Town of Panton Chartered 1761

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Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 23rd, 2024

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Member Teresa Boucher, Selectboard Member Zack Weaver, Town Clerk-Treasurer Kyle Rowe, Kevin Cooke, Jeanne Jackson, Richard Jackson, Cindy Cooke, Mary Rudd, Steve Weber, Charles Kennett, Kathy Kennett, Janice Moulton, Robert Moulton, Sharon Ashcraft.

Via Zoom: Paula Howard

1. Teresa Boucher called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.
2. Additions/deletions to the agenda-**NONE**
3. The Selectboard voted to accept the minutes of the previous meetings on
    a. 12/14 **(Howard motioned, Teresa Seconded, VOTE-3 in favor to 0 opposed)**
    b. 12/21 **(Howard motioned, Teresa seconded, VOTE 3 in favor-0 opposed)**
    c. 12/9 **(Zach motioned, Howard seconded, VOTE 2 in favor-0 opposed, Teresa abstaining.)**.
4. The Selectboard reviewed the AP and Payroll warrants, there were no issues.
5. The C/T reported on several issues;
    a. Accurate financial reports won't be reported at Selectboard Meetings until the C/T works with a NEMREC accountant on 12/27 and beyond to fix accounting errors.
    b. The C/T reported on the Assistant Clerk performing as the Lister, and the need to divide time to maintain that schedule.
    c. The C/T discussed the preparation for Town Meeting. The last day available to warn the Town for Town Meeting is February 2nd, so we should be able to get the Town Report done in a timely manner.

d. The Clerk's office is going to implement a public records request policy. There is discretion available for the C/T to apply the request policy, but it will contain language making sure that the generation of new reports is charged appropriately. The policy will be presented to the Select Board before any policy changes.
e. The C/T reported on answers pertaining to the eVolve program; The town entered into the agreement in June 2017, and it will expire in June 2027. The maintenance is currently part of the agreement. The maintenance beyond that date will be approximately $150 per heat pump, per year.
f. The VARS will have a meeting with the Ferrisburgh Selectboard at the beginning of January, and Panton should do the same. Howard noted that they are organizing that meeting.
g. The C/T moved into the budget discussion;
    i. The most significant change was regarding the Paving/Grant Funding of Paving. Panton won't be eligible for paving grant funding for at least two grant cycles. Panton was ranked 29th in terms of need, and will advance 6 to 7 "slots" per year. However, Panton ranked 7th for "structures" funding, and will, the words of Jim Cota, AoT Technician, be "likely to receive a Structures Grant this year if you apply." The C/T noted we will be applying, and elaborated on the project the funds would be used for (a culvert on Panton Rd.) The very rough estimate was $175k. The C/T continued to note that the paving funding in the budget would remain $100k, and would be 8/10ths of a mile, from the Addison Town line back into Panton. Howard noted that if we lack on paving maintenance by not keeping up with it, we are somewhat penalized. The C/T stated we would get the funding, but it would be a slower process. Kevin Cooke asked for clarification on whether the paving budget would remain the same, the C/T responded it would, but that the grant funding allocation would be moved to the "culverts" line item rather than paving. The C/T also reiterated that we are seeking FEMA funding for July 2024 storm damage cleanup.
        1. Steve Weber asked if we are being penalized in effect by having good roads. The C/T responded that we would eventually get the grant, but it's a slower process.
        2. Kevin Cooke asked if the process was slowing down/stretching out. The C/T responded that it was slightly, and will be 5 to 6 years between grant funding.
    ii. The C/T noted that the Highway Department is keeping track of the roads and their needs, and will continue to update the road inventory as needed, and required by the AoT.

iii. Kathy Kennett asked if the structures grant paid for paving, the C/T said no, but clarified it would pay for repaving on top of a surface that was cut into.

h. The C/T discussed the other changes, the dump truck loan service, and the change to retreatment, reflecting the previous discussion.
    i. Kevin Cooke noted that deletions to the budget need to be made carefully, as the town should have a record of previous FY transactions and budgeted items. The C/T agreed, and agreed to make sure those changes were documented.

