Town of Panton Chartered 1761

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Selectboard Meeting Minutes
October 16, 2024

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Member Zach Weaver, Selectboard Member Teresa Boucher, Emergency Management Coordinator Bob Groff, Town Clerk and Treasurer Maggie McCormick

Liz Haenel, Sharon Ashcraft, Mary Rudd, Kevin Cooke, Cindy Cooke, Chuck Kennett, Kathy Kennett, John Viskup, Richard Jackson, Terry Pelletier, Gretchen Bailey, Dave Rheaume, Martha DeGraaf, Paula Moore, Paulette Bogan, Michael Catillaz, Maggie Catillaz, Jonathan Ehrens, Peter Welch, James Dayton, David Jackson, Nicholas Jackson

Via Zoom: David Martini, Dave Hazel (Viridis), Wendy Knight, Marcia Haas (Viridis), M'Lissa Dayton, Robin Herbick

1. Howard called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

2. Additions/deletions to the agenda: None.

3. Approval of the minutes of the September 9, 2024, September 23, 2024, and September 24, 2024 Selectboard meetings

Howard moved to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2024 as written, Teresa seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

Howard moved to approve the minutes of the September 23, 2024 as written, Zach seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

Zach moved to the minutes of the September 24, 2024 as written, Teresa seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

4. Review/approval of accounts payable warrant, timesheets & payroll warrant
    a. Payroll warrant for 9/27/2024: $6996.07
    b. Payroll warrant for 10/11/2024: $6949.42
    c. Accounts payable warrant for 10/16/2024: $147,949.38, including paving.

d. Maggie noted that the town had expended $427 for legal fees for an Open Meeting Complaint, and the contracted assessor cost the town $3823 FY24, and $1119 to date in FY25.

5. Review of FY25 revenue and expenditures to date
    a. Maggie presented the year-to-date financial report to the Selectboard. Each was provided with a copy in their meeting folder.
        i. Nothing that is of note. Maggie stated she had reviewed State Aid to Highways as a potential to pay for flood repairs.
    b. Assistant clerk Donna Oliver has been made a signatory on the town's Community Bank accounts
    c. Maggie presented the Annual Financial Controls document to the Selectboard for their signatures. Each was provided with a copy in their meeting folder.
    d. Maggie presented the FY25Q1 quarterly report to the Selectboard. Each was provided with a copy in their meeting folder.

6. Emergency Management Coordinator's report
    a. The Vermont Emergency Management (VEWM) advisors will function as the liaison with FEMA for flood repair reimbursement.
    b. FEMA meeting with VEM to be determined.
    c. Bob completed a VEM survey about the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) process.
    d. Bob posted to Front Porch Forum about seasonal conditions.
    e. Bob will attend a Vermont Public Safety Communications Task Force conference virtually on October 22, 2024.

7. Paying July Flood Bills
    a. Maggie brought up the possibility of using State Aid to Highways for Class 2 and Class 3 road repair flood expenses.
    b. There was a discussion of the classes of impacted roads is and it was noted that West Road, which suffered damage is a Class 4 road.
    c. Janice Moulton asked if we would be using state money designated for Class 2 and Class 3 roads to pay for repairs on Class 4 roads.
        i. The answer is no.
8. Replacing contracted lister
    a. Maggie said she had not heard from Will Benton.
    b. Howard will call Bill Benton.

9. Vermont Public Records Act policy
    a. Howard is still working on the draft.

10. Communications
    a. Maggie has a Government Institute class on Friday, 10/25.
    b. Maggie asked if the Selectboard wanted her to maintain notary public status and if the board wanted Donna to become a notary.
        i. The board asked that both Maggie and Donna be notaries.
    c. Carol John Letter
        i. Letter addressed to Howard requesting refund of past taxes due to a lister's error in the square footage of finished basement in their Staton Drive property.
    d. Vergennes Hydroelectric document notice.
    e. Agenda mistake –this one should have had the VPWD Representative Interviews on it
        i. Howard said the board would set a date to conduct interviews with multiple candidates, likely to precede the next board meeting on 10/28-- e.g., 5:00 p.m. on 10/28.

The Zoom computer failed at this point and the recording ends here.

11. Public comment

Terry Pelletier
    a. How did the solar project fact sheet come about?
        i. Howard stated it was worked out between Panton's legal counsel and Viridis' legal counsel as a reasonable answer to people's questions.
        ii. Howard stated the fact sheet would be available on the town website, posted to Front Porch Forum, and paper copies will be available at Town Hall.

Cindy Cooke
    a. Where does the estimated annual revenue to the town of $350,000 come from?
        i. Howard: this is the starting figure Viridis provided to Panton's counsel.
        ii. Cindy: The fact sheet reads, "property taxes." Does that mean taxes collected on the land?

Kevin Cooke

a. The Town should ask for clarification on this amount and incremental amounts.

Martha Degraaf

a. Who will get the electricity?
    i. Howard/Teresa: that has yet to be determined.

Jon Ehrens

a. What is the time-frame the PUC application and public comment.
    i. Teresa: 18 – 20 months out.

Terry Pelletier

a. Viridis solar said they hoped to sell power to Connecticut, but they haven't received approval.

Sharon Ashcraft

a. $350,000 is same number as the earlier number and is based on the Shaftsbury project, which is not permitted yet.

