

MONKTON SELECTBOARD MEETING

Minutes

DATE: Monday November 9, 2020

REMOTE MEETING ONLY – Minutes and recording will be posted

(Approved 11/23/20)

S. Pilcher called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Members Present: Stephen Pilcher, Paul Low, Marikate Kelley, Bill Martin, John McNerney

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Patrick Reen, Betsy Brown, Teri Fitz-Gerald, Bailee Layn-Gordon, Andrea Wolak, Jessica Demeritt, Bret Griswold, Cathy Cashman, Dawn Griswold, Jessica Abbott, Sarah Rougier, Kathleen Bushey, Mark Boltz-Robinson, Lisa Boekman, Kristin Blanchette, Ben Hollwedel, Kim Callahan, Jaime Schulte, kimballvt (Zoom user name), unidentified caller (413 area code).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

S. Pilcher announced that the dog park is nearing completion. P. Low has been doing a lot of work on the dog park.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

APPROVE MINUTES

M. Kelley moved to approve the minutes of October 26, 2020. P. Low seconded. All voted in favor. Motion passed 5-0-0.

REVIEW AND APPROVE CHECK WARRANTS

J. McNerney moved to approve check warrant A/P #01026 in the amount of \$2,691.89. B. Martin seconded. All voted in favor. Motion passed 5-0-0.

M. Kelley moved to approve check warrant P/R #01109 in the amount of \$12,249.66. P. Low seconded. All voted in favor. Motion passed 5-0-0.

REVIEW AND APPROVE OVERWEIGHT PERMITS, ETC.

The following overweight permits were reviewed and signed:

- Performance Food Service

PUBLIC COMMENT

none

NEW BUSINESS

MAUSD STATUS – PATRICK REEN

P. Reen, Superintendent of the Mt. Abraham Unified School District (MAUSD) came to share information/context on what is going on with the district and to

understand the role that Monkton Central School (MCS) plays in the town of Monkton. Mr. Reen stated that the district is experiencing declining enrollment and is projected to lose 120 students in the next 5 years. MCS has lost 33 students (22%) over past 5 years and 57 students over past 10 years. Mr. Reen noted that the district needs to make a feasible plan regarding how to deal with budgeting with a declining enrollment. One possibility to deal with this is the closure of a school or schools. Mr. Reen noted that closing a school can impact each town differently. He stated that he is talking with select boards in each of the school district's towns to find out what role each school plays in their community. He will be making a recommendation to the School Board as to what to do and the Board will then take his recommendation under consideration. Mr. Reen noted that there are only two ways in which a school can be closed: under the current articles of the merger, an elementary school can only close if the town votes to close the school. The only other way to close it would be if the 5 town district votes to amend those articles of agreement allowing for some other method, such as the vote of the whole district or authorizing the board to make the decision.

M. Kelley noted that, as a parent she didn't get to know anyone in the community until her kids started going to MCS. She stated that she then became more active in the community. M. Kelley noted that the building could be used for recreation needs.

Mr. Reen stated that if the town votes to close the school, the town could buy it for \$1. The town could not sell the building for 5 years. M. Kelley asked about debt. Mr. Reen noted MCS has next to nothing in debt.

P. Low asked if debt is a reason to close a school or not. He also asked if Mr. Reen is having the same exact conversation with each town - Mr. Reen noted yes to having conversations with other towns.

S. Pilcher noted that demographics in Monkton are different than elsewhere in the district. The town is growing in population. He noted that new development taking place, though we have not seen it show up in school enrollment yet. He stated that the school is a central part of the community and always has been. It's a very active and vibrant school culture. The town and school interface the most at Town Meeting (gym is used). For many years Town Meeting was held during regular school hours which was a great opportunity to watch democracy in action. The town still uses the gym for larger meetings. He noted that the town is growing and will continue to grow because of our location closest to Chittenden County.

P. Reen commented that the demographic study indicates that most of the growth seems to be in older families, not those with school aged children

B. Martin echoed M. Kelley's statements regarding not knowing anyone in town

until his children started attending MCS.

