

## Townshend Selectboard Meeting Minutes - March 5, 2007

### Present:

Berenice Brooks  
Alene Evans  
Henry Martin, chair

Jeffrey Russ  
Irvin Stowell,  
Selectboard

### Participating members:

Barbara Bedortha, TES teacher; Kathleen Hege & David Dezendorf, Townshend School Board; Anita Bean, Town Clerk, Kurt Bostrom, road foreman and Fredrick Hege

The chair *called the Meeting to Order* at 7:00 PM and recognized *Participating Members*:

Barbara Bedortha (2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher) spoke about participating in a Forestry Program along with fellow teacher Julie Dolan (5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher). They both have incorporated Forestry into their classroom studies. The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students draw pictures of their adopted Common tree showing how seasonal changes affect them. The older students have become aware of what happens when a tree is injured, inside and outside of the tree and what happens when it's bark becomes injured.

As a Community Service Project, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students suggested reseeding the Common where they played kick ball and capture the flag (near the gazebo); planning to finish this project before April vacation, hopefully, allowing enough time for the grass seed to germinate.

The entire Board was very supportive of the students undertaking such a project and would like to help and work with the kids. Martin explained that Bartlett Tree fertilizes and trims the trees and suggested that she talk with Bill Eckhardt for additional assistance and support.

On another related matter, both she, Dolan and the students would like easier access, from the school to the walking/hiking trails and asked that maybe the Town could consider creating additional forested areas. She asked if anyone realized that it costs money to walk the State Forest trail.

The students have created a display, a survey and plan to make a presentation at tomorrow's town meeting. Bedortha left at 7:20 PM

Joseph Daigneault, Townshend fireman, did not come to tonight's meeting as it became evident to Martin that he did not have to report on the funds the department received after their old soda coolers were auctioned.

After attending the pre-town informational meeting Kathleen Hege, Townshend School Board Chair, wanted to explain and clarify that historically, after the Town received the taxes, the Town and School negotiated a payment schedule from the remaining taxes collected by the Town, which allowed the Town to operate on the remaining tax money. When it was time to make the School's final payment the Town usually borrowed money to meet its obligations. She emphasized that this is not mine, your money or ours. It was our conservative effort to put off borrowing money.

Select persons believed Hege was looking at only one side, as the Town has to pay for more services and take the hit of holding the delinquent taxes. The consideration to send separate tax bills, as other towns do, would be adversarial.

Dezendorf joined Hege in the explanations that the school had no time to study, or realize their implications in collecting taxes 4 times a year. The school's largest hit of expenses is at the end of the school year and beginning of the summer like the prepayment of fuel; extensive summer

cleaning and maintenances and the following year classroom purchases. The Board has taken charge of trying to revamp their payment schedules like having the Supervisory Office bill 4 times a year.

The biggest consequence the School Board did not realize was how the voter approved use of their \$50,000 surplus toward the repairing of the School roof, due and payable in September. This added to their financial dilemma, monetarily putting the School behind. Hege instilled that it was not a mismanagement of monies.

Hege and Dezendorf also stated the School Board has had to borrow moneys because receipt tax money on a quarterly basis, for the fiscal year, provides them with insufficient money. Hege stressed that she was not here to discuss the quarterly tax payments but to correct the misconception that the Town had to borrow money to pay the School. She is unsure as to how the new State legislation of directly sending the education pre-bate money to the Town, instead of to the taxpayer, will affect the amount of monies the School will receive. Will this pre-bate money sit in the Town's coffers or given directly to the School? Will this pre-bate be deducted from the taxpayers first bill or equally over the 4 quarters this affects the monies the school will receive.

Additionally, it's not like the old days when the taxes raised were the voted results at Town Meeting. Now, the State sets our educational tax. Should the School have to borrow a simple \$1.00 the State multiplies it by the Town's Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) 40% - the \$1.00 becomes \$1.40. Should the expenses of paying interest on borrowed money increase our costs to educate our children, the State will penalize us and the \$1.40 will be doubled to \$2.80. The percentage of CLA affects the funding of education. They believe that the two boards need to meet and achieve an equitable, acceptable financial payment schedule.

On a completely different matter, before Dezendorf left, Evans had talked with Howard Lott, Chair of the Listers, and received permission to allow Dezendorf to set up and show movies (DVD) to the children, during Town meeting, with adult supervision.

Evans remembered taking her sons to the Library to play, under the supervision of a paid babysitter.

