Town of Isle La Motte

Select board Special Meeting

March 10, 2021

5:00PM @ ILM School

Members present: Selby Turner, Rusty Spaulding & Paul Zera

Others present: Sarah Noble, Anne Jobin Picard, Sylvia Jensen, Barbara Callahan, Robert Varga, Cindi Varga & Carol Bohannon

Meeting called to order at 5:24PM by Chair, Selby Turner

1. Rescind warning and budget approved March 3 rd.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; why are you rescinding?

- Turner had discussion; there was a problem with the zoom meeting.

- Noble had discussion; there was a few budget numbers that were incorrect. The surplus is now added to the warning.

- Turner had discussion; the board has been working with the Town Attorney in the rewording of the warning to make sure it is all done correctly.

- Motion by Turner to rescind warning and budget, 2nd by Zera-- All in favor.

2. Discussion on new budget and warning take public comments.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; what is the restoration and preservation reserve fund? and what are you planning to do to digitize the records.

- Sarah Noble; yes, we do, I will get the exact number to you in the next couple day. All the books except for 1 or 2 from this year have already been digitized.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; office assistant employee report of wages and budget number is different.

- Noble had discussion; the payroll lapses the year 2020-2021. I can’t change the accounting figures on it. The assistants are hourly also, not salary. The reason it is different than it used to be is that Betsy used to have my do a partial payroll at the end of the year. RHR Smith & Co. suggested not to do that.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; assistant treasurer is not listed under employee report of wages position.

- Sarah Noble had discussion; that would be an oversight on my part of not putting that position on Mary LaBrecque’s Employee report of wages.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; it’s not itemized, where is her wage? For next year, maybe split that out.

- Sarah Noble had discussion; her wages earned as assistant are there. Assistant treasurer and assistant clerk come out of the same line item of office assistant in the budget.

- Barbara Callahan; town handyman wages? You have $600, and we didn’t spend any but do have an amount in there for the next year, reason?

- Turner had discussion; we can’t keep a Town handyman, so any handyman jobs, we have to sub-contract out.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; ban service charges, actual was $1816, why?

- Sarah Noble had discussion; we have had a lot of bounced checks this year from tax payers. Canadian checks are also charged over double when returned.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; total general fund expense; budgeted $198,075, and actual wasn’t totaled its actually $178,156, why the difference?

- Sarah Noble had discussion; it was an oversight on my part to not pull the number down in the totals.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; winter roads under snow removal, we have budgeted 130,200 and the actual is $91,867. Where is the difference?

- Spaulding had discussion; that is two payments to John Yaratz.

- Sarah Noble had discussion; My family and I had to quarantine at the very end of the year, so those payments to John were made late. Without having all of John’s invoices in front of me, I can’t answer this completely.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; town highway, summer roads total highway expense. Budgeted $268,991 and actual was $235,792.

- Spaulding had discussion; that again relates to this $91,867 which doesn’t show Johns last two payments. This is the exact amount off.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; this is not to find fault, this is constructive. In actuality the town report responsibility is the select boards or town auditors, not Sarah’s.

- Mary Catherine Graziano; looking at town use of school, $14500. from what i understand that appropriation is when we were assessed a penalty when we went over our per pupil cost to reduce tax burden. North hero no longer pays that, we voted on it every year until last year when it was discontinued, and now its back. I looked into what other schools do of the community use to school building, emergency shelter, town hall meeting site. Alburgh does have the school as an emergency shelter and so does Grand Isle, they do not pay for use of the building. Sheldon hosts its annual town meeting and is not charged a fee. South hero does but it is down about $5000 from previous years. Swanton School is an emergency shelter and does not charge. Along with other towns. what is the justification for continuing this now?

- Spaulding had discussion; we are using the school right now, the highest we’ve paid is about $46,000 a year. The school request this year was $14,500 and we read into previous minutes that they took this money and put it back into this building. Last year because everything changed they forgot to request it. This year it was requested so we gave it to them.

- Turner had discussion; of all those schools listed, how many of those have had their school closed?

- Mary Catherine Graziano had discussion; None that I have listed but i believe one school is closed and does not charge.

- Turner had discussion; I know they’ve given us an estimate of around $15,000 a year to ru, t has to be at the ready 365 days a year. Our moving into it means we will now be using the entire space.

- Spaulding had discussion; normally this is an article that gets voted on every year, but because of covid the articles are rolled into the town budget. I assume after covid if all our meetings go back to normal, all 20 articles will be individually voted on at town meeting.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; continuing the conversation, just to set the record straight, $14,500 is when we owned the building. we don't own the building anymore; the expenses of this building are managed by the towns and we are a unified district. North Hero doesn’t get charged for maintenance or use.

- Spaulding had discussion; they pay $37,000 a year.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; it was for rental of the Town clerk space, but the fireman still had their dinners there. Grand Isle doesn’t get charged by the district for the maintenance of their building. Why are we being charged?