John Viskup

a. Solar is promoted by the state as another source of revenue
b. He owns (owned) a 5-acre solar field, and the electricity is/was sold out of state because VT can't afford to buy it.
c. Solar provides huge profit for the corporation.
d. [The development] might look good to town, but taxes are forcing people out of state
e. This development will ruin the bucolic scene. The roadway will be lined with black smudges. Vermont banned roadside signs to preserve aesthetic, but is putting in solar fields. Climate change is a real thing, but Vermont can't save the world.

Michael Catillaz:

a. Who has the authority to approve this?
    i. Teresa: The PUC has the authority. The people bringing this forward will sit before the 3-person PUC. This is a huge thing.
    ii. This is why it's on the ballot, to get a fuller opinion.

Sharon Ashcraft

a. The town will have input through the PUC process.
b. There are two other projects in the state looking for approval.
c. This development will ruin the town. Panton will never be the same.
d. This is an industrial-scale power production facility. There is not another one of this size in the state.

Terry Pelletier

a. SB is important here, because they can opt to support this project or not and it matters.

Roberta Puschel

a. 6-month residents are not allowed to vote. Largest landholders can't weigh in.
b. Panton could have a separate ballot for non-residents
    i. Teresa thanked her for the suggestion and recognized it as a possibility.

John Viskup

a. VT is cloudiest state in the Union.
b. Panton has already satisfied its contribution to renewable energy. Proposal puts 300-acre field in an area not defined in the Enhanced Energy Plan.
c. There is a tax-based on inventory at the plant, which is low.
d. Developer charged with bribing Brazilian officials bribes.
e. A grass roots effort is needed to inform public.

Paulette Bogan:

a. Will the PUC offer residents an opportunity to weigh in?
    i. Teresa: Yes. Public comment is solicited in tiers which begins with abutters and then moves to non-abutters.
    ii. Residents' opportunity to have the most impact will be in front of the PUC.
b. Any idea of when the PUC might take this up?
    i. Teresa; There is a 45-day warning period
    ii. Howard: Shaftsbury and Fair Haven are already in the feedback process and the PUC seems to be short-staffed. There has been no forward movement with those applications.

John Viskup

a. Peter Walsh's wife is on the PUC.

Sharon Ashcraft

a. There is YouTube video of a VT PUC public hearing.

Mary Rudd

a. The DRB/PC was locked out of the building at their legally warned meeting on 10/17.
    i. Howard: You [Mary] will need to get a door code to conduct the DRB/PC meetings
    ii. Mary: I don't want a door code.
    iii. Mary read text messages from an exchange between her and Howard that evening.

b. We need to get back to assistant clerk supporting the DRB meetings.

Sharon Ashcraft:

a. Why are the public attendees not listed on the minutes of the September 24 Special Selectboard Meeting Minutes?
    i. Maggie: There is no requirement to list attendees unless they speak.
b. Sharon (or Kathy Kennet?) received a message from Mel Hawley that vacancies must be noticed withing 10 days.
    i. Maggie: Vacancy was and is posted on all town bulletin boards.
c. Why hasn't the position of Town Advisor been noticed? and why no notice of
    i. Howard: the Town Advisor position was specifically created so the town could avail itself of the special legal knowledge of the resident for whom it was created when the state removed the position of Town Agent.

John Viskup

a. There is no one sitting on the water board.
    i. Howard: there are two other Panton representatives on the VPWD board.

Kathy Kennett

a. Asked that a member of the public is also present for VPWD interviews.

Liz Haenel

a. Requested that comments be less critical and more constructive.

Jamie Dayton

a. Asked if the Selectboard would form a budget committee to support the board in budget preparation.
    i. Teresa: Budget meetings will be scheduled at the next Selectboard meeting.

Janice Moulton

a. What is the board looking for in the VPWD representative?
b. Why has no one been appointed yet?

Kathy Kennett

a. Stated Howard won't appoint her. One person does not run the Selectboard.
b. Can VARS members speak to the public about the committee working on the VARS contract?
    i. Teresa: The goal is to get VARS to be more able to respond. Over the course of the year, VARS had 72 days with no coverage
    ii. Wally (Reed, Ferrisburgh) and Rhonda (Williams, Waltham) could come discuss the contract effort

Kevin Cooke

a. That's a no-brainer; invite them to a meeting to talk about VARS effort.

John Viskup

a. The Town pays $10,000/year now. Proposed solution expected to cost $40,000/year.
b. This is Vermont. Not NYC or Hollywood. Even if it is fully staffed, VARS would take at least 10 minutes to get out here.
c. It's Important to let the rural population know that they must get the person to the hospital.
    i. Zach: the Town cannot advise residents to take emergency medical response into their own hands due to liability.

Martha Degraaf

a. VARS has been posting their statistics to their website and Facebook account.
    ii. Howard: we want to make sure there are no closed days.
    iii. Teresa: we want VARS to have more full-time staff and provide service they can be proud of. Covid has halved the number of volunteers working with VARS.

Howard moved to enter executive session. Teresa seconded. All in favor; the motion passed. Executive session began at 6:49 p.m.

Teresa moved to exit executive session. Zach seconded. All in favor; the board returned to open session at 7:12 p.m.

Executive session did not require any action to be taken. No actions were taken.

12. Adjournment

Zac moved to adjourn. Teresa seconded. All in favor; the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Maggie McCormick
Town Clerk & Treasurer