

Town of Fletcher – Select Board Informational Meeting
Link: <https://tinyurl.com/fletchersbmeeting> Password: 330460
Monday, February 22, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Virtually Present

Members: Jon Bondy (Chair), Rich Bidwell, Matt Gillilan, Matthew Swartz, and Jesse Wiens.

Guests: Zach A, Tessa Anderson, Lars Baris, Michael Burk, David Clark, Jillian Clark, Josh Cozzens, Staci Davis, Corey Decker, Deb DeLong, Andrew Douglas, Brianna Douglas, Bruce Douglas, Lynn Douglas, Dana Duchaine, Sue Ferguson, Russell Frantz, Michelle Frenier, Jess Graff, Wes Graff, Pam Jedlicka, Sybil Jewell, Craig Lambert, Deb Mears, Jamie Mears, Christine Nilsen, Barbara O'Brien, Alex Sargent, Pat Saylor, Thomas Saylor, April Still, Jeff Still, Mark Sustic, Karrie Sweet (Town Clerk), Tara Sweet, Aimee Tinker (Assistant Town Clerk), Kathryn Towle, Sara Villeneuve, Taylor Watts, Rachael Wilson (Secretary), Janet Young, Andrea Zamuda.

1) Call to Order:

- a. Jon Bondy called the meeting to order at 7:05pm.
- b. Jon provided an overview on how the Webinar style Zoom meeting works.

2) Moment of Silence: Jon Bondy read the names of Fletcher residents who passed away and there was a moment of silence.

3) Explanation of voting: Jon Bondy explained that because of COVID-19 gathering restrictions, voting this year will be by Australian Ballot on 3/2/2021. Jon encouraged voters to use absentee ballots to help keep in person contact to a minimum due to COVID-19. Jon explained that the ballot includes voting for candidates on the Select and School Boards and the Town and School budgets. The School informational meeting will be on Wednesday 2/24/2021.

- a. Sara Villeneuve asked if ballots can still be mailed. Aimee Tinker responded that ballots can still be mailed, but she recommends that voters should pick up their ballot if they request it after Wednesday (2/24/2021) so that they have it in time for the vote on 3/2/2021.

4) Veterans and Service Members: Matt Swartz thanked veterans and service members for their service.

5) Informational Meeting Presentation:

- a. Jesse Wiens explained how to ask questions via Zoom. By raising your hand, putting the question in the chat.
- b. Jesse shared his screen with the slideshow of the Select Board's presentation. Jesse reminded residents about the town website and where to find updates on COVID-19, how to join a Select Board Meeting, Broadband project information, and meeting minutes.
- c. Roads: Matt Gillilan reported on the FY20 road highlights.
 - i. Matt explained the Halloween storm and that the costs from the storm will be covered by FEMA. He also explained the Wright Road bridge project: The town will be responsible for 12.5% of the cost (approximately \$\$35,000) and the remaining costs will be paid by the FEMA and the State.
 - ii. Matt explained the paving loan balance of \$713,000 and went through the equipment replacement fund chart (also located on page 25 of the Town Report). Jon Bondy explained that the paving loan is ending in FY 25 or 26, so about the same time the balance in the equipment fund gets lower, the paving loan will end. Matt Gillilan confirmed that FY25 is the last payment on the paving loan. After the last payment on the paving loan, the Select Board will have to reevaluate the equipment replacement fund plan. At this point in the meeting, the Select Board paused and asked if there were any questions.
 1. Michael Burke asked: Is the grader a lease that will have to be renewed? Matt Gillilan explained that the grader is a lease payment with a \$1 buyout. The Town will own the grader after the final lease payment.
- d. FY 2020 Report: Jesse reported the information in on FY2020. Jesse Wiens explained that this information is also available in the Town Report.
 - i. Jesse explained the bottom line: There is a surplus of \$67,000 at the end of FY2020. The Select Board is proposing that it is applied to taxes in the FY22 budget. Jesse paused and explained how to raise your hand or use the chat to ask questions or comments about FY2020.

