

12-15-2025 Selectboard Meeting

Meeting minutes

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:11 PM by Chair Jeff Parizo. Prior to the official start, there was extensive discussion about technical difficulties with the Zoom link. Several community members were having trouble accessing the meeting online, requiring them to copy and paste the link rather than clicking directly. The board delayed the start until 6:11 PM to ensure everyone had adequate time to join.

Board Members Present included Ron Bushway, Jeff Parizo, Ellen Howrigan, and Jennifer Morway. Aimee Cochran joined via Zoom partway through the meeting.

Community Members Present were Emily Clark, Colleen Bushway, David Leake, Glenda Leake, Roth Perry, Don Cota, Diane Cota, Rachel Griggs, Melissa Boutin, Amy Stenger, Lucas Stenger, and Lucille Campbell.

Community Members via Zoom included Blanche Roberge, Sue Lawrence, Lynda Morgan Gardiner, Peter Riegelman, Esther Blow, Adam Lavigne, Mike Donoghue.

Amend Agenda for Matters NOT Listed

When asked if there were any amendments to the agenda, Ron Bushway stated "Nothing." Jeff Parizo confirmed "I got nothing."

Public Hearing - Town Charter

Jeff Parizo opened with extensive remarks about the proposed town charter. He explained that Grand Isle currently has a land charter, not a town charter, and that "these two things are different." He shared that the idea came from a fellow selectboard member from another town who "explained the merits of the town charter" and whose "only regret was not putting everything in theirs when they had the chance."

Parizo outlined his opinion on the local option tax, noting "The town presently must raise about 2 million plus or minus to run just the town, not including the school." He emphasized that "Either way, the selectboard must raise the funds to meet the obligation to the town. Either through property taxes or local option tax." He pointed out that "the town presently receives nothing for the tourist seasons" and that "Local option tax would generate revenue from rooms, alcohol, and meals, and short term rentals are becoming increasingly common in our town."

Regarding appointed positions, Parizo stated "As I have looked around at the boards and commissions, I see an aging population. Grand Isle County is the oldest county in Vermont. Where are the volunteers gonna come from in the future?" He noted that "In my opinion, if people do not have to run and be elected, they might be more inclined to serve on a board or commission."

Parizo concluded his opening remarks by announcing "On my final note, this is my goodbye to the town as select board member. Like I told the board at the last meeting 2 weeks ago, I will not seek reelection this March. I have served the town for the last 20 years in one capacity or another."

The discussion then opened to the public. Diane Cota asked about section C5 regarding the select board determining "its own rules and orders of business not addressed by state statute." Parizo clarified "That's the rules, procedures, and conflict of interest that we pass every year."

Ron Bushway raised concerns about the word "shall" in the appointed officers section, asking "I'm not sure that if that shall is in there, that means you will we will have to do it." Parizo confirmed "Absolutely. Have to do it. Absolutely."

Jennifer Morway explained her earlier inquiry to the town attorney about using "may" instead of "shall," stating "The original thought around this was that related to a lot of these appointed officers is quite frankly, I think we might get into a situation with some of these positions not having anybody to fill them." She noted the attorney's response was "no" - it must be "shall" or nothing.

Ron Bushway also expressed concern about the library and cemetery being "kind of private entities. They have their own budgets." Morway agreed, saying "The library and the cemetery make me nervous because they have a whole new set of rules too that we don't have."

Peter Riegelman observed "I think you're gonna have a really tough sell going from elected to appointed. Just that's just me. That's, like, that's just my opinion." Emily Clark noted "It's the only time you ever really see anybody run opposed is the select board... Almost every other position that I have ever seen on a ballot, there are no choices."

Lucille Campbell strongly objected, stating "You're taking any say for of the town voters off the table if you're doing this. I mean, that leaves nobody the people to vote for except you people." She later added specific concerns about the cemetery commission, explaining that years ago the town voted "that the cemetery would be run by cemetery commissioners, and there would be 5 year terms for each one, and it would be 5 commissioners."

Rachel Griggs asked "What makes you think that appointing someone is gonna be any different?" when addressing concerns about finding volunteers. Parizo responded that "they go out and talk to people and people are more willing to come in and sit in a meeting and then be appointed versus elected for those positions."

Jennifer Morway provided context about resistance to running for office, saying "The feedback that we get is that someone's not wanting to deal with the politics of the town... What they're not interested in is having their names dragged off a front porch forum or having their kids - and that is what happens."

