

Town of Shaftsbury Selectboard Meeting

December 18, 2023

In person at Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom

1. Call to Order

The meeting came to order at 6:30 p.m. Present were selectpersons Art Whitman (chair), Mike Cichanowski, Naomi Miller, Martha Cornwell, and Tony Krulikowski. Also present was town administrator David Kiernan.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

No one reported a conflict of interest with any item on the agenda.

3. Minutes

There were none.

4. Warrants

Check warrant #21, \$141,878,.72. Mr. Krulikowski moved to approve the warrant. Ms. Cornwell seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.

5. Announcements

Mr. Whitman noted that a Planning Commission member is needed, and that one or two Economic Development Committee members are needed.

Our bookkeeper of many years has announced her retirement. A new bookkeeper is sought.

Petitions of candidates for elected offices are due January 29, 2024.

Community appropriations requests are due January 18, 2024.

Ms. Cornwell noted that long time road crew member Ron Jennings recently retired. She thanked him for his years of service.

5. Public Comments

There were none.

6. Treasurers Report

Reviewing the cash flow, Ms. Dexter noted that delinquent taxes are coming in. She congratulated Holly Behan for her capable assumption of delinquent tax collector duties. Some last minutes changes have been made to tax bills as a result of actions by the state. The cash balance as of December 18 was about \$1,200,000. She will issue community appropriations and other payments the last week of December.

She will project to budget at the next meeting, when some payroll additions will have been made.

Mr. Kiernan answered a question about the audit and about gravel, which latter went up about 30% last fiscal year, largely because of diesel costs.

8. Town Meeting Information Session -Proposed Change to Preceding Saturday – Marlene Hall TC for inclusion on 2024 Town Meeting Warning for vote

Ms. Hall reported that she checked with the secretary of state's office and with other town clerks regarding changing town meeting to Saturday before the vote (to be effective March 2025), and learned that it was both legal and practicable. Ms. Miller said she'd received a letter noting that observant Jews could not attend the Saturday morning meeting and would therefore be disenfranchised. She suggested a meeting time of Saturday evening at 7 p.m. Ms. Hall said the town clerk's office would have no problem with that day and time. Mr. Whitman wondered whether moving the budget vote to the Australian ballot should go on the ballot, to ensure greater voter representation regarding the budget. Questions were asked about whether the vote to move to Saturday should take place at the gathering of townsfolk or via the ballot. Ms. Hall will get more information.

9. Community Appropriations

Monty's House Wildlife Rehabilitation

Karen Rose introduced herself. She is a licensed rehabilitator and a member of the state's Wildlife Rehabilitation Governance Board. Monty's House is a 501c(3) organization, and the only rehabilitator in the southwestern part of Vermont. (Ms. Rose also accepts some animals from other parts of the state when "rehabors" are full elsewhere.) She requests \$1000 to help offset expenses, which at the height of summer can approach \$200 weekly. She said in 2023, Monty's House had 73 intake incidents total and, for Shaftsbury, 15 intake incidents with 37 different animals. The largest animal she can accept is porcupine. She is seeking a permit to rehabilitate songbirds.

John C. McCullough Free Library

Jenny Rozycki, executive director, presented a request for level funding. She said that, after significant renovations, the library reopened in December 2022, and has had their best year ever. New member numbers and summer reading program participants broke records. She left the board a copy of the library's 3-year strategic plan. Mr. Kiernan reported that in FY 2025, all library requests will be moved to line item status in the budget rather than remaining in the community appropriations budget.

10. DPW Report

DPW foreman Yannotti reported that roads have not fared badly so far this winter. Now the crew is focusing on maintaining equipment. He didn't receive any calls about damage from the day's storm.

He said he'd found out that a few towns are using a plow with a rubber cutting edge in autumn and again, sometimes, in mud season, to avoid pushing earth from a soft road into roadside ditches. Mr. Yannotti is concerned about whether switching plows back and forth would be cost effective, but he noted that the crew does lose a lot of gravel when plowing roads that aren't frozen. The bolts holding the carbide blades to the plow are essentially sacrificed (because of rust) each time the blade is changed. He has no experience with the rubber edged device, but will looking into it. He will also look into a similar device for wing blades.

