

Selectboard Regular Meeting

Monday, January 22, 2024

Chris Letourneau Meeting Room and via Zoom

Minutes

Zoom Details:

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6165843896?pwd=STduU2JzTmpiVmE1MXZSaWZWLzVadz09

Meeting ID: 616 584 3896 | Passcode: 5243524

Dial by your Location: 1 929 205 6099 (New York)

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CALL TO ORDER 12 13

- Selectboard Present: Devon Thomas Chair, Jamie Comstock, Carl Rosenquist, Nicholas
- Selectboard Zoom: Shannon Jenkins Vice-Chair
- **Staff Present:** Dawn Penney, April Edwards, Doug Bergstrom
- Staff Zoom: Cheryl Letourneau
- Public Present: Ken Minck, Terry Cleveland, Fred Grimm, Marty Jansen, Heather Dunsmore, Heather Grimm, Robert Giroux
- Public Zoom: Karen Heinlein-Grenier, Bridget Stone, Frank Gore, Valerie Keller, Kristina Senna, Jana Thuesen, Sue Webster, Sarah Savich, Johnny Chagnon
- **6:00 p.m.** D. Thomas called the meeting to order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE 23

CHAIR UPDATE 24

D. Thomas informed the public if they wanted to make a statement with respect to DEI they could make it during public comment. His plan was to keep the comments to only board members during that time on the agenda.

ADDITIONS, DELETIONS, OR CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

N. Martin made a motion to add the Certificate of Highway Mileage to the agenda, C. Rosenquist seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

SELECTBOARD MINUTES AND WARRANTS

A. Approval of Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes for 01/08/2024

- C. Rosenquist made a motion to approve the 01.08.2024 meeting minutes with corrections, N. Martin seconded. All in favor, motion carried.
 - B. Approval of Warrant #38 Corrected to Warrant #1
 - Discussion was had on Warrant #38 being renumbered to Warrant #1 due to starting new number for the 2024 bills.
 - C. Rosenquist made a motion to approve Warrant #1, N. Martin seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT (For items not on agenda)

All participants must clearly state their names. Appropriate actions will be considered once the Selectboard has reviewed the information provided and necessary subsequent research.

- H. Dunsmore asked N. Martin if he is running again. N. Martin said he has not yet decided but members of the public have put out petitions on his behalf.
- B. Dunsmore expressed disappointment that the board has said that no one can comment about DEI during that part of the agenda. She said it has been a flawed process. She feels that people who did not agree with D. Thomas' views were run off a committee. She also brought up that no one has brought up how much this is going to cost the taxpayers. The constitution gives everyone equal rights. She believes that DEI is a way of singling people out and has watched this happening in Burlington and does not want Georgia to be like that.
- D. Penney reports that S. Jenkins has notified the board that she will be on Zoom in about 20 minutes.
- H. Grimm said that anything that is on an agenda the public is permitted to speak about. She does not think it is legal for the board to say they cannot comment. D. Thomas said they are within their rights; people are still given the right to comment. It was made clear that the public wanted to be at the DEI meeting, and you reported that it was a 3-minute meeting. Now you state that no one can comment. She reported that this was not transparent. D. Thomas said the statement is recorded and part of the packet.
- C. Rosenquist said originally it was presented as a statement and in the last week it has become a policy. He does not understand how this happened. D. Thomas said this is not the time it will be debated.
- T. Cleveland thanked the board for taking on a DEI statement and offered to help.
- F. Grimm commented on the DEI as a statement versus policy change on the agenda. You are not following the policy of implementing a policy. D. Thomas said he wants it to be a policy and he will say why.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

9. BOARD BUSINESS (Public comment on agenda items limited to 5 minutes)

- A. Personnel Policy Firefighter pay rate Action.
- C. Letourneau said there was a motion to amend the pay scale for the firefighters by D. Penney when she was on the board that was not put into the policy. She is asking for a motion to put that previous motion into the current policy. N. Martin said the policy does not align with the current pay. C. Letourneau confirmed.

• C. Rosenquist moved to approve the motion made by D. Penney of the previous board to update the firefighters' pay in the personnel policy, N. Martin seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

B. Adopt the revised Trail Ordinance - Action

- C. Letourneau says the fine went from \$100 per day to up to \$800 per day. The attorney updated and drew up the documents.
- N. Martin made a motion to adopt the revised travel on trail ordinance, D. Thomas seconded. D. Thomas, J. Comstock and N. Martin are in favor, C. Rosenquist abstained, motion carried.