Town Clerk, Anita Bean, presented the Selectboard for review a cost analysis of her paying 20% of the health insurance vs the 4% salary increase. She was very appreciative of the raise but was discouraged and disappointed but not defeated. After paying the 20% she will be earning \$200 less than she did in 2004. She can't afford to go backwards in pay. One doesn't go from paying zero to paying 20% of their health insurance and shouldn't be penalized for not working a 40-hour week. There are times when she does have to work late for elections and Australian balloting and also does work that she believes, is not her responsibility like setting up for town meeting. What it boiled down to, continued Bean, is that at tomorrow's Town Meeting she will be amending her pay raise to cover her 20% insurance premium and will let the Town decide. If it doesn't happen she'll deal with it accordingly and do whatever she has to do.

Bean then advised everyone that she had done a lot of leg-work on other available insurers, finding one that is \$200 a month cheaper. She spoke to VLCT who agreed to come Tuesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM to present other various health related plans. Martin expressed to Bean that the Selectboard was remised in not meeting with her and the Town Treasurer earlier to explain the Board's situation and its unanimous decision to stay with VLCT's health insurance provider and their asking each employee to contribute 20% toward their health insurance.

Martin continued, when he first came on the Selectboard, road foreman, Stowell, was only earning \$7.25 per hour. And about 6 — 8 years ago the Selectboard realized the town employees should contribute toward their health insurance but our wages and salaries were at the bottom of the

pay scale. Since then, the Board has annually increased their wages to the high end of the pay scale. The newly employed road crew were informed that accompanying their wage increase, would come a time when they would have to contribute to their health insurance - most employees pay 20% of their health insurance.

He also stated that last fall, when VLCT's notified all Towns that they were dropping BCBS health insurance, the Selectboard did not have much time to investigate and or acquire another health insurance provider and since time was of the essence the Selectboard agreed to stay within VLCT's pool and with whatever health insurance they provided (CIGNA). Martin addressed the fact that it took many years to increase the Town wages to the higher end of the pay scale. The Town couldn't have initiated incremental payments of their health insurance was his answer to Dezendorf's suggestion to incrementally increasing the yearly contributions. Dezendorf added it's risky business for a company to yearly switch health insurance provider. It's better to stay with one company.

Road foreman, Kurt Bostrom added that he would be paying a "sizeable weekly amount" as he has the family plan. He remembered being told that the Town would pay 100% of their insurance, Stowell quickly interjected - the Town **pays** paid 100% for 2-person health insurance. Bostrom stated that it's time that the Town stops regressing and becomes progressive.

Martin reported that the Town has absorbed health insurance increases for the last three years of 22%, 36% and 11%. The Town can't afford this any more and hopefully we can join a less expensive health plan with great benefits. Stowell added that the Town employees should remember that part of their salary package includes their health insurance and the Town's contribution toward their retirement.

Martin appreciated Bean coming and members of the Board will attend next Tuesday March 13<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM insurance meeting. Bean, Dezendorf & K. Hege left at 8:15 PM

*1b. Road Foreman, Kurt Bostrom* then reported:

- After lengthy checking and unsuccessful searching to find where the oil was leaking in Truck #3, Bostrom called the service department at Delurey's and was told that the nozzles with the hydraulic lines were not functioning after becoming brittle thus allowing the oil to seep/return to the fuel tank (the truck is at Delurey's for repair)
- Truck #1 just stopped, the road crew found and repaired the stem into the fuel tank which had broken off.
- The results of walking Windham Hill Road with an engineer from the State Dept of Transportation and John Alexander it became very obvious to Bostrom that the costs to improve this road would be extreme. It will have to be constructed to the new rules and regulations. Consequently, the Town would never get a significant grant to cover this extensive road construction.

Martin wondered if maybe the town of Windham would join forces and both towns could pressure the State on the urgency to repair this important and main road to Windham. Bostrom said he'd follow up with the State this week.

- Stowell noticed that the winging back of State Forest Rd was not enough, as two cars still can't meet. The snow should be winged/pushed off the road and off the banks.
  - Stowell asked that the Highway Orders be itemized ie: price per ton; number of tons, etc.

- Stowell gave Bostrom the road posting signs; and
- Reminded the Board that after the anniversary date of a highway employee starts his vacation cycle. Martin's goal is to have the Personnel Policy before July 1<sup>st</sup>. Evans interjected that she attended and brought back material from a VLCT workshop which focused on the process to terminate employees. Bostrom left at 8:35 PM

*1a. Town Clerk and/or Treasurer:*

Town Treasurer provided copies of all of her e-mails requesting responses from State authorities on issues that arose during the pre-town information meeting; the Board received Financial Statements August thru Nov. She had not yet edited Dec '06.