Mr. Whitman said that, for several years now, the state has required that every town comply with a permit designed to protect water quality, the Municipal Road General Permit. Roads affected are those that are "hydrologically connected" (that drain to waterways). Mr. Kiernan said hundreds of roads in town do not yet meet the standards, also known as Vermont Better Roads Standards. Meeting these standards, he said, is crucial to receiving grants from various agencies. He will be placing information on the permit program and Better Roads on the website. Mr. Yannotti said the Better Roads manual portrays roads as they should be. It explains, for example, why ditches are necessary and tree removal is required. Mr. Yannotti urged residents to contact him or members of the road crew whenever they have a

question about roads. Ms. Miller asked that this and other information be placed on the website and perhaps a group discussion regarding such issues can be held in February or later. Mr. Cichanowski and fire chief Joe Vadakin said the roads have never been in such good shape. (And this despite larger vehicles generally on all roads.)

11. FY 2025 Budget

Fire Chief Joe Vadakin said the department is looking at replacing fire gear in FY 2025 at a cost of about \$10,000 (for two sets). Some repair work on lighting is needed on one of the engines, which is thirteen years old. He said the department's main pager channel is the same one used by Berkshire County in Massachusetts. It has gotten to the point that Berkshire County's traffic can override the Shaftsbury channel. In years to come, Chief Vadakin would like to upgrade the 18 personal pagers, which includes many portable radios, to avoid the problem of Berkshire County overriding Shaftsbury's channel. Mr. Vadakin will look into prices and bring back more information. He would like to continue using both cell phone and pager devices. Over the longer term, he would like to upgrade the alarm system (some of it is fifty or more years old) and other communication systems, such as with state dispatch. He'd also like to invest in annual undercoating of the trucks, especially since the department is keeping the trucks an extra five years. Mr. Krulikowski asked whether anyone has come up with a solution to lack of volunteers. It was suggested that required training is onerous and off-putting for potential new members.

Mr. Kiernan introduced the budget, devised with the goal of keeping the increase to 5% or less.

The board discussed the DPW budget and gravel in particular, which as a category encompasses every rock-like material used by the Town, including rip rap. The budget proposes a 4% increase for the DPW crew. Health insurance costs for the crew will go down in 2025. Monies were moved from "class three roads" to gravel. The budget proposes building up a sidewalk maintenance fund, especially since the water main reconstruction will disturb a good deal of sidewalk.

As proposed, the budget will add \$25.80 per \$100,000 to a citizen's tax bill.

Mr. Kiernan noted that the town administrator cost would go up about \$27,000 to cover the likely cost of a family health insurance plan, which Mr. Kiernan does not now have. The budget reflects the movement of funds now paying for the webmaster/cemetery superintendent/administrative assistant/assistant town clerk to other categories, such as the town clerk office. (The move will also simplify payroll.) The assessor's clerk will receive an increase, reflecting a very commendable performance by the clerk and a substantial increase in the grand list as a result of her efforts.

The fire truck budget will remain as originally planned for the time being, though there may be issues in four years with financing the next truck.

Community appropriations requests are approximately level.

Mr. Kiernan hopes to vote on the budget at the first meeting in January.

12. VLCT – Town Administrator recruitment

Mr. Cichanowski said the ad went up on four websites today and more sites will be added today.

13. Appointment – David Mance III Tree Warden

Mr. Cichanowski moved to appoint David Mance III as Shaftsbury's tree warden. Ms. Miller seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0. Mr. Kiernan will send Mr. White a letter of thanks for his years as tree warden.

14. Other Business

Ms. Miller moved to authorize Mr. Kiernan to sign a renewed contract with CAT-TV. Mr. Krulikowski seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.

Mr. Whitman read aloud a letter of thanks and congratulations to Ron Jennings, which was signed by the selectpersons.

Ms. Cornwell suggested a similar letter for bookkeeper Joan Vargo.

Mr. Whitman reported that Martha Cornwell has resigned from the Planning Commission. Ms. Miller said working with her has been a deep joy, and that she is a quick study. The board thanked her for her service.

15. Review of Action Items

16. Executive Session – Personnel -Real Estate

Mr. Cichanowski moved to enter executive session. Ms. Miller seconded the motion, which Passed 5-0-0. No action was taken upon return from executive session.

17. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 p.m.