Don Cota suggested reconsidering the Town Treasurer position, asking "Why are we gonna bring it up again here?" after it had previously failed in a vote. Morway identified "the Town Treasurer, the listers, the delinquent tax, and the Town constable, those 4, to me, are the ones that make the most amount of sense."

Sue Lawrence joined via Zoom and suggested that if the selectboard "chose to abolish the listers, you could do an assessor. And that's what a lot of towns have done because, again, they have not been able to get 3 people that wanna run."

Adam Lavigne, participating via Zoom, raised a technical question about the local option tax language, noting it states "the town tax shall be implemented in the event the state local options tax... is repealed." Parizo acknowledged "I read that too, and I haven't had time to talk to the attorney about it. But I will forward that question to him."

The discussion about whether cemetery commissioners could legally be appointed became contentious, with Lucille Campbell stating "I don't believe, after reading the statutes, that the cemetery commissioners can be changed from elected to appointed by anybody without a town vote." Sue Lawrence agreed to email the town attorney for clarification, with Parizo instructing "You would email the town attorney, copy us, and ask your question."

Mike Donoghue cautioned the board about potential open meeting law violations, and Peter Riegelman emphasized the importance of ensuring Zoom participants had equal access, noting "if somebody's waving their hand for 20 minutes... I saw Sue waving her hand for a long time."

The public hearing concluded with Parizo stating they would hold another meeting in January, and possibly a third meeting "just to make sure that anybody that isn't here tonight has ample time to come in and talk about it."

Jeff Parizo moved to end the discussion of the public hearing for the first public hearing on the proposed changes to the draft town charter. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All in favor.

Review and Approve Minutes

11/17/2025

12/1/2025

Jennifer Morway made a motion to approve with corrections the 11/17 and the 12/1 minutes. Jeff Parizo seconded the motion. All in favor.

There was extended discussion about the posting of draft versus final minutes on the website, with Mike Donoghue commenting on having "2 sets of minutes floating around." Carrie San Angelo explained that corrections are made in real time on Clerk Minutes but that draft Word documents posted to the website don't reflect those updates.

Guests

Roth Perry, Recreation Committee

Ellen Howrigan read Roth Perry's recommendation: "Hello, selectboard. I'd like to recommend the following existing rec committee members for another 1 year term, Erin Leduc, Lindsay Lundquist, Melissa Hamblitt, Emily SJ White, Diane, Hannah St. Pierre, Dustin Lavigne, and Roth Perry. I'd also like to recommend the following new member for a 1 year term, Taylor Sexton. Taylor is a Grand Isle resident that is actually employed by Richmond's Town Recreation Department, and she would be a great addition to the committee."

Ellen Howrigan moved as Roth recommended. Jen Morway seconded. All in favor.

Review and Sign Warrants

The warrants were reviewed prior to the meeting.

Jen Morway moved to approve the warrants. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All in favor.

Financials

Northfield Savings Bank Line of Credit Maturity Date Extension

Jeff Parizo presented the line of credit extension for \$550,000 dated December 15, 2025, clarifying "This is a line of credit extension for the library construction."

Jeff Parizo made a motion to approve this line of credit. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All in favor.

Aimee was reminded she would need to stop in to sign the document.

Highway Department Update

Ron Bushway provided the update, noting "Steve is leaving on December twentieth" for the holidays. He reported "there's been a lot of nuisance snow, lot plowing and sanding. They worked on the mini excavator, welded the tube back on, and fixed the brake leak."

Additional updates included hauling away the cardboard container and metal dumpster, with Bushway noting "Chuck's coming to fix the water leak at the garage" on Tuesday and would "give us an estimate or try to write up an estimate on that heated apron" on Wednesday. Bushway thanked "Emily Clark for helping us at the transfer station, fixing the square."

Buildings Facilities Manager Update

Ron Bushway reported "everything's going good. Nothing to report there" and noted "even with the cold weather, nobody's freezing up."

IT Update

Website Development Meeting Update

Carrie San Angelo reported on the meeting with Eco Pixel, explaining that "you can only ever see the most recent 4 or 5 posts" on the current website. She noted that Eco Pixel provided "a list of all of the old posts" and recommended that "each board or committee review the existing website and make a list or screenshots or whatever of the things that are on their respective pages that need to stay."

