

**Town of St. Albans
Selectboard 'Special' Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 14th, 2019
5:00 p.m.**

On Monday, January 14th, 2019 at 5:00 p.m., at Town Hall the Town of St. Albans Selectboard met.

Officials and staff present: Chair William Nihan, Vice Chair Bruce Cheeseman, Brendan Deso, Stan Dukas, Al Voegele, Town Clerk Anna Bourdon, Director of Public Works Alan Mashtare and Town Manager, Carrie Johnson.

Public: Bob Fairbanks, SAPD Chief Gary Taylor, SAPD Lieutenant Ben Couture, Joe Luneau, Sally Lerner, Charlie Moore, St. Albans Historical Society and Museum Executive Director Alex Lehning.

W. Nihan opened the meeting at 5:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was said. The purpose for the 'special' meeting was to conduct a budget work session to continue work on the FY '20 budget.

Marine Unit

W. Nihan explained that the Board would not be talking about any proposal regarding a marine unit or developing a Harbor Master Plan. That discussion will take place at the next Selectboard meeting on Wednesday, January 23rd.

St. Albans Police Department

Chief Gary Taylor and Lieutenant Ben Couture came before the Board to give an update on the Police Department to answer questions about the Street Crimes Unit. Chief Taylor explained that in the 2018 calendar year, there was a 4% increase in police calls. Arrests were up 29% and DUI's were up 30% which he thinks includes driving under the influence of marijuana. He went on to explain that the police are using DRE's or Drug Recognition Experts. The police responded to 35 drug overdoses in 2018 with 20 of them fatal. Lieutenant Couture is more of the drug expert and he went on to explain that there is a drug out called "Molly" which in powder form is also called Ecstasy or bath salts.

Chief Taylor went on to explain that the Street Crimes Unit (SCU) continues to do an amazing job. In 10 1/2 months, SCU arrested 104 people, conducted 162 interdictions, seized 3.99 pounds of crack cocaine, 4 grams of meth, 105.275 grams of heroin, and \$17,804 in cash.

Chief Taylor explained that two females have passed the academy entrance examines and will start at the academy on February 1st. Kit Hanson, a female officer has been placed at SATEC as the School Resource Officer (SRO) and Officer David French has been placed at BFA.

St. Albans Museum and Historical Society

Executive Director Alex Lehning and Vice President Charlie Moore came before the Board requesting additional funds for the Museum. Mr. Lehning explained that over the last few years, they've noticed an increase in expenses. They doubled their fund raising efforts, and increased events, programs, and services. Even with these efforts, they discovered they were unable to keep up with the increase of expenses. One major expense is the building that houses the Museum; it is a schoolhouse built in 1861.

W. Nihan asked how the Museum's endowment was? Mr. Lehning stated that their endowment is fairly small, \$330,000 and they draw the standard 5% from it per year. Mr. Moore pointed out that 5% is how much they can take each year per the trust agreement.

A. Voegele asked if the funds they were asking for were endowment funds or operating funds. Mr. Lehning stated requested funds would be for operating costs. He went on to say that they generate 86% of their own income every year.

A. Voegele asked Mr. Lehning at what point does he start to see a deficit and how much is that that you would need to raise progressively. Mr. Lehning said moving forward they will start to see the income-expense gap increase to \$10,000 - \$15,000.

Mr. Moore explained that the Museum plays a critical part in the community, City and Town. He went on to say that they have really tried to live within their budget but, with

the aging facility, it is getting really tough. W. Nihan stated that they should take a look at the building, if that is what's draining their resources and see what it would take to bring the building up to snuff. Mr. Lehning explained that one of the steps they took was to apply for a grant to do a buildings assessment. They have a professional firm who is going to go through the building from cupola to basement and give us some of those answers.

A. Voegele asked Mr. Lehning what additional funding the Museum was asking for. Mr. Lehning stated an additional \$10,000 so, an increase from \$5,000 to \$15,000 annually. A. Voegele stated he'd like to see the Town match the City's commitment. Mr. Moore stated that the City's commitment is \$15,000 annually.

Budget Draft #4 – 1.14.19

Parks & Recreation

C. Johnson asked the Board if they had any questions or concerns regarding the Parks & Recreation budget. S. Dukas pointed out that they had already gone through this. C. Johnson explained that they had gone through every department but, this was the final go through because the next time the Board sees the budget, it should be approved. S. Dukas explained that when they started, we were \$231,124 higher than the all-time high of previous years. He said he had a goal to flat line the budget. The next pass through it was reduced by \$35,000. He stated we are \$60,000 ahead and he agreed to settle on the \$60,000. S. Dukas suggested that the salaries listed in the draft budget be left the way it is and we'll settle up in June before we give out salaries in July. A. Voegele stated he had one question on salaries for executive session.

