

Dorset Selectboard Meeting Minutes

January 16, 2024

Members present: Megan Thorn, Jim Salsgiver, Frank Parent, Liz Ruffa

Members Absent: Henry Chandler

Others present: Rob Gaiotti, Jim Mirenda, Amanda Penge, Dorie Morgantini, Ben Weiss, Stephanie de Sibour, iPhone, Besty's iPhone, Don, Mark Phillips, Roger & Gay Squire.

December Meeting Minutes:

Date correction to December meeting minutes; Frank Parent moved and Jim Salsgiver seconded motion carried 4-0.

Public Comment:

Questions about 85 Benedict Lane from Amanda Penge with regard to the zoning permit status of the property moving from residential to commercial.

Housing Task Force Update:

Liz Ruffa presented the Housing Committee update. Cat Bryars from Shires Housing spent the meeting with the group and great discussions were had. The group has broken out 4 categories to pursue: 1. Housing trust, 2. Raptor Lane, 3. Infrastructure 4. Land use changes. Jim Salsgiver asked about community housing trusts and what is needed to start them up etc. Manchester is pursuing a similar community housing trust. Liz Ruffa requested approval from the Selectboard to add 4 more meetings to the Housing Committee schedule. When it was initially set up they envisioned 3-4 meetings. Megan Thorn inquired about housing trust and the process. Liz Ruffa noted that the Town is looking to spark the process but not become a builder or realtor etc. Status of the housing study noted. Jim Salsgiver noted about the BCRC study on the website and getting it out to the community via the newsletter. Jim Salsgiver moved and Frank Parent seconded to continue the Task Force through the next 3-4 meetings into spring 2024, motion passed 4-0.

FY25 Town Budget Hearing:

Rob Gaiotti presented the budget highlights for the FY25 town budget year. Noted Changes & New Expense: Town Clerk Succession Plan/ Full time Assistant continued through 2024 election.

Highway Projects & Equipment:

- Pave Dorset Village – after waterline work, hoping to save the Fire District a decent amount of money on the resurfacing costs for the large project (\$75,000-\$100,000+)

- Partner with Long Trail School to pave remaining portion of Paul's Way
- Funding to pave Kirby Hollow Road portions
- Work with DMPA to prep Village for sidewalk work (7th year)
- Replace single axle and recondition a tandem dump
- Possible Brookside Drive Road extension (if FEMA buyout occurs).

New Town Office Design/ Permitting

- Bond Payment Full amount = \$264,715.20 (4% for 30 years) (the payment declines over time; average payment will be around \$170,000). This line item goes from 125k to 264k, which represents a 4.9% total budget increase from FY24
- Will continue exploring costs and plans for improvements to the current Town Office (soon to be East Dorset Town Green).

Personnel:

- Wage changes reflect a 3% cola/ merit increase for FY25
- CPI is nearly 5% currently
- Healthcare 90% Employer & 10% employee, about a 6% increase in costs with some moving around of plan type etc. We are adding an HRA benefit for those shifting to the Medi-gap plan, the Town still saves some money.
- Unemployment Insurance and reporting requirements start 7/1/24, we are purchasing UI through the VLCT trust. This will allow us to dissolve our UI fund and utilize these funds to offset expense in FY25 (there is a town meeting article related to this).

Misc:

- Law Enforcement costs are increasing from 20-30%. New Sheriff has had to adjust contract hourly rate to be in line with what is realistic.
 - ARPA Planning: \$582,000 Total
 - All funds must be obligated in 2024, spent by 2026.
 - Obligated - Town Office Solar: \$125,000 (w possible 30% direct pay from Feds)
 - Other Options:
 - East Dorset Green (old Town Office site): \$175,000 – remove building, turn to green space and add small pavilion and expanded playground/recreation
 - Route 30 Path Design/Planning or matching grants
 - Housing Efforts/Raptor Lane
- EV Chargers for Raptor Lane

Detailed Breakdown View:

Selectboard: small decline

Town Manager: 4% increase mainly due to wage changes

Town Clerk & Elections: 5.2% increase due to wage changes/ general election

Treasurer & Audit: 1.1% increase due to audit expense

Assessors: Flat

Planning & Zoning: 5% increase related to ZA job having more work

Town Offices: large increase Town Office bond payment boosted up to \$264,000

Public Safety: 7% increase – Sheriff contract going up.

