

Town of Fairfield Selectboard Minutes

February 26, 2024

In Attendance: Tom Howrigan, Gavin Ryan, Brian Dubie (virtually), David Persons and Ron Bocash

Roads: Absent

Town Clerk: Linda Hodet

Town Administrator: Cathy Ainsworth

Secretary: David Persons, Cathy Ainsworth

Visitors: Sarah Allerton, Cathy Branon, Greta Brunswick, Sorel Chaput, Vanessa Kittell, Jeanne Hopkins, Paula Johnson, Lynda Ulrich, Liesl Ulrich-Verderber, Chuck Verderber, Don Wells, Julie Wolcott,

1. Rep. James Gregoire provided a legislative update and answered questions. He talked about districts in the state who are increasing their school budgets by 20% and how recently reversed protections approved by the governor may impact this. There was conversation about the 9.81% school budget increase in Maple Run. Rep. Gregoire said that, if the school budget is voted down, millions of dollars would need to be cut from the Maple Run budget to make a small dent in this increase. Community members talked about school budget increases related to policy changes, over recent years, due to increased mental health issues and equity initiatives. Rep. Gregoire said he hoped discussions will take place on how to best deliver education in VT. Regarding how Tax Increment Financing in St. Albans may affect the education taxes specific to other Maple Run District schools, Rep. Gregoire deferred to representatives on other committees.
2. Julie Wolcott and Greta Brunswick, along with Common School community meeting participants, presented their report and recommendations to the Selectboard, as requested. They described their process of visioning and identifying key principals, while considering costs and benefits, to arrive at their prioritized recommendations regarding the Common School. Considerations ranged from demolition to restoration, with their top recommendations focused on renovating the building for reuse. They recognized that cost issues would need to be resolved with these recommendations. They said the meetings' participants had identified the Common School's importance as a historic landmark and suggested that reuse options may have revenue-generating benefits. They provided a list of grants to prioritize as a potential next step and discussed the need for municipal matching to move forward with any grants. Greta said the group identified that the Rec. Committee, as volunteers, struggle to manage the space but hope to continue recreational use of the building. Lynda suggested that capital campaigns can sometimes result in large endowments for projects like this. The Selectboard thanked them for their efforts and requested Cathy consult a civil engineer to determine what would be required for an up-to-code wastewater system. They requested that Greta and Julie present the Common School report again at Town Meeting, to take place during the Municipal Budget agenda item, article 5.
3. Linda discussed Town Meeting preparations.

Dave made a motion to approve the minutes of February 12. Ron seconded. All in favor.

These minutes exist in draft form until approved by the Selectboard.

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Tom made a motion to approve the minutes of January 26. Ron seconded. All in favor.

4. Cathy said that the Town of Fairfield's offices will be closed on the Eclipse Day (April 8). The Selectboard agreed to move their April 8 meeting to April 10 that week. She said the Bent Northrop Memorial Library will also be closed and the school dismissal is early that day. Other towns are scheduling events, not the Town of Fairfield, however we may see a lot of traffic.
5. Regarding Roads, Cathy reports that Franklin County was not listed in the disaster declaration made by the Governor to FEMA for the December Floods, so Fairfield will need to eat the cost. She said Fairfield's RFP for 2024 paving will be ready at the next Selectboard meeting for their review- she suggests they open bids at the March 25 Selectboard Meeting or at the first April Selectboard meeting of the month. Cathy attended VTrans's Route 36 preconstruction meeting for their bridge replacement near the Fairfield Market. They expect to close that portion of Route 36 starting after the week of July 4th. Cathy is estimating expenses that may result from local bypass traffic and will find out if bypass grant funds will be received up-front or by requisition after-the-fact.

Ron made a motion to approve the Certificate of Highway Mileage, year ending February 10, 2024, and authorize it to be signed by the Selectboard Chair. David seconded. All in favor. Tom Signed the document to be returned to VTrans.

6. Cathy reviewed the final draft of the lease for the Old Town Clerk's office with the Selectboard and noted items added, as written by Fairfield's legal counsel. Selectboard agrees to a 60-day notice of termination for this clause. Lease to begin March 1, 2024.
7. Cathy said a new File Clerk, Sandra Roby, has been hired and will start this week.
8. D & H Branon built a house without getting a permit beforehand and are refusing to pay the increased fee (doubled \$949= \$1898 total). This is required in instances of after-the-fact permitting, as per our zoning regulations. Both Zoning Administrators have addressed this with no movement on the matter by D & H Branon. The Selectboard has authority to waive or enforce the fee. The Selectboard refuses to waive the fee and directs Cathy to draft a letter from the Selectboard to enforce it.
9. Both Planning and Zoning board appointment candidates appeared before the board, still interested in the 2 new seats. No other candidates came forward.

Tom made a motion to appoint Vanessa Kittell and Don Wells to the open seats for the Planning and Zoning board. Ron Seconded. All in favor.

David made a motion to approve the warrants. Gavin seconded. All in favor.

10. The Selectboard tabled Town Meeting Planning; this discussion will be rescheduled for a special meeting at 6pm on Monday, March 4.

Ron made a motion to adjourn. Gavin seconded. All in favor.

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