C. Ken Minck - GCC Grant - Action

- K. Minck was sent a grant application by C. Letourneau. K. Minck said he is here to say the grant has a 20% in kind with a worst case of \$10,000 match. N. Martin asked if that would have to be paid in 2024. K. Minck said the approvals will be October 2024, but has not heard when the 20% would be due.
- C. Rosenquist asked what the grant would be for. K. Minck answered, a walking path to connect trail #4 and Russell Green nature area and maybe some money for the bridge that got washed out. He is not sure if anything can be added. C. Rosenquist confirmed that ARPA money was allocated \$10,000 to the repair, could you use some of that money for the in kind. K. Minck said that was up to the board. C. Rosenquist said that should be able to be used and then you do not have to come to the board for more money.
- Discussion was had on time limits for allocation of funds.
- B. Dunsmore said she thought K. Minck was asking if he needed approval and she had not heard a motion. K. Minck said it would not hurt to have a motion. H. Dunsmore said the board said that C. Letourneau could not apply for a recreation grant without your permission earlier. N. Martin confirmed.
- N. Martin made a motion to approve the Conservation Commission to apply for a trails grant, N. Martin seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

D. Town Warning

- It is noted for voting purposes that S. Jenkins joined the meeting at this point.
- C. Letourneau said they need to have the budget numbers and what is to be raised by taxes to put the numbers in. She also needs to know if article 5 is going to go for a bond, what length and amount because there are many steps to get approval. There will need to be meetings to warn. She said she needs this information tonight to give to the attorney tomorrow. N. Martin asks what the bond options are. K. Minck said it is usually the life of the bridge. D. Bergstrom says the bank will not give numbers until the board approves and then town approval.
- Discussion was had on \$1.3 million or \$1.5 million.
- D. Bergstrom says it is too short and too narrow to qualify for state funding. The idea was to bring it up to standard to qualify in the future. H. Dunsmore asked if the ARPA funds are going to go towards this, it was confirmed.
- K. Minck confirmed this will be done on Australian ballot. C. Letourneau confirmed this is what the attorney wanted.
- N. Martin moved to provide C. Letourneau with the details to cover a bond of 20 years of 1.5 million dollars to cover Rugg Brook Bridge on Mill River Rd, J. Comstock seconded.

- K. Minck asked for the word "replace" to be added to the motion. N. Martin amended his motion to say "replace", J. Comstock seconded the amendment. All in favor of the amendment, amendment carried. All in favor of the original motion, motion carried.
- K. Minck questioned if the funds for the Veterans Memorial were going on the ballot for a reserve fund. D. Bergstrom said he thought they were allocated. J. Comstock said he thought it should be an article on the ballot. C. Letourneau believed that there was excess money from C. Branagan that was put into a fund. A. Edward said it was going into a fund much the same as the GCC to show it is just for the monument and will not roll into the general fund.

E. Budget - Review and Approve

- S. Jenkins asked if all departments were given an updated budget. N. Martin said there were no changes, and it was just fire and highway that made an update.
- D. Bergstrom presented the budget. He started with ARPA.
- D. Bergstrom said there was an 8.85% increase at the end of last meeting, and it is now showing a 9.05% increase with the addition of NEMRC that was missed. Discussion was had on revenue being down, delinquent taxes, state aid to highways, and extra payments made.
- N. Martin said the audit was well worth the money. A. Edwards said some of the items in the audit were identified in 2008.
- B. Stone questioned the library budget and asked if A. Edwards brought the numbers to the selectboard. N. Martin said the original numbers the library presented were a 60% increase. He responded that this is the eleventh hour to be making changes. Discussion was had on departments being invited to budget meetings.
- Discussion was had on \$145,000 going into paving from ARPA and the highway department getting a new truck.
- N. Martin made a motion to approve the 2024 budget as presented; C. Rosenquist seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

F. DEI Statement Policy – Action

- D. Thomas read the policy that S. Jenkins and he worked on, "Policy of Inclusion, the town of Georgia condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age or disability, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community. As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all of its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect this commitment. The Town of Georgia is and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions". He asks that this be a policy because if it was a statement, it would be just words whereas a policy is something that we plan on running this town by. It would go before the community, lawyers and become part of the operating procedure of the town. We can get financial assistance easily by having the lawyers to look over this. He does not believe there is anything in the statement that will interfere with how we are already operating the town.
- C. Rosenquist said he was prepared to move to approve a statement of inclusion tonight but not a policy. He would move to have a statement with one minor change, "The town of Georgia condemns racism and welcomes all law-abiding persons". D. Thomas says he

- understands what he is getting at, he does not agree but he understands. S. Jenkins agrees with D. Thomas.
- D. Thomas made a motion to accept this Policy of Inclusion as written for the Town of Georgia, S. Jenkins seconded.

