

Approved Minutes
MAIDSTONE SELECTBOARD MEETING

Monday, April 1, 2024
7:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting, both in person at Town Hall and by Zoom Video Conference

Members Present in Town Hall (in-person): Scott Lovell, Chair; Brad McVetty, Vice Chair; Bruno McKenzie

Town Official Present in Town Hall (in-person): Emergency Management Coordinator and Fire Warden Bill Sanborn

Town Officials and Staff Present via Zoom: Town Clerk Amy Pear; Treasurer, Delinquent Tax Collector, Lister, Zoning Board and Planning Commission member Bob Champagne-Willis; Assistant Town Clerk and Lister Sam Graham; Zoning Board and Planning Commission member Bruce Barker; Lister, Auditor, and Health Officer Sandra Gray; Selectboard Administrative Assistant Mary von Alt

Also Present via Zoom: Lin Mixer, Andy Champagne-Willis, Ed Tully, Alexa Bernotavicz, Sam and Carol Gorham, Jim Bennett, Jan Barker, Burt and Carol Kline, Paul Kamins, Bonnie Lovell

NOTE: This meeting serves as the organizational meeting held each year after Town Meeting as well as the regular monthly meeting of the Selectboard.

Chairman Scott Lovell called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm..

SELECTBOARD:

- Bruno made a motion to elect Scott Lovell as Chair of the Selectboard for the ensuing year; Brad seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- Bruno made a motion to elect Brad McVetty as the Vice Chair of the Selectboard for the ensuing year; Scott seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- Brad made a motion to use the Coos County Democrat and the Caledonian Record as newspapers to post in; Scott seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- Brad made a motion to use Tarrant, Gillies, and Shems as Town Council. Bob pointed out that the Town has a standing contract with Monaghan Safar PLLC to handle tax sales. Brad modified his motion to use Tarrant, Gillies, and Shems as Town Council as well as Monaghan Safar for tax sales; Bruno seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- Brad made a motion to readopt the Rules of Participation; Bruno seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- The Selectboard briefly discussed the annual contracts that are on the Signing Desk, awaiting signature by the Selectboard. Amy said a contract from Groveton Fire has not yet been received; she did not attempt to reach them today to inquire about that as they were busy with an active fire. Bill Sanborn will look into this. Scott said the Selectboard does not need to vote on these annual contracts; the other Selectboard members agreed; they will sign the contracts after the meeting.

APPROVE MINUTES:

Bruno made a motion to approve the minutes for the Selectboard meeting held on Monday, March 4, 2024; Scott seconded the motion. Brad did not attend that meeting, so he did not vote. The motion carried.

ANNUAL APPOINTMENTS:

- Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard, one year term (currently, Mary von Alt): Mary said she had decided not to continue. The Selectboard will post that position.
- Administrative Assistant to the Zoning Board and Planning Commission, one year term (currently, Mary von Alt): Mary said she was mistaken in putting this on the agenda, as she thinks it is the responsibility of the Zoning Board and Planning Commission; Brad and Scott agreed with that allocation of responsibility, so Scott moved the meeting to the next item on the Agenda.
- Emergency Management Director, one year term (currently, Bill Sanborn): At Brad's suggestion, this item was tabled for the time being.
- Health Officer, three year term (currently, Sandy Gray): Brad made a motion to appoint Sandy Gray as Health Officer for a three year term; Bruno seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- NEK Broadband Representative, one year term (currently, Jack Donnelly): Amy confirmed that Jack sent an email to the Town stating that he is interested in continuing as the NEK Broadband Representative. Bruno made a motion to appoint Jack Donnelly as NEK Broadband Representative for the next year; Brad seconded. The motion carried.
- NEKWMD Representative, one year term (currently, Paulette Routhier): Brad made a motion to appoint Paulette Routhier as the NEKWMD Representative for the next year; Bruno seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- NVDA Representative, one year term (currently vacant): This position will be posted.
- Road Commissioner, one year term (currently, Brad McVetty): Bruno made a motion to appoint Brad McVetty as Road Commissioner for the next year; Scott seconded the motion. Brad recused himself from the vote. The motion carried.
- Town Agent, one year term (currently, Jim Mazzonna): Bruno made a motion to appoint Jim Mazzonna as Town Agent for the next year; Brad seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- Tree Warden, one year term (currently, Bruce Hobaugh): Brad made a motion to appoint Bruce Hobaugh as the Tree Warden for one year; Bruno seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- Zoning Board of Adjustment, three year term (Bob Champagne-Willis's appointment ends in 2024): At Bob's request, this item was tabled until after the discussion of the path and direction of the Planning Commission listed on the Agenda under Old Business.
- Planning Commission, three year term (Bob Champagne-Willis's appointment ends in 2024): At Bob's request, this item was tabled until after the discussion of the path and direction of the Planning Commission listed on the Agenda under Old Business.

