

**TOWN OF CLARENDON BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING**  
**REGULAR**  
**January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Selectboard

Mike Klopchin, Chair  
George Ambrose, Clerk  
Robert Congdon  
Cash Ruane  
Art Menard

Heidi Congdon, Treasurer  
Katie Nop, Secretary  
Gloria Menard, Town Clerk  
William Chmielewski, PEG-TV  
Bob Underhill, Lister  
Kevin Peck, Lister  
Jimmy Austin  
Ed Baker  
Shelly Lutz  
Wayne Willhaus  
Bob Bixby  
Teresa Miele  
Janet McCoy  
Jeanie Stimpfel  
Dan Pinkowski  
Kevin Dougherty

**Call to Order**

Chairman Klopchin called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

**Agenda additions/deletions**

The road crew requested that the executive session be cancelled for this meeting due to a long day/night of plowing. Selectman Congdon motioned to remove the executive session from the agenda and Selectman Ruane seconded. All Board members approved.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Selectman Ambrose motioned to approve the Regular Meeting minutes from December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and Selectman Congdon seconded. The motion passed unopposed. Selectman Congdon motioned to approve the FY25 Budget Workshop minutes with any corrections and Selectman Ambrose seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Highway**

*Road Commissioner Report-*

Road Commissioner Ruane said there was brief discussion during budget about purchasing portable traffic lights for job sites. They cost about \$18,000.00. He hopes to have more definite pricing for the next meeting. The advantage of the traffic lights would be the cost savings that would come with this long-term investment. The lights would replace contracting with a flagging company. The road crew wouldn't have to work around the flaggers schedule for projects around town. The cost to hire flaggers has gone up considerably and they're difficult to schedule.

Chairman Klopchin asked if the public had any questions for the Road Commissioner. Jan McCoy commented that she's glad it snowed because her side of town has been so dusty. She

asked if the road crew is able to spray dust control in the winter. Road Commissioner Ruane informed Jan that the equipment is all put up for the winter and the product has to be stabilized for the winter. Jan also asked the Board when the Kingsley bridge plans to be reopened. Chairman Klopchin said he spoke to the one of the guys on site and they were thinking July or August. They were behind schedule due to the flooding that occurred during the summer. Katie will check in with VTRANS and the contractor for an official update.

Shelly Lutz talked with the Board about Rutland Town's upcoming Highway Committee meeting on Jan. 12 at 9am where Quarterline Road maintenance will be discussed. She questioned what the procedure is for coming to a conclusion. Rutland Town said to come with a "best case" proposal. Shelly asked which members will be attending the meeting and what the protocol for negotiating will be. Selectmen Congdon and Menard will be unable to attend but Road Commissioner Ruane, Chairman Klopchin, and Selectman Ambrose will be going to the meeting. Selectman Congdon said that at this point, his understanding is that the Board will be going into it with seeing where Rutland Town is at with a proposal of grading the section (minus material) to make the winter trade more equitable. Shelly reiterated that they know roughly that it will cost Rutland Town \$3500 to plow/salt the section of Creek Road that Clarendon has proposed. She questioned what Clarendon's costs would be to grade that section, say 3x a year. Selectman Congdon asked Road Commissioner Ruane where he was at with his figures. He responded that figures are up in the air due to the new grader. Selectman Congdon said to have at least have some sort of an idea for figures. Selectman Congdon felt that there were bones and structure to start a conversation and see what kind of reaction they receive. Selectman Congdon said the idea would be to have most things hammered out so by the next meeting, there can be finalizing. Chairman Klopchin emphasized the importance of both towns' Road Commissioners being present at the meeting. Chairman Klopchin asked if there were any other questions. Selectman Ambrose questioned the Road Commissioner as to why the new grader made figures uncertain. Road Commissioner Ruane said it will take a bit for the road crew to get used to it timewise.