i. Kathy Kennett asked about a PA system for the town hall. The C/T discussed the recent estimate from the acoustic panels supplier that might be 50% lower than previous estimates. The C/T also discussed having reached out to a PA supplier to get a quote for a PA system, hopefully before town meeting. Kathy Kennett asked if that was in the budget, the C/T noted that there was funding available for such improvements in the Town Hall Maintenance/Improvement Fund. Howard stated that he was nervous about changing the ambiance/color of the building by installing acoustic panels. Sharon Ashcraft asked what the panels would be like, and added that perhaps area rugs might be a better answer, and not involve drilling into the walls. The C/T added that we hope to have the PA system before anything else. Sharon Ashcraft asked if this would be voted on separately by the town during town meeting. The C/T replied that one could petition for an item to appear on the warning, but otherwise this might be an issue that is brought before the Selectboard. Zach noted that Sharon and Howard are on the same page.

j. The C/T discussed the new Community Service request from the Vermont Rural Fire Protection. The selectboard discussed the topic, Bob Moulton adding that we have mains and capacities to fight fires with our current infrastructure. The selectboard agreed not to propose the request for the warning.

k. Teresa read aloud a statement on the Selectboard's position on the Viridis solar project. NOTE-This a draft statement, and subject to change after legal review.
    i. "We, the Selectboard of the Town of Panton, value the contributions of our citizens in all civic matters, and the vote held by the Town recently regarding the installation of the Viridis Solar project is a clear statement on the attitude of the citizens of the Town. We support the feelings and clear preference of the Town in this regard. It is incumbent upon us as public officials to investigate all options for the Town, and while we recognize the perception of the use of funds from Viridis to hire legal

counsel or engineering firms, our agreement with Viridis makes it clear that we are not beholden to a specific choice of legal or engineering expertise, and in fact will be compensated regardless of our position, or findings by said experts. It is in the best interests of the Town, both professionally and financially, to gather the greatest information possible on this issue, and do so in a financially sound manner. Additionally, as conversations between the Town of Panton and their legal representative could be used against us in further negotiations and work with Viridis, it would be a considerable disadvantage to hold these discussions in a public forum. We value transparency and will make sure to report any important updates to the public, but need to weigh that against the damage that could result from our strategies and tactics being made public. We will continue to uphold the will of the Town regarding this project and make the voice of the people known to all those who we hire to represent the Town of Panton."

ii. Howard motioned to support the voters of the Town of Panton in their decision on the solar project. Teresa seconded the motion-**VOTE 3 in favor to 0 opposed.**

iii. Kevin Cooke asked for clarification as to whether the attorney the Town hires using the escrow funds must be in favor of the project. The Selectboard responded no. Howard added that we hired the attorney before any money changed hands, and that this is a common tactic to promote good faith in the community they wish to develop.

iv. Kathy Kennett asked if that statement would be in the minutes, Howard replied that it would be, and will be on the website.

v. Steve Weber thanked Howard for explaining why the conversation needs to be held in executive session, that statement made it very clear.

vi. During Public Comment, Sharon Ashcraft provided documentation on positions she had previously attributed to the Selectboard regarding the solar field.

vii. Howard wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah.

l. The next budget meeting was scheduled for Monday, January 6th, at 5:30pm at the Town Hall. The C/T noted that town warnings will now be posted at BJs.

i. Howard motioned for the Selectboard to go into Executive Session at 6:21 p.m., with Kyle Rowe and Leslie Caldwell in attendance. Teresa seconded-VOTE-3 in favor to 0 opposed.

ii. The Selectboard came out of Executive session at 7:21 p.m., and made the following statement. "The Selectboard came to the decision to not

consider any negotiations with Viridis until after a 45-day Plan/Notice of Intent is filed."

iii. Howard motioned to accept that statement, Zach seconded, VOTE-**3 in favor, 0 opposed**.

iv. Howard motioned to adjourn, Zach seconded, **VOTE-3 in Favor, 0 opposed.**

v. The Selectboard adjourned at 7:22 p.m.