- Turner had discussion; except we are going to occupy it.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; not if your budget gets turned down. You mean to tell me that if the budget gets turned down you will still move into the building.

- Selectboard had discussion; it is a separate article to be voted on.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; Belvidere school. It’s the same footprint. t belongs to a unified union school district. It’s used as an emergency shelter and the town doesn’t pay. I asked the financial director what the expenses are for being open 2 days a week. $45,622- $48,467. Savings may be because of solar and standing seam roof.

- Spaulding had discussion; how well did the district maintain the building?

- Turner had discussion; let everyone be aware that article 5 the budget article, note that the highway surplus of $6000 can only be used in highway and not allocated to other areas of the budget.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; didn’t the accounting firm recommend that the highway budget is completely separated from the general budget?

- Turner had discussion; Yes, and I would like for us to do that also. We brought this up with the accounting firm again this year and I think it’s a good idea.

- Sarah Noble had discussion; I will have to discuss this with Community Bank.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; when did you discuss article 6?

- Spaulding had discussion; we didn’t, Selby called the attorney to judge the petition you submitted and the attorney stated all the paperwork of all the complaints that were sent to the attorney general were sent to the attorney, along with the petition you submitted. Attorney re-wrote this entire warning. No secret meetings. The attorney wrote this.

- Turner had discussion; read what attorney stated into minutes (see attached)

- Spaulding had discussion; just so people understand that, last November we had a conversation with VLCT about this and we knew it was totally up to the select board, but we wanted to involve the Town and get input. We tried to write the articles so it wasn't saying “We can move if we want, but we’ll take your input.” We wanted towns people’s input. The attorney said we shouldn't even ask the people about that because we have fully authority to make this decision. We said “We want the town on board.” I insisted this article was in there this year. What really kicked this off was your (Sylvia Jensen) email which wanted both of these articles on the ballot and you would accept it only if it was heavily favored of one article or the other.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; I don't understand the “two competing articles.” It’s like when were last on the board together that we had received a $300,000 grant to buy the stone house at the beginning of the island for a visitors’ center, and a question was placed on the ballot about whether we would support that or not.

- Spaulding had discussion; no, it wasn’t, it was never on the ballot. It was questionnaire that was sent out, but it was never a ballot item. This was sent out on 1/12/2009 and it said; Your question- “should the town investigate the purchase of Dyer Hill house next to Ember’s garden to create a rental property/ bed and breakfast welcome center?” and we put that in there because you were pushing that. We looked into the cost of maintaining it and it was going to be about $70,000 a year. The people answered “No.” At that same time we asked the people “Would you consider moving Town offices to the school, should room become available through addition or vacancy?” and they voted “Yes” on that.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; 12 years ago. We know what the cost will be here now.

- Selectboard had discussion; No, we don't. You’re taking an accumulation of the costs from other Towns.

- Debbie Spaulding had discussion; CIUUSD figure for 2018-2019 for the school occupied was $29,800.

- Spaulding had discussion; $10,000 of that is janitorial costs. It’s certainly not going to cost the town that. Fuel was $6500, but that’s keeping all rooms at 68 degrees, which also by law the school must pump all the air out of the building and pump in new air every half hour. That will not have to be done for the town. Furthermore, I have also enlisted a contractor to give an estimate of what it would cost to work on the Town Hall, because the Town Hall is a public building but has no code for a public building at all. He pointed out that as soon as they go into that building for renovations, the entire building would have to be brought up to public building code. All door casings, every wall, wiring, the fire marshal needs to be involved and he even questioned about upstairs with the access and egress and he said I’m not going to waste my time giving you and estimate because no one is going to agree to do all that. I told him I would pay you because all we get is a bunch of empty rhetoric about how much it will cost to put a coat of paint in the building and new roof and septic. The building is a 1900 building with no code at all. As soon as they go in there, the entire building will need to come up to code. We will have that estimate hopefully by the informational meeting.

- Turner had discussion; the permanency of this all comes up in 2023 with another vote.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; who are you dealing with?

- Spaulding had discussion; that will be known when the estimate is done.

- Barbara Callahan; there are grants out there and that building could be saved. I don't agree that its old a decrepit.

- Turner had discussion; grants are not free, there is a match to every grant.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; they’re 80/20 or 50/50.

- Turner had discussion; you’re forgetting the most important thig here, the building is too small. We basically have 670 sq. feet to be used in there, the rest is stairways, bathroom, furnaces etc. that take up an enormous amount of space. The governors estimate right now states you should have 100 sq. feet per person. Right now, we are at max just in this room. Another thing to take into consideration if the town moves in here and we occupy the space until 2023; there could be a whole different board and you decide to renovate the existing town hall and move back in, we will have to get everything out of that office to do the work. I would rather see the existing Town Office moth balled rather than this school. The board has a vested interest in the school building. The move in here is going to be all volunteer. The safes will be moved from the same spot in the wall as we got them in.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; if you move in here, will you still keep the trash cans on the front steps?

