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, November 27, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.

In attendance: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Selectboard Vice-Chair Teresa Boucher, Selectboard Member Zach Weaver, Moderator Michael Catillaz, Emergency Management Coordinator Bob Groff, Clerk & Treasurer Maggie McCormick, Assistant Clerk & Treasurer Suzanne Snyder, Addison Selectboard Member Peter Briggs, Addison Selectboard Member Rob Hunt, Addison Selectboard Member Roger Waterman, Addison Fire Dept. Chief Bradley Clark, Ferrisburgh Selectboard Member Walter Reed, Middlebury Regional EMS Executive Director Kate Rothwell ,Vergennes Area Rescue Squad (VARS) Operations Coordinator Justin Soter, Vergennes City Manager Ron Redmond, Vergennes Mayor Chris Bearor, Vergennes Fire Dept Chief David DiBiase, VARS Vice President Christina Brace, VARS Treasurer Brian Goodyear, VARS Resource Coordinator Jenna Lindemann, VARS member Grey Switzer, Waltham Selectboard Member Andrew Martin, Stephen Fleming.

1. Howard called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. and thanked everyone for coming.
2. Additions/deletions to agenda: Minutes approval moved to after the EMS and Fire discussion
3. Howard introduced and handed the meeting over to moderator Michael Catillaz.

4. Area Emergency Response Capacity Discussion

Michael explained the group would discuss EMS first and then move on to Fire. He asked everyone around the table to introduce themself.

EMS: Michael asked the stakeholders present to tell the group their biggest concerns about delivering EMS to the five towns.

1. Andrew Martin: succession and retention
2. Howard Hall: availability and response time, more funding, service is a promise made by the board to residents
3. Teresa Boucher: reliable services
4. Zach Weaver: reliable service and funding
5. Justin Soter: shares concerns about response time and out of service time. Highlighted how the

6. Ron Redmond: concerned about increasing population in Vergennes, with a city "brand" that includes robust public safety. Noted opportunity to create a district for shared costs and resources
7. David DiBiase: funding and recruitment for career staff. Need to have paid staff with competitive wages.
8. Chris Bearor: Referenced Middlebury rescue and others, where rosters all cycle from full to lacking and lack of people in every profession
9. Walter Reed: availability/response time and out of service time
10. Brad Clark: keeping interest and involvement of younger members—avg age of current members is late 40s. Not seeing teenagers join.
11. Peter Briggs: adequate training for responders and training time requirements

Discussion: Michael opened the floor for discussion

1. How to reach/recruit young/younger people
2. Presenting the "why"
3. High school programs
4. State curriculum available to fire departments for in-house local training but prospects must be at least 18 to even begin training
5. Promote the "excitement" of the training and mission.
6. VARS has sole authority over their operations and funding structure. Justin and other leaders there are already developing a funding strategy and have added one FT professional responder with plans to add another in the next year.
7. Addison FD members receive no compensation at all for their service or training time.

FIRE: Michael asked the stakeholders present to tell the group their biggest concerns about delivering fire protection to the five towns.

1. Peter: High average age of members, training levels and viability; younger folks need to work hard to make ends meet. Recruit in schools—first to inform is first to hook.
2. Brad: Need younger people before they have too many other things they are involved in. Statewide Saturday open house—no one showed up. Bridport had attendance and got three new members. People no longer work in towns where they live, so volunteering after commuting home is less appealing.
3. Walter: EMS is more important than fire response because things can be replaced but loved ones cannot. Also noted that fortunately there are not that many fires.
4. Chris Bearor: equipment costs. A new tanker currently costs $1M and production/delivery time is three years. VFD needs a 15 -year replacement plan.
5. Dave DiBiase: Noted that VFD has a full roster of productive and proud members. Challenges s are equipment and training costs, limited geography for responder residents, the lack of glamour in routine maintenance of equipment.
6. Ron: Expressed concern for the health of fire fighters. Interested in creating a district, for example, Otter Creek Valley Fire District to allow providers to share resources and

increase purchasing power for equipment. A district with a larger service area might generate higher call volume and allow volunteers more active shifts

5. Justin: EMS would like local government funding for training.
6. Zach: communication among/between stakeholders is important. Concerned about response time and how to do effective recruitment outreach. Supports this forum as a way for everyone interested to know what's being done.
7. Teresa: thanked all the responders and noted they are continuously asked to do more and noted that technology changes mean more training. Believes that middle school students are a great recruitment target and the EMS and Fire have a "cool factor" that appeals to this age.
8. Howard: thanked all the responders. Fire, ambulance, water, and sewer is city government. All the town governments can work together to make residents' lives better because people depend on us. Suggested ride-alongs as one recruitment strategy.
9. Bob Groff: residents don't think about EMS/Fire until they dial the phone. Need to make it visible.
10. Andrew: Has never heard any taxpayer complain about funding Fire or EMS. Suggested creating a scholarship for responder career training.
11. David: governance committee/board proposed between Vergennes and Ferrisburgh. The five towns have mutual aid agreement, but a better funding mechanism is needed. The responders all work together already. Noted that the Addison County district is the strongest group in state.
12. Justin: VARS leadership has Exec Comm meeting scheduled and has invited SB members to a meeting.
13. Ron Waterman: most towns are working on their budgets now and need to receive requests for funding in time to put them on the Town Meeting ballot. Ron noted that the municipalities not all being on the same budget year is a challenge, but the Fy25 VFD budget is done.

Michael closed the discussion.

Justin Soter agreed to take the lead, in partnership with other stakeholders, to address the EMS challenges and opportunities.

David DiBiase agreed to take the lead, in partnership with other stakeholders, to address the Fired issues.

5. Approval of the minutes of the November 11, 2023 Selectboard Meeting

   Howard moved to approve the minutes. Teresa seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

6. Public comment: None.

7. Communications
    a. Addison County Court invitation to participate in county budget discussion on December 11,2023 at 10:00 a.m.
    b. Ballot funding thank you notes were received from Open Door Clinic and Vermont Family Network
    c. Maggie is serving on the VMCTA Education and Certification Committee for 2024.

8. Review/approval of accounts payable warrant, timesheets & payroll warrant

Teresa moved to accept the timesheets and warrants. Zach seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

9. Executive session to discuss employee compensation and benefits

Howard moved to enter executive session. Zach seconded. All in favor; the board entered executive session at 7:24 p.m.

Howard moved to exit executive session. Teresa seconded. All in favor; the board returned to open session at 7:28 p.m.

10. Howard moved to adjust employee compensation as discussed in executive session. Zach seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

The group discussed the budget meeting scheduled for December 13, 2023 at 5:30 and determined to keep it at that time.

11. Adjournment

Teresa moved to adjourn. Howard seconded. All in favor; the meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Maggie McCormick
Town Clerk & Treasurer