Department of Public Works

Again, C. Johnson explained that there weren't too many changes to this budget as they were done in the previous draft. B. Cheeseman asked A. Mashtare if he felt he was in good shape for next year. A. Mashtare said yes.

B. Cheeseman suggested changing the rotation of paving for Town roads. Instead of 10 years, go to 20 years and use the funds for something else, like sidewalks. A. Voegele suggested a program that would allow you to look at a road that was due for paving in the rotation and if it's in great shape, not pave it and move it in the rotation for another year. A. Mashtare stated that when he first come to work for the Town, he noticed that the paver had to jump from different sections of the Town to other sections that didn't make sense. Now, he's arranged to have sections in the same part of the Town paved so, the paver doesn't to jump around. It costs \$1,000 every time you have to move equipment.

A. Mashtare explained that the truck lift in the shop has to be inspected each year. It is leaking oil and will not pass inspection this year. It needs a new lift cylinder on one side by the inspector said you need to replace both sides at the same time. He doesn't feel that it's worth putting the money into, especially if we are going to replace it in the new garage. We can try selling it to a private buyer with the conditions that the Town isn't liable. It's worth about \$1,000. A. Mashtare was looking for permission to put it out to bid a buyer. The Board agreed to authorize A. Mashtare sell the lift for scrap metal.

Director of Administration

B. Deso suggested dropping the Stormwater Consultant line item down from \$20,000 to \$10,000. The Board agreed.

Town Manager

B. Deso suggested dropping the Legal line item down from \$50,000 to \$40,000. He also suggested dropping the Engineering/Consulting line item down to the fiscal year 2018 amount to \$25,000. B. Cheeseman suggested leaving the Engineering/Consulting line the way it is because the next project will be Town Hall and we'll need those funds. He agreed with the Legal line item reduction, however. The Board agreed to reduce the Legal line item but, not the Engineering/Consulting line item.

B. Deso suggested to decrease the Town Manager Miscellaneous line item by \$4,500 and leave it at \$14,000. The increase was going to be to purchase tablets for the Selectboard. They agreed to wait on that. S. Dukas requested a copy of the Franklin County budget for their next meeting.

Police Contract

B. Deso explained that we have a Capital Equipment Fund that we put \$30,000 in each year from an article. He went on to say that A. Bourdon said the fund is at \$96,000. B. Deso suggested using those previously collected funds to pay for the \$50,000 police

cruiser to drop the Police Contract line item by \$50,000. B. Deso then suggested when we do our next contract to look at when we have certain pieces of equipment due and pay for it equally over the terms of the contract.

B. Cheeseman stated that the police contract states we buy a cruiser every two years.

C. Johnson stated it was two out of the five year contract.

B. Nihan said the purchase of a cruiser is part of the contract so, it's part of the cost of policing and would be somebody else's asset. Why should we be buying something for somebody else unless it's contractual?

A. Voegele said that the problem he sees is on the years we don't have to buy a police car, the tax rate goes down. Then we have to pay the \$50,000 another year and we have complaints the budget is rising. So, let's cut something else. He agreed with B. Deso's suggestion. Who owns the cruiser is immaterial, it's part of the expense of operating.

B. Cheeseman didn't disagree with B. Deso's theory but, stated that we only have a year left on the current contract. He agreed with B. Nihan to build it into the next contract. B. Cheeseman and W. Nihan both suggested leaving the Police Contract line the way it is.

A. Voegele explained that if we take the \$50,000 and put it towards any place we want to reduce the budget, take the money out now and put it somewhere else as income. We do that and it'll reduce the amount we need to raise from taxes. A. Bourdon stated the \$50,000 would be moved to the revenue side of the budget.

W. Nihan stated it's a difference of reclassification of funds, it's not revenue in his mind in pure accounting sense. C. Johnson pointed out that the \$50,000 is just sitting in a savings account. W. Nihan said that he understood that and where it's sitting doesn't matter, it's what it's called. It's just a transfer of funds. C. Johnson stated that it reduces the expenses. B. Cheeseman said that how it benefits the taxpayers is all that mattered to him.