Jennifer Morway clarified that the plan was to "start the new website on dot gov clean" rather than transferring corrupted data from the current site. She emphasized "there's so much bad data on that and so much corrupt that doing that transfer is just gonna make another bad website."

Mike Donoghue reminded the board that "the secretary of state has limitations on eliminating records and public documents" and that "They do have to be accessible." The board discussed creating an archive section for older content.

Next Meeting: December 16, 2025, 12:00-2:00

Carrie confirmed another meeting with Eco Pixel was scheduled for the next day, with Aimee Cochrane, Adam Lavigne, and Sara planning to attend.

New Business

Annual Appointments

Recreation Committee

This item was addressed under the Guests section.

Planning Commission

Carrie identified that "Jen is up" and "Kayli Barber" for reappointment.

Jeff Parizo made a motion to reappoint Jennifer Morway and Kayli Barber to the planning commission.

Ron Bushway seconded. All in favor, with Jen Morway recusing herself from the vote.

Budgets

Town Clerk & Treasurer

The board reviewed the budget numbers, with discussions about revenue projections and childcare contributions. The medical insurance was confirmed at \$24,480.

Jeff Parizo made a motion to approve the town clerk treasurer's budget of \$179,240. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All in favor.

Town General Fund

The board decided to "punt it to our first meeting in January."

Delinquent Tax Rate 2027

Jennifer Morway expressed concern about delinquent taxes, stating "I'm a little concerned about the delinquent tax rate or the delinquent taxes have been just a little bit" higher. She noted that recording fees were up "not for transfers. They're for refinancing" which suggested "people are not necessarily refinancing because of rates, but because they're trying to put themselves in a different situation."

Morway questioned whether "8 percent delinquent tax rate is a good number," acknowledging "we want the number to be deterrent for people to pay on time, but we also don't wanna be putting people in a situation that if they're already not being able to pay, that they're really not being able to pay."

Ron Bushway asked about the current amount owed, with responses indicating "about... like, 90,000." The board discussed that while state statute sets the maximum at 8 percent, they could vote to reduce it. Melissa Boutin offered to "do a comparison too as far as prior history."

NRPC 2026-2034 Regional Plan Public Hearing: December 17, 2025

Jennifer Morway noted that the Planning Commission would receive an updated presentation the following night. Jeff Parizo emphasized the importance of participation, stating "that map they presented would have significantly changed our land use in the town of Grand Isle" by tying up land in "rural Conservation."

Old Business

Junk Ordinance

Jennifer Morway reported on her conversation with Scott, explaining "his recommendation is that we go back to the original draft that the attorney had written up" and "change everywhere that says official to the town constable."

She outlined concerns about ensuring proper procedures, noting Scott wanted "an SOP kind of for the town constable" to distinguish between zoning matters and direct complaints. The board discussed whether to proceed with the ordinance, with Morway asking "Do we want to do this? Do we want to junk this?"

The discussion was tabled for executive session to discuss specific ongoing cases.

Town Charter

This item was noted as already addressed during the public hearing.

MERP Grant Update: Snow Guards on Roof of Existing Library

The board discussed the need for snow guards due to "snow's coming off and hitting people in the head."

Jeff Parizo made a motion to approve \$2,000 for snow guards on the roof of the existing library for the money to come out of unassigned funds. Ellen Howrigan seconded. All in favor.

Highway Grant for Solar

Jennifer Morway reported "Long story short, we are not eligible" because "solar doesn't qualify" for the FEMA grant, though she noted the irony that "they should have qualified, but somebody forgot to proofread" regarding solar with backup batteries.

2025 Audit Report Update

The board discussed that the accountant "Rick" would attend the January meeting. There was confusion about whether the audit had been formally accepted.

Jen Morway motioned to formally accept the Audit Report, Ellen Howrigan seconded, All in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session

Jeff Parizo made a motion to go in executive session to discuss confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the Selectboard pending per 1 VSA state statute 313(a)(1) that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or person involved at substantial disadvantage. Ellen Howrigan seconded, all were in favor.

The board entered executive session at 7:53 PM.

Jeff Parizo made a motion to come out of executive session at 8:10 with having the attorney do the legal enforcement at Cooper Bay South. Jen Morway seconded. All in favor.

Adjournment

Jeff Parizo made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:10. Ron Bushway seconded. All in favor.