Town of Panton Chartered 1761

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Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes

Saturday, December 14, 2024

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Member Teresa Boucher, Town Clerk-Treasurer Kyle Rowe, Kevin Cooke, Robert Moulton, Charles Kennett, Jeanne Jackson, Richard Jackson, Diana Merrill, Steve Weber, Sharon Ashcraft, Mary Rudd, Julia Miller, Steve Miller, David Rheaume, John Viskup, Dave Merrill

Via Zoom: M'lissa Dayton, Terry Pelletier

1. Howard called the meeting to order at 9:03am.
2. Additions/deletions to the agenda-**NONE**
3. Approval of minutes of November 18, 26 and December 9, 2024 meetings. Howard motioned to approve the minutes for the 18th and 26th, Teresa seconded,
    a. **VOTE-2 in favor, 0 opposed, the motion passed.**

    Teresa moved to table the vote of the minutes of the 9th, as she wasn't present, Howard seconded;

    VOTE-2 in favor, 0 opposed, the motion passed.

4. Review and signing of warrants for payroll and accounts payable from December 9th SB meeting.
    a. Payroll $5701.59
    b. AP-$2143.23
    c. Howard motioned to approve payroll and AP, Teresa seconded
        i. **VOTE-2 In favor, 0 opposed, the motion passed.**
5. Discussion and review of draft budget
    a. C/T created copies of budget for town members in attendance.

b. Howard addresses town members introducing C/T
c. Teresa began discussion by asking about VARS. C/T responded that after discussions with other towns, and reviewing information from other towns selectboards, the VARS rate would increase from $15 per capita to $25 per capita after the current contract ends in June 2025. The consensus was that there wasn't much room for negotiation with VARS on this rate increase, but that there was room to negotiate more seats on the VARS board, and other towns in VARS group agreed with this sentiment. C/T recommended that updated costs be "baked in" to FY26 budget. The increase would be approximately $6375, bringing the line item total to $16375. Steve Weber asked when the negotiations would conclude. Howard responded that the SB would be meeting with VARS in January, and would be trying to negotiate a increase to the board size to better serve the member towns. The budget needs to be more transparent.

6. The C/T began to read aloud and respond to the sections of the Citizen's Budget Committee;
    a. The C/T explained that there was no annual payment, beyond taxes, that GMP makes to the Town for the solar field, but GMP provided a favorable agreement (eVolve) to the town for building improvements.
    b. The Grant Revenue line item (10-6-00-40.10, line 29 of draft budget) would be discussed and reviewed by Highway Department and the C/T.
    c. The C/T discussed his desire and plan to move the Town from its current 4 bank accounts to one singular account, with a sweep function, through Community Bank. As such, interest revenue would be singular, and would continue to flow into the General Fund. The process will take some time, but accounting, and fund management will be significantly easier. In terms of the reserve account, having a separate account for each one was not recommended by any Treasurer or financial personnel that the C/T spoke to, and those reserve accounts can be handled internally through NEMREC and our accounting software.
        i. Diane Merrill asked if the town reports would show those transactions, the C/T responded affirmatively that our NEMREC software would show all the transactions.
        ii. Kevin Cooke commented that the funds being spent from different reserve accounts would need to be documented correctly, and accurately. The C/T completely agreed, and added that simplifying this would make that process easier.
        iii. Steve Weber asked how the accounts would reconcile, the C/T stated that Laurie Curler in Ferrisburgh Town Offices would continue to do

that, and that NEMREC would allow us to track and correct issues as they arise. Journal entries would allow us to correct errors in accounts, and all of this would be reflected on future town reports (balance sheets, transaction detail, etc). This process should hopefully unfold over the next 6 weeks.

