

Minutes
Select Board Meeting
Town of Coventry
Monday November 6, 2023

This meeting was recorded on Zoom and then posted to YouTube. The link to the Town's YouTube channel is at www.coventryvt.org.

Board Members Present

Scott Morley
Scott Briere
Dan Webster

Town Officials Present

Matt Maxwell, Town Administrator
Kerry Kement, JOP
Deb Tanguay, Town Clerk
Israel Sanville, Planning Commission
Kate Fletcher, DTC
Renee Falconer, Animal Control Officer

Public Present

Phil Marquette
Charlie Pronto, NAS
Jeff Johansen, NAS
James LaPorte
Carleen Leonhart
Deric Lunna
Brian McWalters, VEM
Ethan Burnham

1. Order

Matt called the meeting to order at 5:01 pm. Persons present introduced themselves.

2. Changes or Additions to the Agenda

Deb T has a Grand List no appeal or suit pending document for the board to sign under other business. Scott B would like to raise the limit on the town credit card. These items will be discussed under other business.

3. Allow for public comment

Kerry K asked if the town would be stripping the newly paved roads in town. Matt M responded that we were advised to wait for the spring to do striping as it does not stick well this time of year.

4. Emergency Services – Newport Ambulance

Jeff Johansen and Charlie Pronto were present from Newport Ambulance Service. Charlie explained to the board that with the map Newport was provided, showing how Coventry would like the town split up, that Newport would still be responding to 2/3 of the town. This was determined based on a five year call average. Charlie stated that the Newport and Orleans Ambulance services cannot be compared evenly as Newport has paramedics and Orleans does not. Charlie stated that if the board decided to split up the Ambulance service to the town that 1/3 of Coventry residents would be losing professional services. Jeff J provided the board with a list of equipment that Newport carries and Orleans does not along with services that Newport can provide that Orleans does not have the capability to match. Charlie said that there are areas of Coventry that Orleans can reach quicker, but if a paramedic is needed Newport is called anyway. Scott B stated that his daughter Katelynn did a study comparing the two ambulance services and that he originally believed whatever service could respond the quickest would be the most beneficial, however he was not aware of some of the differences between Newport and Orleans Ambulance. Scott M went over some of the statistics from Katelynn's report with Charlie and Jeff. Jeff J said that Orleans doing a lot of transfers may skew the numbers slightly in regard to total calls. Scott M spoke with Charlie and Jeff about the town Fire service being divided and felt that Ambulance should be done along the same lines. Phil M presented a map to the board and discussed response times to various parts of the Town of Coventry. Dan W and Scott M spoke with Jeff about Newport Ambulance coming to places in Coventry from the Orleans side and not directly from Newport. Charlie mentioned that the timing of all this is not great as NAS had already prepared their budget for the year expecting to cover all of Coventry. Charlie and Jeff provided the board with a cost for coverage of the whole town and a split based on the map provided. Scott B said the decision will be tabled and special meeting will be set this week to make a final decision. The Board thanked Jeff and Charlie.

5. Flood Plain Buyouts

Matt explained the process of the buyouts and introduced Brian McWalters from Vermont Emergency Management to give applicants an idea of the timeline for buyouts. Brian explained that it usually takes about six months to a year for an application to be processed and once it has closed there is a 90 day limit for demolition of the property. Brian stated that VEM will provide all the application information and that property owners may withdraw at any time. Carleen Leonhart asked how the town planned on managing the projects. Will it be done one property per application or will the town submit one application with all the properties included. Brian said the applications can be done individually or as a group. Brian explained how VEM will pay for the buyouts and be the implementing party for any

leg work needed to move the project along. The properties will be assessed using industry standards. Kate Fletcher reminded the board that it is hard to back track on value after something like a flood. James LaPorte asked Brian what would happen to the value of the assessment should another flood occur before the buyouts can take place. Brian said they may need to be reappraised, but in his experience most applicants are satisfied with the value they receive through the buyout. Brian M said the next step would be to get a signed statement of participation from the town and property owners. Scott M asked if the town would be moving as one and Brian said that fewer applications is more efficient, but the town is allowed to make multiple submissions if necessary. Kate F suggested an informational meeting for all that are interested in the buyout program. Scott M instructed Matt M and Phil M, as emergency coordinators, to find every affected property and give them the information they need if they choose the buyout. Scott M will speak with the Fire District.