J. McNerney noted that he agreed with M. Kelley and B. Martin - he didn't know anyone in town until the kids started at school. Involvement with various programs at MCS is also what drew him into the community and volunteering/working on various community committees and activities, including the Select Board. J. McNerney noted that unlike other towns in our district, Monkton has no other gathering place in town. There are no restaurants, stores, etc. The school is the only gathering place in town. He urges that the School Board should release towns from the 5 year hold on the building if a town does in fact vote to close their school. He also suggested considering other inducements to a town that might help with the transition (for example, running the activity bus for the entire school year to that town, to help families deal with young children and after school activities.)

S. Pilcher commented that his interface through the school is through the mentoring program and had an amazing experience. He asked if the town could consider leaving the school district if the voters want? P. Reen said anything is possible but would need to be approved by the 5-town electorate.

B. Layn-Gordon shared the perspective of a young family. She noted that one thing that Monkton is missing is childcare/preschool. Affordable housing as well. She reiterated that the school is only large gathering space in town. It is also home to the park and ride and the only public playground.

B. Brown echoed M. Kelley's comments re: not meeting people in town until kids started at the school and also stated that she became more active in the community because of it. She also agreed with S. Pilcher's comments regarding demographics and noted that aside from Middlebury, Monkton is the only town in Addison County that is growing according to census data. She also noted that most Monkton parents/guardians work in Chittenden County and having younger students further away could be unsettling to some and present more transportation issues to those families if MCS were to be closed.

J. Schulte stated that the school serves as a community hub/center of activity. He noted that the town will see a growing population. He stated that he thinks our school enrollment has bottomed out and will see it going up.

B. Martin asked about other towns in the district seeing similar declines. Mr. Reen stated that Monkton, Robinson (Starksboro) & Lincoln are currently seeing the steepest declines. Beeman (New Haven) not so much, but they saw one a few years back. Bristol has been on the decline but numbers have stabilized a little. It was noted that affordable housing is a huge issue in the district. B. Martin noted that as a realtor, and as he explained to the person who interviewed him researching for MAUSD, he is seeing a significant portion of homes being bought by young couples without children or very young children who have yet to

enter the school. So they are not a factor in the current school population, but will be in the future.

S. Rougier - Early Ed would be a great asset to our community...there is space for those kids and there is a high need.

K. Blanchette shared the link to the NESDAC report and noted that the Community Engagement meeting is tomorrow night (Nov 10).

P. Reen thanked everyone for their input. He noted that no one wants us to be in this situation but that we can't wait as he doesn't think that voters will support the tax penalties that would be involved if we continued down the current path.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASE GRANT

B. Hollwedel noted that the vendors stated that they don't anticipate a raise in price, meaning that the price wouldn't change between now and the new budget year. P. Low asked what we did in the past without this piece of equipment. Ben noted it was either done by hand or rented. This is an unexpected grant that was given to our region of Vermont. It is an 80% match. The equipment is \$7750...our cut would roughly be \$1600. P. Low asked if he is comfortable that the maintenance costs will not be high. Ben state that he does not feel it will be a huge amount of maintenance. Ben also noted that the rental used this last time was approximately \$500/day. M. Kelley asked if it matters if we do it this year or the next budget year. Ben noted that it won't break the budget if we do it this year.

J. McNerney made a motion that we proceed with the purchase of the haybale shredder under the terms outlined in the grant. M. Kelley seconded. All voted in favor. Motion passed 5-0-0.

TREE WARDEN UPDATE

Mark Boltz - Robinson gave an overview as to what he has been doing as Tree Warden since he's been appointed. He also did an overview of the State Statutes which were just updated and effective as of 11/1/2020. The Town can now develop a shade tree preservation plan.

S. Pilcher asked who has been doing tree removal. John McNerney (as a volunteer assisting landowner friends, not as a town employee) and the Road Crew was the answer. P. Low noted about trimming of trees for power lines (Green Mtn Power) - it falls back on the homeowner as to whether to keep the logs or not. P. Low asked about the expenses around removing trees. M. Boltz-Robinson noted that the felling of a tree of standard maturity (ie sugar maple)

without hauling is about \$800. He also stated that he has been researching ways to get money for this (grants, etc).