REPORT FROM THE TOWN CLERK:

- The Town Clerk has submitted the Certification of Votes report to the Treasurer and the Selectboard Chair after Town Meeting, as required by law. (*Note: 24 V.S.A. § 1167. Certification of votes: When at an annual or special meeting a town votes to raise a tax, to borrow money, or to make any appropriation of money, the clerk of such town, within five days thereafter, shall certify such vote to the treasurer of the town and to the chair of the selectboard.*) Amy asked if anyone had questions about the report; there were no questions.
- Amy asked the Selectboard to approve attendance by the Town Clerk, the Assistant Town Clerk, and the Treasurer at the Springtime training for Town Clerks and Treasurers by VMCTA (Vermont Municipal Clerk Treasurer Association); the cost is \$35/person. Bruno made a motion to approve the training at \$35/person for the Treasurer, the Town Clerk, and the Assistant Town Clerk; Brad seconded the motion. The motion carried.

REPORT FROM THE ROAD COMMISSIONER:

- The Town Highway Posting Authorization papers have been posted at the Town Hall and on the bulletin board at the Lake, Brad reported.
- Brad said he had the Annual Financial Plan, which was completed by Logan Perron of the Vermont Agency of Transportation at the annual meeting; the Selectboard needs to sign it and return it to Mr. Perron.
- Brad said that he had the Certificate of Compliance for Town Road and Bridge Standards and Network Inventory, but did not see the paperwork to sign. The Selectboard must sign that paperwork and return it to Logan Perron, attesting that Maidstone has adopted the newest Town Road and Bridge Standards; we have done that, said Brad, and we have the network inventory. This paperwork is included in a packet sent to the Road Commissioner and a packet sent to the Town Clerk. Amy has pulled out the paperwork that she, as the Town Clerk, needs to sign and return after the organizational meeting. She will give Brad the paperwork that the Selectboard needs to sign.
- Brad says he has been working on the roads a bit, trying to get rid of some of the mud. They are in pretty good shape until the next rain and snow storm later this week, when he will start all over again.
- Lin, Jan, and Amy all expressed appreciation for the work done on the roads.
- Amy asked Brad if the Selectboard did not need to approve the posting of the weight limits for the Town roads, so that they can be enforced legally. Brad then made a motion to post the Town highways with the State limits; Bruno seconded the notion. The motion carried.
- Current Town Officers List: The Town Clerk will fill this out with the new appointments made at this meeting, and will return it to the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

REPORT FROM THE TREASURER:

- Bob has given the Selectboard the Budget to Actual reports for the first three months of this year. There is nothing extraordinary to report.
- The second installments of the 2023 property taxes are due on April 15th, as well as [Homestead Declarations, Property Tax Credit Claims, and Schedule HI-144, Household Income](#). Everyone who has outstanding taxes due has been notified.
- The Selectboard Warrant for the month of March is on the desk. Quite a number of invoices at the end of the month are waiting for the single signature in order to be part of the Warrant bundle.

REPORT FROM THE DELINQUENT TAX COLLECTOR:

The Town is down to two taxpayers who are delinquent and a total of six taxpayers who are late on their 2023 taxes; the two taxpayers who are delinquent are also late on the 2023 taxes and therefore included in the list of six late taxpayers. The list of delinquent taxpayers may change after the April 15th due date for the second installment of the 2023 property taxes. Steady progress is being made on delinquent taxes, but there is nothing significant to report at this time.

REPORT FROM THE LISTERS:

The statistical reappraisal being conducted by NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) is moving along quickly. Notices of reappraisal will be mailed to all property owners on the 15th of April, Bob believes. The Town will hold pre-grievance hearings on May 1st and 2nd. These hearings are an opportunity for property owners to ask questions about what is behind the property values listed in the reappraisal notices. There will be information on the notices that everyone receives as to how to make an appointment for a pre-grievance hearing. The grievance hearing dates are May 16th and May 17th; again the notices that everyone receives will include information about how to make an appointment for a grievance hearing, as well as the phone number to call. "As everyone knows the property values have risen dramatically over these last few years, which is the reason we are going through reappraisal at this time. It is basically that a tide has risen that raises everyone's property values, but not equally," Bob explained, "because it depends on what your property is." A huge portion of property taxes in Vermont consists of education taxes. The education tax rate for Maidstone has been reduced. People's property taxes will be determined by the combined impact of the lower education tax rate and the increased property value.

