

TOWN OF CASTLETON SELECT BOARD MINUTES

Wednesday, December 28, 2022 7:00 p.m.

Castleton Fire Station Community Room

273 Route 30N, Bomoseen

In-Person & Zoom Virtual Public Meeting

Zoom Meeting Recording Link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/ECUB5p6pMj4_NArGV4sOjo2ovIJYXb3N_CsJHY7EoD9TTLxb50sDpTNgnbfe2oRu.z7xIZVTEnIPW0mya

PRESENT: Jim Leamy, Chair; Richard Combs, Vice Chair; Mary Lee Harris, Joseph Mark, Parliamentarian, Michael Jones, Town Manager, See Attached List

PRESENT VIA ZOOM: R. Spaulding (Phone), Nancy Mark, Katie Culpo, Allison Harvey, Recording Secretary

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Select Board Chair J. Leamy at 7:00p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by J. Leamy.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

R. Combs made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. J. Mark seconded. J. Mark stated that it was his recollection that at the last meeting when the Hale Resources Extension Request was addressed it was stated that it would be on the agenda for the January 9 meeting, and that it should be removed from this agenda and addressed at the January 9 meeting as originally discussed since there may be interested parties that intended to attend the January 9 meeting when it was addressed. **J. Mark made an amendment to the motion that the Hale Resources Extension Request be stricken from the agenda for this evening and put on the agenda of January 9, 2023. R. Combs seconded. All voted in favor of the amendment. ML Harris recused herself. Amendment carried 4-0.** R. Spaulding stated at the December 12 meeting they discussed this meeting being about the budget and warrants, not all of the other items on the agenda. He has second thoughts on that as they should have met the 26th for a regular board meeting and asked how everyone else felt about it. J. Leamy stated the only other item is the generator purchase approval. **All voted in favor of the motion to approve the amended agenda. ML Harris recused herself. Motion carried 4-0.**

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

R. Combs made a motion to approve the minutes of November 14, 2022 as presented. J. Mark seconded.

Page 2 – fourth paragraph, second line, *vis-versa* should be changed to *vice versa*.

Page 2 – first line of fifth paragraph, *4 were in favor* should be removed.

Page 2 – fifth paragraph, fourth line, *4-6* should be changed to *46*.

All voted in favor. Motion carried 5-0.

R. Combs made a motion to approve the minutes of December 12, 2022 as presented. ML Harris seconded.

Page 4 – sixth paragraph, sixth line, *it was* should be changed to *ML Harris*.

All voted in favor. J. Mark abstained. Motion carried 4-0.

CITIZENS COMMENTS & CONCERNS - ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA:

Sue DeCarolis questioned the special meeting this evening and had gone to the site and saw they were going to be addressing policy, and she addressed an email to the board members. She has been attending school board meetings and has become aware that there is a substantial mental health need and staff shortages at the schools for the children. There is a need and she thought it was going to be addressed, she is concerned with overall health and wellbeing of the community and questioned how the board addresses it. A lot of funds are being directed to the needs of the community and asked if

the social services lines will be addressed during the budget process.

SELECTBOARD BUDGET DISCUSSION

M. Jones stated he had no particular updates but he is prepared to discuss suggestions or places that should be looked at. There is a 13.8% increase or \$486,940 in the proposed budget. The highway budget has a carryover, as it always does, and in the past when they have run into shortfalls or woes there was some leverage to make it up with that carryover. It has been used for paving, to offset crushing, purchasing a tractor, so it is used for a lot of different reasons. There was no paving done last year, they chose not to so that \$170,000 got carried over. They could decide to use that carry over to cover the paving for this year. The risk to doing that is that it would have to be put back in next year so the spike would be next year because it would have two years' worth of paving included. R. Combs asked if they are now behind by a year since they did not do last year's paving, M. Jones replied yes. And if they take it out this year, they still are a year behind on funds for paving. M. Jones explained they often try to get paving grants, but they don't very often come through from VTrans. R. Combs stated he has gone through the budget a number of times and can't seem to see any fluff that could be taken out and doesn't think it is wise to take out another year of paving. All he could see was the \$83-84,000 to support the expenses at the village school that could be taken out, but nothing else has much extra. N. Mark asked if she could say something about the library budget. She was not sure if it was able to be corrected before the board received their copy, but the library budget shows a \$5,322 deficit. They have discussed it and have planned on revenue that will produce a balanced budget, rather than the deficit. R. Combs stated the CVS total of \$83,571 is what is in the budget on page 5. ML Harris asked if there wasn't a need for phone or internet at the village school. M. Jones stated held off because he was not sure what would happen with the building. The Recreation Director has a town cell phone and is using a cell phone hot spot to be in that building to have internet access at this time.