A. Bourdon suggested adding it to revenues which will reduce it all from the expense side. When we get the bill (police contract), she could write a check through a warrant on the Capital Equipment Reserve. W. Nihan stated as long as it's properly accounted for. What we could do is to make a memorandum adjustment at one point in time, beginning of the year, whenever we get the audit done, say we are going to transfer money from "X" fund to general revenue. He went on to say that once we get the vote in, before the end of the fiscal year, you can make the adjustment. A. Bourdon stated that that isn't going to reduce our taxes. It's just going to give us extra fund balance at the end of the fiscal year. That would be the cleanest and the safest way to do it. W. Nihan stated that what it really does it takes it from restricted funds and puts it in the general revenue.

A. Voegele asked W. Nihan if he agreed to allow the money to come out of the Capital Equipment Fund and by memorandum, move it to the revenue account. W. Nihan stated no, that it's not earmarked, no way. We're just trying to hide something. A. Voegele said that we are not trying to hide anything, Bill. W. Nihan said to just do what the contract says, we buy a cruiser, this is what it costs and that's where you put it. A. Voegele explained that he wasn't arguing that point. That's an expense. He asked again if we were going to shift the funds from the Capital Reserve fund into the operating revenue fund. W. Nihan stated yes, we are going to shift from somewhere in the Capital Reserve accounts to the general, unrestricted revenue. A. Voegele asked again if he was approving it. W. Nihan stated he agreed to that.

B. Cheeseman asked if the Town had done this in the past. A. Bourdon explained that we have paid for equipment out of the Capital Equipment account. W. Nihan stated not for a third party. A. Bourdon said that was correct.

C. Johnson stated that we are not changing the Police Department line item. A. Voegele stated that was correct.

Ambulance

No changes.

Local/Regional/State Organizations

C. Johnson explained that the Board had questions at the previous meeting regarding Vermont Center of Independent Living. A summary had been provided to the Board. B.

Cheeseman asked for \$200, what reason would we have to take them off the list? A. Voegelé stated we don't have any but, wouldn't want to increase it.

B. Deso suggested cutting the American Red Cross line item down to \$1,000 and add that \$1,000 directly back to the Veterans Valet and make that \$2,000. B. Cheeseman stated he disagreed explaining that the American Red Cross plays a much bigger role in life than the Veterans Valet. He went on to say that he's been to the hospital a few times and hadn't seen the Veterans Valet guys. He was sure they were there and they were working but, he has never had the opportunity. He does not want to cut the Red Cross one penny. A. Bourdon explained that it was already cut. B. Cheeseman asked why and C. Johnson explained it was discussed at the last meeting. A. Bourdon explained that it was cut \$500 because it is a national organization. B. Cheeseman said, so what. It's a national organization that will work right in our neighborhood if we need them. I stated that it was one of the most worthy organizations out there. B. Deso asked if he dropped his stake of \$1,000 out of that budget, would you give \$1,000 to the Veterans Valet anyway. B. Cheeseman stated no, he didn't feel it was worth giving it another grand. W. Nihan stated he would like to move the valet up to \$2,000 anyway. A. Voegelé stated that the request did not come from the hospital, it came from the veterans themselves. W. Nihan explained that there is \$5,000 or \$6,000 left for the veterans to pay off their vehicle. They have been getting a lot of help from the hospital. The volunteers are quite active and do a wonderful job. He also stated that this is a one-time request. C. Johnson explained that this is a one-time and not every year request. B. Cheeseman stated he would not agree to it but, don't cut the Red Cross. A. Voegelé stated he'd go along with that just to get his vote. C. Johnson then asked what amount would B. Cheeseman like to see in the Red Cross. B. Cheeseman stated he was talking about \$2,500, I don't know why we reduced it. A. Voegelé recalled in the last discussion, it was because it's a national organization. He understands what the Red Cross can do for our community and that they are a dynamic organization. B. Cheeseman agreed. He went on to say that if we agree to give back the \$500 to the Red Cross that was cut, he would agree to the additional \$1,000 to the valet. A. Voegelé stated he would go along with B. Cheeseman because he's going to vote to support \$2,000 for the valet service.

W. Nihan stated that one thing he doesn't like about Red Cross in general is their administrative cost of fund raising has always been reported to be extremely high. I don't support Red Cross but, I do support Catholic Relief because their fund raising percentage is extremely low. S. Dukas stated that he's a veteran but, that \$1,000 was enough for the valet.

C. Johnson stated that she heard a consensus for \$2,500 for the Red Cross but, didn't hear a number for the Vermont Center for Independent Living. The Board agreed to \$200.

