

Town of Bethel
Selectboard @ 6 pm
Monday, October 11, 2021

Present: Chris Jarvis, Paul Vallee, Lindley Brainard, Dave Eddy, Gene Kraus and Therese Kirby.

Visitors:

Owen Daniel-McCarter	Danny Dover
John Fago	Mary Floyd
Ferron Griffin	Mark Heckman
Martha Leibbrandt	Jesse Plotsky
Lylee Rauch-Kacenski (via Zoom)	Patrick Redden

6 pm Chris Jarvis called the meeting to order. Lindley Brainard moved to approve the agenda as presented, Paul Vallee seconded. Approved.

Appointments:

Patrick Redden, owner of 21 Livery Stable Road, is requesting utility fees continue to be waived until May 2022. Therese Kirby gave the Selectboard some history of this account. Patrick said he purchased it in 2009, it was vacant since 2004, there were many structural deficiencies: foundation washed out in several places, first floor beams rotted, all finishes need to be installed, and no water or sewage used since 2004. Goal of building into 3 separate units has changed to now getting it to a point where someone will look at it to buy. Paying another \$5000 a year for utilities is not feasible. Chris Jarvis explained the current water/sewage rules and the need for consistency with past requests of this type. Currently charged vacancy rate for 4 units, but if it becomes a single-family home, charges will be less. Paul Redden is planning to put it on the market in May. Discussion of abatement of all amount due

except vacancy rate of 1 EU. Gene Kraus moved and Lindley Brainard seconded to consider building a one unit (1 EU) building. Lindley seconded, approved. Lindley moved to move the property to vacancy rate charge for 1 EU until Patrick Redden returns to Selectboard to have water turned on. Paul Vallee seconded. Unanimously passed. Patrick agreed to keep the Selectboard informed of his progress. Therese will issue a revised bill tomorrow.

Public Comment

Therese Kirby explained per the Selectboard's request, they are doing a trial Zoom of this meeting to see if a hybrid meeting is possible. Gene Kraus said, if it is possible, it would be nice to have a volunteer or several volunteers on a rotating basis to monitor the Zoom session.

John Fago voiced concern about a family evicted from a home and the financial hardship this has cost the family. He asked if there is or could be a “transfer tax” instituted to make this process more equitable.

Therese Kirby explained that currently the State of Vermont charges and collects property sale tax. She is unsure if municipalities even have the legal authority to institute such a tax. She explained about all of the COVID relief funds/programs available to residents. Bethel has received over \$16,000 in delinquent utility payments for residents. Gene Kraus commented that affordable housing is a problem locally, state wide and nationally and anything that can be done to make affordable is welcome. Dave Eddy said doing anything about affordable housing just in Vermont, could end up hurting Vermont, by adding to the housing shortage here.

Request to Cater from Babes Bar on 10/16/21

Jesse Plotsky and Owen Daniel-McCarter made a request to allow Babes Bar to cater an event at the White Church on 10/26/21. Dave Eddy moved and Lindley Brainard seconded to approve the request. Unanimously approved.

Rotary's request to waive fee to use Town Hall on 10/24/21

Therese Kirby noted the normal fee is \$50 for 2 hours for non-profit organizations. The Rotary is active in Bethel and has served the town through the years. Paul Vallee moved and Lindley Brainard seconded to waive the usage fee for the Town Hall by the Rotary on 10/24/21. Unanimously approved.

Act 64 - Mailing ballots for SCHOOL issues only at Annual Meeting only

Therese Kirby explained the Selectboard may need to decide whether or not the Selectboard will allow the mailing of ballots for SCHOOL ISSUES to all active Bethel voters. This was done during COVID and Town Clerk Pam Brown was advising a request MAY come. The School Board would need to decide if they want to make this request. If the School Board wants to do this, the Selectboards of both Bethel and Royalton would need to vote to approve the request. While Town Clerks want more people to vote, they are not in favor of mailing ballots to all registered voters, as there are numerous ways voters may request a ballot. There has not been a formal request from the School Board at this time, but Pam Brown wanted the Selectboard to know about this new law.

