

**TOWN OF CLARENDON BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING**  
**REGULAR**  
**December 11th, 2023**  
**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Selectboard

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

Heidi Congdon, Treasurer  
Katie Nop, Secretary  
Bob Underhill, Lister +Cemetery Committee member  
Kevin Peck, Lister +Cemetery Committee member  
William Chmielewski, PEG-TV  
Jeannie Stimpfel  
Beverly Brown  
Teresa Miele  
John Sikorak  
Janice McCoy  
Kurt Stanley  
Sarah Kumm  
Alf Strom-Olsen  
Shelly Lutz  
Wayne Willhaus  
Bob Bixby  
Art Peterson, VT State Rep.  
Dan Pinkowski  
Mike Pedone  
Nichole Peterson

**Call to Order**

Chairman Klopchin called the meeting to order at 6:01PM.

**Agenda additions/deletions**

Selectman Ruane motioned to add the Selectboard's 2024 meeting schedule under New Business, Selectman Ambrose seconded, and all approved.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Selectman Congdon motioned to approve the Regular Meeting minutes from November 27th, 2023 and Selectman Ambrose seconded. The motion passed 2-0. Selectman Ambrose abstained from the vote because he was not present at the 11/27 meeting.

**Highway**

*Road Commissioner Report- N/A*

*Structures Grant reimbursement-*

Cash and Katie explained that the Structures Grant reimbursement paperwork was filled out for the Creek Road culvert replacement. The total came to about \$182k and the town contributes a 10% match. All Board members present have to sign off on the grant. Selectman Congdon motioned that the Board sign off on the grant, Selectman Ambrose seconded, and all Board members approved.

*Better Roads grant-*

Road Commissioner Ruane explained that there was a grant application before them. The town is requesting \$18,500 to implement Better Roads/MRGP standards on a section of Bump Road. The segment has been identified on the MRGP map. The location is on the lower end of Bump Road, near Route 7. Selectman Congdon motioned to have the Chairman sign the grant application. Selectman Ambrose seconded the motion. Katie noted that the RRPC has reviewed the grant as well so it's all ready to be sent in. The motion passed unanimously.

Jan McCoy questioned if this grant was applied for annually. Katie responded yes and that the town is hopeful the funds will be awarded next year so the project can begin after July 1. Selectman Congdon explained that the segment being applied for is specific to the Municipal General Roads Permit (MRGP).

#### **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**

*Bob Bixby-*

Bob Bixby wished a Merry Christmas to Selectboard and all town employees.

*Art Peterson, VT State Rep.-*

Representative Peterson explained that he is going around to the towns he represents and inquiring if they have any concerns he can bring to the Legislature. Selectman Congdon acknowledged his grave concern for what's come out in the last few weeks regarding the education rate increase. He explained that Clarendon has tried for many years to not increase the municipal portion of the budget, but year after year the education rate keeps going up. It's not the town side of the budget that's squeezing the tax payer, it's the education side.

Chairman Klopchin questioned if all the town elementary schools in the Mill River district were still open; it was confirmed that they are. Selectman Ambrose said that the only way to save money in education in Vermont is consolidation. Art Peterson responded that he had a zoom meeting with the Southwest Supervisory Union and consolidation was mentioned. However, he admitted that a lot of this gets talked about, but not much action is taken. 2 of the superintendents said that they didn't think they would see these huge increases. Mr. Peterson thinks the 18% increase is dependent on the economic status of the students. Some of the towns will get hit hard, while others may not. Rep. Peterson questioned at the State level how they are going to improve test scores. There's a shortage of qualified teachers. Selectman Congdon explained that some teachers are under an "Emergency Licensure" which is why there's underqualified teachers in the schools.

Jan McCoy questioned if the teacher contracts merged with the union. The understanding was that yes, the elementary school teacher contracts merged but they're separate from the high school contracts. Jan questioned if there's a merge of school districts, would there be a merge of teacher contracts. In theory they should, but it's a grey area. Selectman Ambrose said that back when he was on the School Board, all the elementary students in the district could fit in one elementary school, and still have additional room. Chairman Klopchin questioned if additional teachers would have to be hired with more students. Selectman Congdon noted that's a subject nobody wants to talk about.

Rep. Peterson said that the rising cost of healthcare is tied into the conversation of education rate increases. He will be pursuing this issue with the committee he's involved in.

Selectman Congdon said it's not just the education rates that are scary. The dollars and cents have been going up over the years. They see it in the increase in DMV registrations, for example. It's on an unsustainable trajectory. Representative Peterson agreed and fears they'll see this continue next year.