C. Johnson explained that at the previous meeting, the Board had a question about another organization; Vermont Family Network. The Board agreed to remove that organization from the list, not funding the request.

St. Albans Museum and Historical Society

The last organization to be discussed was the St. Albans Museum and Historical Society. A. Bourdon stated that they get \$5,000 annually per a voted article. B. Cheeseman stated that was an awful increase, it's a lot of money. A. Voegelé explained that he went along with B. Cheeseman's earlier statement about the Epicenter; we are part of a community and we need to work together. We are half the population of the community. S. Dukas stated that most of their programs are not Town orientated. A. Voegelé pointed out it's mostly county.

S. Dukas explained that most organizations needs some kind of support today with the cutback from the federal and state government. It's up to the towns. He asked the Board how much they wanted to spend. He thought that we were already spending quite a bit. We have an aging population in the Town, as it showed in the survey. They want some stability. B. Deso explained he'd like to have a museum around by the time he has kids that are in middle school and can go to use it for field trips. W. Nihan stated he was happy to leave it at \$5,000 year after year. A. Voegelé stated he'd like \$15,000 but, would settle for \$10,000, increasing it by \$5,000. B. Cheeseman stated that if we go \$10,000, why not just go the \$15,000. S. Dukas asked if it goes on the ballot? B. Cheeseman stated he'd go for the \$15,000 and that we put it on the ballot. A. Voegelé, B. Deso and W. Nihan agreed. W. Nihan had one condition. He explained that it was put on unconditionally, \$5,000 a year, indefinitely. For other articles we promised so much a year for so many years, then it stops. Then they would have to ask again. He

suggested to put the question on the ballot and give nothing from that resolution. We are authorized to do it, we are not ordered to do it. A. Bourdon clarified with the Board to remove the current \$5,000 from the budget and put a question on the warning for \$15,000. W. Nihan stated yes. A. Voegelé would like to see the \$5,000 stay and have a question for \$10,000. S. Dukas asked W. Nihan if the voters reject it, do they get nothing? W. Nihan stated he would consider supporting the \$5,000. B. Cheeseman suggested putting the question on the ballot for 5 years.

The Board agreed to remove the \$5,000 from the budget and put a question on the ballot for \$15,000 a year for a term of 5 years. If the question fails, it is up to the Selectboard to decide whether or not to continue with the \$5,000 that was originally in place. There would be a deficit of \$5,000 on the Historical Society line item if the Board agrees to put the \$5,000 back in the budget. There would need to be a quorum of the Board to agree to that.

C. Johnson confirmed with the Board that the American Red Cross is \$2,500, the Historical Society is going to \$0, and Veterans Valet is going to \$2,000.

Route 7 Sewer Bond

A. Bourdon explained to the Board that we currently have 13 payments left and we pay two payments a year. We currently do not have any loans. We are debt free.

Fund Balance

A. Bourdon explained to the Board that the fund balance, less articles is \$208,989. We can give \$100,000 back to reduce taxes. C. Johnson explained that we don't want to go below that because we like to retain 5% of our budget as fund balance which is about a couple hundred thousand. S. Dukas asked if you put 5% of what is left into the emergency fund after you do your normal deductions? C. Johnson stated no, we don't put in any money into the emergency fund unless it's voted on and approved by voters.

B. Cheeseman asked how much was in the LOT (Local Options Tax) account. A. Bourdon explained that as of December 31st, 2018, there was \$3,362,566.

A. Bourdon stated that she was confident that at the end of fiscal year 2019, we will have another \$200,000 - \$300,000 fund balance because of delinquent tax collection and she will pay the schools less in May because of all the homestead late filers. It was agreed to apply \$200,000 to reduce taxes by the Board.