Insurance: 6.2% increase total, PACIF rates up, healthcare going up

General Services: small decline

Budgeted Appropriations: Increase due to shifting of small voter items over.

Highway: 1.3% increase due to paving, wages etc.

Voter Approved Appropriations: 6% increase due to raising and new organizations

Overall, it represents an 8.4% increase in expenses from year to year, grand list is expected to increase which could lower the tax increase to around 6-7%

Projected tax rates: \$0.3714 Last Year \$0.3515

$\$0.0199 \times \$350,000$ house = \$69.65 year to year town tax increase (likely lower due to GL)

Short Term Rental Ordinance Discussion:

Rob Gaiotti presented a memo on STRs: Vermont Towns are now regulating short term rentals (STRs) through ordinances and also zoning bylaw. Ordinances vary widely, some ordinances are simple and require STRs to be aware of and follow the applicable State laws enforced by the Division of Fire Safety. Other ordinances are much more involved with requirements that go beyond the State code requirements.

The BCRC recently noted that there could be as many as 90 STRs in Dorset available for rent currently. That represents about 7% of the housing stock being used as STRs. It also should be noted that around 55% of the housing stock is used by primary residents and 45% is used by non-residents (includes STRs and traditional second homes).

Hosted vs. Un-hosted – A few of the regulations make a distinction between hosted (owner lives there) and un-hosted (owner does not live there). It's unclear how many units in Dorset are hosted vs. un-hosted.

Fees – Typically all ordinances charge annual fees to STR owners. The fees vary from \$150 for “hosted” and \$300 for “un-hosted” to \$100 per bedroom (4-bedroom house = \$400 per year). If Dorset is home to 75-90 STRs these fees could potentially represent \$20,000 to \$30,000+ in annual revenue (assuming 75-100% collection rate).

Enforcement – the ordinances also vary widely in what the Town enforces. Those regulations with more local requirements obviously require more attention and enforcement. Typically, the Zoning Administrator is tasked with enforcement.

Insurance – most ordinances include a requirement for appropriate insurance to be carried by the property owner.

Capacity – most ordinances define the capacity, usually 2 people per bedroom. Some ordinances cap the capacity at a specific number (8-10 people) regardless of the number of bedrooms. There are often concerns with properties exceeding the capabilities of their private septic systems if too many people are in the house. The Town does not regulate water/wastewater.

Impacts on long term rentals - it’s hard to determine how many of the 90 STRs would be possible long-term rentals but a safe guess is 20-30%. This puts the STR impact on long term rentals in the 20-30 units that are not available for long term rent because they are being used as STRs. This likely coalesces

Other considerations – Noise (we don’t really have tangible complaints relating to this), frequent calls for service (mainly public safety, fire and police), Positive impacts related to the local economy – much of Dorset’s economy revolves around real estate (selling it, taking care of it etc.).

Manchester Village has a good ordinance to model from if we move forward developing one (attached).

Discussion ensued about the issue. Frank Parent noted that he thought the “purpose” described in the Chester Ordinance was a good fit for Dorset. Megan Thorn noted that the Manchester Village Ordinance was also a good example. It was the consensus of the Board to have a draft ordinance created for review at a future meeting.

Old Business/ New Business 1-16-23

New Town Office

Permitting will take place in January through April; Design is largely completed. Naylor & Breen will begin bidding around February 1st.

Read Farm Lane (No Change)

We await the final decision from FEMA related to the increased costs of the buyout. The State has told us to get a closing attorney on board, and that they would expect a decision by the end of the year.