- C. Rosenquist requested to ask a question. D. Thomas said they are not taking questions. H. Grimm called for a point of order. C. Rosenquist said that is not correct. D. Thomas said they are trying to do a job. H. Grimm called for a point of order. D. Thomas replied, "no thank-you". He said he has gone over the legality of this. H. Grimm said a point of order must be addressed. D. Thomas said the job is to do the business of the town and people are free to observe. They are legally obligated to provide a time to comment and that has been done. H. Grimm called for a point of order.
- D. Thomas called on H. Grimm for her point of order. H. Grimm refers to the Selectboard Rules and Procedures 6.1.2. N. Martin stated in an effort of transparency and inclusion we should always allow public comment, especially for something that was done in three minutes and now has a twist with a policy. He did not like how this played out. S. Jenkins said they have offered public comment on this for a year now. N. Martin said he too was ready to vote, saying a DEI statement is a good thing. He questioned how you enforce a policy, if someone does not follow the policy, then what. D. Thomas said that is why he would see no reason to vote for this. He said that he will provide time to hear from the public but would like to hear from the selectboard first.
- D. Thomas said the reason that people were willing to accept this as a statement is because it is not enforceable. As a policy, the way it is written is open for interpretation, but it is in the books and can be a mantra by which we govern the town. This was not whipped up in three minutes, he said that he and S. Jenkins had over a year to research this. They decided to use the one from Bob Harnish because that is the one that best meets the need. They only needed three minutes to choose.
- N. Martin asked if this was exactly what was sent. D. Thomas confirmed, saying he could send the email. J. Comstock asked if he copied and pasted or if he wrote it out himself. D. Thomas replied that he did not write it out himself, all he added was the town of Georgia. J. Comstock asked to look at that, even though it was nitpicking. He said, "the town of Georgia is and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions" and theirs says, "The Town of blank has and will continue to be" and you changed it from "Declaration" to "Policy". D. Thomas replied that was because what they were asking for was a simple statement that we could sign and be done with. N. Martin said D. Thomas originally asked the committee to go out there and gather information. D. Thomas said he owned that saying he thought it would be more authentic as a policy. J. Comstock said he thought most if not all wanted this. He did not like how this was gone about. He thought the whole committee thing was a bunch of BS. He said they all had their opinions, and they could have done this from the get go. He thinks if they are going to adopt something it should be a declaration because that is what everyone else is doing. We agree as a board that there should be one and we are happy to vote it in. What anyone else does is up to them. The way this was gone about it was not something he was proud of. J. Comstock said he is not behind a policy, but he is behind a statement or declaration or even both. C. Rosenquist agrees. N. Martin also agrees.
- D. Thomas said it is a policy. If it is a statement, it is just words. If we intend on living in this than it should be a policy, which is what he and S. Jenkins agreed on. He agreed that the way in which they went about the DEI process is not something that he is proud of. He

condoned it but it was not initially what he presented. He would have liked to have seen something with more control and focus on what they were trying to get to. The reason why he and S. Jenkins wanted to get this to the board in January was because when they decided to retire the DEI committee, they wanted to show them that when you are focused and keep the task at hand it does not take a long time. If the board wants something with a little bit of teeth and indicates that you are honest about what we say, then you should vote for this. If you want to say something, put it on the record and then forget it ever happened then we can make a statement. J. Comstock asked why they would ever forget that it ever happened and what teeth would you put into it. There is nothing we can do as a society; if there is a hate crime, that is a crime, and it has nothing to do with us. D. Thomas said the only thing it says is that it is against our policy as a town to be openly discriminatory. C. Rosenquist says that is what our personnel policy says. D. Thomas said the personnel policy is going through a review and a future board may want to have a change of heart, this would make it harder for them. This shows that we are being authentic and trying to do something.

