

Grand Isle Select Board
Minutes of the Special Meeting

Monday, August 30th, 2021 at 6:00pm 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; Ron Bushway; Eric Godin

Community Members Present: Colleen Bushway; Mike Donoghue; Esther Blow; Linda Effel; Randy Gover; Susan Lawrence; Rachael Griggs; Emily Clark; Joe Longo; Mary Parizo; Peter Reigelman; Lucille Campbell; Melissa Boutin; Josie Leavitt; Bianca Adams; Denise Abbott-Douglas; Mark Cobb; Amanda Hamlin; Jean Baker Prouty; Tonya Poutry; Barbara Capen; Kristina Botala; Mitchel Richardson; Tracy Paradee

Board Members to Amend Agenda for Matters Not Listed:

Garage Open House – Old Business

County Courthouse – Old Business

Howard Demars application for Planning Commission – New Business

Relax and Restore VT – New Business

II. GUEST OPEN COMMENT

Joe Longo asks if the debris from the old fire station had been cleaned up today, saying that there was debris spread out near the church, behind the fire station and in the field with the pond. Jeff Parizo and Ron Bushway say they hadn't seen anything, but Jeff says that he contacted Tyler Billingsly and they were going to send someone out to make sure everything was cleaned up.

Emily Clark says that the Planning Commission are going to hold a meeting on September 7th, including several elected officials to discuss several matters including daycare in the Islands, ARPA funding, and the possibility of getting more land from the state for the Donaldson Park. Emily says she wanted to make sure people knew that there would be a meeting and to invite everyone to attend.

Denise Abbott-Douglas says that Grand Isle Rescue has been very busy. Jeff says that there is a meeting planned for September 27th with rescue and the North Hero Select Board to address the staffing issues that Grand Isle Rescue is facing.

III. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES OF AUGUST 10TH AND AUGUST 16TH

Adam White moves to approve the August 10th Select Board Minutes. AnnaMarie DeMars seconds. No discussion. Jeff calls the vote, which passes with four 'ayes' with Ron Bushway abstaining.

AnnaMarie Demars moves to accept the minutes of the August 16th meeting. Ron Bushway seconds. No discussion. Jeff calls the vote, which passes with four 'ayes' with Adam White abstaining.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

NEMRC Training: Jeff Parizo says that Wendy Wilton with NEMRC is offering a training for officials to better understand the financial numbers that are presented to the Board. This training will cost \$145 per hour, and Jeff says he'd like to take 2 hours and have a special meeting for town officials to learn more about the process. Adam White asks if she's going to be teaching basic economics. Eric Godin says he thinks that the training would be geared towards municipal issues, and says he would welcome the training, as he isn't an accountant and would like to better understand the reports. Colleen Bushway asks if she could attend the training, as she is treasurer for the Library. Adam White concurs and asks if this could be open to all town officials. Josie Leavitt asks via Zoom if it could be open to the public. Jeff says that he doesn't think that it would be a problem, as it's \$145 per hour with no mention of a limit on who could attend. Denise Abbott-Douglas says she feels that it would be good for the public to be able to attend, as there may be folks that may want to run to be on a Board at some point. Eric asks Melissa Boutin if this money would come from the general fund, which Melissa confirms. Adam White suggests scheduling the training and having a Q&A afterwards to answer all the questions. ***Eric Godin moves to authorize Jeff Parizo to contact NEMRC and schedule the financial training. AnnaMarie Demars seconds.*** Joe Longo asks that if the Board didn't have a good understanding of the numbers, why did they approve the budgets. Joe also asks why the Board would need the training as they are the ones who have authority over the budgets. Eric says that the Board members by in large are NOT accountants, and this training could help them better understand the town finances and make better decisions. Eric says that as a pharmacy technician and bass player, he is definitely not an accountant and would like to have the training in hopes that he will make better more informed decisions for the town. Jeff says that he feels this sort of training should happen annually after the Board is elected every year. Adam White concurs. ***Jeff calls the vote, which passes unanimously.***

Bonding of Town Employees Update: Jeff Parizo says that he asked VLCT about the need for bonding of town employees, and concluded that all town employees are covered under the town insurance, PACIF.

VLCT Training September 15th: Jeff Parizo says that the training is 9:30am to 12:15pm on Wednesday the 15th via Zoom. The training pertains to municipal budgeting and finance, legal requirements and best practices. Jeff says that he thinks it would be a good idea for Board members to attend this training if possible. Eric Godin says he'd like to attend the training as well. Adam White asks if Jeff will reach out to the other boards in the town and invite them to attend the training as well. Adam says that the all-volunteer Boards within the town are understandably overwhelmed when budget season comes, and this training might give some assistance to those people. The training would cost \$48 per person. Eric says he feels that there should be some idea as to the cost to the town before a vote is taken. It is pointed out by Adam White and Colleen Bushway that each department has a training budget that would be utilized to pay for this training. ***Adam White moves to have Jeff Parizo and Eric Godin attend the September 15th, VLCT training regarding budgeting and to send the information out to other town boards. Eric Godin seconds. Jeff calls the vote, which passes unanimously.***

