

MINUTES SELECTBOARD MEETING
Grafton Town Hall Upstairs In Person/Live
With accommodation for persons unable to attend in person via interactive Zoom

Monday, July 15, 2024, 6:00 pm

Present at the meeting in the Town Hall:

Selectboard: Chair Joe Pollio, Vice Chair Cathy Siano-Goodwin, John Gregory, Steve Sargent, and Anna Keegan

Also: Morgan Wilbur, Don Dougall, Barabara Xander, Brian Xander, Steve Ankuda, Patrick Cooperman, Patsy Ellis, Denise Martin, Amber Stevens, Suzanne Welch, Mary Howard Feder, Dottie Cannon, Liisa Kissel, Sam Battaglino, Robbie Sprague, Wendy Martin, and David Hall

Present online: Lain Stevens, Jim Paulsen, Nancy Merrill, Charlie Bonin, and Eric Stevens

1. Call to order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. Adopt Agenda: It was moved by Cathy Siano-Goodwin, seconded by Anna Keegan to adopt the agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Approve Minutes of the July 1, 2024, meeting: Anna Keegan asked to amend the minutes to include language about Colin Bratton from the Windham Regional Commission getting updated data for the posted speed limit for the study that was conducted on Townshend Road. Morgan Wilbur said she would amend the minutes to include that.

It was moved by Anna Keegan, seconded by Cathy Siano-Goodwin, to approve the minutes of the July 1, 2024, meeting as amended. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Short-Term Rental Discussion with Town Attorney: Town Attorney, Steve Ankuda began the discussion by stating the concern around Short-Term Rental (STR) properties has been apparent in neighboring towns. He said that the State of Vermont has health rules and regulations for these properties. If a municipality starts dealing with STRs or enforcing any type of regulation, the state stops its enforcement since the towns are taking it on. The State essentially would become “co-partners” with the Town. Ankuda talked about the typical concerns: noise at night, parking along the road, garbage, and long-term housing, but not much else. He gave some examples of neighboring towns, such as Springfield. They created a registry but are now abandoning it because it takes too much time to regulate and enforce. Ankuda mentioned the transfer tax change. When a homeowner purchases a second home, the new tax is going to be approximately 3.5% of the purchase price of the home. This is designed as a way for the State to get a handle on more housing. Ankuda recommended adopting other policies such as nuisance and parking. He said with those policies in place, the problems could be dealt with. Suzanne Welch asked how much involvement the attorney had in drafting the current ordinance. Ankuda stated he did not have any involvement, he simply reviewed what was presented and made some suggestions. Welch commented on how the demographics of Grafton are much different than a town such as Springfield. Wendy Martin mentioned that more ordinances sound like more government and asked how the Town would enforce a STR ordinance. Ankuda said the demographics are similar in comparison to Londonderry and Chester. Regarding enforcement, Ankuda said there are fines that the Town can issue. If problems arise, the ordinance could be amended. Welch felt as though the proposed draft ordinance is reasonable and that the Selectboard should focus the discussion on the current proposal. Liisa Kissel said that all of the problems that had been discussed would have been solved with a simple ordinance. Joe Pollio stated he felt the paperwork for the Town would be too much to manage if the ordinance passes. Welch said she thought it was not too much for Town Administrator Morgan Wilbur to manage. Mary Howard Feder said that part of

becoming a host, the owner already has to register with the State, have a health inspection, fire inspection, etc. However, not all people do that. Feder said that would be an additional responsibility for Wilbur to manage. Robbie Sprague asked, again, who would enforce the ordinance. Would people be instructed to call Wilbur in the middle of the night to file a complaint? Brian Xander said that in the ordinance, it states the “STR Administrator” is a person or persons designated by the Selectboard of the Town of Grafton to administer and enforce this ordinance. Ankuda mentioned there is a State database that shows which properties are open for outside renters. Welch said that this ordinance would send a loud signal to people who rent their homes to other people. It shows them that the Town is watching and has a handle on the issues. Ankuda talked about the procedure the Selectboard would take to adopt the ordinance. A public hearing would be scheduled to address any questions or corrections to the proposed ordinance. If at the public hearing, no changes are made, the Selectboard can adopt the ordinance which would become effective 60 days from adoption. If a petition is filed within 44 days of the adoption, a Special Town Meeting would be held for a town vote to disapprove the ordinance. Pollio felt that the Selectboard should begin the process. Sprague asked how we know there are 38 STRs within Grafton. Wilbur said in the spring of 2023, she referenced Airbnb and VRBO to identify the homes. From there, she conferred with the Town Listers and was able to identify the property owner and their mailing address. However, Wilbur said she could have easily missed some properties. John Gregory felt there were not many problems or complaints and that if there were, they could be handled individually. Steve Sargent asked if this could be brought to the attention of the Fire Marshal. Pollio said the State has claimed to be understaffed and would not take interest in Grafton.

It was moved by Cathy Siano-Goodwin, seconded by Anna Keegan, to fine-tune the proposed STR ordinance and set a public hearing date when the Selectboard is ready. Motion passed by a vote of 4-1 (with Gregory voting no).