Route 30 Village Concerns:

We will be removing the Village speed signs soon for winter weather. FYI – we need to apply for right of way permits with the State when we put them back out next spring.

Little Mad Tom/ Tennis Way:

Continued work to coordinate with permitting agencies and property owners on Tennis Way to make the berm repair on the river. As reported last week, we have received the Army Corps and Rivers permits. We await the USFS special use permit. We have also solicited a price from Herrmann Construction to make the repair and the estimate is \$10,000 to \$15,000. This is a very good value and we are fortunate that Herrmann is available. We are also requesting assistance from VTrans financially. Hopefully we will be able to split the costs 50/50 at worst. We estimate the berm repair will solve the problem for a 10–30-year time frame.

Upper Hollow Lot:

Test Pits were positive, and will begin to look into local permits to confirm site feasibility.

New Business:

Sediment Study:

On 12/26 we met with property owners on Benedict Road and Josh Carvajal the stream alteration permit staff. A lot was discussed and property owners are very concerned with the continued flooding of the area even under the smaller rain events.

Discussion was had around the Town developing a sediment study that defines the river bed level in relation to the VTrans and Town bridges nearby. If the study shows that sediment needs to be removed to return the river to the scope of when the bridges were built, than ANR would allow for a sizable amount of sediment to be removed. The Town of Bennington has an active sediment plan for the Roaring Branch and is allowed to remove material when they document it. The downside is that this study could show that not much material is needed to be removed or ANR could deny the permit. Doing further research on this. The study is likely to cost \$20-30,000 and we need a funding source and some assurances that it will lead to actual sediment removal.

PC Letter – Board changes:

Attached is a letter from the Planning Commission related to changing our board structure from PC/ZBA to PC/DRB.

January 16, 2024 Finance Report:

Delinquent Taxes:

\$97,229 as of 1/12/24, last year \$120,524

FY24:

We are 57% expended at the 58% mark in the fiscal year. A few non-profit appropriations were paid out. Monthly expenses like payroll, insurance, utilities. Early winter has been mild, little material and overtime costs yet.

Sinking Fund Balances:

ARPA: \$436,500

Reappraisal: \$195,044

Equipment: \$195,044 Highway Paving: \$203,388

Unemployment: \$50,882 Land Records: \$30,533

Town Buildings: \$11,383 Highway Bridges: \$10,141

Debt: Equipment Loan: \$0 2021 Town Office Bond: \$3,600,000 (bond rate: 4.01%)

Assets: 10 acres Upper Hollow Road / 308 acres Raptor Lane

Town Manager's Report 1-16-24:

Highway:

- Winter Road treatment total so far: 13 (this covers anytime we plow or put down salt/stone on roads). Typically around 30-40 events in a winter.
- Equipment maintenance

Misc.:

- DFD is applying for construction permits to possibly add 500-750k in additional work to the current project. This will allow them to maximize grants.
- PACIFIC meetings in Montpelier
- The Housing Committee Meetings – group is making good progress. Next meeting is February 21st.
- FY25 Budget work/ Town Meeting preparation
- Route 30 Pathway final draft almost ready. Dubois & King will present the final report at the 2/20 Board Meeting.
- FEMA reimbursement work continues for the July storm. Total damages are around \$30,000.
- Site visits to Tennis Way berm and the Battenkill flood chute area.
- Working with VTrans to hopefully cover some of the costs related to repairing the Tennis Way berm.
- East Dorset Village ice rink is up and hopefully will be ready for skating next week.
- Work related to STRs for the 1-16 meeting.

Liquor License Approval:

Frank Parent moved and Liz Ruffa seconded convene as the Liquor Control Board. Frank Parent moved and Jim Salsgiver seconded to approve the Liquor License for Jiffy Mart, motion passed 4-0.

Frank Parent moved and Liz Ruffa seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:38pm. motion passed 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rob Gaiotti, Town Manager