- N. Martin confirms that the D. Thomas had a different charge of the committee than his charge was here. D. Thomas confirms that to be true.
- S. Jenkins wants to know if they can put a limit on the number of comments and time given to this because she wants to be able to wrap this up. D. Thomas said that he is going to let people say their peace. S. Jenkins said that was fine, she was just hoping to keep it to a limit.
- H. Grimm said she found it disrespectful that D. Thomas said he could do the job that he gave the committee better. She said that was not kind to say to people who gave their time. That was rude. If you go to the Ethics Policy it says, "no public official, employee or volunteer shall discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex" she said that is a policy that you have. The personnel policy also speaks of this. This is currently in place in two policies already. S. Jenkins replied that was just for hired people. H. Grimm then said to D. Thomas that he had said he and S. Jenkins were going to meet to talk about getting a statement and not to create a policy. It should have notified the public and the rest of the board. The board should work as a whole. S. Jenkins said that is what they are doing. D. Thomas agreed, saying that is what they are currently doing by bringing it up to the board for approval. D. Thomas agreed that it is in the Ethics Policy, and this reaches further. He wonders if we already have it what is the pushback. C. Rosenquist asked why they should repeat it.
- H. Dunsmore asked if other towns have it as a policy or a statement. D. Thomas said most have it as a statement. It is he and S. Jenkins that are proposing a policy.
- H. Dunsmore said she does not have a problem with this. She does not treat anyone differently and does not post things about people publicly. Her problem is how D. Thomas and S. Jenkins went about this and making this into a policy. It appears you are doing something crocked. J. Chagnon called for a point of order saying this should be brought to Executive Session. D. Thomas responded "no" to the point of order. H. Dunsmore continued saying if the board wanted to make a difference it is what you do with it, education could be better. D. Thomas replied saying a statement or policy does not change how the town does things. He thinks a policy is a more authentic way of doing things. He feels as though if the board wants it to be a statement, then they can vote down this motion.
- J. Comstock asks why they cannot do that with the statement. He said he feels like he is being cornered. He supports this but he said he feels as though it was presented as though the people who are against the way in which it was presented means they are against DEI

and he does not like that. He said he supports this and says he works in a hospital because they support this and take it very seriously. He does not like the feeling of being painted into a corner of, if you are not with us you are against us. S. Jenkins asked if they could vote in a statement and work their way into a policy. D. Thomas agreed, saying he is not trying to put them in a corner. He just felt like a policy is more sincere. J. Comstock said this is strong enough.

- D. Penney read a statement from J. Thuesen from Zoom, "Policy implies that there can be consequences to being an open bigot. Statement does not. It is absolutely deplorable that Carl would like to add "only law-abiding citizens' and I certainly hope that the town residents remember this in March. This completely negates the point of INCLUSION. Carl's added phrase also is a constitutional violation, since he is so hell bent on following the constitution." D. Thomas said he did not want to focus on individuals right now if that is okay.
- N. Martin said for three months the board gave it their all. This is a challenging topic. He felt that jumping from a declaration to a policy will only magnify the frustrations of many. He is behind a statement, but a policy is for the workplace.
- T. Cleveland suggests putting it in as a statement and she is willing to help. This can keep moving forward. J. Comstock agreed saying he did not feel as though a policy is where they should be. D. Thomas said they just did not want it to go away.
- J. Comstock said they can only do what they can do. D. Thomas said that is what S. Jenkins and he wanted but they are willing to negotiate. J. Comstock said that he feels a statement and a committee is a move in the right direction.
- F. Grimm shared a concern that the chair has shown a bias towards people that do not share his viewpoint by not even inviting people with differing opinions to the table. He said that is not inclusive. He does not think anyone in the room would treat anyone differently. He asked about gender identity has changed over the years; do you have room for that. He questioned religion, would they welcome someone from ISIS here. J. Chagnon called for a point of order. D. Thomas said he would let F. Grimm finish. He said the two people who have been pushing for this the most are the two people who have been interrupting people the most.
- J. Comstock said if there is a committee after this it should be as structured as possible.
- D. Thomas asked S. Jenkins if they wanted to call for a vote. He said he would be willing to withdraw his motion of a policy.
- D. Bergstrom informed the board that if they were to put a policy into action, that would be it. He stated that usually a policy gets sent to legal first and then brought back to the board for adoption. D. Thomas said by sending it to legal they would be able to get the fee waived.
- D. Thomas said that it sounded like the board was more interested in a statement than a policy. He asked if it would be okay to withdraw the motion of a policy and make another one for a statement. S. Jenkins agreed.
- D. Thomas withdrew his motion.