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1. Pam Jedlicka asked if the builder is in anyway responsible for the buckling floor in the Town Office. Jon Bondy explained that the administrative costs to go back to the builder were more expensive and more hassle than it was worth. Jesse confirmed that \$9,000 out of the \$10,000 of the Town Office expenses were for the generator.
- e. FY20 highlights report:
- i. Karrie Sweet spoke to the \$18,000 grant the Town received to digitize Town records for research or email if needed. This grant paid for a large scanner for maps and books, Sybil's salary, a computer workstation, and portal for the digitized records. The portal will need to be budgeted in the future, but the set-up fees were covered by grant.
 - ii. Aimee Tinker spoke to the Election grant the Town received. This was a \$5,000 grant for anything to facilitate safe elections. The grant paid for an air purifier, laptop, acrylic dividers, tables, organizing shelves, additional signage, and a laminator. These items will be helpful for when elections can be held at the school again.
 - iii. Rich Bidwell spoke to the Town Office generator that will power entire building, the heat pumps, the Office in the Town Garage, radiant floor heat, and the approximate \$1,000 savings in propane heating because the radiant heat floors are working properly.
 1. Jesse Wiens thanked Rich for his hard work and opened floor to questions. There were no questions.
 2. Sue Ferguson said great job on the grants and thanked Karrie and Aimee.
 3. Pam Jedlicka said thanks to all for their hard work.
- f. FY2021 updates:
- i. Jesse Wiens spoke to the broadband project.
 1. Jesse explained that there was a vote to take out a revenue loan and grant to complete a broadband buildout to the Town. The revenue loan is not a loan that is paid for by tax money and it will never become a part of taxes. The loan is paid for by revenue from the internet service. The Northern Borders grant for \$440,000 was secured. The project cost reduced a little because Mansfield Community Fiber (MCF), who will be building out the fiber, added \$120,000 to the project. The VEDA loan has also been approved. Since approval there has been lots of work putting together the lease agreement and memorandum of understanding. The reason for the lease agreement is because the Town will own the fiber and lease it to MCF. We are on track for the application for poles, and Tim Nulty from MCF expects that this time next year (or at the start of Winter in 2021) a number of residents will be able to access the MCF services. The remaining residents will have access by the Summer of 2022. By September 2022 every Fletcher resident will have the ability to access high speed fiber optic internet if they wish. There is more information and an FAQ on the Town's website.
 - a. Michael Burk commented that the service is wonderful.
- g. Alex Sargent to comment on the Town reappraisal:
- i. Alex reported that the listers, working with Courtney from VT appraisal, are plugging along with the reappraisal. Alex has been traveling with Courtney and they have completed approximately 50-60 properties. Alex's connection was breaking up and Jon Bondy added that most people have given enough access to the appraisers so they can perform the assessments they needed. Alex was able to return to the meeting and confirmed that they have been working from the west side to the east side of town. Alex said it is planned for the reappraisal to be complete in 2022. Alex explained that the reappraisal is all pre-paid and there are no budget constraints for property owners. The Select Board opened the floor for questions.

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1. What if you were appraised in the last couple of years? Alex Sargent explained that the last appraisal was in 2005 and that they want all homes and properties to be reappraised for the same year. All homes and properties will be reappraised regardless of their last reappraisal.
- ii. Other questions and comments:
 1. Sara Villeneuve had a question about broadband: She is concerned that she will have to pay \$1500 per house (6 houses) on her private road, to bring the fiber optic line up to our homes from Buck Hollow. Is this case to all private neighborhoods?
 - a. Jesse Wiens explained it is not the case for all private neighborhoods. There is not a one size fits all cost. Jesse explained that the build out is building out to all roads, including private roads, up to the second to last house. The build out will not go to the home, but to the pole or conduit if it is underground. If residents want the service, they are responsible for the cost from the pole to their premises. MCF kicks in \$400 towards this cost. If it costs more than \$400 then you're responsible for the remainder. The cost is approximately \$1/foot for MCF to run fiber, but that cost doesn't include digging for conduit. Jon Bondy explained that if there is a situation where the phone company owns the infrastructure (like conduit) this could change the circumstances. Jon also explained that there is a plan for a universal access fund (10% of MCF profit after the loan is paid) that could help pay for the costs to residents. Sara confirmed that the website says it is 1.60/foot for MCF to dig. Jon explained that it might be helpful for Jon, Jesse, and Sara to meet to talk about the situation she mentioned.
 - b. Dana Duchaine recommended that people to go with MCF because they have been using their service for 4-5 months and they have done a fantastic job. Whether you want it above or below ground will depend on what you need. In their case, MCF ran the cable next to their existing conduit (they didn't have to put the cable in conduit because of how it is coated) and Dana paid a little more than \$400.
 - c. Sue Ferguson asked how to access the universal access fund. Jesse Wiens explained that MCF must build the network first and then the fund kicks in once there is actual profit from the broadband subscribers. After that, the Select Board will need to work out how residents will access the fund.
 - d. Michelle Frenier asked if the terms changed because MCF used to include 300 feet from the pole to the premises and now it is a dollar amount. Jesse explained it did change because contractor costs changed. Jesse explained that the other changes that they made increase the amount of mbps that each tier of service provides without increasing the prices of their service tiers. Jon Bondy explained that with Consolidated Communications, they never guaranteed you would receive the speed you were paying for, but with MCF he is actually getting faster speeds than he's paying for. Jon explained that the universal access fund was something MCF volunteered to do and it is a sign that they're behaving more like good neighbors than good businessmen. Michelle was recalling back to a few Select Board meetings where a town's person had requested service and there was some service connection that had to be added and she had to pay for that.
 - i. Pam Jedlicka responded that this was her situation. That there is an item on the pole called a cap. This is not on every pole, so there may be additional costs for residents if the closest cap to their house is on a

