requiring the treasurer to provide quarterly reports. Howard wasn't sure if this had been done.
   f. John and others were concerned about the selectboard's lack of knowledge about the budget, the reason for a 33% increase in our budget this coming year, and reason for another deficit. M'Lissa said we need to build transparency and trust. There must be more oversight.
   g. Sharon had to request information about salaries that was blank on town report.
   h. Discussed how to reduce costs for highway dept. Hire Pete LaPete? Mary said we need to calculate the cost per mile per year.

9. Confirm FY25 amount to be raised by taxes.
   a. The budget was approved at town meeting, so it's too late to make changes.
   b. Sharon said we should implement a procedure for budget approval like Middlebury. They have a meeting of town's people before the town meeting so they have input. This is not in our charter. Topic was tabled.

10. Set tax rate/tax bill mailing.
    a. Suggested we cannot do this until we review budget overage. Because the budget was approved at Town Meeting, we should plan to underspend the budget so we have an overage next year. Zack made a motion to set tax rate of 0.5861. Howard seconded. All in favor. Motion approved.

11. Reserve Fund Policy.
    a. There was confusion about what this fund is actually used for. It should not be called the reserve fund, but the emergency fund.
    b. Printed names should be next to signatures.
12. Vital Statistics in Town Report.
    a. On recommendation from Montpelier, we will no longer put names of births, deaths, marriages in our report. Instead will provide total numbers of each.

13. Freedom of information Act Policy.
    a. We are working on a form to complete. The Town will have 2 days to produce documents. If this is not possible, the Town will have up to 10 days. We will not create documents but will produce what is available.

14. BCA Written Decision on Assessment Appeal.
    a. This is in process.

15. Town Hall Hours for August 22-27.
    a. Howard read the hours.
    b. John questioned the frequent changes in town hall hours.

16. Public Comment.
    a. Sharon said we must have information about Act 133, the open meeting law on our website with an explanation of how to submit a complaint for the open meeting law. This was required on July 1 and should be corrected. She provided a copy of the statute and copy of the complaint form found on the Addison County Regional Planning Commission website.
    b. John said we cannot expect a lay person to keep up with statutes sent by state. We should have a part-time town manager to make better decisions for the town. Perhaps we could share a town manager with another small town.
    c. Kathy questioned the recent article in the Addison Independent which stated that the Selectboard is in negotiations with the solar company. Howard said this was false. We have not discussed anything with them. The company has only provided us with preliminary figures.

17. Communications.
    a. Howard attended a VARS meeting in which they stated they were 20-30 hours a month short (out of service 2.5 months per year). They should be able to provide coverage so residents don't have to wait 55 minutes for an ambulance. We need to change the way VARS is funded by the five towns. Estimated that it would cost $250K per year to hire enough professional people to provide 24-hour coverage.
    b. John was very concerned and suggested letting everyone know about this so they can make a plan B if they have an emergency. He thought it should be sent out on FPF. Kathy thought that would cause alarm.
    c. The 5 towns are working with an attorney to create a contract.

18. Review FY25 Revenue and Expenditure report.
    a. M'lissa does not trust the numbers. She gave an example of the reappraisal costs, which were charged to this year, but should have been charged in last fiscal year. FY24 AP has not been reconciled.

19. Review/approval of accounts payable warrant, timesheets & payroll warrant.
    Howard and Zack reviewed each bill and amount. Zack made a motion to approve the

accounts payable and payroll warrants. Howard seconded. All in favor; approved.

20. Executive Session.
    a. Howard made a motion to move to enter executive session at 8:03 p.m. Zack seconded. All in favor; approved.
    b. Howard moved to exit executive session at 8:17 p.m.

Zack moved to accept the 3.9% COLA increases retroactive to July 1. Howard seconded. Approved.

21. Adjournment
    Howard moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m. Zack seconded. All in favor, approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Oliver
Assistant Town Clerk