5. Highway Report: Morgan Wilbur stated that Colby Record was unable to attend the meeting. Joe Pollio asked where the Assistant Road Foreman was. Wilbur said that Record asked him to attend in his place that afternoon, but he was not given sufficient notice to attend. Pollio felt that it was unacceptable no one was present to give a report and that someone should attend every meeting in case some questions or concerns need to be addressed. Wilbur said Record gave her some things to report on. Those were that the crew planned on replacing a culvert on Middletown Road and that they were working on the cemetery fence for the Village cemetery. Pollio stated that many roads desperately need to have chloride because they are very dusty.

6. Clerk/Treasurer: No report.

Town Hall Cleaners – Worker’s Compensation: Morgan Wilbur explained that Randy Bean, the gentleman who cleans the Town Hall does not carry a worker’s compensation policy, therefore she was looking to the Selectboard for some guidance. Essentially, the Selectboard could either hire him as a part-time employee, cover the small exposure charge from the insurance copy, or try to hire a larger company that carries a policy. Patrick Cooperman and Pasty Ellis stated how important it is for companies to carry their own worker’s compensation because of liability exposure (in the case of the cleaner this would entail a fall or exposure to chemicals, perhaps) and the Town should not make exceptions. John Gregory stated that at the last meeting, the Selectboard unanimously voted to handle instances such as this on a case-by-case basis, as long as the total cost is less than \$5,000 per year. Anna Keegan asked if the cleaners hurt themselves while cleaning the Town Hall, would the Town be liable? The answer was yes, and that the Town’s insurance policy would go up because of the incident.

It was moved by John Gregory, seconded by Cathy Siano-Goodwin, to follow the policy that was made at the last meeting and cover the potential worker’s compensation charge for Randy Bean. Motion passed by a vote of 4-1 (with Keegan voting no).

Gregory asked Keegan why she didn't agree with the motion, even though she voted with the majority at the last meeting. Keegan stated that she may not have fully understood what was being voted on last time.

7. Committee Reports:

Personnel Committee: Cathy Siano-Goodwin said she and Steve Sargent planned to meet with Morgan Wilbur and Colby Record on Wednesday for their reviews. Siano-Goodwin said that at the next meeting, they would like to enter into an executive session to discuss the reviews with the rest of the board. John Gregory asked if raises for employees were due. Siano-Goodwin said a decision needs to be made by August 15th. Wendy Martin mentioned that the Selectboard budgeted for a 4th highway crew member and asked what the timeline on this is. Joe Pollio said the Selectboard is undecided on hiring another employee at this time. Siano-Goodwin said she created an outline for tasks that she plans to present to Record on Wednesday. With this, Siano-Goodwin hoped Record would consider that and be very clear as to why the highway crew feels another employee is necessary.

July 2023 Flood Update: Morgan Wilbur stated that Kim Record, as an authorized representative signed an allonge for the \$1 million line of credit maturity date to be extended from July 17, 2024, to December 13, 2024. No further action from the Selectboard is necessary.

8. Fire Warden Appointment: Morgan Wilbur recognized Bill Brown's passing and gave condolences to his family and friends. She said that Brown was the Fire Warden for the Town of Grafton for 29 years. She stated that Eric Stevens, the current deputy, has agreed to assume the Fire Warden role. After consulting with the State of Vermont, there is no paperwork required for this to occur. The state is also trying to move away from having deputies, unless necessary. Given that, Wilbur spoke with Fire Chief, Robbie Sprague and he felt that it is important to have someone else available to take calls if necessary. After checking with the state, Wilbur was told that Sprague, as the Fire Chief already has the wildland fire response statutes that the Fire Wardens hold, therefore they would recommend Sprague be a "key person." For this, Sprague would need to complete a form. Or, the Selectboard can officially appoint Sprague as deputy with an official end date for the title. After some input from Sprague, he thought it made sense to list himself as the key person.

It was moved to Cathy Siano-Goodwin, seconded by John Gregory, to appoint Eric Stevens as the Fire Warden and Robbie Sprague as the key person. Motion passed unanimously.

9. Septic Pumping 2nd Reminder Letter: Morgan Wilbur wanted to let the board know that she is sending a second reminder letter to property owners who are due for their septic to be pumped this year. Wilbur said there are 15 systems that need to be done.

10. Other Business: There was no Other Business.

11. Public Comment: Patrick Cooperman asked if there was going to be a temporary bridge for the Walker Bridge construction project. John Gregory said the contractor is currently working on the first permanent lane of the new bridge, once that is done, traffic will go onto that side while the current traveled lane gets worked on. Robbie Sprague mentioned that originally, they were going to have a temporary bridge but decided not to go that route.

Wendy Martin informed the board that two gentlemen went into the Town Hall a couple of weeks ago and filmed their interactions with Morgan Wilbur, the Postmaster, and several community members. They then posted the video onto a YouTube channel. She referred to them as "First Amendment Warriors." Martin said they have a right to film since it is a public building, however, thought it was important that the Selectboard was aware this occurred. Don Dougall said some people do this type of thing: make content and then post it to a viewing platform to make money. Joe Pollio said he spoke with Kim Record about this, and they were looking into getting security cameras for the building. Wilbur spoke up and told the board how uncomfortable it was to

be working in the office while someone was filming. She also said she had been working on getting a grant, which had been obtained, for security cameras. Wilbur assured everyone that cameras would be ordered in the coming days.

12. Next regular meeting: Monday, August 5, 2024, at 6 pm.

13. Adjourn. It was moved by Cathy Siano-Goodwin, seconded by Anna Keegan, to adjourn the meeting at 7:17 pm. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Morgan Wilbur
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