J. Mark stated he has discussed with M. Jones the bottom-line increase and whether the village school should be a separate line item. Even if the CVS expenses are taken out, the budget increase is still about 11.4%. J. Mark stated there has been a lot of item increases, and he would hope voters know that the Town cannot provide the same kind of budget constraints as in the past due to that. He also feels that taking out highway funds is not wise either. ML Harris asked if ARPA funds could be used to lower the budget. M. Jones stated they can be if they are used for a normal provision of government such as building a salt and sand shed and paving roads are normal provision types of things. ML Harris stated she also feels this increase is huge and would like to see them do whatever they could to reduce the bottom line. M. Jones stated they could review the one ops, for example the sand blasting of trucks in the highway budget, if it's a one and done, they could strategically do something different with those items.

J. Leamy stated they also have the CLA, the common level of assessment, which is probably going to go down, causing the tax rate to go up, thus increasing property tax bills by 3 plus %. The CLA for Castleton was at 91%, it is now down to 80%, which places a higher burden on the taxes, and this will affect the property taxes the citizens are going to have to pay. J. Leamy feels the increase is excessive as well, and they have people having a problem with paying taxes, fuel and gas, and he feels the board needs to do their level best to keep taxes down to something folks can afford. He has heard that Fair Haven was at a 3.9% increase and Rutland city is at a 2.4% increase. If they even do what has been discussed, they are still at 11%, which will make a considerable impact on taxpayers. M. Jones stated over the past 3 years if you look back at these budgets, it was up \$10,000 over the previous year and they cut a lot. To try to offset the education component by cutting municipal services seems unwise to him. J. Leamy doesn't disagree. R. Spaulding asked how it is that Fair Haven and Rutland are so low when Castleton is so high. M. Jones stated he has not seen their budget but does know the police cut \$374,000 out in Rutland City. But their total budget is over four million in total. R. Spaulding stated he felt maybe Castleton has held their budget down too much for too long. R. Spaulding asked M. Jones if he could come up with what is included in the increase. M. Jones stated fire and highway is a lot of it, plus the \$84,000 for CVS and then the Police Department finishes it. J. Leamy asked if they could get a summary sheet for each department showing increases/decreases in dollars and in percentage. J. Mark stated has 4 questions: What do we think of using reserve funds to shrink the gap in the increase? Do we want to hold CVS expenses out and treat it as a separate article? Do they want M. Jones to comb through the appropriate expenditures for ARPA funds and what is the bottom line increase the board would be comfortable with? R. Combs asked if J. Mark meant reserve or carryover. J. Mark stated what M. Jones was speaking of, which was carry over. R. Combs stated there is a \$71,000 increase in the Police Department, which is wage increases, as well as highway and fire department which are because of increases in the reserve accounts. It was stated that about a third of the budget is related to employee expenses.

J. Leamy asked about looking into a change in health insurance, and M. Jones was not sure if that could be done without addressing it with the bargaining unit first.

J. Leamy asked if anyone on the board would be against the CVS budget being on a separate line item. ML Harris was not sure if that would make a difference, as if approved, it would not reduce the budget. J. Mark questioned whether any revenue would be expected from the CVS building. Discussion on the proposal of the CVS group and how it would generate funds were very optimistic. ML Harris asked if possibly the board should approach the group to revise their proposal. Discussion on whether the group will continue to try to bring it together to work, but they have faded away it seems, and it is being left in the lap of the recreation director, and it would not be reasonable for them to be held responsible for the outcome of the village school. It was questioned if it wouldn't be beneficial for it to be separate item on the warrant but then if it would be lost if it were near the end of voting considering the number of articles that is on the ballot. J. Leamy stated Castleton is one of the few towns that has so many items on the ballot and can understand voters getting weary by the end of the list.

