

**TOWN OF CASTLETON
SELECT BOARD MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING**

**Bike and Pedestrian Accessibility Scoping Study
Friday, May 27, 2022, at 2:00 PM
Zoom (Virtual)**

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/apODxgzUkFbBEgJTsMGGSIHxAq7P4VnnFs0l4NYMcWhpgPbkQ06pZlpk4iQm1v4p.h2s8djigdikW_6X?startTime=1653674510000

Passcode: iZR4&O32

PRESENT: James Leamy, Chair; Michael Jones, Town Manager. Participating via Zoom: May Lee Harris, Member; Richard Combs, Vice Chair; Devon Neary, Rutland Region Planning Commission, Nicole Fox, Fuss & O'Neill, Zak Hale, Hale & Hale Resources, Inc. **Absent:** Joseph Mark, Select Board Parliamentarian, Robert Spaulding, Member.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Select Board Chair, Jim Leamy at 2:02 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Combs made motion to adopt the agenda. Ms. Harris seconded the motion. All were in favor of adopting the agenda. Motion passed 3-0.

Chairman Leamy stated the purpose of the meeting was to review and approve alternative from the Pedestrian Accessibility Scoping Study and discuss/determine whether to apply for a Bike & Pedestrian Grant this year or next year. Determine funding source(s) for Town's 20% cost share of a Bike and Pedestrian Grant.

Town Manager M. Jones addressed the board regarding an attachment he sent to them in an email reference "Project #1" of the Pedestrian Accessibility Scoping Study and the associated costs. Mr. Jones stated that the Town has a 20% cost share of the project equivalent to \$300,000. He advised the Select Board members that the Town does have some funding on hand. Mr. Jones also explained to the board some funding alternatives.

Mr. Leamy asked the board members if they had any questions for Ms. Nicole Fox (Fuss & O'Neill) or Mr. Devon Neary (Rutland Regional Planning Commission). Ms. Harris had no questions of Ms. Fox or Mr. Neary. Mr. Combs advised he had reviewed the project documentation and it seemed self-explanatory. Mr. Combs noted that the current cost estimates are based on 2020 information and asked Ms. Fox or Mr. Neary if there would be any significant cost increases to the project due to the fact the estimates are two years old. Ms. Fox stated that she has not updated the costs but has recalculated costs from other projects out to the year 2025. She also acknowledged that we are experiencing an unusual level of inflation and could refigure project costs but it would be some idea whether the Town was moving forward with the project so she could gauge the correct year for the escalation. Ms. Fox stated she could provide an escalation number, but it is impossible for her to predict what the actual construction costs would be at the time of construction.

Mr. Combs asked Ms. Fox if it was realistic if the Select Board were to choose to move forward with the

project, would phase #1 be done by next year, or if that was too optimistic, assuming the money was available. Ms. Fox stated the design follows the VTRANS Municipal Assistance Design Process. Ms. Fox stated it may take 18 months to two years to for project completion and the timelines could vary due to right-of-way considerations or other holdups, the timeframe could vary widely. The conversation continued and it was agreed upon that it is realistic to think that if the project was approved to move forward that at best case it would be two years away, but more likely three years. Mr. Combs asked that he

Mr. Combs addressed Mr. Neary stating, “to proceed with the design, it would it be our [Town] best interest to apply for this grant now and then we would have to pay for the design over the next year or two.” Mr. Neary responded that the match for the first phase of the grant is \$300,000. The grant The Town Manager is asking to apply for would only cover the first phase of the project (Alternative #3, Phase 1). Mr. Neary continued to explain that the project is likely two-three years away. He further stated that there is a potential opportunity to save some money by working with VTRANS to harmonize the project with a Class I paving project of Route 4a in 2024. Mr. Neary stated that although it isn’t a guarantee if the Town is able to collaborate with VTRANS around the paving and it potentially could save the Town up to a couple hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Neary believed applying for the Bike and Pedestrian Grant this year would be in the best interest of the Town, because it would better align the sidewalk project with the VTRANS Class I repaving project of Route 4a. He further stated that there is an advantage to apply for this grant coming out of a scoping study gives the Town a pretty big advantage because VTRANS is familiar with the project.

Mr. Combs asked Mr. Neary that if the Town were to be awarded the grant, would the Town’s cost share of the design be significantly less than \$100,000. Mr. Neary stated the cost share would be 20% and it is a reimbursement program. Mr. Neary advised the Town would not be on the hook for the full match until the two-three mark when construction happens.

