

01-05-2026 Selectboard Meeting

Meeting minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jeff Parizo called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM. Board Members Present included Aimee Cochran, Jeff Parizo, Ellen Howrigan, and Jennifer Morway. Board Member Ron Bushway attended via Zoom. No community members were present in the room at the start of the meeting, Sheriff Ray Allen arrived after the meeting started. Community Members via Zoom included Lucille Campbell, Colleen Bushway, Esther Blow, Lynda Morgan Gardiner, Sue Lawrence, and Michael Wright from LCATV. Melissa Boutin and Sara Santor were present in person.

Amend Agenda for Matters NOT Listed

Chairman Parizo announced several amendments to the agenda. Aimee Cochran requested to add a "Round Barn Update" under old business, explaining "I wanted to add a Round Barn and update. Under old business, Round Barn update?"

Chairman Parizo stated he wanted to remove the highway grant for solar and the 2025 audit report update from old business, noting these would be addressed under Rick Brigham's guest presentation. He also indicated there would be an executive session at the end of the meeting to discuss confidential attorney-client privilege matters.

Public Comment

No public comments were offered during this portion of the meeting.

Review and Approve Minutes

12/15/2025

Jeff Parizo motioned to approve the minutes from 12/15/2025 with corrections. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Guests

Sheriff Ray Allen

Sheriff Ray Allen presented his budget proposal for fiscal year 2027, requesting \$198,853 for 52 hours per week of coverage. He explained this represented a 3% cost of living increase from the previous year. Allen clarified that his insurance is covered by the county and state, as he is technically a state employee paid by the state.

Sheriff Allen reported that the primary increase in incidents over the past five years has been in mental health and welfare checks, particularly stemming from 29 Faywood Road, the Round Barn, and Hyde Road locations.

Board members expressed concerns about patrol coverage distribution across the island. Chairman Parizo observed, "you have the north end of the island, and we know what's going on. And then you have the south end of the island with the ferry dump and all the traffic... It seems like we get missed because I still see it. They're speeding through here during the school times."

Sheriff Allen acknowledged the concern and mentioned that one of his deputies "fell in love with the North Hero village this year" and has been focusing more patrol time there. He explained the town receives a portion of traffic ticket revenues, with higher percentages in reduced speed zones.

The Sheriff announced several upcoming developments: a new K-9 unit named Knox, a German Shepherd born in Germany, would be arriving at the end of January after three weeks of training in North Carolina. Additionally, two sergeants would be completing death investigation training, which would allow them to handle non-criminal death investigations without relying on state police.

Regarding the north end of the island, Sheriff Allen revealed that one town had cut his department by 14 hours per week, and they expected to run out of contracted hours by March or April. When asked what would happen if there was a call after hours were exhausted, he stated, "We are a business, contracted service" and would not respond.

The discussion turned to drug issues, with Sheriff Allen confirming that drug use is not decreasing. He shared a recent incident involving fentanyl and explained Vermont's limitations on vehicle searches, noting "Vermont is, I think, 1 of 3 states that with probable cause on a motor vehicle stop, you have to ask nicely for permission to search."

Ron Bushway asked about welfare checks at specific addresses counting toward the 52 contracted hours, to which Sheriff Allen confirmed they do count. Bushway expressed concern: "Ray, did you respond to the 1 that happened about a week ago with 2 overdoses? That's pretty concerning that you spend so much time there, and we're really not you know, like Jeff mentioned earlier, we got a lot of speeders on our roads and stuff."

Sheriff Allen explained that mental health calls are increasing countywide, especially during this time of year, and described various ways people trigger emergency responses, including through out-of-state hotlines. The Sheriff invited the Board to tour the sheriff's facility and mentioned upcoming events including a blood drive on January 23rd.

Rick Brigham, Sullivan & Powers - Audit Report Update

Rick Brigham's was scheduled to give a presentation on the Audit Report but was unable to attend.

Review and Sign Warrants

Board members reviewed and signed warrants during the pre-meeting period. There was discussion about various bills and corrections needed, including adjustments to totals and questions about autopay items. Melissa made corrections to the warrant totals during this process. Jennifer Morway made a motion to approve Jeff Parizo signing the warrants. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All voted in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Financials

Financial discussions were integrated throughout the meeting, particularly during the budget review process.

Highway Department Update

Ron Bushway, attending via Zoom, reported that Chuck's had fixed a water leak in the ceiling at the garage equipment room. He explained, "There was a fitting in the ceiling that was totally rotted out. So Steve and Austin had to tear some of the ceiling out. Now it's gotta be repaired, but they said they can do that." The fitting was described as "a metal fitting that went from PEX to copper" that was "totally rotted out."

Board members expressed concern about the age of the building and the early failure of components, with Jennifer Morway suggesting they contact the original contractors about these issues. Bushway responded that the original contractors were called, "when we called them before, they just didn't have time to come out and service them, I guess."

Ron also mentioned getting a quote of approximately \$11,000 from Chuck's for apron heating work to energizing existing pipes to prevent doors from freezing. Chairman Parizo instructed him to get a second estimate for this work.

Buildings Facilities Manager Update

This update was incorporated into Ron's highway department report, as he serves in both capacities.