Selectman Congdon noted that there was insurance info in their packets in regard to a maintenance agreement. He said to definitely have that discussed at the meeting so that can be finalized with whatever proposal materializes. Katie will attend the meeting to take notes and discuss insurance requirements. Selectman Ambrose explained that the 3 Board members won't take any action, it's merely a discussion. Selectman Congdon said that hopefully the 3 board members will hammer out details and the proper protocol would be that at the next SB meeting there will be something in hand for finalizing. Katie noted that VLCT recommends getting an attorney to draft the agreement. Selectman Menard noted that should be considered in the costs.

#### *Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Grant-*

The town was awarded funds from the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. This money is to be put towards Otter Creek debris removal. Katie went through the grant application documents with the Board. She drew their attention to the budget information and budget narrative. The estimated project costs were \$63,580 with construction costs being \$57,800 and the town is responsible for a 25% match. NRCS is offering technical assistance reimbursed up to 100% of 10% of the construction cost. The town will have to hire a third-party engineer for this project because NRCS is too overwhelmed with projects resulting from the summer's flooding. Selectman Congdon questioned the location for debris removal. Road Commissioner Ruane said it was north of the ledges near Alf Strom-Olsen's land. Katie said the NRCS engineer estimated high since he was considering that mats may need to be rented for access. Selectman Congdon clarified the location is South Creek Road; Cash confirmed. Katie said this project is time sensitive; everything must be wrapped up by July 7<sup>th</sup>. The town could request an extension but it's not guaranteed. There's also opportunity to request additional funds if needed, but that's also not guaranteed. Selectman Congdon motioned to have the Board Chairman sign the grant application documents on behalf of the Board and Selectman Ambrose seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

#### *Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities (BRIC) Grant-*

Katie went over the grant pages with the Board, mentioning the importance of reviewing the project scoping page, budget, and timeline pages. The town will be applying for an alternatives analysis on a section of the Cold River. The grant is a 3-year award period, but

the timeline has been broken down to 24 months. The budget right now is \$52,500 with a 25% local match. Katie said the focus area is the Route 7 bridge west towards Otter Creek. Katie said the lady from VEM said that if bids come in higher and the town is struggling to meet the match, they could walk away from the money. The deadline to get this prepared for the State to review is Jan 12. Selectman Ambrose moved to go ahead with the grant and Selectman Congdon seconded. Katie added that the attachments that go along with the grant submission are the town's most recent Hazard Mitigation Plan, The 2013 River Corridor Plans and pictures of the proposed location. All Board members approved the motion.

#### **Approval of Select Board Warrants**

All new warrants and warrants previously signed by the designated Select Board Member were approved and signed by all Select Board Members.

#### **Guests**

N/A

#### **Public Comments**

N/A

#### **Old Business**

N/A

#### **New Business**

The Board received a letter of interest for the vacant Lister position. It was not added to the agenda in time to discuss at tonight's meeting so there was discussion in the office, that because filling the position wasn't an emergent need, it was proposed that the Board could discuss it at next meeting. The Board agreed.

#### **Town Officer's Report**

*Heidi, Treasurer-*

Heidi provided the Board with a copy of the current budget status of the current year that the town is in. The Board also had the comparative budget report in front of them and on the rightest column was the FY25 proposed budget, if the Board approves it. Chairman Klopchin asked what the total difference was from last year. Heidi explained that it's an increase of \$40,000 on current taxes which is a little over 1 cent. That includes a reduction of the fund balance by \$100k. The Board tried to be very conservative with increases given the chatter of the education increase and inflation.

Selectman Ambrose discussed the unfortunate way in which schools are being funded in Vermont. He explained the way state payment works on tax bills. He said the only answer to lower education taxes is consolidation. Shelly Lutz questioned if other towns have had the same conversations or thought processes on consolidating. The Board was unaware. Selectman Ambrose said he had brief conversations with Shrewsbury back when he was on the School Board. Selectman Congdon felt that as long as the legislation requires a unanimous vote amongst the different schools, than there won't be consolidation. Selectman Ambrose explained it has to be a super majority. Jan questioned if there's ever been discussion of having all the towns coming together to have a meeting to discuss pros and cons of consolidation. Selectman Ambrose was unaware of any further conversation since the time of the merger. Selectman Ambrose offered discussing with the superintendent to see if there's been any talk of it.