Labor Day Meeting: Jeff Parizo says the next normal meeting would fall on Labor Day, September 6th, and asks if the meeting should take place as usual. Ron Bushway says no. Adam White says he thinks that there had been discussion that we were having this special meeting on August 30th in lieu of a Labor Day meeting. Adam says that if an emergency comes up, a special meeting can be called. Eric says that there are no major issues that should come up on the Select Board calendar in the next few weeks and agrees with cancelling the Labor Day meeting. ***Ron Bushway moves to cancel the September 6th, 2021 Select Board Meeting. Adam White seconds. Jeff calls the vote, which passes unanimously.***

Masks in Town Buildings: Jeff Parizo says that he feels that the state is moving towards mandating masks in public spaces again soon, noting that several people at the meeting were wearing masks. Jeff asks if the Board wants to mandate masks inside town buildings. Health Officer Ron Bushway says that other towns have already starting mandating masks, including Shelburne, Marshfield, Powlette, Essex, and several other towns. Ron notes that the Grand Isle town Library is mandating masks, and says there have been new cases reported in Grand Isle County recently. Ron says he feels that Grand Isle should go back to having masks mandated in public buildings. Colleen Bushway says that the Library is already getting pushback on their mask mandate, and that the Librarian is feeling intimidated. Colleen says that one person has been giving the Librarian a hard time and another person had complained about having to wear a mask. Denise Abbott-Douglas points out that there are town employees the town can't afford to lose to serious COVID infections, citing the difficulty in getting enough people to staff the road crew, and that she thinks it would be silly not to mandate masks at this point. Joe Longo asks if the Board would authorize money to have three people staffed at the transfer station, so there was an attendant at the entrance to make sure masks were being worn. Ron and Jeff say they don't think a booth attendant will be necessary, as people will only be required to mask when they head inside. Adam expresses concern about the wording of a mandate, citing town employees working inside, but not in the vicinity of other people, saying that he doesn't want the Board to have to have a special meeting in a week to address concerns about the masking policy. Ron says that he feels that this issue is going to be revisited, as the State guidelines are going to change. Eric agrees, and asks town clerk Melissa Boutin for her opinion, as she is the one in the Town Office full time. Melissa says that she enjoys not having to wear a mask while at her desk, and understands the need to mask up when interacting with other people. Emily Clark says that she feels that the town office can be controlled, especially knowing that the employees are vaccinated, but whether or not the public has been vaccinated is a question, as well as questions about how easily the delta variant of COVID spreads. Emily says she's not sure the town employees would be safe having unmasked public people come into the office. Joe Longo says that he saw 140 people this week at the transfer station, and he has no idea of whether or not they have been exposed to COVID. Joe asks the health officer if he should go back to closing the window in his booth, which leaves him working in over 100-degree heat. Ron says that he feels that should be up to the employee, saying that if Joe didn't feel comfortable, he

should go ahead and close the window. Adam says that he isn't against another mask mandate, and says that the COVID numbers aren't coming down. Adam says he doesn't want confrontations between the public and the town employees, saying that the public should be upset with the Select Board, and not the town employees. Jeff Parizo says that the federal government is saying there will likely be no relief until spring of 2022, and that he doesn't want to get sick, acknowledging that breakthrough cases are being reported even among the vaccinated. Ron says that he won't be surprised if we have to revisit the issue at another meeting. Emily Clark says she wants to make sure that the town employees aren't the ones who should have to confront people over the masking policy, and that the policy should support the safety of the town employees. Peter Riegelman asks if there can be a written policy presented at the next meeting. Eric Godin says that there likely can be, but the Board needs to get out in front of this with a motion at this meeting. Jeff says that he isn't sure there should be a written masking policy, as the issue is going to be revisited and adjusted at future meetings. Rachael Griggs asks if it could be put on all masking signs that is being mandated by the Select Board. The Board agrees. ***Adam White moves that starting on August 31st, 2021 in town buildings, the public must wear face masks and town employees, while interacting with the public must wear a face mask. Eric Godin seconds the motion. No further discussion. Jeff calls the vote, which passes unanimously.*** Adam White asks Ron Bushway if he can reach out to the town employees that report to him, informing them of the changes.

Howard DeMars Letter of Interest for Planning Commission: Jeff Parizo states that Howard DeMars has submitted a letter of interest for the long vacant position with the Planning Commission. Jeff says that he will bring it up to the Planning Commission and he just wanted to let the Select Board know about the letter.

Relax and Restore Vermont: Adam White says that the Select Board received an email from Amanda Hamlin, inquiring about use of the Annex to continue her massage therapy business within the Islands. Adam says that he responded to Amanda saying it could be discussed at tonight's meeting. Amanda Hamlin says she has been searching for a space within the Islands and wondered if the Annex was available. Adam says that he knows the Planning Commission is taking the lead on the issue. Emily Clark says that Amanda's request will be put on one of the next two agendas for the Planning Commission to discuss. Emily says that there is interest in having another daycare occupy the Annex, as well as talk of the building being the temporary home for the Grand Isle Library, but goes on to say that either of those options don't necessarily preclude there being further space available. Eric Godin says that there is a lot of discussion around the issue right now and it may be a while before any decision is made in regards to use of the Annex. Jeff Parizo says that he appreciates Amanda's interest in the building, as the town is trying to attract more people to do business in the town.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Donation and Storage Policies: Eric says that he has sent both policies to VLCT for review. It is decided to table both items until the policies have been reviewed. No further discussion

NSWD Rep: Adam White asks the Board if they approve of him posting the ad for the NSWD representative on Front Porch Forum and around town. Adam notes that the date listed in the ad is for the September 20th meeting. Eric says he will post it on the website.

Personnel Policy Update: Jeff says he did get ahold of Abby at VLCT regarding the review of the town's personnel policy, and was given a tentative date for completion of the end of September. There is limited discussion about VLCT's workload, and the discussion moves on to the next topic.

ARPA Funding: Jeff Parizo says that the town of Grand Isle has not received any funds from the county ARPA funds as of yet. Adam asks if there has been any information about the amount of money the town would receive, which there has not. Josie Leavitt asks when the public will be allowed to comment on the spending of the ARPA funds. Jeff responds that the discussion will likely take place at the September 7th meeting of the Planning Commission.

Open Audit Bids: Jeff says that there have been two responses to the audit RFP that was put out, and both came via email. One came on August 12th from Bonnie Batchelder and Associates, and another was received today, August 30th from RHR Smith. Town Clerk Melissa Boutin asks why the Batchelder bid didn't come to her. Jeff responds that he doesn't know, but that it arrived via his email. Jeff asks for discussion about the two bids. Eric Godin says that he had heard there was a petition to send the issue to a special election, and if that were the case, he feels the Board should let that play out, to be more democratic. Jeff agrees, but says he has seen no such petition as of yet. Ron agrees with Jeff. Joe Longo asks which email address the bids were received by. Jeff says they arrived to his Select Board email address. Joe asks why they didn't come to the town office as indicated in the previous discussion. Jeff says he doesn't know, and Eric says that the question may be better answered by the auditing company. Joe asks how can the RFP be accepted. Jeff says that he doesn't think the other six firms that were contacted about the bid were going to respond, so he was moving forward with what they had, as they didn't want to kick the can further down the road. Adam White verifies the amounts for each bid, mentioning that Bonnie Batchelder and Associates want just over \$20,000 per year for the 3 year audit, while R.H.R. Smith want \$11,000 for all three years. Jeff agrees, saying that R.H.R. Smith had modified their price since the first RFP went out, saying the first bid was \$7,500 per year for the three years. Adam notes that R.H.R. Smith's bid says that if a further three years were to be requested, it would cost the town \$15,000 for all three years. Ron Bushway asks if these were the only two bids. Jeff confirms that they are. Adam says that this is a more in-depth audit than the town usually gets. Peter Riegelman mentions that Fire District Four went through a similar process. Peter goes on to say that any firm, no matter what they charge, should guarantee the town that they have examined the financial records and dealings of the town and that the town will be given reasonable assurance that what has been examined is correct and that it follows the law. Peter says that he applauds the idea of doing a request for services, and that he doesn't feel that VLCT is doing enough for municipal entities. Peter says he wants guarantees that an audit done

follows the law and is accurate, so residents can feel some comfort when the process is complete. **Jeff Parizo moves to accept Bonnie Batchelder and Associates bid for a 3 year audit of the town's finances at \$20,400 for each year, for a total of \$61,200.** **AnnaMarie Demars seconds.** Joe Longo says that he feels the RFP's are illegal. Jeff responds saying 'so noted'. Adam White asks where the funding will come from. Jeff responds that it will come from the general fund. Adam asks if it is known what the general fund balance is currently. Jeff says that per the end of year reports the town should have 1.1 million dollars in the general fund cash. Melissa says that doesn't all belong to the town. Jeff says there should be four or five hundred thousand. Adam points out that restricted funds are included in those numbers. Melissa indicates that the report is being misread. Rachael Griggs asks that with the amount of money in question, shouldn't the Board need the approval of the voters to spend it. Eric Godin says he know that there has been a push for the audit, but given the amount of money, he agrees with Rachael that the residents of the town should have a say. Adam asks what the rationale is for selecting the more expensive of the two bids. Ron Bushway responds that he had heard feedback saying that if R.H.R. Smith was chosen, they would be auditing their own work, and didn't feel that was right. Ron says that he thinks it's time to move on and address the concerns of the towns people. Bianca Adams says she feels Jeff's motion is correct, and that R.H.R. Smith should not be auditing their own work, questioning why his costs were so much lower than the other bid. Susan Lawrence says that these accounting firms have a reputation to uphold, and she feels that if they are following proper procedure, there shouldn't be an issue. Susan says that R.H.R. Smith has been auditing towns for a long time, and doesn't think that they would want to ruin their reputation by doing something incorrect. Esther Blow says that a petition was filed for this action and that she feels the audit should move forward. Joe Longo asks what was wrong that people found that brought the issue of an audit about, and says that nobody can answer that question.