

Town of Fairfield Selectboard Minutes

January 22, 2024

In Attendance: Gavin Ryan, Brian Dubie, David Persons,

Roads: Absent

Town Clerk: Linda Hodet

Town Administrator: Cathy Ainsworth

Secretary: Melissa Manson

Visitors: NWATV, Lynda Ulrich, Albert Menard, Dawn Menard, Rusty Branon, Cathy Branon, Don Wells, Chuck Verderber, Vanessa Kittel, Michael L'Esperance, Charlene Fecteau, Charlie Fecteau, John Brissette

1. The Selectboard revised the agenda to move the insurance discussion to the beginning of the meeting.
2. John Brissette, HUB Insurance, came to present their proposal for 2024. They have been our insurer since 2017. The proposal does not include cyber security insurance- Cathy to follow up with on this. Discussion about aggregate vs. individual liability limits. Slightly less than previous year due to improved workers comp rate.
3. Public Comment: Chuck Verderber requests an executive session to discuss his recent resignation from the Zoning Board.

Brian made a motion to enter executive session to discuss a personnel issue with Linda Hodet. David seconded. All in favor. Brian made a motion to exit executive session. David seconded. All in favor. File Clerk submitted her letter of resignation to Linda, Cathy and the Selectboard, with 2-week notice. We will look for alternatives and have abbreviated hours in the Town Clerk's office while Linda continues her part-time medical leave.

4. Lynda Ulrich comments that we should take this opportunity to review the work loads and responsibilities of town staff and see if we need to add administrative assistance staffing to the Town Administrator and Town Clerk, considering the increasing municipal work required. Gavin says they must be aware of expenditures.
5. Discussion of whether to add an item to the Town Meeting warning about 2024 surplus funds. Instead, as was done in the previous year, amend the budget to include the surplus in revenue and expenditures on the 2024 budget.
6. The board reviewed the ballot initiative regarding the zoning board size/increase. Brian explained that this is a non-binding advisory petition so the Selectboard can choose whether to put it on the warning. VLCT recommended that non-binding, advisory petition items not appear on the warning. The board spoke about the fact that, according to bylaws, zoning board members are not elected, but appointed, and the size of the board is determined by the Selectboard. They also said that they wanted to validate the public's advice, so a discussion of this matter is on the meeting agenda later in the meeting. Discussion from the floor about this ballot initiative, included people pointing out that increasing the size would allow people to participate in municipal efforts, as has been regularly requested by the Selectboard. Public pointed out that about 100 people signed the petition, to show their hope that

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Town of Fairfield Selectboard Minutes

it would be on the warning so it may be discussed at Town Meeting. There was strong encouragement to include this on the warning. Discussion followed among the SB members about whether to include on the warning. Because all three board members present were not in agreement to put the question on the warning, it was decided not to, clarifying that discussion could still take place at Town Meeting regarding this, under “To transact any other non-binding business that may properly come before the meeting”.

7. The board reviewed the ballot initiative that the Town of Fairfield discuss an inconsistency between the Town Plan and the land use regulations. This is also considered a non-binding advisory petition. Discussion of the fact that this discussion has been happening, the Town of Fairfield crafted a grant that outlines the process to effectively align the two, which was denied, but they are still interested in identifying funds and next steps to move this effort forward effectively. The board members agreed to put it on the warning, although it is non-binding and advisory.
8. Charlene and Charlie Fecteau did not get enough signatures to get on the warning regarding having the Selectboard create an ordinance allowing 4X4 and side-by-sides on the class 2 and 3 roads in Fairfield. Although it is not on the warning for Town meeting the Selectboard requested to add the topic to a future agenda to continue this discussion.
9. Warning for Town Meeting finalized and signed.
10. The Selectboard decided to reverse the order of the agenda’s Zoning Items
11. Zoning Board applicants chose to be interviewed in an open meeting. Dan Pipes, Vanessa Kittell and Don Wells all expressed written interest in any vacant or future openings on the Zoning Board. The Selectboard asked each candidate the following questions: Tell us about yourself and your interest; are you available to attend the meetings/ can you fit it in. All candidates said they are available and would fit it in to their schedules. Mr. Pipes spoke about his experience in the military, with national security, with the National Resource Conservation District, with legislative breakfasts; and his interest in being active during his retirement, while giving back. Ms. Kittell spoke about her love and life experience of Fairfield and hope to serve here; her experience owning her business; her Master’s and Doctorate in bioethics in agriculture; her cabinet level secretarial experience; her experience as a lawyer with diverse clients; and her interest in process, adhering to requirements, clarity and transparency. Mr. Wells talked about growing up in Sheldon and living in Fairfield; his experience starting an insurance company; his accounting experience; his interest in wanting to give back; and his interest in making sure rules are followed. The Selectboard decided to go into executive session regarding this appointment later in the meeting.
12. The Selectboard continued discussion about increasing the number of ZBA and Planning commission Members. The community reiterated their hope that the board would be increased to allow community members to serve. They encouraged the Selectboard to increase it from to seven or nine. Melissa, speaking as the Zoning

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Town of Fairfield Selectboard Minutes

Board Chair, said it would make sense to take advantage of the current increase in public interest. The board discussed that they could increase or decrease at any time. There was discussion about when new members would be able to participate, for example, not in the currently closed hearing deliberation.

Brian made a motion to increase the size of the Zoning Board from 5 to 7 members. Gavin seconded. David requested that the motion be withdrawn, to add to the next agenda for continued discussion with a larger board, because he currently dissents.

Brian made a motion to approve the minutes from January 8. David seconded. All in favor.

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

13. Regarding the Common School Committee, Cathy says that Julie Wolcott will report to the SB at the 02/12 meeting.
14. The Municipal Planning Grant was not approved to review the zoning alignment with the Town Plan, due an unusually competitive round of applications, not because the application did not have merit. Cathy asks “what are the next steps?” The contract amount was \$16,224. Can this come from another source?
15. Cathy reviews the proposed town budget with some changes based on surplus and FEMA reimbursements and suggests that some of this could be used for the zoning reg update. Should the budget surplus be transferred to the equipment fund as previous?

Brian made a motion to include the estimated 2023 surplus of \$58K and anticipated \$34K FEMA reimbursement into the 2024 budget as non-tax revenue to be used in the following lines: \$2000 to Zoning Legal Expense line; \$16,224 to the Zoning Misc. line for the project not funded by the municipal planning grant; \$58K to the Surplus Transfer to Equipment line; and \$15,776 to the Equipment Fund line bringing it up to \$55,776. David seconded. Gavin pointed out that this is not enough to cover the whole cost of upcoming truck rotation needs. All in favor.

Brian made a motion to enter executive session to discuss a personnel issue. David seconded. All in favor. David made a motion to exit executive session. Brian seconded. Steven True offered the Zoning Administrator position.

David made a motion to enter executive session to discuss Zoning Board appointment. Brian seconded. All in favor. David made a motion to exit executive session. Brian seconded. All in favor. Dan Pipes has been appointed to the open position on the 3 year term on the Zoning Board expiring at the end of 2024.

David made a motion to adjourn. Brian seconded. All in favor.

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