

Town of Charleston
Selectboard Meeting 01/12/2023

MINUTES

Attending: Selectpersons Patrick Austin, Peter Moskovites and Larry Young; Highway Foreman Wendell Hastings; Town Clerk & Treasurer Teri Gray; Health Officer & Animal Control Officer Sarah Jenness; Head Lister Jean Wilson; Resident Erin Sheridan; Ed Barber with Newport Daily Express; and Selectboard Clerk Colleen Kellogg.

THESE MINUTES ARE UNOFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED AT THE NEXT MEETING.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by Patrick Austin, Chair. Ms. Kellogg asked to add the following to the agenda: Wages increase requests for Listers and Auditors, Complaint about compost dumping on Crawford Hill Rd, and a Request for ARPA funds from Pope Memorial Frontier Animal Shelter. Board members agreed to first hear comments regarding the compost issue and to discuss wages and CLA with the Listers to accommodate those attending in a timely way.

Patrick Austin moved to approve the minutes of the December 22, 2022 meeting as written, seconded by Larry Young and approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Erin Sheridan, property owner on Crawford Hill Rd, wants the town to be aware that neighboring property owners are commercial composters who are hauling compost/scrap to the property as chicken feed, but it looks to her like too much volume for chickens. At times, she has been concerned about animals left unattended, odor problems, and the property has attracted dogs, and neighborhood dogs have become sick. She has read that a facility must have a permit to operate. The Town Clerk looked up the address and said the property at 780 Crawford Hill Rd is owned by Roger French and Kathleen Lyford.

Pat Austin, who represents Charleston on the NEK Waste Management District board, said that the recycling law provides a “small chicken farm exemption,” that is the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture. If you're feeding chickens, you don't need a permit, but you really do have to be feeding chickens. The waste district does not allow dumping of food waste from commercial haulers in their district without a permit. He understands the property owners operate a company that was registered with the waste district but is no longer. He has seen a compost pile close to road—it's so close that it might even be in the highway right-of-way—as well as compost totes at the woods. Ideally, the district would keep businesses from using a non-compliant scrap hauler. They are violating waste district and Agency of Natural Resources rules. Mr. Austin contacted the waste district director a couple of days ago, and the district hopes that the town can help gather photos and other evidence. Sarah Jenness also spoke to the waste district and was told they would send someone to visit the site. The Selectboard could consider sending a letter to the waste district and the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources Solid Waste Division, and to Josh Kelly, ANR, making it clear that the company has a similar history in other towns. Mr. Austin will work with the Clerk to draft a letter. Ms. Sheridan has pictures and can email/share with the town office. Peter Moskovites supports sending a letter to get the relevant authorities into action for the sake of area residents. Mr. Austin raised the possibility of taking legal action like a “cease and desist” if agencies move slowly to address the situation.

Animal Control Officer Sarah Jenness visited the site in September to evaluate animal care, and at that time there were no animal care violations. She said there were probably 75-100 birds in a solar powered electric fence—and a couple of goats. They had shelter, food, and water. The Chair suggested the animals might need another check now that cold weather is here, and board gave their support to Ms. Jenness to do a follow-up animal welfare check. There are “No Trespassing” signs posted so she will have to arrange this with the property owners.

Mr. Austin said that, in the future, Charleston could revisit the idea of a Solid Waste Improvement Plan (SWIP), but right now the town must rely on the waste district because it is a member town.

LISTERS/CLA

Jean Wilson, Lister Chair, said that since it was budget time she wanted to request a wage increase for the Listers, who have not seen an increase since 2018. She submitted a written proposal with wages and cost of living information for the board’s review. She added that the overall Lister budget has gone down, owing to the fact that the officers are well-trained and experienced and work very efficiently.

