



**Town of Berlin
Municipal Office Building
108 Shed Road**

**Berlin, VT. 05602
Regular Select Board Meetings
1st & 3rd Monday of Each Month**

**Monday, January 3, 2011
6:00 PM**

Selectboard Members: Susan Gretkowski, Chair; Nancy Driscoll, Vice Chair; Roberta Haskin, Secretary; Brad Towne, and Jonathan Goddard. Present: Jeff Schulz, Town Administrator; Patti Lewis, Town Treasurer. All items are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

APPROVED MINUTES

Susan Gretkowski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

FY 11/12 Budget

Jeff Schulz stated that **Chief Bill Wolfe**, Berlin Police Department, has provided charts showing arrests, tickets and stops over the past year. **Chief Wolfe** stated that there is currently a vacant full time officer position that he would like to fill. He stated that there are two individuals that are interested in the position and he requests approval from the Board to move forward with interviews. **Chief Wolfe** stated that there are two part-time officers currently covering the full time position. He stated that he would rather have a full-time certified officer and cut back on the hours offered to the part-time officers. **Chief Wolfe** reviewed the Police Department budget request with the Board. He stated that he has kept the budget much the same as it was in FY11. **Susan Gretkowski** asked the Chief not to interview individuals for the vacant officer position until the budget is finalized.

Jeff stated that the Board had asked for a history on several items on the highway budget, and he provided a history of the winter equipment maintenance costs. **Patti Lewis** stated that the highway department has one vehicle that is no longer under warranty. The Board continued to review the highway budget. **Jeff** stated that **Patti** had received a quote for long term disability protection, with a payout of approximately 60% of the current monthly earnings. **Patti** stated that the cost of the protection would be approximately \$335 per month. **Jeff** stated that the County Tax will decrease from approximately \$34,700 to approximately \$27,000 for FY12. The Board tabled the discussion on the budget until the next meeting.

Public Comment

Pat McDonald requested approval from the Board to sign a letter to the U.S. Postal Service in support of a post office placed in or around the Berlin Mall. She stated that the Postal Service has always maintained that Berlin is too rural to support a post office. The Board made some suggestions to revise the letter. **Susan Gretkowski** asked that **Pat** revise the letter and email the draft to **Jeff Schulz**, who would then pass it along to the Board for approval.

Treasurers Report

Patti Lewis reviewed the warrants, which include the first installment of the property and casualty insurance. She stated that the insurance premium has decreased approximately 17% from last year.

Old Business

Tax Stabilization Policy

Jeff Schulz stated that the Board has a copy of the Tax Stabilization Policy and a copy of the warning that was used at Town Meeting last year. He assumed that the Board wanted to put a similar article on the Town Meeting Warning this year to be voted on the floor. **Jeff** stated that copies of the policy would also be available at Town Meeting for the public to review. **Pat McDonald** suggested putting the policy in the Town Report for the public to read, as the residents will be voting on the article rather than the policy at Town Meeting. **Nancy Driscoll** stated that the format seems to have been changed from the legal language to more of a layman's language, and asked if that was the intention of the Economic Development Council? **Pat McDonald** stated that the intention was to make the policy less formal so that more people could understand the policy. **Jeff** stated that the Board needs to vote to put the article regarding the Tax Stabilization Policy on the Town Meeting warning. He stated that when the Selectboard gains authorization to enter into Tax Stabilization agreements, they would then develop the policy. **Brad Towne** asked if **Pat** could develop a spreadsheet showing what proposed taxes would be based on different assessed value of businesses? **Pat** stated that she could develop a spreadsheet to show what the policy would look like in action for the public. **Jeff** stated that the Board did not need to vote on the warning item tonight, but gain a general consensus of support, and then vote on the warning. The Board reached a consensus in support of the Tax Stabilization Policy as presented.

Personnel Policy

Jeff Schulz stated that drafts of the Personnel Policy have been distributed to the employees and some revisions completed based on the input from employees. He stated that the next step was for the Board to approve the policy at their next meeting. **Jeff** stated that the Board had reviewed the policy verbally and agreed to most of the changes suggested by the employees.

Records Restoration Fund

Patti Lewis stated that at a previous meeting the Board had voted to reserve \$1.00 per page of recording for the records restoration fund. She stated that the vote was supposed to be retroactive, but the Board did not state this in the motion. **Patti** is requesting the Board conduct a re-vote to make this motion retroactive to July 1, 2010. **Susan Gretkowski** asked what the reasoning was behind making this retroactive? **Patti** stated that making the reserved funds retroactive would be more in line with State Statute. **Brad Towne** stated that the Clerk was collecting \$2.00 per page for the records restoration fund, the Statutes state that \$1.00 per page may be reserved, but there is no reason that the Town could not put the extra funding into records restoration from the General Fund. **Patti** stated that there is approximately \$12,000 in the records restoration fund, and the Clerk uses approximately \$1,500 per year on restoration. She stated that if the vote was made retroactive to July 1st, the records restoration fund would decrease and the Clerk Fees will increase. **Patti** stated that the Clerk is happy with the restoration fund the way it currently stands. The Board declined to make this vote retroactive to July 1, 2010.

