

SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, November 21, 2023 5:30 p.m, Old Schoolhouse Common and Zoom

Present: Selectboard members Richard Baker and Justin Campbell; Town Clerk Bobbi Brimblecombe; Scott Franks (Property Manager); John Schmeltzer (Deputy Commissioner, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)); J. Bradley Materick and Bob Popp (Conservation Commission); Tim Maclay, Tom Maclay; Christopher Martin; Chelsea Hammer (Marshfield Convenience Plus)

At 5:35 p.m. the meeting was called to order by Chair Richard Baker

Changes or additions to the agenda: Emissions reduction grant, Class IV Road Policy

Review and approval of minutes: The Board approved the minutes of the November 7 meeting with minor corrections.

Public Comment:

Old Schoolhouse Common: The Board received a quote from Northern Basement Systems to install a sump pump in the elevator shaft. Scott Franks recommended going ahead with the project. We will need to hire an electrician to install an outlet. Scott recommends doing several electrical jobs at the same time, to save permit fees. Rich moved to approve the proposal; Justin seconded – all in favor. Other possible jobs include additional outlets in the Library and Town Clerk’s Office, installation of a water bottle filling station, and changeover from fluorescent to LED lights (the fluorescent light bulbs will no longer be available after January 1).

Scott reported that the heating system needs a lot of work. The heater in the Library is not working even though the water in the system is hot. The Board agreed that we need one HVAC company to work on the system. Scott will make some contacts. The Town has a grant for an energy audit and will wait for the results of the audit to decide about replacing the oil boiler.

Scott reported that the generators have all been serviced.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program: Justin explained that the project at Marshfield Convenience Plus has been approved. The estimated total cost of the project is 146,254.00. The property owner’s share would be 36,563.50. Justin explained that we are not clear about how to administer the work. Chelsea stated that they already have a contractor on board for the project. She asked whether FEMA would be able to help with the costs. Bobbi explained that the FEMA Public Assistance program only covers town properties. Justin plans to ask if we can provide alternate specifications because he feels that there are locations where a smaller job may be enough. Bobbi explained that the procurement guidelines are not clear and we don’t know whether her contractor would be eligible to bid if he helped with the specifications.

John Schmeltzer explained that DEC has been looking at ways to help towns and property owners. He stated that DEC is looking at helping towns that don’t have the bandwidth to administer the

Emergency Watershed Protection Program. He noted that there is some money available in the projects for technical assistance. John indicated that the Rivers Management section has issued a permit for next flood measures. Chelsea explained that the river bank has eroded more and the fuel company is no longer wanting to deliver fuel. Rich asked if the issue is the tank or the delivery trucks. She stated that the tractor trailer drivers are not comfortable bringing a full load in case anything happens with the tank but they could do smaller loads with a smaller truck.

John has also talked to the State's underground storage tank folks. At this time, the tanks have not been red-tagged. Chelsea explained that according to S.B. Collins, the tanks are anchored to prevent them from lifting but that would not prevent them from sliding down the bank.

John explained that the NRCS has proposed one solution but there may be another solution. He suggested that they might want to talk to their contractor about what it would cost to do the work themselves, to see if it would be comparable to what their share would be under the program. He reminded her to work with the State's river engineer if they go that route, to make sure the work would be approved.

Bobbi explained to Chelsea that the property owner will be expected to pay their share of the project up front. John explained that there may be additional engineering costs for the property owner as well, over and above the amount that the NRCS will reimburse.

John explained that he is trying to figure out how to help towns with the projects and paperwork. Justin explained that he is not in a position to project manage all of these projects. He is planning to talk with the Regional Planning Commission to see if they can help. Bobbi asked if the State could be the sponsor. John feels that it would not be efficient.

Rich stated that if the state could even help us with the procurement process for engineering services, that would be helpful.

Justin will talk to the EWPP representative tomorrow. John will talk to the DEC business manager to see how they can help. Justin will ask about procurement rules. John stated that the state has contracts with civil engineers that the town may be able to use – he will find out.

Tim Maclay explained that at their project, much of the cost is building a road to take the material offsite. It would be much less expensive if they were allowed to move the debris away from the river but leave it on their property. John will follow up with the river engineers to see if it would be allowed. Tom Maclay stated that he would like to build a block wall. John suggested that they talk to the river engineer about that possibility.

Martin Bridge Management Plan: Brad Materick explained that at the last meeting, the Conservation Commission discussed a proposed plan for the previously hayed areas. He made minor changes to one point, to clarify that the Selectboard makes final decisions, and equipment might be needed to restore one of the fields to pre-flood condition.

He put the proposed plan on Front Porch Forum. He got only two comments, and they said that the plan looks good.

Justin has reservations about adopting this section of the plan. He likes seeing the fields mowed. It is a historical use. It is a benefit to the town to support a working model for town land. He likes the working model in the Stranahan Town Forest, with haying and sugaring and trails. He would like to see the town promote mixed use of the property at the covered bridge as well. He appreciates the work that went into the plan. He feels that the proposed soft edges could happen in other areas of the property without stopping mowing of the upper fields. He is in favor of continuing to hay the land as he has been doing, noting that a buffer has been established around sensitive areas. He would like to see a contract similar to the one in the Stranahan Town Forest. He feels that the land is an important resource and he would like to see the activity supported rather than limited. He feels that if the acreage is shrunk as much as proposed, haying would not be economically viable.

He noted that there is nothing in the contract to explain how the town would pay for the selective cutting/mowing that is advocated in the plan; the fields are being kept open now with no cost to the town.