Draft March 2022 Town Meeting Warning

The Selectboard asked visitors present for their thoughts about Australian ballot or mail in ballot. The general feeling is there is value to voting in person. Chris Jarvis noted studies have been conducted regarding moving Town Meeting to Saturday, and they show no difference in number of voters when the meeting date is moved. Chris Jarvis has spoken with some older residents and they still want voting at town meeting. Lylee Rauch-Kacenski spoke about the importance of meeting people at Town Meeting, as well as promoting democracy. The Selectboard will leave the draft warning as is and discuss more at the next meeting.

Bethel Climate Action 10/4/21 public meeting - request to endorse statement attached.

Chris Jarvis reviewed discussion from last meeting on this issue, and Gene Kraus reported on meeting with a group on October 4 to determine concerns of Town residents. (Report of this meeting was included in the Selectboard packet.) Mary Floyd stated the Conservation Committee would like to support Climate Plan but needs more time to study the proposal before action is taken. Gene Kraus said the report from the Climate Council will come out in December, but the deadline for comments to the Council is October 15, therefore the urgency. Martha Leibbrandt spoke in favor of endorsing the resolution. Paul Vallee thanked Gene Kraus for organizing the public round table. He asked if the Selectboard endorses this document, will the Selectboard be endorsing 350VT ? Should the Selectboard adopt our own proposal? Ferron Griffin distributed the Vermont Natural Resources Councils (VNRC) priorities, which are close to the Bethel Climate Action Report. The Conservation Commission wants to discuss the VNRC report and will most likely support that and send it to the Vermont Climate Council. Danny Dover strongly asked the Selectboard to endorse the VNRC recommendations. Gene Kraus moved the Selectboard support the Bethel Climate Council items 1, 2 & 3, and support the work of the Conservation Commission as they address climate issues at their meeting on October 12. Discussion followed and Gene Kraus withdrew the previous motion and moved the Selectboard endorse and send to the VT Climate Council items 1, 2, 3 of the Bethel Climate Action document. Lindley Brainard seconded. The motion was not approved. Paul Vallee voiced concern about Items 1, 2 and 3 and any position the Selectboard would take. He recommended endorsing the Conservation Commission report when issued. Gene Kraus explained the endorsement of Items 1, 2 and 3 of the Bethel Climate Action document to Climate Council is not binding the Selectboard to anything, only asking the Climate Council to consider Items 1, 2, and 3.

Gene feels it is important for the Selectboard to speak. Therese Kirby noted that currently the Selectboard is tied, leaving the option of breaking the tie, or backtracking to change the wording. Gene Kraus withdrew his motion. Chris Jarvis suggested the Selectboard, at a duly called meeting, ask the Climate Council to consider Items 1, 2, and 3 of the Bethel Climate Action document, as well as future recommendations from the Bethel Conservation Commission. Gene Kraus moved and Lindley Brainard seconded. The motion passed.

Minutes and Communications

Town Manager's Report:

Working with District 4 Project Manager on creating an RFP for a new engineer for Pinello Bridge. Met with FEMA 10-8-21, have additional information to add to the RFP and hoping to have that issued in a few days.

Dave Bergeron is not returning as seasonal plow driver and an ad has been placed in The Herald, on our website, on our Facebook page, and Front Porch Forum.

Budget numbers have been received from one department. Should receive budgets from Recreation and Fire in the next two weeks. Will include some budget numbers for our 10/25/21 meeting in the packet.

Lindley Brainard moved to approve the minutes of 9/27/2021 as printed and Paul Vallee seconded. The motion passed.

Paul Vallee moved to adjourn at 9:10 pm and Lindley Brainard seconded. The motion passed.

Julie Kraus
Secretary