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different road. The fiber must come from the pole with the cap. Jon Bondy said that he and Jesse Wiens can bring this concern it up to MCF for an explanation.

2. Michael Burk said their service has been great and hasn't gone out since August. He said with his previous service he had to reset his router almost daily.
 3. Matt Swartz added that there are a few different types of cable: The drop line from the pole to the house and the fiber from the road to the trunk. The fiber from the road to the trunk needs to be run through conduit.
 4. Jon Bondy suggested that the meeting move on because the informational meeting is about the vote and not only broadband. Jon suggested that maybe having a meeting or time during a Select Board meeting to discuss broadband. Jon also encouraged that residents with broadband questions contact himself and/or Jesse Wiens.
 5. Jesse Wiens added that he is stepping down from the Select Board, but that he plans on helping to make sure the project is seen through to a good place, so that others can take on and handle the project. Jesse explained what a big deal the broadband project is and that it is in national and state news. Jesse encouraged residents to remember that the Town is pioneering bringing broadband to a rural town. A lot of Select Board members from other towns have been contacting Jesse wondering how they have brought broadband to Fletcher. Jon Bondy added that this is a main reason why it has taken so long to get documents together because we are breaking ground.
- h. FY2021 updates continued:
- i. Matt Gillilan spoke to the River Road box culvert grant: Work started in FY20 and the money for the grant was received in FY21. This grant was for approximately \$137,000. Matt also spoke to the Wright Road bridge project coming up this year. He explained that all difficult permits are in place and work should be able to begin this summer. Matt explained that Town trucks will be able to drive on the new bridge so it will be open year-round. The Select Board cut \$25,000 from the paving budget to help cover the Town's cost of the bridge.
 - ii. Matt also gave an update on the Halloween storm. The Town should hear from FEMA soon. FEMA is also involved in the Wright Road bridge project. Aimee Tinker explained that the Town has a new FEMA representative. Aimee said it is a long process that was made longer because of COVID. At this time there isn't a date for when the FEMA money is coming in, but it should be soon.
 - iii. Karrie Sweet spoke with the Town Office's response to COVID-19: To stick with the rules and guidelines for state the Town Office doors were closed, but people can come in by appointment. Karrie said that they want people to feel like they can get help when they need to and encourages people to use the green drop box when possible. Karrie explained that all researchers have to call and make appointments because only one person can work in the vault at a time. Jon Bondy added that when COVID became an issue about a year ago, the Select Board was concerned it would impact residents their abilities to pay tax bills. The Select Board had conversations about how COVID was impacting residents and didn't see an impact on residents' abilities to pay taxes. Jon said that he doesn't want to minimize the impact on our community, but that it feels like we've done better than other towns and that we should be grateful for that. At this point the Select Board paused for questions or comments.
- i. Proposed budget for FY22:
- i. Jon Bondy explained that Fairfax Fire expenses have been up. Though some costs are not due to negligence, the Select Board is going to come up with policy to see if we can get reimbursement from insurance companies and have repercussions for residents if a call is due to negligence.