Chris Martin hays the field in the Stranahan Town Forest. He does not have a written contract but he waits to do the first cut after the fourth of July based on conversations with the Conservation Commission. Tim stated that he tries to hay the covered bridge property before June 1st.

Tim has a problem with the recommended soft edges. When they walked around, they wanted a 6' buffer but in the plan it says 10'. He has already given up 50' along the river. Brad explained that the 50' buffer between the hay field and the river is an area where they have been working with the Friends of the Winooski to restore a vegetative riparian buffer. Along the side towards the railroad bed, there is a rare sedge that should be protected.

Rich asked what the purpose is of not mowing fields 2 and 3. Brad explained that they are trying to balance all of the uses. He stated that for some years, not all of the fields were being hayed; they were just brush hogged once in a while. He explained that the areas outside these three fields is either steep or wet. Justin feels that those areas may be more appropriate for the hand cutting that the commission is advocating. Bob explained that they are trying to balance the recreation component, the conservation component, and the agricultural component. They want to keep the fields open but haying is a pretty intensive way to keep the fields open, and destroys habitat. The soft edges are much better for wildlife habitat. The rest of the land is forest or wetland, not upland open land.

Justin explained that the Village has acreage that they manage with logging. He wondered if any logging could be done or if there is a forest management plan. He feels that there is potential to maintain those blends on the rest of the property. Brad explained that Ed Jalbert has written a forest management plan but nothing was ever done with it. They intend to have it updated as part of the management plan.

Rich asked Tim about the hay value. Tim stated that one of the fields is not very good. Rich wondered if there is a compromise. He asked whether Tim would be willing to hay field 1 and 2, and brush hog field 3 every few years.

Brad explained that fields 2 and 3 do not need to be brush hogged in the next year or two, so we have some time to figure out how to pay for the brush hogging.

Rich asked if it would be a benefit to log and increase the size of field 3 to increase the size of the open land. Brad explained that their goal is to do the least intensive management as possible.

Justin feels that it makes fiscal sense to have town-owned land be working land. He thinks it make sense to wait and review the entire plan. He noted that the logging that the Village has done has been a big asset to the Village. We suffer from a lack of tax base due to the amount of state forest and conserved land, and that impacts our economic viability.

Rich asked how much it would cost to brush hog field 3. Tim and Chris estimated it would be \$500. Justin explained that brush hogging should still be done every other year, so not much different from haying. Bob explained that the brush hogging would be done in the fall.

Tom Maclay asked what affect the plan would have on visitors, if they couldn't walk around as much because the fields would be allowed to grow up. Brad explained that field 2 would be managed as a grassland, and the future plan will include more mowed paths than they have now.

Michele agrees with Justin that we have a lot of conserved and limited use land in Marshfield, and she wonders why that land is not being managed for habitat, instead of taking these working fields out of production. She noted that there will be more public undeveloped land in the future when the buyouts happen, and that property will not be earning any taxes.

Chris stated that Tim is the only person who would ever consider haying this because it is so difficult to access; Tim has access because he is the adjoining landowner. When Tim no longer wants to hay, it isn't likely that anyone else will. He noted that things change and values change, so what we do today, plans we make, will change. The next group of people will see things differently.

Justin noted that we have an existing use and he is reluctant to stop that use. The other issues are being addressed, there is compromise. Bob stated that they are not talking about stopping the use but limiting it. He stated that this property is valuable to wildlife because of the setting along the river.

Tim stated that Field 1 can not be hayed for a year or two because it has so much silt on it and so many ruts. If he was allowed, he would harrow the field, drag it, and seed it. He noted that there is a lot of reed canary grass there, and if it is allowed to set seed, it makes the hay worthless. He tries to mow before June 1st to allow any disturbed bobolinks to recreate their nests.

Brad explained that the goal is to have a wide range of habitats, to promote a variety of wildlife and particularly birds.

Rich asked the Conservation Commission to consider the town as a whole, and look at the amount of former farmland that is now just brush hogged. He suggested that they should take the comments into consideration and decide whether they want to come back with a revised plan, or the same plan.

Tim explained that it would not be viable to mow just field 2 next year, because of the expense that he will undertake to seed field 1. The Conservation Commission is also looking at a plan to restore the hayfield. Bobbi mentioned that the expense may be reimbursable by FEMA.

Justin moved to continue in 2024 with Tim's existing haying plan to hay field 2 and 3. Michele seconded. Justin and Michele voted yes, Rich voted no. The motion carried.

Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund eligibility: If the Town meets all of the conditions, we will be eligible for the highest reimbursement, 17.5% from the state and 75% from FEMA; otherwise the state share will be 12.5%.

Gym: The gym will remain closed until the floor can be repaired.

Holt Road: The Board approved having "one lane bridge ahead" signs installed.

Homeland Security Grant: We don't have an eligible project.

December Meeting Schedule: Rich will zoom into the first meeting December and miss the second meeting.

Railroad Bed: The Board approved an additional \$1,500 for repairs to the parking area. It will be paid for out of the recreation grant.

VOREC Grant: Rich walked the nature trail and does not feel that there is a way to reroute the trail because the land that is further from the river is wet. The Town will not apply.

Flood Repairs: Justin has a request for qualifications that he is working on for engineering for the bridges, and for a landscape architect to plan for repairs at the Old Schoolhouse Common property.

Expenses, Permits & Payroll: Selectboard members read and approved reports for General Expenses and Payroll.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Bobbi Brimblecombe, Town Clerk

The foregoing is a true copy of the Minutes of the November 21, 2023 Selectboard Meeting.

A True Record. Attest, _____, Town Clerk