Ms. Harris stated she thought this was premature and was upset about how the meeting time was warned. She was concerned that there may be members of the public who saw one of the postings thinking the meeting would be at 5pm. She found it disturbing. Mr. Jones advised that the meeting was legally warned at least 24 hours prior to a special meeting. Ms. Harris stated she felt manipulated and was ready to sign off so there wouldn’t be a quorum. Ms. Harris stated that she thinks this should be a full board decision. She questioned whether considering this project for American Rescue Plan Act or a budget surplus is the right thing to do because there are several other projects on the list for ARPA consideration.

Mr. Jones addressed the board chairman stating the Select Board has already approved the concept and an alternative. He stated that this meeting was to determine whether the Town apply for the Bike and Pedestrian Grant. Mr. Jones stated that there hasn’t been a commitment of ARPA funds at this point whatsoever. Mr. Jones further advised that the Town already has approximately half of the 20% cost share needed and there is potentially another \$90,000 over the next two fiscal years should the Selectboard continue to approve the \$45,000 that is appropriated in the highway budget each year just for sidewalks. Mr. Jones presented some further facts and figures on sidewalk projects and reiterated that the purpose of the meeting was to determine whether to apply for the Bike and Pedestrian Grant that would pay for 80% of phase 1 of a sidewalk project that the Select Board has already approved the design (Alternative #3).

Mr. Combs addressed Ms. Harris stating the only reason he asked the questions about timing of the

project was because he already knew how much funding the Town already had for the project. Mr. Combs advised that taking into account the funds we currently have on hand, plus the \$45,000 per year the Town typically appropriates for sidewalks, that two years down the road, the Select Board may have to get creative to pay a small amount of money to make the project whole, and if it extends into a third year, the shortfall can be covered by the \$45,000 from that third year. Mr. Combs stated he didn't think that ARPA funds would have to be used at all. Mr. Jones agreed with Mr. Combs.

Ms. Harris if there was a problem waiting and applying for this grant next year. Mr. Combs addressed Ms. Harris and stated the only drawback he sees with wait to apply for the grant next year is that it would delay the project another year meaning the Town would three to four years before the Town could start construction, which would put the project significant past the paving VTRANS has planned on doing. Mr. Combs went on to say that he echoed what Mr. Neary stated earlier and trying to mesh the Town's sidewalk project with the VTRANS paving project makes sense and could potentially save the Town some money.

Mr. Jones addressed the board advising that there is also a stormwater scoping study happening in the village area that needs to be taken into consideration when developing a timeline for the sidewalk project. Mr. Jones advised that if these project timelines are not synchronized, we could end up tearing up new sidewalks and new pavement to install storm drains in the village.

Mr. Combs addressed the board members advising that even if the Town applies and is awarded the grant, the Select Board still must vote to accept the grant. He advised that there would still be an opportunity to scrutinize it, but he would not want to squander an opportunity to at least keep the project moving forward.

Ms. Harris wanted clarification and asked whether the Select Board could decide to not move forward with the project even after the grant was awarded, after considering all the financials surrounding the project. Mr. Combs thought that was correct and asked Mr. Jones to confirm or not. Mr. Jones advised that the Select Board could do that, but it is not recommended, meaning VTRANS would not view it favorably. Mr. Jones also stated that if the Select Board chose to do it, they could add more money into future operating budgets to properly fund the project. Mr. Jones expressed his concerns about timing and advised he sees no harm in applying to keep the project moving forward, in the meantime, the Select Board can consider adding money into the next two future budget years to close the gap on what he believes is a 10% shortfall to make the project financially whole. Mr. Jones reiterated his concerns about the timing of the project as it pertains to the paving of Route 4a and stormwater infrastructure upgrades in the village. Ms. Harris agreed with Mr. Jones about the timing and stated she would hate to see the Town put in something new and then tear it up. She advised that she has seen it happen too many times in Town where the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing, or they don't agree with each other.

More discussion took place about the timing and synchronization of the sidewalk project with other projects. Mr. Jones stated that VTRANS typically doesn't deviate from their project schedules and the likelihood of it shifting from early 2024 is not likely. He also stated that he agreed with Mr. Combs assessment that the sidewalk project is not likely to start in 2024, thus the likelihood of a conflict with the paving project is negligible.

Mr. Leamy stated that based on what is happening with the economy right now, he doesn't see prices going down, so it appears that the longer the Select Board waits, the more it will cost.

Mr. Combs made a motion to authorize the Town Manager to apply for the Bike & Pedestrian Grant. Mr. Leamy seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. **Mr. Leamy and Mr. Combs were in favor. Ms. Harris was opposed. Motion failed 2-1.** Mr. Jones thanked Ms. Fox and Mr. Neary and stated he was very disappointed.

There were no comments or concerns from the public or from Select Board members.

ADJOURN

Mr. Combs made a motion to adjourn at 2:25pm. Ms. Harris seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion passed 3-0.

FINAL