6. Loose Cows on Airport Road

Renee Falconer, the town animal control officer was present to speak to the board about some cows that continually get out on the Airport Road. Renee would like some guidance from the select board on what she can do as the owners of the cows refuse to make any adjustments to ensure the cows remain on their property. The property owners are Audrey Marsh and Thomas Bezio. Ethan Burnham, who lives nearby on Airport Road, stated that the cows have been causing damage to his property for the last two years. Aside from Mr. Burnham, Renee detailed some of the damage that other property owners on Airport Road have endured at the expense of the loose cows. Renee has spent between 15 and 20 hours on this issue alone and has contacted the Vermont Game Warden Service for assistance. The Game Warden has determined that there is not enough evidence for animal cruelty charges against the cow's owners. The cows currently inhabit four acres of swamp with no shelter available. Ethan B told the board that the cows have damaged an apple orchard on his property and cost him thousands of dollars in expenses. Deb T told the board that the Sheriff's Department was willing to speak with the animal owners about the situation. Scott M said that he would like Renee and the Game Warden to issue tickets to the animal owners for allowing the cows to continually escape and cause a nuisance. Scott M encouraged neighbors who have experienced damage to their property to sue Marsh and Bezio and get the consequence trail moving forward. Ethan B expressed his desire to have the cows removed from 5707 Airport Road

7. Fence Viewer Vacancy

Stewart Maxwell has verbally resigned his position as fence viewer for the Town of Coventry. Scott M made the motion to accept the

resignation. Dan W made the second and the vote was unanimous. The board will consider candidates to appoint to fill the fence viewer vacancies.

8. Cleveland Meeting House

This item was tabled and will be discussed at a later date.

9. NEKO Meeting Recap

Northeast Kingdom Organizing held a meeting in Coventry at the end of October to give residents an opportunity to share their experiences during the July 2023 flooding. Scott M told the board that the meeting was attended by approximately 12 town residents along with some state and local officials. Scott said that we heard from the Coventry Residents in attendance that the town did not do a very good job during the week of the flood. Those sharing felt that the communication and response of the town was lacking. There were some ideas on how to mitigate future flooding and a proposal to form a town flood committee. Scott M told the board that he was in agreement with a lot that was said that evening and that things could have been handled better. Scott M would like to see Coventry evaluate its response as a town and look into emergency interstate access for the Howse Road. Scott M and Phil discussed the possibility of dredging the river that runs next to the village. Phil stated that dredging is part of the ongoing Ice Jam Study. NEKO will be holding a follow up meeting on December 7, 2023.

10. Other Business

The first item under other business was town truck for the Road Crew to minimize the use of the F600 truck. Scott B outline the reasons for purchasing a truck. Scott M felt the idea was good, but does not want to spend any money out of special funds for the purchase. Scott M stated we have a \$60,000 surplus from last years budget that should be used for the truck. Scott B thought the purchase should come from special funds. Scott M would like to Scott B to speak with the town auditors about spending the budget surplus. The second item was a roadside mower rental for the summer of 2024. Scott B would like the cost of a two week rental built into the budget to try a new approach to the roadside mowing, as our current set up is not safe or efficient. Phil M asked if the board had looked into hiring the roadside mowing out for 2024. The board felt the cost for that would be too high. The next item was a request to raise the town credit card limit from \$2500 to \$10,000. Scott B said that the town credit card is the safest way to make certain purchases and \$2500 is too low, especially in an emergency. Scott B made the motion to request a limit increase to \$10,000. Dan W made the second and the vote was unanimous. Deb T had a document for the board to sign concerning the town Grand List. Deb T and the board discussed Coventry Village School being Australian Ballot for all their voting this year and that the board must grant the school

permission to mail out ballots. Deb T would also like to include the town Personnel Policy and the Boilers in the Community Center on the next agenda.

11. Approval on Minutes – 10/16

Scott M made the motion to approve the minutes as written. Dan W made the second and the vote was unanimous/

12. Warrants

Scott M made the motion to accept the Warrants. Dan W made the second and the vote was unanimous.

13. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 7:16pm