She also commented on Charleston’s CLA, which has gone down to 83.26%. This is basically the town’s grand list value divided by selling prices. When the CLA is 83.26, the state adds almost 17% to the tax rate to bring everyone up to 100%. Reappraisal is required any time the CLA is below 85%, and 165 Vermont towns now fall under this requirement. If a statistical update is done within 5 years of the last reappraisal, towns can save cost by not having to do all of the inspections and remeasuring. It’s more about looking at the model, how much land values are up, how much house values are up, putting those numbers into the schedule, and conducting drive-bys to check for property changes. Ms. Wilson said that NEMRC, which does a great job with reappraisals, is currently submitting proposals for 2026, and she has asked them to submit a proposal to Charleston. They can provide expertise in analyzing tables that is beyond Lister expertise. There is money in the town’s reappraisal reserve fund to cover it. Sale prices have continued to go up, so waiting two years would be good to see how things settle.

ROAD REPORT

Foreman Wendell Hastings said that roads are getting a little rough. They are fighting potholes but not mud, and sees roads holding up pretty well. The crew dumped 20 loads of gravel on Dane Hill Rd, and he hopes to bring 20 more loads of gravel and some shim back from the Barton pit. Echo Lake Rd is also getting rough. Twin Bridges Rd and part of Hudson were graded. Due to weather, the town is saving money on plowing but spending a lot on sand. To keep the grader in good order, he’s changed the oil in transmission and the grader, and he believes he may have caught the leak that was raising concerns. Clamps were loose on the return line of a hydraulic pump; he’ll know for sure next time it's used.

Regarding the highway budget, Mr. Hastings sees flexibility in the tire budget if needed. They put chains on the L60 to extend the life of the current tires, and if one is blown, the old grader tires are stored under cover and can be used for another 1-1.5 years. He took measurements at the Barton Pit and estimates there is about 8,000 CY gravel, which is not the 11,000 crushed, however, the town has also used around 2,000 CY. 10,000 CY is needed each year; Larry Young suggested the number might actually be a little less than that. Pat Austin noted that the town is halfway through a 20,000 CY bail-and-crush job.

OLD BUSINESS

- Discussion of further crushing work by JA McDonald was tabled until the next regular meeting.
- Discussion of any further ARPA funds allocation was tabled until the next regular meeting.
- A preliminary draft of the 2023 Town Meeting Warning was reviewed. The Charleston Volunteer Fire Department must increase their ask to include dispatch services and asked the board to decide on the best article(s) wording. Board members agreed that one article with just a total would serve voters best, and the article will be drafted accordingly.
- A draft RFP for a backup generator was tabled until the next regular meeting.
- Board reviewed draft numbers for the 2023 proposed budget and discussed specific highway line items including summer crew needs, cutting edges for loaders that will need to be purchased, and current salt inventory that might allow the town to forgo salt purchase this year. Budget discussion and approval will continue at the special budget meeting on January 19th.

NEW BUSINESS

- Pat Austin moved to place appropriation requests from Vermont Rural Fire Protection and North Woods Stewardship Center on the 2023 Town Meeting Warning, seconded by Larry Young and approved.
- The Charleston Mileage Certificate is not due until February so the matter was tabled until the next regular meeting.
- CLA was discussed earlier in the meeting.
- The Board confirmed they will hold the January 19th Special Budget Meeting as warned.
- Reviewing a draft of the 2023 Town Meeting warning, board members agreed the fire department appropriation request should be kept as simple as possible with the just the total amount.
- Mr. Austin moved to increase the Auditors' hourly rate to \$15, seconded by Mr. Young and approved.
- Mr. Austin moved to set the following new hourly rates for the Listers: Chair Jean Wilson \$24, Lister Steve Wilson \$22, Lister John Westinghouse \$22, seconded by Mr. Young and approved.
- A request from Pope Memorial to contribute \$5,000 in town ARPA funds toward a new facility was received by the board with no action. ARPA funds must be allocated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026, so the board will continue to discuss possible projects.

Two 2022 Selectboard orders totaling \$9,021.93 and three 2022 Road orders totaling \$17,485.47 were approved unanimously and signed by all members. Three 2023 Selectboard orders totaling \$21,505.24 and four 2023 Road orders totaling \$10,374.22 were approved unanimously and signed by all members.

Seeing no other business, the chair adjourned the meeting at 7:56 pm. The next meeting will be a special meeting to approve the budget and warning on January 19, 2023 at 6:00 pm. The next regular meeting will be held Thursday, January 26, 2023 at 6:00 pm.

Approved this 26th day of January 2023:

Selectboard, Town of Charleston