Water Supply Project

Jeff Schulz stated that the Town received approval from USDA to move forward with the income survey. He stated that **Tom Clark** has been contacted and will work with **Jeff** to make sure the address list for the Town is current. **Jeff** stated that the next step is to meet with the Water Supply Committee to discuss outreach efforts to the residents and business community. He stated that he has seen more interest from the business community in participating in the water system. **Susan Gretkowski** asked if **Pat McDonald** would be open to a joint meeting of the Water Supply and Economic Development Committees? **Pat** stated that she thought a joint meeting would be a good idea and would like to invite the Town Center Task Force to that meeting. **Susan** stated that the Selectboard had combined the Economic Development Council and the Town Center Task Force into one committee. **Pat** stated that there are vacant positions on the EDC and the Town Center Task Force. **Jeff** stated that he had calculated the number of users at approximately 350. **Nancy Driscoll** asked that if the Town needs to show that all potential users have been contacted and only need 64 responses, how does the Town know that number is a true random sample of the area? **Jeff** stated that the number of potential users to be contacted is approximately 350, then 64 responses to the letter would be a solid representation of the area. **Jeff** stated that he has been contacted by the City of Montpelier to schedule some meetings pertaining to the water system discussions. **Susan Gretkowski** stated that the Town's next step will be based on the outcome of the income survey. She stated that she is not comfortable

in conducting more formal meetings with the City of Montpelier until more solid figures for construction and financing have been reached. **Jeff** stated that **Eric Law** from the Water Supply Division works on the paperwork for the planning loans, and **Mr. Law** will be providing detailed information on policies, how the loans will be paid back, and how that is tied to any future loans. He stated that the Board will have a solid idea of some of the questions regarding forgiveness of the loans and the authority of the Selectboard to incur those expenses. **Susan** stated that the Board would need to know when the payment obligation would begin. **Jeff** stated that there is some forgiveness of the loans if construction moves forward. **Susan** stated that the Board needs to know the deadline date of when the Town would need to start paying the loans back to the State.

New Business

Grand List Errors & Omission

Jeff Schulz stated that there is one error on the Grand List. He stated that a tax bill on a property was sent to two property owners. **Jeff** stated that one tax bill needs to be found in error and sent to the Board of Abatement. **Patti Lewis** stated that there were three parcels owned by one individual, that individual sold all of the parcels to another individual, but was still billed for a one acre parcel. She stated that this bill for the one acre parcel was a duplication and needs to be abated. Motion by **Nancy Driscoll** to correct the Grand List on parcel 00049-009 and to consider this under errors and omissions. Second by **Jonathan Goddard**. Motion carried 5-0.

Treasurer Schedule

Patti Lewis stated that discussions have been conducted with **Roberta Haskin** and **Susan Gretkowski** as to what her hours as treasurer will be during the upcoming Legislative session. She stated that she feels confident that she can complete both jobs. **Patti** stated that she will be in the office on Mondays, and other days will depend on her committee assignment. She stated that she will also be working nights and weekends in the office to complete her responsibilities as Town Treasurer. **Patti** stated that both **Rebecca Richardson** and **Mary Wissell** have the cash receipts software on their computers and will be able to take walk in tax payments. She stated that she will be keeping up with the mailed tax payments. **Susan Gretkowski** asked if either **Rebecca** or **Mary** will be able to answer any questions the residents may have? **Patti** stated that **Rebecca** has the ability to look things up in the Grand List and Tax Administration if there is a need, she will also load the NEMRC software on **Jeff's** computer so that he will have access to the General Ledger and Tax Admin. She stated that she will also leave a message on her voice mail to have residents email her with any questions or concerns. **Roberta Haskin** asked that if **Mary** is working on taxes, would she still be working her normal position? **Patti** stated that **Mary** would work on taxes separate from her sewer commission position. **Jeff** asked how **Mary** would be paid for work completed on taxes? **Patti** responded that there is a Clerk/Treasurer assistant wage line that should have sufficient funds to cover those positions. **Brad Towne** asked how much of those funds were used by the Clerk? **Patti** responded that the Clerk assistant used approximately \$500 and there is approximately \$2,500 budgeted in that line item. **Jeff** asked if there were any issues with delinquent taxes? **Patti** stated that she will be billing some of the delinquent taxes and the rest will be filed with small claims court. She stated that filing a claim in small claims court is less expensive than paying the Town Attorney to conduct a tax sale. **Susan** asked **Patti** to update the Board once a month and let the Board know if any adjustments are needed to complete the position as Treasurer. **Patti** stated that she has organized all of the Treasurer's paperwork both in her office and the vault. She stated that she has worked two jobs in the past with no problems. **Susan** stated that she has no problems with **Patti's** work ethic, but that if problems arise with residents not being able to see the Treasurer, the Board needs to know. **Roberta Haskin** stressed that **Patti** should be careful to give both positions her best effort while working the extended hours that is required of both positions.

