

**Grand Isle Select Board**  
**Minutes of the Special Meeting**  
**Tuesday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at Grand Isle Town Office and via Zoom**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**Select Board Members Present:** Jeff Parizo – Chair; AnnaMarie DeMars – Vice-Chair; Adam White; Eric Godin

**Community Members Present:** Denise Abbott Douglas; Ron Bushway; Jean Prouty; Esther Blow; Melissa Boutin; Mark Cobb; Joe Longo; Lucille Campbell; Tonya Poutry; Couper Shaw; Josie Leavitt; Mitchel Richardson; Mike Donoghue; Mary Parizo; Bianca Adams; Rachael Griggs

**Select Board to Amend Agenda for Matters Not Listed:**

**II. GUEST OPEN COMMENT**

Denise Abbott-Douglas brings up an article in the Islander and other news outlets about the Grand Isle County Courthouse being open 2 days per week. Denise says she is concerned by this news because it leaves a hole in county residents ability to do court business. Denise also questions where the money the residents of the county pay annually is going, and if residents should expect a refund. Adam White says that he has reached out to the States Attorney, Doug DiSabito, but hasn't heard back. Adam says he has requested the court's annual budget from the Town Clerk, Melissa Boutin, and mentions that the court utilized a county deputy for security, who has recently retired. Adam goes on to question where the funds the county has paid for the security, which is now not being utilized, saying that he is looking for answers. Adam says that per the Islander article, the Sheriff's department is two deputies short, and he has requested the budget for the Sheriff's department as well, and plans to reach out to the Sheriff to ensure the contractual obligations are still being met. Denise says she is concerned that this could be the first step to fully closing the courthouse altogether. Adam concurs, and says a larger concern is that people looking for domestic services, such as relief from abuse orders, would have to drive to Franklin County to get any help. Adam says that not everyone has access to a vehicle, and this poses a significant risk. Mike Donoghue says that he is aware that there have been some residents have expressed interest in filling the position. Jeff Parizo notes that the States Attorney has been very vocal on the issue. Eric Godin states that the States Attorney has posted all of his correspondence with the judiciary on Facebook, and notes that the judiciary was going to offer virtual services, which he doesn't feel is adequate. Josie Leavitt says that it often isn't possible to have a virtual hearing if you are in the same house with your abuser. Adam says that the States Attorney is working with everyone, and the Select Board is looking into the financial aspect of the situation, making sure that the town is receiving the services that it is paying for. Jeff points out that the county is only growing larger. Adam suggests putting this as an agenda item for the August 30<sup>th</sup> special meeting. Eric offers to reach out to Doug DiSabito and requesting he attend that meeting. Jeff asks Adam if he would write a letter to the chairs of the Select Boards of the other towns in Grand Isle County, asking for their input on the situation. Josie

Leavitt says that the chair of the North Hero Select Board, Harry Parker is an attorney and would certainly participate. Jeff suggests inviting members of the other Select Boards, and our local state representatives to the meeting as well.

Denise then asks about a sign at the transfer station saying that masks were required, and asks for clarification. Eric Godin says that the last time the Board had discussed the issue, it had been decided to officially follow the Governor's guidelines, but were leaving it up to the transfer station employees discretion whether to take the signs down yet, to promote the safety of the residents and employees of the transfer station.

### **III. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Letters of Interest – Vacant Select Board Position:**

Adam White, AnnaMarie Demars, and Jeff Parizo each read one of the letters of interest from the three applicants: Ron Bushway, Josie Leavitt, and Couper Shaw. Jeff opens the floor for the Board members to ask questions of the applicants. Jeff says that the questions should be addressed to all three applicants. AnnaMarie DeMars opens the questions by asking if the applicants have seen the last few meetings. Jeff Parizo asks "In your opinion, what is our town lacking in regards to resources?". Couper Shaw says that money seems to be the biggest thing the town is lacking. Josie Leavitt says she feels that the town is lacking in daycare options, since the Learning Adventure closed, mentioning that at least one other town is trying to open a daycare facility. Josie says the town could also use a senior center, and that housing the two facilities together could be mutually beneficial. Josie then says that she feels the town is lacking room for other people's opinions, and that a little more kindness when expressing their disagreements with other's opinions. Josie points out that Grand Isle is not a racially diverse town, but we are a very economically diverse town, and a politically diverse town. Ron Bushway agrees with Josie that the town needs daycare options. Ron says that the town is also lacking in businesses, and tourist attractions. Jeff acknowledges that a lot of people just drive through Grand Isle. Adam asks the applicants "What would you do to try to bring business here?" Ron Bushway says that the first issue is figuring out where to place them. Josie says there has to be available commercial space, and cites her experience owning a bookstore. Josie suggests making space available to encourage more business, possibly partnering with a builder. Josie says she thinks it would be nice if there was a restaurant that everyone could afford. Couper Shaw says he's just moved back after three years, and he feels like there are a lot of new businesses open in Grand Isle. Couper says he feels that things are progressing currently. Adam says that this question is difficult to answer due to how much is involved in starting a business, especially in ones own home. There is discussion about several businesses that grew and ended up moving out of Grand Isle to get larger space. Josie suggests getting business owners and people interested in starting businesses together to help address the issue and brainstorm, as this could generate useful ideas and create connections between Island business owners to help each other out. AnnaMarie cites Middlebury, who did an incentive program to help promote business in their downtown area. Eric Godin says he doesn't really have any questions on issues, but hopes the candidates realize the details of what they are coming into. Eric says he hopes people would act independently, based on facts, and says that the term could