Wayne Willhaus asked if there's been any calculation done on the actual cost savings, because that's what it will take to get the votes. Selectman Ambrose essentially said no, but with buildings being closed, utility costs are immediately cut, as well as teachers. Shelly Lutz asked why more teachers would be needed. Selectmen Ambrose and Congdon said it's the opposite- less would be needed. Nobody wants that conversation. Selectman Ruane said this needs to be a state-wide initiative. Selectman Congdon agreed but acknowledged that legislators want to be reelected and if they vote to consolidate, they look like traitors to the towns they represent. Selectman Menard said that the teachers' unions are a big thing in Vermont as well. Wayne added that probably about 20% of the people in town

have children in school. The public conversed about the lack of kids riding on the school buses and a lot of parents dropping off kids nowadays. Selectman Congdon added that the other solution is allow for universal school choice and let the free market work it out. Selectman Ambrose agreed and said people will quickly see quality of education and choose the best option.

Heidi said as long as the Board is okay with the budget presented before them, then the office will work on preparing the warning for next meeting. Selectman Congdon also asked to have language prepared for asking the voters to establish a Hazard Mitigation Fund.

*Gloria, Town Clerk-*

Gloria reported that the next election is March 5 and it includes Town Meeting elections and Presidential Primary. If anyone wants a petition, there's petitions going around now. There has to be 20 signatures, it can include your own. Petitions are due back to Gloria on Monday, January 29 at 5PM. Jan McCoy asked if a question about consolidation could be on the ballot to gauge how the public would feel about it. Selectman Congdon said technically non-binding articles are not allowed on the ballot anymore. The Board could consider doing a survey as an additional sheet. Selectman Menard noted that the survey cannot be handed out with the ballot. Jeannie Stimpfel suggested talking to the other district towns to see if they're interested in having a survey as well to collect all the information at once. Selectman Congdon asked Selectman Ambrose to talk with the superintendent to see if other towns would be open to that.

*Katie, Secretary-*

Katie reported that Dave Potter dropped off reports from RCSWD and their budget passed. They have an 8% increase (roughly \$1.9m to \$2.5m). They also underwent an HR audit and the assessment is included in the packet. Katie also posted the engineering RFP for the flood related damage sites. She's already heard back from two engineers that they will not be bidding because their plates are full for the year.

*Bob Underhill, Lister-*

Bob explained that the Listers are expecting to receive a letter from the State ordering a revaluation. The State is taking over the revaluation process. Every town in the state has been grouped into 1 of 6 groups. Clarendon is in the first grouping. The State has realized that they are not many assessing firms that will be able to handle the burden. Some firms are booking 3 years out because most towns have tripped the revaluation scale due to the real estate frenzy. Bob doesn't feel that the revaluing is imminent given the timeline and how far out assessing firms are booking. The Listers plan on waiting to get the letter from the State and go from there.

The Listers are one person short in their office. Chairman Klopchin asked if Bob wanted to speak to that. Kevin Dougherty is interested in the Lister position. He was present at the meeting and introduced himself. He currently serves at town Zoning Administrator, Auditor, Justice of the Peace, and he is the town rep. to the Regional Ambulance Service. He's been thinking of the job for a while but had prior health issues and didn't want to apply before getting it sorted out.

Selectman Menard asked how auditing was going. Kevin reported that they're getting started but Rick Bersaw has not issued the public notice for the meeting. Town Clerk, Gloria, reported that he has not and they have not heard from him. Gloria told Kevin that he is able to issue the notice, any auditor can do it.

**Select Board Member Concerns**

*Selectman Congdon-*

Petitions are on the front table if anyone's interested in signing them.