- D. Thomas made a motion to accept the declaration from Vermont Declaration of Inclusion.org, J. Comstock seconded.
- H. Dunsmore speaks for K. Senna who asked about the results of the town plan where this question was asked.
- B. Dunsmore asked about the additions that were made in the motion.

- D. Bergstrom said question number 19 on the town plan survey read, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A community is improved by celebrating diversity and welcoming all persons regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, or disability." The categories to be able to answer were strongly agree with 47.2%, agree with 20.8%, neutral with 17.87%, disagree 4.8%, and strongly disagree with 0.33%. There were 375 people who responded to that question.
 - J. Chagnon shared that he thought starting with a statement is a good place. Then you can build on it.
 - J. Comstock said he thought this was a good start.
 - C. Rosenquist said he would vote for this in if it contained "law-abiding citizens". He said he does not know why we would welcome into town drug dealers, rapists, or a bunch of thugs. D. Thomas said he would not want that because it would seem as though we did not want people from out of the country here in town. S. Jenkins questioned if law-abiding means someone who got a DUI when they were 18, someone in trouble with Wildlife, someone who got in trouble at 16. She does not think it is relevant here.
 - F. Grimm asked what if a person's personal religion was against civil law, like slaughtering a goat.
 - D. Thomas called for a vote on the declaration as presented on the website. D. Thomas, S. Jenkins, J. Comstock, and N. Martin voted yes, C. Rosenquist abstained. Motion carried.
 - G. Certificate of Highway Mileage Action Addition
 - N. Martin made a motion to approve the Certificate of Highway Mileage with the year ending February 10, 2024, Class 2 roads 19.53 miles, Class 3 roads 43.64, State Highway roads 17.622 miles, class 4 roads 8.23 legal trails 2.10 miles, J. Comstock seconded. All in favor, motion carried.
 - C. Rosenquist asked if D. Thomas signed a letter to go to Perrigo. C. Letourneau will send it to him.

10. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, TREASURER AND SELECTBOARD SUB COMMITTEES' REPORTS

- A. Town Administrator
 - C. Letourneau reports that she will rejoin the Georgia Community Events Committee again. She welcomed any members to attend the meeting at 01.30.2024. She reported still getting the town report together and also gearing up for multiple elections, saying this will be a busy year.
- B. Treasurer

- D. Bergstrom reports that A. Edwards closed out 2023.
- 338 C. Buildings
 - Nothing to report
- 340 D. Budget and Finance
 - N. Martin said the budget was presented earlier. They will need to start working on the Capital Budget next.

343 344	• D. Bergstrom reported the need to have documents for the Town Report in by Friday. N. Martin will make revisions and get them back to him.
345	E. Personnel
346	 Focus back here now and move forward.
347	F. Public Works/Grounds/Recreation
348	 Nothing
349	G. Committees at the direction of the chair
350	 Nothing
351	11. OTHER
352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365	 F. Grimm asked about the \$80,000 to the beach. N. Martin said it was allocated currently. H. Dunsmore asked S. Jenkins if she planned on running again. She responded that it was a very unpleasant year. It was the worst year of her life, and she said she will not run again. V. Keller said it is hard to follow the Selectboard meetings. She asked that the recordings be put up more quickly. She thanked everyone for their work. D. Bergstrom said he uploads the LCATV link the same day we get it. He spoke of the time it takes to transfer. V. Keller asked if it could be budgeted for. H. Grimm asked if \$80,000 was ARPA. It was said it was, it just had to be allocated. N. Martin reported none of the numbers they reported today had any ARPA monies in them. ARPA will be on a separate list. H. Grimm asked for a survey of the changes that they see at the pavilion, and she is happy to help. B. Dunsmore asked what people are going to say about not having a rec person. N. Martin responded they desperately tried; they made several offers. There were people interested in rec or people who wanted to write grants, but it was hard to find someone with both.
366	12. PLAN NEXT MEETING AGENDA
367	A. 01.29.2023
368	13. EXECUTIVE SESSION (if needed, pursuant to 1 V.S.A sec 313)
369	14. ADJOURN
370 371	 At 9:05 p.m. – C. Rosenquist made a motion to adjourn, J. Comstock seconded. All in favor, motion carried.
372	15. TABLED ITEMS:
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Posted to the Town website.

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375 Signed: Cheryl Letourneau, Town Administrator

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