iv. John Viskup commented that in the past the town always had 1 account, and we need a record of where funds were misused and misappropriated.
v. Kevin Cooke commented that he would like to see more regular reporting of balance sheets, transaction details, other financial reports generated by the town. C/T responded that we'd like to include a "Clerk/Treasurer Report" item into the agenda's of each SB meeting, to provide greater transparency.
vi. John Viskup commented on eliminating "slush fund" cash, and a greater level of transparency and accountability for miscellaneous expenses. C/T agreed and wants to make sure those transactions appear in AP.
vii. Steve Weber returned to the discussion of the Paving Line, and potentially removing it as a source of revenue, or updating to reflect actual expenses. C/T asked to table that question till more information could be gleaned.
viii. C/T discussed Misc. Highway Reimbursement, and discussed researching more information from the Highway department, and Waltham on the specifics of that cost.
ix. The C/T discussed the staff salary concerns on the Citizen's Budget Committee. C/T had complied information from VLCT on staff salaries, and made copies of that information available to the meeting participants. The average salary in the towns and cities listed in the table for those towns where the Clerk/Treasurer was one position, and had similar full time work weeks was $61,649, but this discussion did not include additional/fringe benefits provided to the employee. This information is not publicly available, but will be provided to anyone who is interested at the town Offices. Handouts were made available at the meeting
x. Robert Moulton noted that salaries for highway departments at least could be affected by the labor given by other/neighboring towns.
xi. M'lissa Dayton noted that the information is not available online, and inquired about "special deals" the C/T has in place with the selectboard. The C/T responded that no "special deals" were in place,

just normal employment offerings, and that all information allowable to be released would be available.

xii. Steve Weber asked a question abut COLAs, and how they will be calculated and reflected in the budget. Howard said that COLAs are typically CPI in our region, and that an estimate is put into the budget. The C/T noted that the COLAs are in the budget currently in the salaries for FY 26, but that we can create a separate line item for easier comprehension. Steve Weber also noted that perhaps the COLAs should be pro-rated based on months worked. The C/T said he would investigate that.

xiii. Kevin Cooke noted on the potential for an increased cost of health insurance. Teresa noted there was a decrease in employee benefits, and asked about the specifics. The C/T noted that the previous clerk's contributions were being paid by the town to a greater degree, and that was a significant factor in the overall decrease. The C/T noted that he would have more information on the insurance information at future meetings.

xiv. Steve Weber asked about cost sharing the insurance with the employees, and the potential to choose different plans. Howard noted that coverage is the employees' option, and wants to stay comparable to other towns, and the loss of employees would be difficult if it was due to a change in that policy. Teresa noted that we are looking at the issue and doing comparable analysis and we want the best for our employees. Mary Rudd noted that Hinesburg has a cost share, and that they are phasing it in over several years. She added that the town should investigate what types of plans the other towns are offering.

xv. The C/T noted that he is seeking information about the eVolve project from GMP and Efficiency Vermont, but they haven't got back to him on the details and timelines. He did note that we are beyond the 6 year window of receiving credits, but couldn't say exactly, not knowing the exact start date, where we are in the 10 year ownership timeline. He noted that we should be preparing to fund the upkeep and maintenance of the heat pumps, water heaters, etc, that were installed under the eVolve program.

xvi. The C/T noted that he wants to create and maintain a debt service document for town equipment, hopefully in the next 6 months. He noted in a later discussion that he'd like to land somewhere in the middle of what would be on the list, cost wise.

xvii. The C/T noted that professional services contract do need to be updated, and is working on that.

xviii. The C/T noted that the Bixby did not increase their fee for this year, but is getting confirmation on that, and the rate calculation from the Director of the Library.

xix. The C/T noted that the IT expenses were actually good, and certainly satisfactory for price and service. C/T can investigate for the future.

xx. The C/T noted that the website is a once a year charge, but needs to confirm. He also noted that the office will most likely discontinue the newsletter and try to keep the website more updated.

xxi. The C/T noted that NEMREC line items need to be cleaned up, but all are valid and quite necessary for the Town, and that going forward, we will leave the items individually in the budget.

xxii. Diane Miller asked about comp time. The C/T responded that comp time has not be adequately checked, but is in process to be fixed, correctly allocated, and made available to the town employees. Howard noted that you can't force an employee to use Comp Time, it's the employees choice. Jeanne Jackson asked if there was time limit in which the employee had to use the comp time, the C/T responded that he doesn't believe so, but there is a maximum allowed to be accrued.