***Martin moved to approve the Minutes of February 19, 2007, seconded by Brooks, unanimously carried by the Board.***

Stowell added that WRC's presentation was on all water quality, not those areas limited to flood zones, as reported.

***Martin moved to Pay Bills and Sign the following Orders , seconded by Evans***

SM06-07— 16A \$497.89 (mailing out Town Reports)	TR prepared State Highway Reports for
SM06-07— 17 \$21,533.64 plus MEC roofing \$485	September & October 2006
SMPR06-07— 16 \$ 3,180.87	Road Com Ords wk/ending 2/24 & 3/3

***unanimously carried and signed by the Board.***

Davis was asked to follow up on L&B's January invoice and statement of Truck #8's purchase price.

*4. Old Business*

**Reporting 6 month taxes** - Evans had obtained and presented the information regarding how the 6 month taxes would affect Homestead.

Trooper Rick Hopkins advised Evans, during one of her phone conversations that it is against the law to drive on the sidewalk so he could ticket those vehicles parked upon the sidewalk. The Board's consensus was first to issue a warning.

Evans also had a copy of Bellows Falls parking ordinance for future perusal. Stowell interjected ordinances still need to be enforced.

**Valley Care's ACT 250** —Valley Cares received the State's Abandoned Land Use Permit for a previously submitted amendment to their ACT 250 to change their electrical service to overhead.

**Planning Commissioner** —Chair recommended to appoint their vacancy when the Board makes all appointments. The chair of the PC, Monette, indicated that both individuals were equal.

**Liquid Chloride** — Chair signed the agreement of AllState Asphalt to provide liquid chloride.

**Vermont State Police (VSP)** —monthly report appeared not to be Townshend. Before this meeting Trooper Hopkins had just reported to Evans that they had expended approx \$5,000 of the \$9,000 for law enforcement in Townshend. Members asked when was Sheriff Clark coming before the Board?

**Rescue Inc.** —presented a complete package of services provided to Townshend residents.

**Town Hall Rental** —A letter was received from “Lisa’s Love Charitable Association” (Mommy’s Market) thanking the Selectboard for rescinding their rental fees.

**Jesse Lynn Gentlewolf** —Martin reported that Gentlewolf had called him inquiring why “her tax relief was denied”. He told her that the Board of Civil Authority issued the decision and stated how she could handle it. Stowell added she also called him.

### 5. *New Business*

- After complete discussion of Tom Connors February 26<sup>th</sup> letter requesting use of the Town Hall (upstairs) from 3/12 — 3/23 1-4:30 PM as it related to the adopted Town Hall Policy. The chair drafted the response, which reflected sections of the accepted policy ie: closed during the winter months; if rented, had an established additional rate to offset fuel costs.
- The State of Vermont notified the Town of two appointments:
  - Health Officer (Timothy Shafer) Davis will inquire as to his acceptance of this appointed 5 year position
  - Service Officer
- Grant notifications were received from:
  - (2007) Better Backroads
  - Brattleboro Area Community Land Trust (rehabilitation loans)
- Stowell indicated that last year’s approved Excess Weight Permits (accompanied with Certificate of Insurance) should accompany this years for consistency in approved weight limits — Board tabled action on them, until next meeting  
Valley Crane Service; Cardinal; S.T. Griswold; Newport Sand & Gravel Co; Gurney Bros
- Martin’s responded in the negative to R. Hege’s inquiry of Vermont Leagues of Cities and Towns advising the Town of a possibility to offer those uninsured part or full time laborers/employees, health insurance. Not sure about elected officials.
- Before Brooks left the meeting, Davis asked the Board if the work and responsibilities of her position be increased to assist the Board? After minimal discussion, their response was yes.  
Brooks left at 9:05 PM

Martin reminded everyone that there were two in complete Articles in this years Town Report, which need Board input and direction:

Law Enforcement:

Stowell and Evans asked, why does the Town need two? Both agencies, VSP & WCSD are corporate and are working together. If the Town does not contract with the Windham County

Sheriff's Department, they will not respond to calls from townspeople. The Town will not give the Sheriff's Dept. carte blanche; we need to meet with them. The Town Treasurer had advised that \$50,000 +/- remains in law enforcement reserve, which should take the town till the end of June. After discussion, the chair indicated he didn't mind passing over this Article.

Infrastructure:

Appears to be enough start up money to investigate repairs/construction at the Town Barn. Agreed for the chair to pass over this Article.