Mr. Peterson said that Rutland Town has dealt with an increase in crime and public safety. Clarendon has seen the same thing. He said that the Legislature has slowly eaten away at the fabric of what law enforcement is able to do. The "catch and release" mentality is not sustainable.

Chairman Klopchin said it will be interesting to see if education budgets pass this year with the recent news of the possible increase. Alf Strom-Olsen said that a couple years ago there was discussion on alternative financing for education. He said there was going to be a discussion at the legislative level. He questioned what the driving cost of education is. Mr. Peterson said he has not heard anything that's come out of that conversation. He said that for change to happen, there needs to be a bill proposed in the Education Committee. There are many funds that play into the education rate. Alf figured the lack of kids would make the costs go down. Representative Peterson said it's actually the opposite.

Jan McCoy asked if the topic of closing the elementary schools in Shrewsbury, Wallingford, and Tinmouth has ever been discussed. Selectman Ambrose said that back when he was on the School Board that the idea only got so far as "wouldn't that be nice," but it never went farther. The idea of the union was to have a bigger voting group. Selectman Ambrose said there's nothing from stopping the School Board from pursuing it. Nichole Peterson questioned what the process would be for closing a school. Selectman Ambrose responded that there has to be a unanimous vote on the School Board and majority vote from each town. Wayne Willhaus asked if anyone has done the calculation on what the towns would save if there was consolidation. Selectman Ambrose said that there were calculations done years ago by a gentleman who wrote about school funding. He was a superintendent from Otter Valley. Selectman Ambrose said there would be a cost savings with teacher costs (benefits) and less school busses/drivers. He said there has to be people willing to have courage to change things.

The Board thanked Representative Peterson for attending.

#### **Public Comments**

N/A

#### **Old Business**

##### *Cold River Plan funding update-*

Katie explained that before the Board was information on what she's found out on funding for a "river maintenance plan." In the past several weeks the town has been discussing a river maintenance plan. Fitzgerald Environmental's email from several weeks ago was describing a sediment management plan. The sediment management plan is one route the Board could go. There's also an "alternatives analysis" route which would identify risks in order to reduce future flood hazards. Katie has spoken with Josh Carvajal, the DEC river engineer in this area, Vermont Emergency Management about the FEMA funding that's out there right now, as well as the RRPC. The FEMA funding is called BRIC- Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities. In speaking with VEM, a sediment management plan would not be a good fit for BRIC. If the town's goal is to manage the sediment collecting in the Cold River, Katie thinks it would have to be funded on the local level. Depending on the results of the sediment management plan, there could be future funding opportunities for construction projects that come out of that.

The Board discussed whether to go the route of an alternatives analysis or the sediment management plan. Katie advised that the results of the alternatives analysis may or may not conclude that the sediment pile up is a hazard. Selectman Congdon felt that starting with an alternatives analysis wouldn't be a bad idea to see what all the risks are. Dan Pinkowski clarified that a sediment management plan is not as likely to be funded by an outside source; the Board confirmed. Katie said her concern is that the Board will pay for the alternatives analysis and it may not conclude what the Board wishes to accomplish near the Cold River/Middle Road bridge. Mike Pedone said that with having an alternatives analysis, it may open the door to future funding opportunities. Selectman Congdon questioned if Fitzgerald Environmental could do both simultaneously. Katie said she was cautioned to be careful on having future correspondence with Fitzgerald Environmental because they developed the 2013 River Corridor Plans and the FEMA procurement process is very strict.

Selectman Congdon questioned what Katie is asking the Board tonight. Katie responded that the FEMA BRIC grant is an extensive application and due mid-January. She needs to get started on it, if that's the route the Board wants to go. From Katie's understanding, it seemed

as if the alternatives analysis would identify what the risks are. Selectman Ambrose said it sounds like a 2-step process; first analysis and then sediment management. Selectman Congdon motioned to have Katie go ahead and start applying for the BRIC funding. Selectman Ambrose seconded for discussion. Dan Pinkowski questioned what the share is on the grant. Katie figured it's 75% federal, 25% local. Katie will speak with Vermont Emergency Management and Josh Carvajal to get more information. Selectman Congdon agreed that Katie can start the process and look at the application. It's highly financial so at least they do have the sediment management plan route as a back-up. He'd like to see where the federal funding will go. The motion carried unopposed.

*Quarterline Road follow up-*

Katie explained that a couple of meetings ago she was asked to reach out to Rutland Town about the status of their winter maintenance plan for the Class 4 section of Quarterline Road. Rutland Town's response was that absent an agreement with the Clarendon Board for maintenance, they will maintain Quarterline Road's Class 4 section according to their Class 4 Policy, which was attached. Selectman Congdon summarized that meant maintenance would be minimal, if any.