- Sarah Noble had discussion; the only reason the trash bins are where there are at the town office is that you can’t get them out of the snowbanks in the winter.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; If the group comes to you again to get a grant for a real structural assessment; we can’t do that unless the town officers say yes.

- Turner had discussion; I think if that happens and we can get a grant to help with cost, that’s great.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; but we can build a vault so all vaults would be gone out of the office space. We’re going to build it.

- Turner had discussion; but where will we put the vault; we can’t possibly make the buildings footprint any larger. It would have to be considered in the cost.

- Mary Catherine Graziano; I’ve been looking through the past decade of town reports and I’m seeing that for a little while the town office budgeted renovations of $10,000-$15,000 and then it just stopped. At most we paid for operations and maintenance was $20000 a year, but it looks like what we will be moving into is a building that to maintain and operate is going to be around that much, but that doesn't include maintenance. we have a history of under maintaining the building. What is the plan for the future of maintaining the school if we decide to stay in it?

- Turner had discussion; first off, all your talking about a building built around 1916 compared to one built around 1998, there is a vast difference in construction and maintenance required.

- Spaulding had discussion; adding to that, the 2009 questionnaire was sent out when we saw a decline of students enrolling. You can’t have town meeting or an emergency shelter in that building, plus the parking only allows about 6-7 vehicles. We would need to maintain another building. It would make more sense to maintain one.

- Mary Catherine Graziano; that’s where a cost benefit analysis sheet would be helpful for decision making.

- Turner had discussion; it’s too premature. Also, in this building, we have 4 nice classrooms that could be income producing for us.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; just for clarity, the CIUUSD owns this building, correct? and will maintain it for the next 28 months, correct? So, our $14500 is not necessary, and will not result in the declining condition of this building, correct? (if left vacant)

- Turner had discussion; You can discuss the $14500 with CIUUSD.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; I will. Grand Isle doesn't pay and North Hero doesn’t pay.

- Turner had discussion; this is all speculation; these are different communities and we don't have the students. Those towns do.

- Bob Varga had discussion; I am so confused. You’re talking about moving in here for 2 years while the district owns it and then in 2 years if we have to move out, where will we go? What are we deciding in the next weeks? If i knew we were going to move to the school while renovating to move back to the town hall or to sell the building, that would make sense to me.

- Turner had discussion; the options will be to stay here or return to the current town hall.

- Spaulding had discussion; it’s a non-binding vote, the board had the power to move here last November, we want the voters’ approval because we like to include everybody. The district will be paying the bills and we will provide the $14500. We will know within those 2 years what the actual operating cost will be of this building. Then the voters can be more informed. This building has not been through a year without children here. The superintendent talked about having alternative programs offered here but they can’t get the staffing or the parent to agree to send students here. The district said they don't believe they're going to be able to utilize the building that way and they truly believe they’re going to offer it back to the town for $1.00. We don't think it makes a lot of sense to put money into the current Town Hall in the meantime because it is only appraised for $107,800, so if you put in $100,00- $200,000 in repairing, we will never sell it for that. the wastewater is just a holding tank. We are trying to find the most economical choice.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; so, are you going to allow that building to continue to deteriorate and look awful?

- Turner had discussion; we will certainly preserve it as best we can. We can’t just put a coat of paint on it, there’s lead paint all over it. There was no attempt to remove lead paint.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; no, it was painted 33 years ago.

- Turner had discussion; I believe the board would like to entertain ideas of what can be done with that space in the meantime.

- Barbara Callahan had discussion; are you voting on this budget you presented to us even though there are some discrepancies?

- Turner had discussion; we are setting the budget at this point.

- Spaulding had discussion; by that time, we will have all those answers, particularly if you have them in question form.

- Turner had discussion; we asked this for the last meeting, and it would be very helpful if you can give us written questions a couple days prior to the meeting so if they have to be looked up we can get those answers.

3. Approve new budget

- Motion by Spaulding to approve new budget, 2nd by Zera-- All in favor

4. Approve new warning.

- Sylvia Jensen had discussion; this meeting is supposed to be a rescheduling of our annual town meeting, correct? I ask you, why is the voting on a Friday not on a Tuesday?

- Spaulding had discussion; we got permission to do this. the secretary of state stated that voting just needs to be within ten days of the informational meeting. Give me an example of when we voted and it wasn’t on a Tuesday. What benefit does this have?

- Turner had discussion; the Secretary of State was aware our vote day would be on Friday. Why does. There is no law during Covid that states this vote needs to be on a Tuesday.

- Motion by Spaulding to approve new warning, 2nd by Zera-- All in favor.

5. Adjourn.

- Motion by Spaulding to adjourn meeting at 6:57PM, 2nd by Zera-- All in favor

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Noble, Select board Clerk

Select board approved on: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Paul Zera Rustam Spaulding Selby Turner