Bob has been following activity in the Vermont legislature to see what is happening and how the Town of Maidstone may be impacted; he reported the following. At this time, the legislature is working through the Yield Bill, which deals with the amount of money that needs to be raised through Homestead Taxes and with the non-homestead tax rate. The legislature is waiting on the historic number of school districts - 30% - that had school budgets that failed this year, before it can determine those numbers. However, weekly reporting from the various legislative committees involved, including Ways and Means, Education, and Operations, on where they feel the numbers are going indicates, so far, that the numbers are looking optimistic overall for what the Town of Maidstone's tax rates will end up being. The impact on individual properties will vary. There will be scenarios in Maidstone, if the numbers proceed where they seem to be going, where even though people's property values are going up, their tax bills will be smaller. At the same time, there are several properties where the property valuation increase will be greater than the property tax rate reduction percentage will be.

Bruno asked Bob if he thinks that property values have doubled for camps. Bob responded that he has seen properties that are barely increasing in value and properties that are more than doubling. Acknowledging the role that the pandemic played in increasing property values, now that the pandemic is over, Bruno said It appears that things are starting to slow down at the Lake. Bruno asked what happens if the real estate market drops and a property's value in a year from now is less than it's appraised at currently. Do the Listers go back and reappraise it, or does it stay like that? Bob responded that the Town has to do its valuation of property values as of April 1st this year. If property values drop after this date, the Town's CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) and COD (Coefficient of Dispersion) will go out of kilter; if they are far enough out of kilter, that will force the State to order another reappraisal. The Town's Listers are supposed to keep property values at fair market value; because we do not know where values will go in the future, property values are based on where they are today.

REPORT FROM THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR AND FIRE WARDEN:

The Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) has been updated, changing some names and telephone numbers. No one had any questions about it. The LEMP is ready for signature by the Selectboard Chair.

Bill reported on preparations for the eclipse on April 8th. Nobody knows exactly what will happen, but increased traffic is expected. Bill checked with the Town's emergency services and with the Sheriff. The Sheriff will have extra manpower on duty, floating around and taking care of emergencies as they arise. If people have a need for police, they should call 911 as usual. Groveton Ambulance will have two crews on duty, one stationed in Groveton and one in North Stratford, equal distances from Maidstone. Response times will depend on traffic. Bill is not sure what Groveton Fire plans, but Stratford Fire will man an engine full-time all day, right close by.

REVIEW OF TOWN POLICIES:

As there are no changes in the Town Policies for Class 4 Road Policy, Town Road Maintenance Policy, Sexual Harassment Policy, Purchasing Policy, Late-Filed Homestead Declarations Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy Rev 1, Code of Ethics for VT Community Development Program Policy, Notary Policy, and Rules of Procedure, Rev 1, Scott suggested that the Selectboard handle them all at once. Amy told the Selectboard that changes had been made to the Records Management Policy and Retention Plan based on newer laws that came out with elections; the updated policies are on the Signing Desk. Brad made a motion to accept the Town Policies; Bruno seconded the motion. The motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Discuss and take action as needed regarding Traffic Study of Maidstone Lake Road by NVDA during the busy summer months:** Amy reached out to Doug Morton at NVDA in preparation for this meeting. He said the time period for the study can whenever we want the study done. If the Town lets him know after the road has been graded, he will set it up. In a brief discussion, the Selectboard decided they would want it done in the summer, when there is the most traffic. Scott said we would have to get hold of Doug Morton.
- **Discuss the necessary completion of the work at Taylor Cemetery by R & S Tree & Landscaping in the Spring, as was discussed at the November Selectboard Meeting; take action as needed:** The Selectboard would like the work done before Memorial Day and decided to send a letter to R & S Tree & Landscaping. Brad asked if Amy would send the letter. She responded that the letter should be sent by the Selectboard's Administrative Assistant when the Selectboard has one; the timeline before Memorial Day does not look like this is an imperative issue. If the Selectboard does not have an Administrative Assistant and there is a time crunch, she will help out.
- **Discuss and act upon purchasing a flagpole:** Scott has researched and gotten quotes for a commercial grade 25 foot flagpole, rated for 144 mph, with an internal halyard and a solid base. The total for the one he suggests that the Town purchase is \$3,087.75. Bob asked if the flag would be lighted, as that must happen for a flag that stays up all night. Scott said the Town would have to buy a flagpole light that clamps around the base and shines up on the flag; the ones that he has been looking at are solar powered and cost about \$200. We would also need money to pay for the concrete. Scott said the total cost would be closer to \$3,700 by the time all is done. The Selectboard discussed the specifics of installation, then Scott asked Bob if we could spend that much from the ARPA monies. Bob said that the Town has just over \$30,000 in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) monies that must be spent, but added that the Town needs to consider what else we want to spend the ARPA monies on, including the loose tiles in the entirety of Town Hall, and what priorities to set. Scott said that he thinks Old Glory is at the top of the priority list, with which Brad agreed. Amy agreed, saying it is reprehensible that the Town does not have a flagpole and has not flown a flag in a long time. However, she pointed out that \$4,000 would help a great deal with a floor at Town Hall that will start rotting soon with the tiles that must be replaced, that two sections are coming off the roof of the building, and that other rot exists. She said \$4,000 is a lot for the Town to pay for a flagpole, but if one cannot be purchased for less, she agrees with the purchase. Scott said the Town could do something less, including a wooden flagpole, but Bruno pointed out that this issue has been going on for more than a year. He then made a motion to take \$4,000 out of the ARPA funds to purchase a flagpole; Brad seconded the motion. Bob said that the motion should say "up to \$4,000", so the wording was corrected. All then voted in favor.
- **Discuss and act upon a path and the future of the Planning Commission working with NVDA for the Town Plan:** Scott announced that Chris von Alt, the Planning Commission Chair, sent in his resignation today. Scott said he didn't know if Bob wanted to speak for the Planning Commission, then continued on to say that he knew that Jesse Noone of NVDA did not want to work with the Town anymore, but had sent a couple of other contacts that the Planning