Selectman Congdon stated that he's thought a lot about this situation, and one of the things Clarendon has done in the past (with the State, years ago), was a winter maintenance trade with no monetary exchange. Selectman Congdon motioned to seek to enter into an agreement to trade Rutland Town's half mile of Quarterline Road for the half mile (roughly) of Creek Road- from Billings' sugarhouse to Alfrecha Road and to do a trade. Rutland Town is on that section of Creek Road anyway and Clarendon would do Rutland Town's Quarterline Road Class 4 section. Selectman Ambrose clarified that would be for winter maintenance only, Selectman Congdon confirmed. Selectman Ambrose seconded for discussion.

Wayne Willenhaus did some calculations and said he was generous with rates, but figured it cost about \$46 to maintain that section of Quarterline road (1 run) in the winter, given labor, equipment, depreciation on equipment, fuel, material, etc. Wayne's point was that he felt the cost was relatively low, and he figures Rutland Town would be willing to pay above that on a per run basis.

Wayne said that the section on Quarterline Road was plowed and sanded this morning but it's still in question what priority they are. Chairman Klopchin questioned how Wayne felt about the trade agreement. The Board clarified that if Rutland Town is agreeable to the trade, Clarendon would do the winter maintenance on the Quarterline Road gravel section.

Kevin Peck, who lives on the section of Creek Road that Rutland Town may potentially be maintaining, countered and felt that Rutland Town does not maintain Creek Road to the same standard that Clarendon does. Selectman Congdon respectfully disagreed and stated that when he's commuting, the Rutland Town section is in better condition. There was discussion on how the towns would be held accountable to maintenance standards.

Teresa Miele stated that this swap doesn't solve the issue of the grading/potholes. She reiterated that Rutland Town does not have the equipment to do the grading. The potholes are back and Rutland Town is trying to do something about them. Chairman Klopchin suggested that this swap is a "break in the ice," for the towns to start working together, but it's one step at a time. Teresa stated that she's still frustrated with the situation not being fully taken care of, but appreciates the headway Clarendon is making. The motion on the floor passed 3-1.

Shelly Lutz said that it would've taken the Clarendon plow truck less time to turn around at the Rutland Town turn around than the the 4 point turn they did this morning. Road Commissioner Ruane stated that this solution could lead to further problems down the road, specifically setting preference for Class 4 roads. Tera Miele said if the residents on Horton Road want their road plowed, they could go through the same process the Quarterline Road residents are going through.

Katie asked if the request should be communicated via email or letter. The Board responded that it can be sent email. Katie will work with the Board to draft a message to Rutland Town.

**New Business**

*2023 E911 Map Review -*

Katie noted that this was an "FYI" for the Board and that her and Matt have reviewed the E911 maps. They are the E911 coordinators for the town. Katie found one spelling error and has noted it. She will be sending in the paperwork to correct it.

*2024 Selectboard Meeting Schedule-*

Katie provided the Board with a 2024 meeting schedule. Selectman Congdon said he will not be able to make it to the first August meeting. The Board decided they would play it by ear for that one. The meeting schedule will be posted at the Transfer Station, Town Hall, Post Office, and town website.

**Town Officer's Report**

*Heidi, Treasurer-*

Heidi reported that they had a budget workshop before this meeting and will continue working on the budget at the next workshop on December 27<sup>th</sup> at 5PM.

*Katie, Secretary-*

Katie reported that she forwarded the Board an update regarding the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. The Otter Creek site was the only eligible site. The town will be notified when funding becomes available for the project. Separately, several weeks ago, Katie had submitted a property for a VEM buyout and heard back that it may be a good candidate for the Flood Resilient Communities Fund. She will be reaching out for more information on that.

*Bob Underhill, Lister-*

Bob reported that they are waiting on the State for more information on their software conversion. Supposedly it's launching in 2024, but they haven't heard much information on it. Listers are also supposed to have a new set of qualifications, but they have not defined those yet. The Listers will continue with the status quo until they hear differently.

*Kevin Peck, Cemetery Committee member-*

The receiving door is repaired and has been put back in place in the Clarendon Flats Cemetery.


**Select Board Member Concerns**

The Board wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

**Adjournment**

Selectman Congdon motioned to adjourn at 6:58pm the motion passed unopposed.

SIGNED:  Mike Klopchin, Chair

SIGNED:  George Ambrose, Clerk