6. *Other Business* no Board action taken

ICE B' GONE w/DVD - Southworth-Milton Inc (PR letter)BCA - Addition to Checklist

7. *Executive Session* - none at this time

***At 9:25 PM Martin moved to RECESS to MARCH 6<sup>TH</sup> for a Selectboard organizational meeting; chair (vice & clerk) date/time/place/newspaper of record, seconded by Evans, carried by the Board.***

Townshend Selectboard Meeting — 5:10 PM — March 6, 2007

Martin & Russ welcomed the two newly elected 1 year term selectpersons: R. Michael Donahue and Carole Melis and congratulated Alene Evans on her election to a three-year term.

Nominations were asked for chair: Henry Martin was nominated and no other nominations were received and he proceeded to individually asked for nominations to the remaining positions, which were accepted:

Vice Chair Alene Evans  
Clerk Carole Melis

Evans explained to Melis that besides chairing an occasional meeting she would receive, before Selectboard meetings, bills and pay orders prepared by the Board's clerk, for her review.

Newspaper of Record Brattleboro Daily Reformer

Martin reminded everyone that our reported news articles usually do not reflect what the Select's may have said or what the Board may have done, etc.

Meeting Date, Time and Place remains the same:

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays, 7:00 PM, Town Hall.

Melis suggested that we hold our meetings in the dining room for additional space and to change the public's perception that the meetings are not open to them since they were held in such a small office. All agreed to try.

During the Town Meeting, Martin received an envelope from Robert Testa (Windham Back Rd). Testa's letter addressed yet again, that his mailbox has been damaged/knocked down by Town trucks. Russ was given a copy for our road foreman and indicated to him the possibilities that he and/or Bostrom could follow up and inspect Mr. Testa's lost property and make a report before the next Selectboard meeting. Members discussed the need to know the width of this road's right-of-way and maybe acquire US Postal regulations on the location of mailboxes.

Evans wanted to update the Board (old and new members)

While having a conversation with VLCT she was transferred to Dominic Cloud to see how the Town could grow and end inter personnel issues between boards, etc. She invited Cloud to meet with the Selectboard. He then presented a proposal to meet with named elected officials and other town employees, as he may deem necessary to interview, in order to establish better communication and working environment. The Town accepted his proposal, in a letter, which totaled \$3,000 plus expenses.

The Selectboard briefly explained their difficulties, through out the year, in not getting financial details or any other information from the Town Treasurer; officials are not working together; there being no updates from the Listers as to the progress of the reappraisal; Evans presented an idea, which was encouraged by Cloud, to create a Citizens Board to act as the Board's liaison.

Town Clerk, Bean, had just set up a meeting with VLCT, for Tuesday, March 13, 2007 at 5:00 PM to present other options that are available for health insurance coverage, hopefully costing less. Martin restated that the newly hired employees were made aware that providing health insurance was a benefit and that someday they would be contributing to the cost of their health insurance.

~~Cindy, who works for the Board as its clerk, was offered the position of Administrative Assistant.~~ Cindy, who works for the Board as its clerk, was offered more hours to assist the administration. Davis stated, the Board needs to review its job description

The following issues were briefly discussed to update the new members:

- Not using the time clock at the Town Barn
- Upcoming Employee Policy and Manual
- Creating new Ordinances
- Working with Vermont Historic to allow the creation of off road (Rte 30) parking spaces, in front of an historic building; continue to receive resistance as individuals still park on the sidewalks
- ~~Resistance in change~~— an idea submitted by members of the Planning Commission to build counter tops was changed to building cupboards along the banquet room wall, which could contain file cabinets, computer, copier and other equipment needed to do business. Maybe the Town should purchase portable wall partitions to hold semi-private meetings in the banquet room
- The Town was offered use of Janos' waste water system for the Town Barn. It might be time to re approach an abutting landowner in an attempt to purchase additional land for the Town Barn.

- VLCT's announcement that they were dropping BCBS as its provider for health insurance was yet another incident and obstacle that presented themselves during this year's budget process. The Board realized they did not have time to seek other insurers and with the urgency to provide town employees with continued health insurance the Board discussed the issue, at length, and its consensus was to stay in VLCT's insurance pool. Martin added it has always been part of the master plan that someday the employees would be paying a percentage of their health benefit. But first, the Town had to increase their wages from the low end of the pay scale. The newly hired employees were told that someday they would be contributing. Melis added that it's not what the public perceives. That what happens when being on a Selectboard, responded Martin.
- The Selectboard will be welcoming their new ideas

***Evans moved to Adjourn at 5:55 PM, seconded by Russ, unanimously carried by the Board.***

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Davis, clerk for the Selectboard