Salaries

C. Johnson asked the Board if they were OK with the salary line items. B. Cheeseman, W. Nihan and A. Voegelé said no. S. Dukas suggested revisiting this in June. C. Johnson stated that she wasn't talking about individual raises. No individual raises were proposed. She did ask for an increase in the Department of Public Works (DPW) salary schedule because we've had difficulty getting people to apply. B. Cheeseman stated that that had nothing to do with salaries. Everybody is experiencing that. He doesn't believe in throwing money at that situation, we pay well. A. Bourdon stated the City pays better. B. Cheeseman stated that he doesn't believe that you have to increase wages to entice people. He thinks the Town, wage wise, sits pretty Damn good. C. Johnson stated that we used to be at par and we are no longer at par with surrounding area wages. We pay one of the lowest salaries in the area. B. Cheeseman wanted to know how the Town compares to the other four areas. C. Johnson explained there are a couple different ways. One was looking at the VLCT spreadsheet that lists different staff wages by category and the other was actually having people call, ask us how much we pay our DPW and then not bothering to fill out an application; they have come right out and said they were going to get paid \$19.50 if they go to other places. Georgia is even upping their salaries because they are having difficulty getting DPW people. We don't want to be reactive but, we're not at par any longer. We are having difficulty hiring and people are leaving because of better wages elsewhere. B. Cheeseman stated let them go, those are the type of people we don't want to keep anyway. A. Voegelé asked B. Cheeseman what would happen if we had a deficit of employees? You complain about the Police Department staffing. You know what the Chief is doing to entice workers. B. Cheeseman stated that we should compare what our Public Works Director does here, compare it to Swanton, compare it to the City, compare it to Milton. Don't compare the salaries, compare the positions in what the individuals to do earn their money. For instance our Director of Public Works has no infrastructure, he's got ditches, we don't have sidewalks, we don't have Main Street, and we don't have water and sewer. He went on to say that right from the beginning, before we hired Alan (Mashtare) when we re-advertised the job, it should have been re-advertised as a Road Foreman not a Public Works Direct. We don't have everything that a Public Works Director does in this town.

A. Voegele asked what the position in Georgia is called. C. Johnson stated that she thought it was called a Highway Foreman. B. Cheeseman stated that what Alan does in this town, in Milton, he would be a Road Foreman. He went on to say that he wasn't knocking Alan and said he does a good job. C. Johnson pointed out that Alan does handle some sewer and he has been on calls a lot in the last 8 months. B. Cheeseman asked how much work with sewer Alan did and C. Johnson explained that the sewer work included the industrial park but, it does become quite critical at times. The Board agreed to leave the salary lines as presented – no changes.

Warning

C. Johnson stated we are going to add an article (Historical Society). W. Nihan asked, regarding Article One, should we have the election of a Lister for a term of 3 years. A. Bourdon stated there should be. C. Johnson agreed and stated in case the removal of the Lister article fails.

Article Three – \$200,000 it was agreed upon instead of \$100,000 to reduce taxes.

Article Five – B. Deso asked the Board if they wanted additional language to offset already expended items? C. Johnson stated that in the question itself, when we are asking for support for this project, are we also saying will you support what we've already expended. Soft costs. W. Nihan stated that those soft costs should go in as part of the cost of the project. Whatever the quote is plus what we've already spent. Funds to offset what we've already spent will come from the Infrastructure Fund (Local Options Tax, LOT).

B. Deso stated that there will be a good chunk of people who will want to reimburse the general fund for the soft costs but, don't want to vote for garage. In transparency sake, could there be separate articles? W. Nihan stated that when we present this to the public, we state this is what it'll cost to build the building, this is what we spent on engineering and the total cost of the project is "X". In addition, we have the salt shed; quotation for the salt shed, what we've spent thus far and what we anticipate for our new boring so, we can allocate all the expenses that we know to the proper project.

W. Nihan stated that for the article, we should have something in there about the state grant as part of the funding mechanism. The Infrastructure Development Fund, the Capital Equipment Fund and the State grant for the garage. A. Voegele suggested adding something saying this will not raise taxes because money has already been set aside. It was agreed to use "previously collected reserved funds" in the wording.

Article 8

B. Deso suggested saving money by taking a year off from funding the \$30,000 into the Capital Equipment reserve fund, give the taxpayers a break.

Article 6

W. Nihan suggested rewording this article to read "authorize the elimination of the office of Town Lister..." C. Johnson pointed out that this came from V LCT and that it has been reviewed by their lawyers, she didn't want to change it too much.

Article 8

Article 7 was skipped and the Board went back to Article 8. W. Nihan asked B. Deso if he wanted to raise the amount. B. Deso stated that the fund already has \$100,000 in it, can we take a year off from putting the \$30,000 in and give it as an effective break to the taxpayers. That'll play into our tax rate. The fund is currently at \$96,000. C. Johnson pointed out that we don't spend from the fund every year. It was agreed upon to not ask to fund the Capital Equipment Reserve Fund for one year and add the question for the Historical Society for the \$15,000.

Adjournment

MOTION: B. Deso made a motion to adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 7:39 p.m. All in favor, none opposed, motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Jenn Gray, Recording Secretary