

**Town of Charleston
Selectboard Meeting 1/11/2024**

MINUTES

THESE MINUTES ARE UNOFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED AT THE NEXT MEETING.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by Chair Patrick Austin.

Attending: Selectpersons Patrick Austin, Peter Moskovites and Tim Jenness; Head Lister Jean Wilson; Charleston Elementary School Principal Christopher Lawson; Duane Moulton, Blair Moulton, and Bob Devaney of Charleston Volunteer Fire Department; Town Clerk & Treasurer Teri Gray; and Selectboard Clerk Colleen Kellogg.

Colleen Kellogg asked to add the following items to the agenda: Equipment repair update under Road Report; a follow-up dog complaint from James Bronner under Old Business; and the town's Equalization Study results (CLA) under New Business. These items of business were accepted by the Chair with no objection.

Peter Moskovites made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 28, 2023, meeting as written, seconded by Tim Jenness, and the minutes were approved as written. There was no public comment.

Charleston Principal Chris Lawson discussed a state change in how pupils are counted and weighted, which adds revenue. He also discussed the end to Small Schools Grants, the end of federal American Rescue Plan ESSER funds, and how Charleston does not qualify for a new Small Schools pupil weighting—all of which reduce revenue. The town CLA dropped to 78.17%, which further increases the education tax rate. At a school board meeting the previous night, the school board began with a 28-cent tax increase and approved a 26-cent increase that does not reduce staffing levels but reduces taxes raised by using existing funds to match grants to update the boiler and air exchange system and skips buying some new equipment. They opted to keep a full-time music teacher because of the community's historic support of music programs and the ability to provide flexible classroom coverage. If more students decide to enroll, another paraeducator might have to be hired. Other towns are seeing increases—from a 10-cent increase in Troy to a 49-cent increase in Jay. Towns with more than a 10% increase in per-student spending could be flagged by a new state panel to determine if spending is reasonable and possibly cap the increase, but this would happen after a budget passes, and the panel is not yet formed.

ROAD REPORT

The town's grader is still out for repair, and a second issue will cost an additional \$10,000 to repair. A radiator will be replaced on one of the Mack trucks for \$4700.

OLD BUSINESS

- Fire Chief Duane Moulton said the department's original request to the town for ARPA funds was to drill a well to replace their failed spring line. Since then, summer fundraisers raised enough money to help cover the well, but they need help to purchase an amphibious rescue unit for increased calls for backcountry recreation rescues--skiers, ice rescue, and snowmobilers. They have a snow machine that is not viable due to changeable winter weather. They are looking into an ARGO vehicle that could be used to access VAST and VASA trails, into backcountry trails like NorthWoods, over land, snow and through open

water. The department is well trained for these rescues but needs the equipment to get there. The cost is \$35,000 with wheels and tracks. As for their ARPA ask, anything will help.

- Peter Moskovites asked about the relationship of a private fire department to a public municipality and how the fire department keeps going. Blair Moulton said CVFD is a private non-profit overseen by a 7-member board and has been going for 69 years. They are pleased to have four new younger members. Lister Jean Wilson said the town votes every five-years to exempt the department property from property taxes. Duane Moulton said the organization is set up so that if anything happens to the corporation, it will fall back to the town.
- CVFD Treasurer Blair Moulton said the 2024 department budget is up 5%. They are asking Charleston for \$55,609 this year—up from \$52,961. This includes a tanker loan payment and dispatching and covers increases in insurance and workers' comp. This year, they must replace about 10 sets turnout gear at \$2800 each. 11-12 air pack bottles have reached their 15-year life and must be replaced at \$1000 each. Mr. Moulton said one benefit of being a private nonprofit is that the department can run trucks older; a municipal fire department must replace them after 10 years. An old Volvo 88 tanker with over 1 million miles will have to be replaced shortly because nobody can drive it anymore.
- Jean Wilson recommended the Selectboard institute the Development Notice her office proposed earlier to help the town Listers keep property values updated. As things are, the Listers must hope to learn about changes to properties. Property owners often contact the town to ask if there is anything they need to do before building or renovating, and this would give the town something to send them. When the town reappraises, Listers will try for a statistical update reappraisal which saves cost by not visiting every house, and they must demonstrate to the state that Charleston has a systematic way of identifying changes. The town highway department might also benefit from driveway culvert standardization. Peter Moskovites said he didn't think this needed to go to town meeting, and he wouldn't want the town office to have to enforce it or impose penalties but overtime it would become the practice. Jean Wilson suggests informing property owners about it in the town report. Various options for distributing the form were discussed, including mailing with tax bills and with Lister sales verification letters sent when properties are purchased. Board members agreed to provide the form to all taxpayers and new buyers.
- By agreement of all board members, all other business will be handled before the board discusses the 2024 budget.
- James Bronner's follow-up 'potentially vicious dog' complaint was reviewed, and members agreed to grant a hearing at 5:30 pm on January 25th. Ms. Gray and Ms. Kellogg will distribute required notices.

NEW BUSINESS

- With no changes to Charleston's highway mileage, the annual certificate was signed by all members and will be submitted to VTrans.
- Kingdom Games will hold the annual Echo Lake Swim August 7th. Tim Jenness moved to approve the marine permit, seconded by Pat Austin and approved.
- A draft of the 2024 Town Meeting Warning so far was received and will be reviewed for the next meeting. Highway Policies and Assets list pages for the Town Report were also received and will be reviewed for the next meeting.
- The Town CLA dropped from 83.26% last year to 78.17%. Jean Wilson said that a 5% drop is better than many towns that are seeing a drop of 10% or more.

With other business taken care of, the board conducted a line-by-line discussion of 2024 Budget needs. The budget document will be updated for further review and approval at the next meeting. Pat Austin made a motion to award the Charleston Volunteer Fire Department a \$15,000 grant of ARPA Funds. The motion was seconded by Tim Jenness and approved.

Two 2023 Selectboard orders totaling \$33.88, two 2024 Selectboard orders totaling \$16,288.05, and two 2024 Road orders totaling \$8,095.48 were approved unanimously and signed by all members.

Seeing no other business, Tim Jenness made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Peter Moskovites, and the meeting adjourned at 8:08 pm. The next regular meeting will be held Thursday, January 25, 2024, at 6:00 pm.

Approved this 25th day of January 2024:

Selectboard, Town of Charleston