potentially be very short, as there may be a petition filed to have a special election. Eric then asks to have the townspeople present ask questions of the prospective board members. Denise Douglas asks each candidate to 'state what makes them uniquely qualified for the position. Ron Bushway says that he has been a lifelong resident of Grand Isle and has been attending Board meetings in 2002, and served on the Board from 2003 until 2014. Ron says that he has served in multiple positions throughout the town and that he thinks his knowledge will help him make good decisions while on the Board. Josie Leavitt says she has been a resident since 2018, and feels that she brings compassion, honesty, and a willingness to listen to everyone. Josie admits that she doesn't know as much about the town as the other two candidates, but feels that this is an asset, due to the knowledge she's acquired attending DRB meetings and in her time living in the town. Josie says that she's willing to admit when she doesn't know the answer to a question and has a willingness to learn about all the issues affecting the town. Josie says that she doesn't bring any personal issues to the Board, and knows how to diffuse a situation; two aspects that she feels are needed given the recent Board meetings. Couper Shaw says that he is also a lifelong Grand Isle resident, and feels that he brings a fresh face and fresh perspective to the Board. Couper says that he wants to learn about the issues and wants to help the town that he loves. Adam White asks what the candidates decision making process is. Couper says he likes to research issues before making a decision, and believes in 'Island values', while acknowledging that there are a lot of new folks moving into the town. Josie Leavitt says that she likes to triage the decisions, determining what is high priority and what is not. Josie points out that the Board makes decisions as a whole, and hopes there is time for the board to have a discussion before making a decision. Josie says that taking this time allows for research to get to the right answers and contact the right people. Ron Bushway says that it's up to the whole Select Board to prioritize and make decisions, and that the Board has to work as a team. Rachael Griggs asks if the candidates will step up and call people out if they do things improperly, and says she feels Josie seems to be a good candidate. All three candidates say they would be willing to call out wrongdoing. Adam says that it is the Select Board's job to make sure the information presented is accurate, and to correct the record if misinformation is introduced. Adam also says that there is a lot of fact finding and research that goes on behind the scenes for Select Board members to make sure we knew what issues would be impacting the town of Grand Isle. Josie asks if the Grand Isle Select Board meets with the members of other Select Boards. Adam says that there had been attempts to get the Boards together, but they weren't very well received. Jeff says that the Board will meet as often as needed to get the town's business done, citing the four meetings that have been scheduled this month. Adam asks the candidates how they are with asking tough questions, citing a conversation he needs to have with the Sheriff to make sure the town is getting all the hours of coverage that the town has paid for as an example. Adam also cites budget questions within the town. Josie says she doesn't like going head-to-head with anyone, but has no problem asking direct questions, saying she would go into these discussions well prepared and well informed. Couper Shaw says he has no problem asking the tough questions, especially if all the pertinent facts are available. Ron Bushway says he doesn't have

trouble asking the tough questions, and says he answers tough questions frequently. Ron says it isn't what you say or what you ask, but how you ask it. Adam points out that whomever ends up with the Board seat will be on the Board for budget season, and needs to be ready to have discussions and ask questions. Ron says that he feels that during his time on the Board, there hadn't been good communication between the Select Board and the other Boards within the town. Adam highlights the difficulty of discussing budgets without representatives of the respective boards present to provide input. Josie suggests contacting VLCT for guidance on good budgeting practices. Mitchel Richardson asks if the candidates are aware of the ongoing audit issue and how they feel about it. Couper Shaw says he isn't aware of what's going on. Josie Leavitt says that she knows a little bit about the audit issue, and that she's in favor of an audit, as more oversight is a positive thing. Josie says she doesn't like the tone of the debate thus far, but there are solutions to the problems that have been brought up. Ron says that he agrees that there should be audits annually, and that he is very familiar with the issue, as he has attended all of the Select Board meetings. Denise Abbott-Douglas says that candidates for the Board need to be aware of the multitude of issues that they could face, and the Board members need to be responsive to the people of the town. Jeff thanks the candidates for their interest, and points out that there are plenty of other opportunities within the town to get involved. **Adam White moves to appoint Josie Leavitt to fill the Select Board seat with an anticipated end date of March 2022. Eric Godin Seconds. Jeff calls the vote. Adam White and Eric Godin vote aye, Jeff Parizo and AnnaMarie DeMars vote nay. The motion is tabled. Jeff Parizo moves to appoint Ron Bushway. AnnaMarie DeMars seconds. Jeff calls the vote. Jeff Parizo, AnnaMarie Demars and Eric Godin vote aye, Adam White votes nay. Motion passes.** AnnaMarie Demars administers the oath of office to Ron Bushway. The oath is as follows: "Do you solemnly swear that you will faithfully execute the office of Select Person to the best of your judgement and abilities according to the law, so help you God." Ron says 'I will'.

#### IV. OLD BUSINESS

**Review and Approval of FY2020 Audit from RHR Smith:** Jeff reads a letter from RHR Smith in regards to questions that Jeff has asked about the FY2020 audit. (The letter will follow at the end of the minutes). Jeff then reads a letter from HRH Smith to the chair of the Select Board summarizing the FY2020 audit. Jeff asks for the Boards approval to sign the acceptance letter. **Eric Godin moves to have Select Board Chair Jeff Parizo sign the acceptance letter for the FY2020 Audit. Ron Bushway seconds. No discussion. Jeff calls the vote, which passes unanimously.** Rachael Griggs asks if anyone thought something was wrong with the audit. Jeff answers that he did not, he just had some questions.

#### V. ADJOURNMENT

**AnnaMarie Demars moves to adjourn the meeting at 7:23pm. Adam White seconds. No discussion. Jeff calls the vote, which passes unanimously.**