IT Update

Website Development Meeting Update

Aimee Cochran reported on the website development meeting she attended with Sara and Adam Lavigne. Key points included:

- Declaration of Inclusion: The committee recommended adding the town's existing Declaration of Inclusion to the website homepage. Chairman Parizo confirmed the town had previously voted on this declaration, making it one of the second towns to do so. The Board agreed to add it to the homepage without requiring a new vote.
- Decision-Making Authority: Cochran sought confirmation that she, Sara, and Adam had permission to make website decisions without bringing each item to the Board. The Board confirmed this authority, with Jennifer noting that unless money is involved, project teams can make decisions and share updates as needed.
- Logo Contest: The committee proposed a town-wide logo design contest with "bragging rights" as the prize, noting the current logo is "tall and kind of busy" for website use. Jennifer suggested also reaching out to the school, saying "It might be kind of a cool thing. They might be able to They're pretty creative."
- Photo Collection: Cochran announced plans to request recent photos from residents via Front Porch Forum to use on the website for banner images and other visual elements.

Next Meeting: January 7, 2026, 12:00-2:00

The next website development meeting was confirmed for January 7, 2026, from 12:00-2:00 PM.

New Business

Budgets

i. General Fund Budget

The Board conducted a detailed, page-by-page review of the fiscal year 2027 proposed budget. Chairman Parizo led the discussion with numerous adjustments and considerations:

Revenue Discussions:

- PILOT program: \$52,657
- Current use: \$62,554
- State owned land: \$11,828
- Reimbursement services: \$31,173
- Reappraisal: \$11,424

Melissa was asked to fill in current tax interest and solar credits based on actuals. The Board discussed interest and dividends, with actual 2025 showing \$23,775. After debate about interest rates coming down, they agreed to budget \$15,000, with Melissa noting, "I would prefer to see something a little bit higher because then we're not asking when it comes to comparing revenues and expenses."

Major Budget Adjustments:

- Custodial Services: Increased from \$6,500 to \$7,000 due to added Fire Department cleaning responsibilities

- Health Officer Stipend: Increased from \$1,625 to \$2,000, with Jennifer Morway predicting "I feel like 2000 at bare minimum."
- Lawn Care: Increased significantly from \$12,000 to \$18,000 after discussing high quotes received in previous RFP process
- Selectboard Stipend: Increased by 3% to \$8,240 total for all members
- Repairs and Maintenance: Dramatically increased from \$15,000 to \$30,000, with extensive discussion about aging buildings and unexpected expenses

During the repairs and maintenance discussion, Jennifer Morway advocated strongly for the increase: "if something breaks right now, it's not just tariffs but - we're putting ourselves in a super bad situation to not have the money in the budget to fix" The Board agreed to track expenses by building going forward, with subcategories for town office, log cabin, old library, new library, and annex.

Other Notable Items:

- Town report \$500 and the Town Report preparation expense \$1500 were moved to the Town Clerk's budget
- Legal fees municipal required executive session discussion for final amount
- Postage increased to \$5,500 due to three elections in FY27
- Fire station bond payment: \$108,364
- Fire station operating/maintenance: Increased to \$15,000 to include \$991 for generator maintenance

Emerald Ash Borer Tree Removal: After discussion with Ron about the inventory showing "well over 100 trees," the Board settled on \$25,000, with Ron warning, "If we jump it up too much, I'm I'm worried that we'll put the whole project in jeopardy."

Highway Department Addition: Ron requested adding \$5,000 to equipment repair and maintenance, explaining "the cutting edges for the trucks, for the for the plows are up to 5000 dollars per truck." The Board agreed, increasing that line from \$30,000 to \$35,000.

ii. County Budget

Chairman Parizo reminded Board members that the next county budget meeting would be Monday, January 19 at 1 PM at the sheriff's office. Sheriff Allen mentioned he had reduced his budget by \$5,000 and the county had also made reductions.

Old Business

Junk Ordinance

This item was deferred to executive session as it involved confidential attorney-client communications.

Highway Grant for Solar

This item was removed from the agenda during the amendments section.

2025 Audit Report Update

This item was removed from the agenda during the amendments section.

Delinquent Tax Rate 2027

This item was addressed in executive session.

Round Barn Update

Aimee Cochran provided an update on the Round Barn grant meeting she attended. She reported: "basically, it doesn't cost us anything. It's a grant. It's not the thing we were worried about with the holding the loan on the town. That's not the way they do it anymore."

Key points from her update:

- The grant wouldn't start until after completion of the library grant
- Grant administration includes someone to help manage it (paid for by the grant)
- The town would only pay Evernorth once or twice rather than multiple vendors
- The grant is for \$600,000

Board members expressed concerns about whether this would count against the town's grant award amounts. Cochran acknowledged "They couldn't answer that question." The Board agreed to have representatives come present at a future meeting, with Jennifer tasked to email for clarification on how the grant might impact the town's grant award amounts.

Executive Session

Motion by Jeff Parizo: "Make a motion to go to Executive session to discuss confidential attorney client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal service to the select board pending 1 BSA states chapter 3 to 13 a 1 that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body person involved substantial disadvantage in inviting in Sara Santor as our clerk"

Second by Jennifer Morway

Vote: Passed unanimously

The Board entered executive session at 8:11 PM, with Chairman Parizo indicating they expected motions to come out of it and estimating 30-45 minutes duration.

The Board came out of executive session at 8:45 PM.

Motion by Jeff Parizo: "I wanna make a motion to come out of executive session at 8 45 with a decision to lower the delinquent tax rate from 8 percent to 6 percent on the ballot that will be voted on town meeting"

Second by Jennifer Morway

Vote: Passed unanimously (with Ron Bushway giving thumbs up via Zoom)

Administrative Check-In

No administrative check-in items were discussed.

Adjournment

Motion by Ellen Howrigan: "So move"

Second by Jennifer Morway

Vote: Passed unanimously

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:46 PM.