Commission could work with on the Town Plan. Scott said he didn't know if anyone had gotten hold of them or what was going on there yet. He asked if anybody knew anything about that. Bob responded that he had heard nothing about this; Amy said that she had received nothing at Town Hall.

Scott said the Town should get hold of Dave Snedeker who has other people at NVDA he could appoint to work with us. He thinks the path forward is to figure out who the Town is going to work with, adding that he thinks the Town should work with Jesse, "because he had been working with us, but he had stepped back." Brad said he interpreted the email from Jesse as saying that NVDA was not going to work with Maidstone at all and had sent the names of individual people who might be willing to work with the Town. Bruno said that he thought it was Jesse who did not want to work with Maidstone, but Brad insisted that it was the whole of the NVDA. In response to Bruno's question, Scott said the date on the email was 3/11/2024. Mary said she was curious if Scott had planned to share that email with the Planning Commission. Scott said that he thought they were tagged on it, but, replying to Mary's question, said that he did not look at the email distribution list. He then said that the Planning Commission "had kind of made it clear to me that they did not want to work with NVDA." Bob said, "That's not true," and Mary said, "I think you are mischaracterizing that." Bruce simultaneously said he had not heard that. Mary added that both Bob and Bruce, members of the Planning Commission, were at the Selectboard meeting and could speak to that. Scott said, "At the last meeting, we started to talk about it, and Chris asked me to call him the next day, which I did, and that was basically what he told me." Mary stated, "That was not what he told you." Scott repeated that it was. Mary continued, "There was never any talk about not wanting to work with the entire NVDA, and I don't know that there was any talk about not wanting to work with Jesse. I don't think you should mischaracterize that." Scott said there definitely was, and Mary again said that he should ask Bob and Bruce, both part of the Planning Commission. In response to Scott's question about whether the Planning Commission knew that Jesse did not want to work with them, Bob replied that Jesse had sent an email saying that because the Town had not signed the contract that he had sent (*to the Selectboard and the Planning Commission*), he would not have any further communication with us. Bob continued, "I will state that I was truly disappointed in Jesse for being virtually disruptive at this last meeting. I was just disappointed that he was not acting in an advisory standard, but there was never any discussion - we have not met since then." Scott said, "In this email it said 'I sent this to your Planning Commission. My apologies as I should have CC'd you as well.' It says, 'I would recommend that your Selectboard and Planning Commission establish a clear path to work with NVDA.' Reach out to our executive director, Dave Snedeker, is what he told us." Mary said she had not seen that and asked Bob and Bruce if they knew anything about it. Bruce said that he recalled an email that said Jesse was stepping back and something about the contract not being approved. (*Note: The Selectboard approves contracts for the Town.*) Bob found and read aloud the March 6th email that was the last communication the Commission received from Jesse: "As you know, some time back I submitted a contract for services to develop a new town plan with the Town. To date it's not been executed. Perhaps it's not the scope you were asking for, so I'm going to step back for now while you determine what's best for your community. If you find that you need NVDA's help in developing a new town plan don't hesitate to reach out. Thanks and good luck to you all." The Planning Commission did not share that with the Selectboard, just as the Selectboard did not share the email it received from Jesse.