2010 Property Valuation and Review Equalization Study

Jeff Schulz stated that the Town has received a letter from Property Valuation regarding completion of the equalization study, which is completed annually in preparation of setting the education tax rate. He stated that the two key components to the study are the coefficient of dispersion and the common level of appraisal. **Jeff** stated that the coefficient of dispersion ensures the uniformity of appraisal of all properties sold in Berlin to assess the fairness of the appraisal of properties. He stated that a percentage of 10% or less means that properties are assessed fairly and Berlin's COD is 11.71%, which has increased slightly from last year. **Jeff** stated that this percentage is still within the acceptable range. He stated that the other

important factor is the common level of appraisal. **Jeff** stated that last year the CLA was 102.5 and the CLA this year is 102.2. He stated that when the CLA decreases below 80, it is a clear indicator of conducting a town-wide reappraisal. **Jeff** stated that he had discussed the study with **Ted Nelson**, Vermont Appraisal Company, who conducted the town-wide reappraisal in Berlin in 2008. He stated that **Mr. Nelson** is of the opinion that Berlin has a good rating and there is no need to appeal these numbers with the State. **Jeff** stated that based on the figures from Property Valuation, the equity of properties in Berlin are still very good. He stated that a partial reappraisal could be conducted, but would want professional advice on whether a partial reappraisal would be cost effective. **Nancy Driscoll** stated that it seems that the mobile home parks are what is keeping the COD number higher in Berlin. **Jeff** responded that Berlin has the highest concentration of mobile home parks of any town in Washington County. **Brad Towne** stated that the COD is based on the appraisal of properties sold in Berlin, and apparently mobile homes are being sold for less than the appraised value.

Health Officer Appointment

Jeff Schulz stated that the State of Vermont is requesting a recommendation for a health officer and a deputy health officer for Berlin. Motion by **Brad Towne** to recommend **Jeff Schulz** be appointed as Health Officer in Berlin. Second by **Jonathan Goddard**. Motion carried 5-0.

Town Administrator Report – Jeff Schulz

Jeff Schulz stated that the Board has a copy of the final Auditor's report. He stated that the Town ended the fiscal year with a budget surplus of approximately \$55,000. **Jeff** stated that he is pleased with the report and how the budget year ended.

Jeff reminded the Board that the petitions to run for office are due to the Town Clerk on January 24th with a minimum of 20 signatures required.

Jeff stated that the assessors proposals are due in the office by Friday, January 7th. He stated that next Tuesday the Hiring committee will meet to read through the proposals and make a recommendation to the Selectboard.

Jeff stated that the West Hill Road issue will be on the next agenda and the Board will need to discuss the options open to them and how to move forward. He stated that he will make sure that the residents of West Hill Road are notified of the meeting.

Jeff stated that there is a group of snowmobilers that wish to initiate a trail and are requesting approval of the Town to cross some public roads. He stated that it is clear that snowmobilers may cross a non-maintained road wherever they like, however, there may be restrictions on crossing a maintained road. **Jeff** stated that part of the proposal is to open a trail that would cross Granger Road and Paine Turnpike. **Nancy Driscoll** asked if the snowmobilers are talking with private property owners? **Jeff** stated that the Town can not regulate snowmobile usage on private property, but they can regulate usage in crossing public roads.

Approval of Licenses, Permits, Vouchers and Applications

Motion by **Jonathan Goddard** to approve the licenses, permits, vouchers and applications as presented. Second by **Nancy Driscoll**. Motion carried 5-0.

Approval of Minute(s) of Previous Meetings

There were no minutes available to approve.

Roundtable

Jonathan Goddard stated that he was glad to see the skating rink open. **Jeff Schulz** stated that **Tom Willard** is out in all kinds of weather working on the skating rink.

Roberta Haskin stated that she has had someone interested in buying her residence on Brookfield Road for several months, and the fact that there was no access to Berlin Pond was a big consideration.

Executive Session – Contract

Motion by **Jonathan Goddard** to adjourn the Selectboard meeting and enter into executive session.

Second by **Brad Towne**. Motion carried 5-0.

Motion by **Brad Towne** to exit out of executive session. Second by **Nancy Driscoll**. Motion carried 5-0

For the Select Board:

Rebecca Richardson – Administrative Assistant