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- ii. On call Road Crew position: Jon explained that a person is identified for the on-call driver if needed.
 - iii. Taxes: Jon explained that taxes will be lower in FY22, but in FY23 taxes are likely to rise because for FY22 the \$67,000 surplus was applied. The hope is that by FY23, COVID will be behind us and the economy will be better. Jon explained that the Select Board tried hard to not have an increase this year.
- 6) At this point, the Select Board opened the meeting up to questions or conversation about candidates. Jon Bondy explained that in a normal year, a candidate would be nominated from the floor and they could speak in Town Meeting. The candidates were given the opportunity to speak in the Meet the Candidates meeting two weeks ago, but if a candidate wants to speak or if someone wants to talk to a candidate we can use this meeting as an opportunity for that. Jesse Wiens explained how to ask a question or raise your hand in a Zoom meeting. Jon also invited attendees to provide feedback on how the informational meeting went and if there are suggestions for doing things better.
- a. Karrie Sweet thanked the Select Board because they have been working hard meeting every week. Karrie also thanked Jesse Wiens for his service on the Select Board and how much he is appreciated. Karrie addressed the Select Board candidates: She wished them luck and explained that it is different being on Zoom and it can be hard to learn not being in person. Karrie hopes we can all start meeting again in person. Karrie explained that the Select Board you'll work with is great and that it is a commitment.
 - b. Jon Bondy commented that Jesse Wiens has been an important member of the Select Board and he hopes that someday in the future Jesse will run again.
 - c. Tara Sweet raised this question for candidates: How many Select Board meetings did you attend once you decided to run?
 - i. Corey Decker said she listened in on Select Board meetings since there has been the Zoom capability and since Jesse encouraged her to run.
 - 1. Jon Bondy asked for clarity because Corey did not attend Select Board meetings and only attended the Meet the Candidates meeting.
 - a. Corey explained that that is what she meant.
 - ii. Matt Swartz said he has attended since a little before when he was appointed to the Select Board (to temporarily fill Christine Nilsen's seat). He explained that he did miss couple of meetings because of travel for work.
 - iii. Tessa Anderson said she has been to all the Select Board meetings since she decided to run in February and knows there is a lot to learn. She said she is happy to continue participating even if she isn't elected.
 - iv. Bruce Douglas said he has attended a few meetings since he decided to run, but he doesn't think it is necessary to attend meetings before running. He did say that it is important to attend after you've been elected and made the commitment.
 - 1. Jon Bondy responded and said that he respectfully disagreed with Bruce. That there was a time when people would come onto the Select Board without knowing what it was about. Jon said he remembered when Rich Bidwell attended meetings and alerted that Jon that he was interested before he ran.
 - 2. Bruce said that he likes that everyone can be heard and respected on the Select Board even if they have differing opinions.
 - 3. Jon explained that as chairmen his goal is to have a consensus from the Select Board. Jon gave an example of a conversation about beaver trapping. That the Town had trapped for 20 years before Christine Nilsen expressed that she did not believe trapping was the right beaver mitigation. Now the Town is doing something different for beaver mitigation. Jon said he likes that the Select Board can be candid.

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- v. Jesse Wiens thanked everyone for their kind words. Jesse wanted residents to know that he is stepping down for personal reasons.
 - vi. Sue Ferguson asked how the candidates were lined up? She explained that there are two, 3-year Select Board terms and she is wondering how the candidates were put into the seats they are running for and how the Town decided that.
 - 1. Jon Bondy explained that the candidates selected what position they wanted to run for, not the Town. He also clarified that there are two, 3-year terms and one 1-year term.
 - vii. Rich Bidwell thanked Jesse Wiens for all he's done for the Town. Rich also said that all people running for a Select Board seat should know there are helpful classes available from the state about how a Select Board works.
 - viii. Jon Bondy asked if there were other questions. There were no more questions or comments. Jon thanked everyone for attending.
- d. Meeting adjourned at 8:49pm

Upcoming Meetings:

Select Board Meeting: March 1, 2021 at 7pm

Jon Bondy, Chair

Matthew Swartz

Rich Bidwell

Jesse Wiens

Matt Gillilan