Scott said that to him the point is, what is the future path working with NVDA? Brad thinks that NVDA is supposed to be writing the Plan and the Town is supposed to do the legwork for them. Bruno said that at some point, NVDA has to check over and approve the Plan, whether the Town writes it and NVDA looks through it to make sure everything is to date and with the State Statutes.

Amy said that, according to NVDA, Bloomfield just did the Town Plan on its own. Our current Town Plan was written by Sean McCarthy and our Town and then submitted through NVDA with some assistance. She doesn't think NVDA wrote the Town Plan for Maidstone, because NVDA then dropped the ball and did not end up finalizing the approval of it. Amy, Bruno, and Bob clarified that the discussion was about the Town Plan, not the bylaws. Scott asked, "Do you think that we don't want NVDA's help with that?" Bob replied, "I would love NVDA's help. But after that last meeting, the way that Jesse treated any work that we have done was not in an advisory manner, but just dictatorial, and he was very disruptive to the meeting." Bruno said, "Yeah, but he did say he was stepping down." Scott said, "They've given us two other people we can work with. We should call Dave Snedeker and tell him we want to work with somebody else. Do we want to do that, call Dave and have somebody else?" Bob said, "I guess so, but there is a bigger issue here. We have a resignation, and we have other members of the community who want to join the Planning Commission. I guess that's where I am kind of like - I just don't know where you all are going on the Planning Commission."

Jim Bennett asked, "Who hired Jesse? The Planning Commission or the Selectmen?" Bob said Jesse was not under hire; he was helping us. Jim then asked, "Who approached him?" Amy explained that NVDA works with the Town on a

multitude of facets. They come in on many different projects; short of a contract, they are not “hired”. She said, “Usually the Town has an NVDA representative who works in conjunction with all of these people regularly. We don’t have that, so individual boards and individual employees work with NVDA on a multitude of issues.” Jim said, “In the end, the Selectmen sign the contract?”, which several said is correct. Mary said, referring to the Town Plan, the Town has a history of working with Alison Low. Alison attended the Planning Commission meeting in August 2023 at which the upcoming work on the Town Plan was discussed. Alison was unable to attend the next meeting on October 4th and sent Jesse in her stead.

Scott described what he thinks the Town should do: Hold a Special Selectboard Meeting to accept Chris’s resignation and look for a Chair of the Planning Commission. He said he has seen three letters of interest in the Planning Commission. Brad clarified that the Planning Commission appoints its own Chair, but agreed that the member opening on the Commission should be posted for two weeks. The Selectboard then will have a meeting to act on the letters received. Bob corrected the process description by saying that the Commission only nominates the Zoning Administrator, not other members; the latter is the responsibility of the Selectboard. There followed a discussion of how many members are possible on the Planning Commission and whether the Selectboard has to vote on the number. Bob has seen something in Town documents about the Zoning Board and Planning Commission having three members and about alternate members. Bruno recalled having 5 members when he was a member. Mary read from the Maidstone Bylaw §503, stipulating a minimum of three and maximum of nine members. Brad read from Vermont Statutes, 24 V.S.A. §4322 (c) (1) “for an appointed planning commission, the legislative body may change the number of members that may be appointed to the commission.” Scott’s comment that he thought a town bylaw outweighed a Vermont Statute was corrected, as bylaws are supposed to be in accordance with Vermont Statutes; the Town must follow Vermont law. As changing the number of members of the Planning Commission involves changing a bylaw, VLCT should be consulted; Scott said he would email VLCT. For the time being, Scott said we would table the whole discussion. In response to Scott’s question, Bob said he will table the discussion of his possible reappointment to the Zoning Board and Planning Commission until the rest of this issue is resolved. After a discussion of posting and timing, the Selectboard decided to hold a Special Selectboard meeting on Tuesday or Wednesday next week. The Selectboard will write the Agenda. Amy said that if they send the Agenda to her, she will take care of posting it.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Discuss and take action as necessary about offer from Essex North Supervisory Union (ENSU) to pay the Town a stipend for the use of Maidstone Town Hall and town technology (OWL and TV) for ENSU meetings and for NEK Choice School District Board meetings:** After discussion, the Selectboard agreed with Bob that this is a service that the Town can and should provide for free; the Selectboard is glad to do so. Bruno made a motion for the ENSU to use the facility at no cost; Scott seconded the motion. The motion carried.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Scott asked if anyone had any other business to discuss. Nobody did.

ADJOURN:

The business of the meeting concluded, Brad made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt