11-03-2025 Selectboard Meeting

Meeting minutes

DRAFT

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Jeff Parizo opened the Grand Isle Selectboard meeting on Monday, November 3, 2025 at 6:00 PM.

Board Members Present: Aimee Cochran, Ronnie Bushway, Jeff Parizo, Ellen Howrigan, and Jennifer Morway

Community Members Present: Colleen Bushway, Sue Lawrence, Lucille Campbell, Carrie San Angelo, Cindy Reid, and Jess Neubelt.

Community Members via Zoom: Lynda Morgan Gardiner, Adam Lavigne, and Emily Clark

II. Amend Agenda for Matters NOT Listed

Chair Parizo asked for amendments to the agenda. Carrie San Angelo noted that Jen Morway had sent corrections to minutes that hadn't been reviewed yet. The board agreed to handle this during the minutes review.

The board added two items under old business: discussing a CD that's due (to be handled under financials) and the MERP grant reallocation. Ellen Howrigan confirmed she had no additions, and Jen Morway confirmed these were her only two items.

III. Public Comment

Chair Parizo called for public comment. Adam Lavigne, participating via Zoom, stated he was present for the DRB clerk discussion and was available if the board wanted to discuss the budget further. No other public comments were received.

IV. Review and Approve Minutes

The board reviewed minutes from September 29, October 6, and October 20, 2025. Morway indicated she had corrections to submit. After brief discussion about whether to approve the minutes separately or together, Morway stated she didn't think the September 29th minutes needed corrections but wanted to review all three.

> Motion by Jennifer Morway: "I motion to approve the September 29th, October 6th, and October 20th minutes with corrections." Seconded by Aimee Cochran Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed unanimously

V. Guests

a. Jess Neubelt, Evernorth, Round Barn Project

Jess Neubelt, lead developer for Evernorth, and Cindy Reid from Cathedral Square presented an update on the Round Barn project. Neubelt explained that Evernorth, along with Champlain Housing Trust, currently co-owns the property and that Cathedral Square would be their new partner in the proposed redevelopment.

The project, purchased in 2005 from private developers at the encouragement of state agencies, now requires significant updates after 20 years. Neubelt highlighted critical safety concerns: the property lacks sprinklers, creating fire safety risks, has no elevators despite housing senior adults and people with disabilities, and suffers from antiquated infrastructure.

The redevelopment plan remains unchanged from their December 2024 presentation: a deep energy retrofit of the 8-unit building and replacement of the 16 units in the round barn with a new building on the same site. Project goals include improving quality, safety, accessibility, resilience, and energy efficiency while strengthening the operating budget and adding community space for service delivery and wellness programming.

Cindy Reid from Cathedral Square emphasized their nonprofit's experience, having developed Bayview Crossing in South Hero Village. She explained Cathedral Square would bring a healthier operating budget and enhanced on-site services to address social isolation. Their SASH (Support and Services at Home) program would expand with additional hours per week, and they would introduce housing retention services for at-risk residents.

Reid stressed the critical timing, warning of two major risks if the project cannot proceed: potential loss of their competitive HUD federal grant of over $1.4 million (one of only 11 projects funded nationally under the Green Resiliency and Retrofit Program), and possible loss of the HAP contract providing rental subsidies for 24 households who could become homeless without this assistance.

The project has experienced approximately a one-year delay, which Lee noted is not unusual in housing development. Recent progress includes conditional use approval from the DRB, completed archaeology with no findings, an extension from HUD on their grant, and significant funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. They've also applied for additional funding through the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston's Affordable Housing Program and the state treasurer's below-market interest program.

Construction is tentatively planned for winter 2026-2027, with a hopeful start in February or March 2027. Residents received a similar update two weeks prior.

Reid then addressed their urgent request for town assistance with a Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) pre-application due November 4th. She clarified this was a non-binding pre-application requiring the town to link Cathedral Square to the town's account in the state's GEARS portal so they could upload their application.

Board members expressed significant concerns about the town's capacity to manage such a grant. Jen Morway noted they're already managing over $2 million in grants with limited staff. Jen Morway emphasized the town lacks infrastructure and personnel, with no full-time or even part-time employees - everyone is either elected or an assistant to an elected official. Town Treasurer Melissa also agreed, noting the additional grant could trigger a more expensive audit requirement.

Discussion revealed that by law, VCDP funding must flow through municipalities, making the town legally responsible for all reporting and audit requirements. Board members worried about potential liability if reporting deadlines were missed, with the town attorney having warned that non-compliance could result in requests for money to be returned.

Cathedral Square representatives offered to budget for all audit and legal costs and help with application work, but board members remained concerned about the fundamental issue of capacity. After extensive discussion about finding workarounds or other municipalities' experiences with similar situations, the board agreed to allow the pre-application submission while researching whether the state could provide alternatives for small towns without adequate staffing.

Emily Clark, participating via Zoom, reminded the board that Jen Lavoie from the state was a GEARS expert who could help with the system.

> Motion by Aimee Cochran: "I move forward doing the pre-application in GEARS for the Faywood Road Apartments." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Discussion: Chair Parizo confirmed with the applicants that

the pre-application creates no legal obligations Vote: Motion passed unanimously, with Ronnie Bushway stating he was only voting yes because Karen Allen volunteered to help with Gears.

VI. Review and Sign Warrants

The board reviewed warrants, with Chair Parizo noting he couldn't find documentation for the $75,000 fire department warrant. Treasurer Melissa Boutin explained it was part of the budgeted reserve and she hadn't printed the budget documentation. Ronnie Bushway identified a typo where a warrant showed $7,225 instead of $8,225.

Board members discussed the challenge of reviewing all warrants within the meeting time constraints, with materials being passed between only two or three members. They agreed to implement a new process where warrants would circulate through all members sequentially during the meeting.

> Motion by Jennifer Morway to approve warrants, which will be reviewed at the end of the meeting. Seconded by Aimee Cochran. Motion passed unanimously

VII. Financials

The board discussed a CD due for renewal at North Country Credit Union. The current CD amount was $160,279 as of September. Board members reviewed rate options: 6 months at 3.75%, 12 months at 3.62%, and 24 months at 3.45%.

After discussion about whether they would need the funds and consideration that interest rates might decline, the board opted for the 12-month term.

> Motion by Ellen Howrigan: "I make a motion we renew CD 1008 for 12 months at approximately 3.6 percent at NCCU." Seconded by Jeff Parizo Discussion: Cochran asked about including an amount variation clause, confirming "approximately" would cover it Vote: Motion passed unanimously

The board then addressed the MERP grant reallocation. Jen Morway explained this would reallocate funds originally designated for the fire station to the new library build for specific items. The grant remains at $500,000 total, with $407,000 being reallocated to the library project.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the new MERP attachment A scope of work to go with our MERP grant and resign." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Discussion: Morway suggested the Selectboard should maintain control of this grant going forward, with much of the remaining work involving coordination with Ron for building-related tasks Vote: Motion passed unanimously

VIII. Highway Department Update

Ron Bushway provided the highway department update, noting that Highway Foreman Steve was on a two-week vacation that began the previous Wednesday. Ron reported he was handling paperwork and signing timesheets in Steve's absence.

The department completed mixing and storing the last of the salt and sand in the salt shed. Recent high winds brought down limbs, primarily on East Shore North and West Shore Road, with significant wind coming across the lake.

On Friday, Ron responded to a water main leak on Adams School Road between houses 107 and 109. The water department initially feared the pipe might be under or beside the paved road, potentially causing pavement collapse. The issue was resolved after they located the pipe, with the highway department providing gravel assistance.

The department began hauling sand for the new library mound, starting with some loads on Friday. Ron announced that John Hemingway, who works Saturdays, would be taking the winter off to head south. Kevin Gardiner has agreed to cover Thursdays and Saturdays during the winter months.

Ron noted that Don would be on vacation the week of November 20th, requiring Ron to cover the transfer station on November 20th and 22nd.

IX. Buildings Facilities Manager Update

Ron Bushway continued with the buildings update. The town garage boilers were serviced the previous Friday, revealing a leak in the mechanical room. The leak involved PEX pipe joined to copper, with completely corroded fittings in a tight space above the ceiling. Ron indicated he would need to contact a plumber, likely Chuck's, to address the difficult-to-access repair.

Winter preparations included winterizing the log cabin bathroom and installing shutters on the block schoolhouse. Ron noted the painters had done their job well, as every shutter was difficult to install, indicating proper paint coverage.

A significant issue arose with the fire station boiler being out of order. Parts were expected by late Tuesday afternoon or early Wednesday, with the problem identified as a bad control board and possibly the fan motor. Board members discussed using the heat pump in the meeting room to warm the space for upcoming library use, with the current temperature at 54 degrees.

X. IT Update

Chair Parizo asked for IT updates. Hearing none, the board agreed to move on without discussion.

XI. New Business

a. Round Barn: VDCP Approval

This item was addressed during the guest presentation with Evernorth and Cathedral Square representatives.

b. Budgets

i. GI Fire Department

Fire Chief Adam White presented the Grand Isle Volunteer Fire Department budget request. He began with the dispatch services budget line of $14,000, explaining it would remain level-funded despite an expected 10-15% increase from Shelburne Dispatch. The department maintains a buffer to absorb such increases.

White explained that the $14,000 pays for Grand Isle's portion of services through GICMA (Grand Isle County Mutual Aid Association), which includes fire departments, sheriff's departments, rescue squads, and emergency management directors. This covers Shelburne Dispatch services and infrastructure including radio repeaters in Grand Isle, Alburgh, St. Albans, and a new one being installed in Colchester to improve coverage for southern South Hero Island.

He provided historical context, noting that before switching to Shelburne Dispatch, the county used St. Albans dispatch at a cost of $30,000 annually. The current arrangement has significantly reduced costs. White also mentioned the state's ambition to consolidate Vermont's approximately 20 dispatch centers, though he expressed skepticism about the feasibility without proper funding, citing Chittenden County's failed consolidation attempt.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the $14,000 for dispatching service for the ensuing 2027 year." Seconded by Ronnie Bushway Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed unanimously

For the fire department budget, Chief White requested level funding, noting 2025 marks the department's 75th year of service. Recent growth includes six probationary members and one junior firefighter, bringing total membership to approximately 23. The increased membership has created equipment challenges - the department lacks sufficient gear and locker space for new members. White mentioned potentially returning to request Selectboard approval for wall-mounted lockers per their MOU.

The department responded to 140 calls the previous year. White described a particularly challenging evening the previous night with three simultaneous calls: an ambulance deer strike, a structure fire, and a carbon monoxide alarm, all within 10 minutes. He praised the department's ability to handle all three incidents.

Financial challenges include aging apparatus and increased maintenance costs. The department now utilizes Jessman’s Garage, a new local facility capable of servicing large trucks, avoiding costly off-island trips to Milton or Colchester. White noted they would likely end the year in deficit due to equipment purchases for new members and vehicle maintenance, including recent steering tire repairs.

Looking ahead, White highlighted the need to plan for SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus) replacements between 2030-2035, when current units reach their 15-year expiration. He proposed purchasing 3-4 units annually at $40,000-50,000 rather than replacing all units at once for $200,000. The department's fleet includes a 1993 engine (32 years old) and a 2000 heavy rescue truck.

White also mentioned upcoming IRS reporting threshold changes for 2026, increasing from $600 to $2,000 for 1099 employees (volunteer firefighters), which may affect compensation strategies.

A new apparatus committee will evaluate future truck needs. White shared concerning industry trends: a truck purchased in 2018 for $352,000 would now cost $650,000, with new trucks ranging from $600,000 to $1 million. The U.S. Senate is investigating fire apparatus manufacturers for potential price manipulation. The department expects to use their entire apparatus fund plus the current year's $75,000 allocation to purchase a new truck arriving in coming months.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the Grand Isle Fire Department $105,000 ask for the ensuing year of 2027." Seconded by Ronnie Bushway Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed unanimously

ii. Cemetery Commission

The Cemetery Commission presented a budget request of $23,850. Board members questioned the IT licenses line item of $400. Sue Lawrence clarified they needed licenses but weren't sure if they needed two G1 licenses or included a G3 license, given the cemetery's integration with other town systems. The board confirmed two licenses at $180 each ($360 total) would likely suffice.

Lucille and Sue discussed ongoing cemetery maintenance and improvements. They mentioned increased funding for lawn care and the caretaker due to uncertain future pricing. The commission has funds reserved for potential projects including extending the black fence on the south side. This project was delayed due to wet spring conditions preventing equipment access and subsequently high prices.

Discussion touched on the cemetery's savings being earmarked for potential culvert expenses and fence extension. The significant lawn care costs were acknowledged, with board members noting the commission had negotiated well given that another bid received was $35,000. The challenge of finding contractors willing to maintain cemeteries was discussed, with suggestions to potentially coordinate RFP timing with the town's lawn care contract.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the town appropriation part of the cemetery for $23,850 for the fiscal year 2027." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed unanimously

iii. DRB

Adam Lavigne participated via Zoom for the DRB budget discussion. Jennifer Morway identified missing line items: IT services (calculated at $1,440 based on previous years) and professional education. While DRB had been learning through bylaws review and consulting the town attorney, the board recommended adding $250 for potential training through Northwest Regional Planning Commission or VLCT, especially for new members or when legislation changes.

The final DRB budget totaled $34,353 with these additions.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the DRB's budget for 2027 of $34,353." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed unanimously

XII. Old Business

a. Town Charter

The board reviewed the timeline and process document provided by Carrie for the town charter. The timeline indicated the Selectboard needed to vote to approve the charter at this meeting and file it with the Town Clerk by January 22, 2026. Board members confirmed they had already completed the necessary work and just needed formal approval.

> Motion by Aimee Cochran: "Motion we approve the town charter." Seconded by Jennifer Morway
> Discussion: Board clarified no signatures were required, just filing with the Town Clerk with a date stamp
> Vote: Motion passed unanimously

b. Website Design Contract Status Update

The board reviewed the EcoPixel municipal website contract that had been approved by both the town attorney and Paul. After clarification about the annual cost ($4,141.95 per year for 3 years, including $4,122 for services plus $19.95 for domain registration), the board prepared to approve the contract.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the EcoPixel municipal website for $4,141.95 a year for 3 years." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Vote: Motion passed unanimously

c. Job Description: Zoning Administrative Officer

The board reviewed the latest draft of the Zoning Administrator Officer job description dated 11/3/2025. Carrie noted she had removed site work recommendations and added a requirement that another employee accompany any site visits. During discussion, board members questioned the requirement for a valid driver's license, agreeing to change it to "reliable transportation" instead.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion we approve the zoning administrator officer job description draft 11/3/2025 with correction." Seconded by Ronnie Bushway Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed unanimously

d. Junk Ordinance

Jennifer Morway summarized recent attorney communications about the junk ordinance, including a 4 PM email that day. The key issue: once a municipal ticket is issued by an enforcement officer (such as the constable), it becomes a civil court matter completely outside the Selectboard's control. The board cannot waive fees or negotiate daily fines - all decisions rest with a judge.

The board faced two options: continue with existing zoning ordinance enforcement through environmental court (status quo), or implement the new ordinance understanding the town would have no control once tickets are issued. Concerns centered on the statutory fines (first offense $100 penalty with $50 waiver, up to $800 per day after) which the town cannot modify.

Board members discussed enforcement challenges, citing examples like Adams School Road and Hyde Road properties that remained problematic. The South Hero Road case was mentioned where someone was fined $30,000 (later waived) but did clean up their property. Historical context included a Sloop Road case that cost the town approximately $50,000 in attorney fees.

Discussion revealed the ordinance template came from VLCT following state law changes. Other towns with similar ordinances include Brandon, Middlebury, Barre Town, Milton, St. Albans Town, and Springfield, enforced by various officials including selectboards, health officers, zoning administrators, or constables.

The board expressed concerns about costs to property owners who might lack means to clean up their properties, questioning who would bear those costs. Jeff Parizo suggested researching how the ordinance has worked in other municipalities, particularly regarding effectiveness and court involvement. The board agreed to gather more information before deciding.

XIII. Executive Session to discuss contracts pending per 1 VSA state statute 313(a)(2) that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or person involved at substantial disadvantage

Before entering executive session, Ron Bushway mentioned he and Austin had met with Lucille about brush cutting at the log cabin. Significant work is needed, including tall trees requiring a bucket truck. The highway department will handle what they can, with particular attention to ash trees, lilacs needing trimming, and a large limb over the schoolhouse.

Aimee Cochran confirmed the town had received the excavator for $59,500.

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion to go into executive session to discuss contracts pending per 1 VSA state statute 313(a)(2) that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or person involved at substantial disadvantage." Seconded by Jennifer Morway Vote: Motion passed unanimously

The board entered executive session at 7:33 PM.

> Motion by Aimee Cochran: "Motion to come out of executive session at 8:50 and vote to go with the Dubuque bid." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Discussion: None Vote: Motion passed (4-1, with Ronnie Bushway voting no)

XIV. Administrative Check-In

This item was incorporated into earlier discussions.

Adjournment

> Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I'll make a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:50." Seconded by Ellen Howrigan Vote: Motion passed unanimously

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.