After further discussion, the Board felt maybe somewhere near 5% of an increase would more acceptable. R. Combs asked how much of an increase in the tax rate the 13.9% is, it was stated it is about \$.10. R. Combs asked M. Jones to do the analysis and agrees with J. Mark's methodology of trying to get there with the questions he posed. Discussion on the tax rate, and the fact that \$.4895 is the current municipal rate. R. Spaulding stated that if they don't use the carry over and do it every year, it isn't going to get cheaper. If they are behind a year in paving, he doesn't feel it should be pushed off another year. Further discussion on whether the grand list will be changing and if so, how much and what year a reappraisal will have to be done, as it is coming due to the CLA being lower. M. Jones could ask the assessor if they can do some hypotheticals with numbers to see what the grand list will change to based on what others are doing for reappraisals and where the numbers might end up. The budget is going to have to be finalized at the January 9 meeting to meet deadlines for warnings and elections.

APPROVAL TO PURCHASE NEW GENERATOR FOR WWTF:

R. Combs made a motion to approve PO #049612 for a new generator for the WWTF in the amount of \$50,700. ML Harris seconded. M. Jones stated the monies would come from sewer reserves. D. Fabricious stated they have had a few problems, and this is something that C. Fouracre had started. The generator t is very old and getting very expensive to repair and operate. It is burning oil, as well as a radiator leak and it can't be left unattended when running. It is 27 years old and it is warn out. M. Jones suggested the generator be accessed for every 20-year upgrade, so they are not in this same position later on down the road. R. Combs asked if this is not approved, what is lead time on something else. D. Fabricious stated they were lucky this one is available, and lead time is 6 months to a year to go another route. R. Spaulding asked if this purchase price includes transportation to get it here and to install. D. Fabricious stated they are only going to assist with taking the old one away and hooking the new one up and it has a warranty. They are going to try to sell the old one. **All voted in favor. Motion carried 5-0.**

PURCHASE ORDERS FOR APPROVAL

None at this time.

WARRANTS FOR APPROVAL

R. Combs made a motion to approve check warrant #1222R in the amount of \$650.00, check warrant #1215 in the amount of \$33,850.50 , check warrant #1222 in the amount of \$1,689,294.00, check warrant #1226 in the amount of \$208,053.41, check warrant #1215P in the amount of \$16,097.76 and check warrant #1222P in the amount of \$16,849.89 ML Harris seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Mark made a motion to approve check warrant #1216P in the amount \$647.02 and check warrant #1223P in the amount of \$647.02. ML Harris seconded the motion. R. Combs recused himself. All remaining members voted in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

M. Jones stated that he wanted to publicly thank the public works crew, fire department, police department and some staff for rallying together this past holiday weekend over the storm. They were thrown lots of curves, trucks in lakes, trees falling on people, sewer back-ups, it was a team effort to help each other through it and they have identified a lot of good things that worked as well as short comings that need to be fixed. Some things will take money to solve and they need to look at the processes and procedures to come up with solutions. He is not sure everyone sees the effort that goes into that type of operation and wanted to make it known. The Board agreed and thanked everyone involved as well.

SELECTBOARD COMMENTS & CONCERNS:

R Spaulding asked if someone could shed some light on who proposed the Community Village Square Home of the Castleton Recreation center, there doesn't seem to be any names attached to it, so where did it come from. It was stated the proposal was presented to the Castleton/Hubbardton Ad Hoc Committee for consideration in keeping CVS building by the group supporting keeping the school that was led by Martha Clifford and Mary Droege. R. Spaulding felt it should be discussed as a board at a future meeting.

BRIEF RECAP & ITEMS FOR FOLLOW UP:

None at this time.

ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

J. Mark made a motion to enter Executive Session at 7:52pm to include the Board and Town Manager for personnel. R. Combs seconded. All voted in favor. Motion carried 5-0.

EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION

R. Combs made a motion to exit Executive Session at 8:11pm, no action taken. J. Mark seconded. All voted in favor. Motion carried 5-0.

ADJOURN

R. Combs made a motion to adjourn at 8:12p.m. ML Harris seconded. All voted in favor. Motion carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted
Allison Harvey
Recording Secretary