xxiii. The C/T noted that all items missing the highway section of the budget, specifically relating to equipment, will be updated and/or added ASAP.

xxiv. The C/T noted that he will double check loan amounts for truck payments in the budget.

xxv. The C/T noted that he needs to have a discussion with the Highway department regarding the paving and road maintenance.

xxvi. Steve Weber noted that the current retreatment budget of approx. $100k was made up of cost shares from labor in other items, and is it a reasonable costs.

xxvii. Kevin Cooke added asking if it was prudent to pave the amount we had budgeted, considering the budget increases we are dealing with.

xxviii. Robert Moulton noted that the rotations for paved road maintenance may need adjustment. Maintaining the wearcouse for the roads is crucial.

xxix. Steve Weber noted that we need to have good usage data before making any changes. The C/T and SB agreed.

xxx. The C/T discussed various funds, noting that before changing the town building maintenance fund we need to have a good

understanding of the costs to maintain heat pumps and newer town upgrades.

xxxi. The C/T noted that the Tire Fund needs to be investigate further, and a conversation with the Highway department. John Viskup noted that the tire fund was set up when the new grader was purchased to handle the high cost of tires for that machine.

xxxii. The C/T noted that the Highway Capital Equipment Fund could use the debt service document. Kevin Cooke noted that the debt service document wouldn't discuss future purchases, the C/T responded that it could and would, as we understand how vehicles age and depreciated. The C/T also noted that used equipment might end up costing more, and would require further investigation in regards to insurance.

xxxiii. Steve Weber noted that we need to have a discussion with all the principles of each fund, to make sure that each purchase will be funded, and then looking out into the future to make sure the account is allocated the correct amount of money.

xxxiv. The C/T noted that the digitization fund is important to the town staff to maintain the digital land records, and future digitization of documents and vital records. Kevin Cooke noted that we don't need the fund if the work is done, and we can shift that money back into the general fund to fund regular expenses. The C/T agreed and will look into potential future uses and then elimination.

xxxv. The C/T noted that the reappraisal fund needs to be improved and continued to be funded.

xxxvi. The C/T noted the records fund can probably be collapsed into the digitization fund and will investigate that option.

xxxvii. The C/T noted that the boat fund hasn't been used, and we can most likely eliminate this fund and figure out a use for the funds.

xxxviii. The C/T noted that the emergency fund could possibly be improved, and certainly needs to remain. Howard noted that it was approximately 70k, Kevin Cooke noted it was capped at 7% of town budget. It would require a warned vote to change.

xxxix. Teresa noted that we need to figure out the TAN (10-7-20-00.36 and .37, lines 77 and 78 in draft budget)

xl. She also noted that there is a line item (10-7-45-00.14, line 137 in draft budget) for Digital Land Records, for possible future expenditures from dissolution of Digitization Fund.

d. Howard asked C/T to reach out to Suzanne regarding Town report. C/T agreed, and added he had contacted an audit firm to conduct the town audit.
e. Steve Weber asked when we would have a more final town budget. The C/T responded it would be several weeks. Howard added that we need to have the Town Report ready for early January. Teresa asked if we should have another budget meeting, the date of December 21st at 9am was chosen.
f. Steve Weber noted that we could print the Town Report ourselves, and a discussion was held on what should be included in the Town Report. Howard asked if anyone would be upset if we eliminated some parts of it. We don't want to necessarily eliminate anything. Several agreed that the most important part was the finance. Sharon Ashcraft noted that the traditions of the town report and the information in it is important for the community as a whole. The C/T will investigate it.

7. Other Business
    a. Teresa motioned to approve Kyle Rowe, the new Clerk/Treasurer to have access to all bank account held by the town, at Community and National Bank of Middlebury. Howard seconded
        i. **VOTE-2 in favor, 0 in opposition, the motion passed.**
    b. The C/T asked the SB to sign off on the Vermont Better Roads Grant Program
        i. Howard signed it.
    c. There was no public comment or further business.
8. Howard motioned to adjourn, Teresa seconded;
    a. **VOTE-2 in favor, 0 in opposition, the motion passed.**

Adjourned at 10:45 am

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle Rowe
Clerk/Treasurer