



**BARRE TOWN SELECTBOARD MEETING
December 19, 2023**

AGENDA

1. Call to order.....6:00 p.m.
2. Pledge of allegiance
3. Consider approving the agenda
4. Consider approving December 12, 2023, meeting minutes
5. Announcements
6. Receive guests for non-agenda items.
7. Discuss and consider adopting 5-Year Gravel Road
8. Discuss and consider hiring a backup Water Operator in Public Works
9. Update on FEMA and flood repair projects
10. Discuss and consider adopting 5-Year Equipment Replacement Plan
11. Discuss and consider adopting 5-Year Building Plan
12. Consider approving Error & Omissions request for the 2023 Grand List
13. Discuss and consider EMS Per Capita Rates
14. Review and discuss ARPA Expenditure Timeline
15. Consider approving proposed Selectboard meeting schedule up to May 7, 2023
16. Consider approving weekly accounts payable warrant for December 19, 2023
17. Miscellaneous: including permits and licenses, if any
18. Round the Table
19. Executive Session: as needed.
20. Adjourn

MINUTES

The duly warned meeting of December 19, 2023 was held at the Barre Town Municipal Building, Selectboard Room, in Lower Websterville at 6:00 p.m.

Selectboard Members Present: Norma Malone, Justin Bolduc, and Mike Gilbar.

Selectboard Members Absent: Paul White and Bob Nelson.

Staff Members Present: Town Manager Chris Violette, Town Clerk Tina Lunt, and Town Engineer Josh Martineau. Those present virtually: Assistant Town Clerk Catherine Whalen, Finance Director Katelyn Kran and Interim EMS Director David Danforth.

Others Present: Times Argus Reporter Eric Blaisdell.

CALL TO ORDER: Justin Bolduc called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Those present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVE THE AGENDA:

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to approve the amended agenda as follows:

1. Item #19 Executive Session: Add Personnel

APPROVE THE MINUTES:

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to approve the December 12, 2023 Selectboard meeting minutes with minor spelling and grammatical corrections.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- It is time to request your early/absentee ballots and remember, there are no standing orders for early/absentee ballots. If you would like to vote early, you must request ballots each calendar year. You can request ballots through My Voter Page at mvp.vermont.gov or by calling the Town Clerk's Office at (802) 479-9391. Additionally, ballot requests can be emailed to Tina Lunt at tlunt@barretown.org or Catherine Whalen at cwhalen@barretown.org. The Barre Unified Union School District Annual Election, Central Vermont Career Center School District Annual Election, and the Presidential Primary Election will be held on Tuesday, March 5, 2024. To participate in the Presidential Primary, voters will be asked to select the Democrat or Republican ballot. State law requires you to request a specific ballot and record this information on the entrance checklist. If you have questions around any of the upcoming 2024 Elections, contact Town Clerk Tina Lunt at (802) 479-9391.
- Last call for 2024 Budget Committee members. If you would like an inside look into the operations of Barre Town government, this short commitment is a fantastic way to do it. We have a few residents expressing interest in serving again, and we'd like to add new people as well. The Budget Committee meets from the end of January to the end of March and reviews every Town fund budget. Letters or emails will be accepted until December 22nd.
- We are also still seeking volunteers from the Town to serve on the recently formed Energy Committee. This is an exciting opportunity to be the first to join this new committee that will serve an advisory role concerning Town Energy Policy, as well as develop and implement community outreach and education opportunities for residents, among other things. The Energy Committee will meet monthly on the first Wednesday of the month (hopefully starting in February).
- If interested in joining one of the committees mentioned, or if you would like more information, please send an email to offices@barretown.org or call the Town Manager's Office at (802) 479-9331.
- While it probably goes without saying, we'd like to remind everyone that all Town offices will be closed for Christmas and New Years Day. All other days should be business as usual.

GUESTS: None.

5-YEAR GRAVEL ROAD PLAN:

Background: Annually the Selectboard reviews and approves the 5-Year Gravel Road Plan. Town Engineer Josh Martineau and Public Works Superintendent Richard Tetreault have reviewed the plan and have made very few adjustments. Town Engineer Josh Martineau will be available to answer questions related to the plan.

A new format to the 5-Year Gravel Road Plan was presented to Board members for review.

Town Engineer Josh Martineau was present. Mr. Martineau noted the roads in years 1-4 have not changed.

Mrs. Malone noted she appreciates Mr. Martineau's work on the plan. She asked if ditching is also being completed when this work is being done. Mr. Martineau confirmed that it is.

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to adopt the 5-Year Gravel Road Plan covering FY '25-'29 as presented.

BACKUP PUBLIC WORKS WATER OPERATOR:

Background: This item is essentially an "early" budget discussion to add a Public Works position for FY'25. Jay Hrubovcak is currently the only staff person that holds a Public Water Operators License. The Town would be in a predicament if Mr. Hrubovcak was out long-term or was to leave employment. To bridge the gap, the Town would have to contract with an outside entity to oversee the Town water system. Mr. Hrubovcak has indicated that he will likely retire in the next three years. Currently, there is nobody within the Public Works Department who is interested in or feels qualified to become the Town's next Public Works Water Operator.

During budget discussion last year, Town Engineer, Josh Martineau and Town Manager, Chris Violette both suggested to then Town Manager, Carl Rogers that the Town include another full-time Public Works person to dedicate to learning the Town's water system and at the same time begin the process of obtaining his or her license. Mr. Rogers elected to add a part-time person to help with the lead-copper line inventory. \$18,720 was budgeted for this person with the intent of filling the position about this time of year and working most of the second half of the fiscal year. Mr. Martineau and Mr. Violette still feel the Town needs to work toward hiring an individual to fill in for the current Public Works Water Operator and use what is budgeted for this. Additionally, Town Engineer Josh Martineau and Town Manager Chris Violette are proposing that a full-time position be added to next year's budget for the sole purpose of finding Mr. Hrubovcak's replacement.

Mr. Violette stated The Town is unsure how to proceed with marketing for this position and is looking for the Board's guidance. Mr. Martineau stated the Town needs a Class 4 Water Operators License to fill this position. He noted it takes roughly 3 years to get this license. Mr. Martineau said his vision would be to create two full-time Water and Sewer positions. He anticipates these positions to rotate. The individuals would help update and implement information. Additionally, one person would be the full-time sewer truck operator.

Mrs. Malone noted she is supportive of this idea. She suggested starting the process now, as this will be a transition over the next 3 years. Ultimately, the Town would be expanding the water and sewer staff with one more full-time employees. Board members were in agreement, noting it is important the Town is right staffed within its departments.

FLOOD PROJECT REPAIR AND FEMA UPDATE:

Background – While all Town roads damaged by the heavy rains in July are fully repaired, the Town is still working on getting reimbursed by FEMA/VEM. Town Manager Chris Violette and Town Engineer Josh Martineau will provide the Board with an update.

Mr. Martineau shared the following update with Board members:

- There were 77 different locations that were affected by the July flooding
 - 70 of those are completed back to pre-disaster conditions
 - 1 location is in progress
 - 5 are being assessed and engineered
- The Town is working with two types of funding; Federal Highway and FEMA
 - Federal Highway projects include Camp Street and the Websterville Road culvert
- Federal Highway projects have a deadline of April 4, 2024
 - If projects are completed within this timeline the Town will receive 100% reimbursement
 - If projects are not completed by April 4, 2024 the Town will have to go through a full Federal Highway requirement (NEPA). The Town would be required to pay 10% of the repairs. Additionally, the timeline will be pushed out 2-3 years
- The total cost for Federal Highway projects is \$1.4 million.

Mr. Martineau provided the Board with an update on Camp Street. He shared that drillers have been at this location, noting that spoon samples were taken of the road. Although it is not definite yet, it appears that around 13 feet below grade is where the split may have occurred. Mr. Martineau stated the overall fix will be to remove and replace with underdrain. Mr. Martineau said the scale is much larger than anticipated, and the Town is now looking at a 2-month completion timeline, noting he is working with VHP and Sanborn Head to come up with a definite timeline for the project. Additionally, he has asked VHP to come up with a list of items that the Department of Public Works crew can work on to help with the project. Mr. Martineau said the project is expected to go out to bid by the end of January.

Mr. Martineau shared that they are meeting weekly with FEMA/VEM. The FEMA funding is 87.5% and may be as high as 90%. Mr. Martineau noted the following locations are listed under FEMA/VEM funding:

- Holden Road
- Bike Path
- Wildersburg Sewer
- South Barre Sewer Pump Station

Mr. Martineau stated he has directed VHB to focus on Camp Street but has asked that after the completion of Camp Street they focus their attention to the Wildersburg sewer line.

Mr. Martineau shared the following updates on costs:

- \$478,000 has been spent on repairs
- \$4.5 million estimated costs for all repairs
- With the 90/10 FEMA split and the 100% Federal Highway reimbursement the Town share is \$496,000. If Camp Street is not completed by April 4, it will be \$538,000.

Mr. Martineau noted Norwich University students have completed soil samples of Wildersburg and will have a preliminary report soon. Additionally, UVM has reached out to Mr. Martineau looking for a senior project. Mr. Martineau directed them to the Bike Path project.

Mrs. Malone inquired about the damage on East Cobble Hill Road. Mr. Martineau said he spoke to Sanborn Head about this, and they have filled this in and do not believe this is a serious concern.

Mr. Violette noted 2 categories have been submitted to FEMA for payment.

Mrs. Malone thanked Mr. Martineau for his work and level of detail.

5 -YEAR EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT PLAN:

Background: Like all the other long-term plans, the Equipment Replacement Plan is another tool used for budgeting and forecasting future replacements. Mr. Violette is proposing a four-year plan for this year due to many upheavals in the Town's equipment purchases over the last few years. The Town must complete an inventory of their equipment and review the replacement cycle to make sure needs are being met in an effective and efficient manner.

Mr. Gilbar noted the significant increases, with exception of the ambulances. Mr. Violette stated there has always been a concern the numbers were not where they should be. Mr. Violette said the revised plan reflects more realistic numbers. Conversation continued as Board members discussed the replacement schedule.

Mrs. Malone inquired about the miscellaneous equipment. Mr. Violette noted there has been a shift in philosophy with this item. Finance Director Katelyn Kran gave the Board a brief update on the computer replacement plan. She noted the Police Department was receiving hand me down computers, but this has not been working well for them, so they will be receiving new computers. Additionally, there are more laptops for department heads which the Town has found to be very beneficial.

Mr. Gilbar asked if Mr. Violette has thought about presenting the plan in an excel format. Mr. Violette noted next year this document will be presented in a new format.

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to adopt the long-term Equipment Replacement Plan as presented.

5-YEAR BUILDING PLAN:

Background: Similar to the Equipment Replacement Plan, the current Building Plan takes a snapshot of the Town facilities and building projects for the future. Town staff is currently working on an inventory of the square footage of their facilities. The hope is to work with Freeman-French-Freeman to develop a more comprehensive 5-Year Building Plan.

Discussion began as the Manager stated the most significant change to this plan is that the Wilson vault roof was moved to year 2. Mr. Violette noted this made year 1 more manageable. He noted the most important thing that gets completed is the South Barre Fire Station roof. Furthermore, Mr. Violette said he expects to get a proposal from Freeman and French this week. This will help give the Town a better idea on what the 5-Year Plan will look like moving forward.

Mr. Bolduc recommended adding an air handler unit to year 1 to help increase the overall expenses. Mrs. Malone noted there is a systemic problem with the Building Fund as it is being treated as an Internal Service Fund. The Town needs a Capital Projects Fund. She is not opposed to bringing in another project to increase the amount but the manner in which the Town is doing this is not appropriate and this method must be changed. Conversation continued as Board members discussed Mr. Bolduc's idea of adding the air handler

unit to year 1. This move would complete the four that need to be replaced. Board consensus is to move the air handler unit to 2025.

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to adopt the long-term Building Plan as amended.

ERRORS & OMISSIONS:

Background: Annually prior to December 31st the Assessor may change the Grand List, with Selectboard approval. This is done via an Errors and Omissions request, which Assessor Russ Beaudin has done to include four properties. The net effect of the change will be an addition of \$229,928 to the Grand List after three value increases and one decrease. Change of appraisal notices have been sent and tax bills will be adjusted.

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to approve Assessor Russ Beaudin's 2023 Errors & Omissions request.

EMS PER-CAPITA RATES:

Background: Barre Town Emergency Medical Service (BTEMS) serves five other towns by contract. Past contracts for the Towns of Orange, Topsham, Washington, Brookfield, and Berlin have all been for three years. Interim EMS Director, David Danforth, and Town Manager, Chris Violette, are recommending the Town only offer one-year contracts for FY'25 for this one time only. With all the changes that are in the works, including contract negotiations, adding Williamstown, a new billing service, new Manager and EMS Director, they feel it is prudent to only do a one-year contract. This will allow a year to better understand revenue and expenses with a goal of setting a fair and equitable per capita rate for all towns served by BTEMS, including Barre Town. They are recommending the following per capita rates:

- Washington: \$65.00
- Orange: \$65.00
- Topsham: \$65.00
- Brookfield: \$65.00
- Berlin (1/1/24-6/30/24): \$56.96 (current contract \$48.05)
- (7/1/24-6/30/25): \$61.28 (current contract \$51.89)
- (7/1/25-6/30/26): \$65.43 (current contract \$56.04)

A spreadsheet showing the distribution of cost increases factored into Berlin's new rates was shared with Board members for review.

Berlin's proposed increase is a result of their existing contract under "contract subsidy" which allows the Town of Barre to adjust per capita rates based on "extraordinary, unforeseeable circumstances". Increases in insurance (greater than 12%) and Berlin Fire Department rent increase (greater than 3%) are triggering factors to increase the rate. Between health insurance and workers' compensation there was an increase of 62.27% in FY'23. Additionally, FY'24 saw a 13.88% increase in health insurance and a 6.45% increase in rent at the Berlin Fire Station.

Selectboard Minutes of December 19, 2023 Continued:

The proposed increases reflect an \$8.91 increase for the balance of FY'24 to \$56.96. FY'25 will see an increase of \$.48 for increase in rent plus the contracted increase of \$3.84 to \$61.28. FY'26 goes to \$65.43 which represents the contracted increase of \$4.15.

Interim EMS Director David Danforth was present. Mr. Danforth stated the rates are based on the current staffing and do not include the expansion of the Williamstown contract.

Discussion began as Board members asked questions around the rates. Mr. Gilbar inquired about the Berlin rate. He noted by 2025/2026, assuming the other Town's have been increased, Berlin will be slightly behind. He suggested adjusting the 2024/2025 rate. Mr. Danforth explained contractually the Town is locked in for the rates for Berlin.

Mrs. Malone asked if Mr. Violette has mentioned the contract proposal to the other towns. Currently, the rates are a 5.8% increase which is in line with past increases. Mrs. Malone is curious what their thoughts will be on the 1-year contract. Mr. Violette shared he believes it will be dependent on how it is presented to them.

Mr. Bolduc inquired about the audit report regarding the rate increase. Mr. Danforth explained with the change in the EMS billing company (effective September 1) the Town is receiving in the moment data on bills and collections. This will allow almost one full year of data to see the average reimbursement per run. This will help give the Town a more accurate number on their per capita rate.

Board members thanked Mr. Danforth for his work on the rates.

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to set the FY'25 ambulance service per capita rates for Orange, Topsham, Washington, and Brookfield at \$65.00. Berlin's per capita for the remainder of FY'24 at \$56.96, FY'25 \$61.28, and FY'26 at \$65.43.

ARPA EXPENDITURE TIMELINE REVIEW:

Background: As discussed previously, the ARPA funds come with a deadline to commit and spend. Information has been received from different sources suggesting that the money be obligated by March 31, 2024. Finance Director Katelyn Kran, Town Manager Chris Violette, and Selectboard members Mike Gilbar and Norma Malone will be meeting with Katie Buckley from VLCT to get a better understanding of what is required. The purpose of this agenda item is to update the Board.

Mr. Violette shared an updated ARPA ideas and allocation list with Board members for review.

Mr. Violette, Mrs. Kran, and Selectboard members Mr. Gilbar and Mrs. Malone met with Katie Buckley from VLCT. This discussion stemmed from an earlier conversation with the auditor regarding ARPA funds and the deadline for committing these funds spent.

Discussion began as Mr. Violette said that he is confident that the items listed in the committed column of the spreadsheet will be purchased by March 31. He noted that department heads were asked to purchase items that are on the list.

Mrs. Malone noted the Town has a lot of committed funds. VLCT was able to confirm that purchase orders are deemed as committed funds. Mrs. Malone noted the Town does have larger sums of money that are long-term expenses, such as the FEMA match for flood repair work. This amount will not be spent before

Selectboard Minutes of December 19, 2023 Continued:

the March 31 deadline and will need to be moved to the General Fund before the April reporting deadline. If these funds are moved, and declared as spent, the Town will no longer be bound by the 2026 deadlines. Furthermore, Finance Director Katelyn Kran added that by acting on this the Town would be exercising the standard allowance that was set forth by the Federal Government.

Mrs. Malone stated due to the provision in the Town's Administrative Code, the Town has held off on committing the funds to the General Fund. This way they could complete some of the projects on the ARPA list.

Mr. Bolduc asked how the transfer of funds will work once the money becomes a fund balance, noting for example, how will this work with the radio system upgrade and FEMA match. Mr. Gilbar explained there is revenue from the fund balance that will cover those expenses. Additionally, Mr. Gilbar stated if the Town is following the same practices and Administrative Code there should not be any concerns.

The Board agrees, come March, they will make a decision to obligate the funds.

SELECTBOARD MEETING SCHEDULE:

Background: The Selectboard has only set its meeting schedule through the end of 2023. The Town Manager would like to propose a schedule that will take Selectboard meetings through May 7, 2024. The Selectboard will reorganize on May 21st and set the remainder of the year schedule.

Town Manager Chris Violette suggested an idea awhile ago about starting meetings during budget sessions earlier as opposed to later. Mr. Violette has proposed that Selectboard meetings start at 5:00 p.m. in February and March. This would allow the Budget Committee to stay better focused when not faced with having to stop to accommodate the Selectboard meeting. Furthermore, it would eliminate double sessions and overall work better for the Selectboard meetings. Additionally, Mr. Violette has suggested the Board does not meet on January 23. This will allow extra time for him to prepare for the first budget meeting on January 30.

Board members were in agreement of the proposed schedule.

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to approve Selectboard weekly meeting schedule through May 7, 2024 as proposed.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

On a motion by Norma Malone, seconded by Mike Gilbar, Selectboard voted unanimously to approve the accounts payable warrants for the week of December 19, 2023

Mr. Bolduc inquired about the Champlain Valley Fuels invoice. He asked if the Town went a long period of time without a fuel delivery. Mr. Violette noted this amount was not out of the ordinary.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Mr. Danforth is requesting the Selectboard to add an estimated \$30,000 back into the ARPA allocation list to outfit the sixth ambulance. The funds would be to purchase a power loader and power stretcher for the truck. After a brief discussion, Board members agree to add this item to the next agenda for action.

Mr. Violette updated the Board on the following:

- Mr. Violette shared that the Williamstown contract has been signed and executed. He is working with Town Attorney Mike Monte on a rental agreement.
- Mr. Violette shared that the Fire Chief mentioned they received a \$250.00 donation from Vermont Community Foundation on behalf of Lynn Crawford.

ROUND TABLE:

Norma Malone:

- Mrs. Malone wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a safe, healthy and happy holiday.
- Mrs. Malone reminded all that the Selectboard will not be meeting next week.

Justin Bolduc:

- On behalf of Mr. Nelson, Mr. Bolduc asked about the spring in the road in front of 89 Jalbert Road. Mr. Violette stated he had mentioned this to the Town Engineer last week and he thought that Mr. Martineau had followed up with Mr. Nelson regarding this issue. The Manager will follow up with Mr. Martineau regarding this item.
- Mr. Bolduc asked if the new updated 5-Year Plans could be added to the website. Mr. Violette confirmed they will be added.

Mike Gilbar:

- Mr. Gilbar asked if EWP could be added as a future discussion item.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

On a motion by Justin Bolduc, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to find the need to go into executive session citing premature general knowledge would clearly place the Selectboard at a substantial disadvantage.

On a motion by Justin Bolduc, seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to go into executive session at 8:30 p.m. for personnel.

On a motion by Norma Malone seconded by Mike Gilbar, the Selectboard voted unanimously to exit executive session at 9:13 p.m.

ADJOURN:

On a motion by Mike Gilbar, seconded by Norma Malone, the Selectboard voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:13 p.m.

APPROVED MINUTES

Barre Town Selectboard

Paul White, Chair

Justin Bolduc, Vice Chair

Norma Malone

Mike Gilbar

Bob Nelson

Filed in the Barre Town Clerk's Office on this _____ day of _____, 2023.

ATTEST: _____, Barre Town Clerk.