

Town of Charleston
Selectboard Meeting 12/14/2023

MINUTES

THESE MINUTES ARE UNOFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED AT THE NEXT MEETING.

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 pm by Chair Patrick Austin.

Attending: Selectpersons Patrick Austin and Tim Jenness; Road Foreman Wendell Hastings; Town Clerk & Treasurer Teri Gray; James Bronner of Norton; and Selectboard Clerk Colleen Kellogg.

Teri Gray asked to add approval of liquor and tobacco licenses for Scampy's store to the agenda under New Business, and the item was accepted by the Chair.

The Chair tabled approval of the minutes of the November 9th meeting until the next meeting since only one member present had attended.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James Bronner lives in Norton and used a doggie daycare business in West Charleston owned by Cierra Gaboriault. He said his puppy was attacked by another dog there and died on December 4th. From his discussion with the owner and photos on Facebook, he feels the business is in violation of state kennel laws concerning separation of puppies from adult dogs and about known vicious dogs. He believes what happened to his dog qualifies as animal cruelty and neglect, and he is concerned that there is still a dangerous dog but doesn't know which one. He has contacted various state agencies and the media but says no one knows whose responsibility it is to press charges. Charleston's animal control officer is aware and has responded to his requests for information. Board members believe this is a legally operating business and see nothing in the town dog ordinance that applies.

ROAD REPORT

- Foreman Wendell Hastings said the town's grader is in Williston for repair. He's seen equipment damage during recent storms--including a plow wing and windshield--due to trees hanging down in heavy wet snow. The crew has been cutting trees daily and asked the board to consider purchasing a chipper.
- Bids received for replacement of a culvert on Fontaine Rd were as follows: Isaacs Excavating & Construction \$43,950; JBL Hauling & Excavating \$22,361. Wendell Hastings said he believes the town can purchase the culvert at a better price. Motion by Pat Austin to award the job to JBL Hauling & Excavating with the town to purchase the culvert; seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.
- The town must develop a scope of work to repair an eroded bank on Durgin Rd near the telephone pole. Ben Matthews of ANR and Eric Pope of VTrans have discussed options. The town can make the repair from above without a stream permit or perform in-stream work that would probably be longer lasting but would likely increase the cost by at least \$100,000 and require advance engineering work. Either option is eligible for FEMA, but the town is responsible for a 17.5% match. The Chair asked to put the matter on the next meeting agenda for further discussion.

OLD BUSINESS

- Board members have received reports from residents of Crawford Hill Rd that compost dumping has resumed at the property owned by Rodger French and Kathleen Lyford at 780

Crawford Hill Rd. Tim Jenness said Animal Control Officer Sarah Jenness has spoken with the property owners about their goats that keep getting out. Referring to ANR work last summer to verify that illegal compost dumping at the property had ceased, the Chair suggested notifying ANR that dumping has resumed, and Tim Jenness agreed. Colleen Kellogg will notify the town's contact at ANR DEC Waste Management and Prevention Division.

- Wendell Hastings said there is a mound of dirt in the town maintenance right-of-way at the French/Lyford property. Significant surface and drainage work was done on that road in response to July flooding, and the pile hinders road maintenance, prevents drainage, and is at risk for washing onto the road surface. It must be moved immediately. Board members asked Ms. Kellogg to send a letter advising the property owners that everything must be moved from the right-of-way or the town will move it at their expense.
- A 2024 contract with Newport Ambulance Service was signed by the Chair.
- Discussion of a proposed "Development Notice" to inform Listers of property changes was tabled until the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- A Better Roads grant application for ditching, culvert, and crown work on Westmore Rd was reviewed and signed by the Chair.
- Pat Austin moved to place appropriation requests from Charleston Historical Society, Echo Lake Protective Association, NEK Human Services, Umbrella, and VT Rural Fire Protection on the 2024 Town Meeting Warning. The motion was seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.
- The Charleston Cemetery Commission is proposing two articles for the Town Meeting Warning: (1) to establish a Cemetery Stone Preservation fund for cleaning and repair of gravestones; and (2) another to authorize the Cemetery Commission to contribute to the fund a set portion of lot sales each year. The Cemetery Perpetual Care Funds do not provide sufficient funds for cleaning because only interest can be spent. The Commission has voted to reduce the amount allocated from lot sales into Perpetual Care to the minimum 20% in order to "free up" funds that could be contributed to the cleaning reserve fund if approved by voters. The Chair asked that the matter be placed on the next meeting agenda for consideration by all board members.
- The Selectboard received a draft 2024 budget from NEKWMD, including notification of an increased per capita assessment of \$1.16. The Chair asked to note that he is not happy with the way the district is enforcing compost activity and haulers within their district.
- The Treasurer presented an update on the 2023 Highway Budget: \$703,266.85 in Revenue and \$616,492.33 in Expenses to date. Possible road needs were discussed, including the grader, truck, current gravel crushing contract, and possibilities for future gravel harvesting. The Foreman has identified an above-ground source in the pit but isn't sure it is a full 10,000 CY.
- Questions were raised about the size of the neighbor's right-of-way through the Barton gravel pit. The Clerk will bring deed information to the next meeting for discussion.
- Wendell Hastings advised the board of increased tire expenses in Fall 2024 when he will need to buy full sets of virgin tires for all trucks. The tires on hand cannot be recapped.
- Pat Austin said radios may be required to go digital. Mr. Hastings has Burlington Communications coming to repair current radios; he will ask them about requirements.
- Teri Gray said the town has received Liquor and Tobacco License renewal applications for Scampy's Store and needs board authorization to approve them. Pat Austin moved to approve the licenses and authorize Teri Gray to approve them online, seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.

2024 BUDGET PLANNING

- Pat Austin offered a motion that the town pay the full 0.44% Vermont Child Care Contribution payroll tax when it begins on July 1, 2024. The motion was seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.
- The town's current mileage reimbursement rate is \$.59/mile. Pat Austin moved to increase the rate to 65.5 cents per mile for 2024, equivalent to the federal reimbursement rate. The motion was seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.
- Pat Austin made a motion to set the Late Homestead Filing Penalty at 3% of the education rate for 2024—same as in 2023. The motion was seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.
- Board members discussed a current VLCT recommendation to take remaining ARPA funds as revenue for the 2024 budget. By agreement, a decision about ARPA funds was tabled until the next meeting so all board members can discuss. The Chair suggested using funds to crush and stockpile gravel.
- There was discussion of truck expenses, current loan rates, and getting the town onto a standard equipment replacement schedule. Wendell Hastings said some area towns are on a 5-year replacement cycle, and the Ford pickup is perhaps in greatest need. It is having wiring issues, and he'll know more when it gets inspected in January. The Chair asked to put equipment on the agenda for the next meeting for further discussion.

The Chair called for executive session at 7:32 pm to discuss employee reviews. Session ended at 7:38 pm with the following action: Motion by Pat Austin to raise Colleen Kellogg's hourly rate 5% to \$25.20. Wendell Hastings evaluation will be completed by the full board on December 28th.

Six Selectboard orders totaling \$23,816.93 and seven Road orders totaling \$67,251.97 were approved unanimously and signed by both members.

Under Announcements & Information, Tim Jenness said the Planning Commission would like the Selectboard to consider emergency operations needs for the April 8, 2024 solar eclipse. The Chair agreed to put the matter on the agenda for the January meeting.

Seeing no other business, Chair Patrick Austin made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tim Jenness, and the meeting adjourned at 7:39 pm. The next regular meeting will be held Thursday, December 28, 2023, at 6:00 pm.

Approved this 28th day of December 2023:

Selectboard, Town of Charleston