*Chairman Klopchin-*

Chairman Klopchin asked Selectman Menard if he had a concern about the road crew. Selectman Menard said he felt there should be another individual hired (a 4th full time road crew member). Heidi said that would add about \$35/40k to the budget. Heidi said the budget the Board has just worked at includes funds for 3.5 people for the road crew. About

\$40,000 would have to be added to make it 4 and be able to cover salary and benefits. Selectman Menard said the State requires more of the municipal roads now which requires more work from the road crew. An additional member would ease that burden. Selectman Ambrose questioned if there's been any more information on the town's road signage project. He thought only Walker Mountain Road had been completed. Cash explained that the State came in and did it. Selectman Congdon questioned if that program still existed. Selectman Congdon said they used to apply for 1 road a year to get signage installed. He thought Walker Mountain, East Clarendon, and Middle Road had been done. Katie will look into the program. Selectman Congdon said the program started because it was a state compliance thing. Selectman Menard reiterated hiring another full-time member. Selectman Ambrose agreed said that he's been a proponent of 4 people in case there are employees out, or if they get injured or sick. Selectman Congdon said that with adding Eddy for an on-call person during the winter, that alleviated some burden and they had talked about hiring a part-time person in the Spring. He wasn't sure that 4 full time people were needed in the winter v. summer, but he had no issue with posting the part-time position again. The addition of 4<sup>th</sup> fulltime road crew member would increase the budget by another cent.

Heidi, Treasurer, chimed in and felt that past conversations with the Road Commissioner, it was noted that having 3 full time members in the summertime was more efficient. She wasn't sure if that had changed. She was understanding that illness and injury do happen but they have a part-time person budgeted. With the current budget proposed, why would the Board not look for a part-time person that could flex up their hours if necessary. Selectman Menard didn't think it was likely that the town could find a part-timer. Anyone that's qualified for the position won't want to work only part-time. Heidi said the Board should take the time to flesh out different models.

Teresa Miele, town resident, acknowledged that recruitment is difficult in any industry right now. She suggested that perhaps the town could work with someone like Ed Baker to fill in where needed, while recruiting someone with the qualifications for the job. She was aware that finding someone with a CDL is difficult, but suggested finding someone that has the experience and the town could waive the CDL requirement in the meantime while they continue the job search. She provided the Board with some options to consider in the meantime, while finding someone part-time or full-time. Chairman Klopchin felt that a 4<sup>th</sup> full time employee was needed- that's been the model in the past. Jimmy Austin said they'd have spares to come into plow but we don't experience the large snow storms anymore where spares are needed.

Bob Underhill reminded the Board they would have to decide on fulltime v. part time at this meeting so that it can be budgeted for accordingly and the warning can be prepared for next meeting.

Ed Baker chimed in and wanted to ask the Board to entertain using brine instead of road salt for winter maintenance. He said every town that has switched to brine has cut their salt budget in half. The cut in the budget could free up money to put towards a 4<sup>th</sup> fulltime road crew member. Clarendon would likely have to drill a better water source to accommodate the switch to brine. The trucks would need to have tanks in the back to spray the brine down. Eddy explained the logistics of how brine works. He said it works at lower temperatures and improves water quality (over salt). Eddy said that the State is pushing it. Road Commissioner Ruane thought that the State was going away from it. Eddy explained the drawbacks: if it gets colder than -13 degrees it doesn't work as well. However, brine sticks to the road better than salt does. There are some logistics that the town would have to figure out with the equipment involved to mix up brine and spread it.

Selectman Congdon would like to see more research done on switching to brine and leaving the proposed budget as is. He said to put the part time ad back up and see if that can get filled.

Eddy noted as for the Quarterline Road maintenance, he suggested doing it for an hourly rate. He said to ask other contractors what they would quote or agree upon a minimum hourly charge.

Approved January 22, 2024

Eddy and Cash will collaborate on the brine research. Eddy also said he can help out during the heaviest part of the storms but he's getting into his busy season (sugaring).

**Adjournment**

Selectman Congdon motioned to adjourn at 7:21PM and Selectman Menard seconded. All Board members approved the motion.

SIGNED:  Mike Klopchin, Chair

SIGNED:  George Ambrose, Clerk