S. Pilcher noted that the Emerald Ash Borer issue is something that needs to be dealt with on the short term. M. Kelley asked if there were grants available for developing Shade Tree Preservations Plans. M. Boltz-Robinson noted not grants per say but that UVM is looking for towns that they could help work on it as a pilot project to serve as a template for other towns. J. McNerney stated that he would like to move ahead with developing a Shade Tree Preservation Plan. P. Low noted that he would like to do more research on his own to see what effects could happen for landowners. J. McNerney asked about how the preservation plan is adopted. M. Boltz-Robinson noted that there is an adoption process - minimum of 1 public hearing. The Board agreed that M. Boltz-Robinson can go ahead and start the process of creating a draft Tree Preservation Plan.

LANDOWNER CONCERNS RE: CULVERT DUMPING WATER ON THEIR LAND

J. Demeritt noted that her uphill neighbor installed a culvert under Stillson Lane (Class 4 road). The water flow is now directed under the road to her land where water was not naturally being dumped before. J. Demeritt asked if they had or need to get permission to do this and wants to know what her rights are. The culvert goes onto her property and was disruptive to her property.

J. McNerney noted that he discussed this with Ben Hollwedel regarding ownership of Stillson Lane. Stillson Lane still shows up on the Vtrans map as a town class 4 road. However, the sign on the end of the roads says "private road". J. McNerney pointed out that If it is in fact a private road, then this is a case between landowners. It was stated that no permission was asked of the town to install the culvert. J. McNerney stated that asked VLCT that if it is a town right of way is a permit needed. VLCT has not answered yet. It is clear on a class 1, 2, 3 road, but what about a class 4 road? Stillson Road does have a Town Highway #. It was agreed that the waterflow issue is an issue between 2 landowners, but the town does have an interest in work done on a town road or Right-of-Way.

MRGP ISSUES

This is in regard to the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP). B. Hollwedel explained that an amendment needs to be made. **J. McNerney moved to sign the MRGP Amendment Form. P. Low seconded. All voted in favor. Motion passed 5-0-0.**

TOWN ROAD 24 – MEADER RD

Several years ago, there was a large washout on the untraveled portion of Meader Road, when a beaver dam broke and did significant damage to the old road right-of-way. In places, there is not much of the old level road surface remaining K. Bushey asked what the classification of Meader Road is. There is a

lot of ATV and snowmobile traffic on the road. She wants to know what her responsibilities and liabilities are. S. Pilcher noted that it is a Class 4 road, so is not maintained by the town. The board asked B. Hollwedel to put a barrier up and signs to indicate the road is closed.

REVIEW UNIFIED PLANNING DOCUMENT AND SCHEDULE HEARING

This will be discussed at the Nov 23rd agenda

MONKTON COMMUNITY DOG PARK

S. Pilcher stated that approximately \$10,000 has been donated to the cause. The park is now under construction. He also stated that this will fall under the heading of the Recreation Committee. P. Low noted that he doesn't think the Rec Committee agrees with that.

NORTH POND ROAD RECLASSIFICATION

The walk through is this coming Sunday and the info meeting is 6:30pm on November 16th and the hearing following at 7:00pm.

PERSONNEL ISSUE – EXECUTIVE SESSION

J. McNerney made a motion to enter executive session to discuss a personnel issue. B. Martin seconded. The Board moved into executive session at 9: 47pm.

J. McNerney moved to exit the executive session. B. Martin seconded. The Board came out of executive session at 9:57pm.

NEW TOWN OFFICES AND LIBRARY STATUS

no update

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR STATUS RE: COVID-19

no update

OLD BUSINESS:

INFRINGEMENT OF ROW ON JOCKEY LANE

P. Low & J. McNerney did a site visit. Survey pins have been set and the right of way has been marked by the surveyor. J. McNerney asked how to make it officially part of town records. P. Low said a mylar should be filed in the land records. S. Pilcher agreed. J. McNerney will contact the Town Attorney to write up and send a cease and desist order to the property owner in question.

SALVAGE YARDS IN MONKTON

No update

TH 36 ROAD RECLASSIFICATION

No update

TOWN CREDIT CARD AND POLICY

No update

CLOUD STORAGE AND POLICY

No update

OTHER BUSINESS:

The Certificate of Substantial Completion for the Bristol Road culvert was shared. It needs to be signed. The question is whether or not it needs to come to the Selectboard since this project was already authorized. It was decided a motion was not needed.

DETERMINE TIME/DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Nov 23, 2020 at 7pm.

ADJOURNMENT

M. Kelly moved to adjourn. B. Martin seconded. All voted in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 10:04 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Betsy Brown