



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

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

## **Special Meeting**

**Monday, January 11, 2010  
5:30 PM**

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

### **APPROVED MINUTES**

**Brad Towne** called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

#### **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

#### **Accounts Payable/Vouchers**

**Patti Lewis** presented the vouchers for approval. Motion by **Susan Gretkowski** to approve the accounts payable/vouchers as presented. Second by **Nancy Driscoll**. Motion carried 3-0.

#### **FY 11 Budget**

**Patti Lewis** stated that the Police had renegotiated a new contract with the Hospital and she has adjusted the budget to reflect that change. **Jeff Schulz** stated that the fee changed from \$32.00 per hour to \$38.00 per hour which should generate approximately an additional \$17,000 per year. **Brad Towne** asked if **Patti** had figured the budget without filling the vacancy in the Police Department. **Patti** stated that she has just level funded for that position. **Brad** stated that the position has been vacant for approximately 5 months and if the Chief really needed to fill that position it would have already happened. **Jeff Schulz** stated that it was a matter of finding a qualified personnel to fill the vacancy and an attempt to save funding during this difficult budget year. **Roberta Haskin** stated that she believed the agreement to level fund wages with the Police Department was contingent on not eliminating any positions. **Brad** stated that the Board could cut the vacant position on the Police Department and give the department the wage increase that their contract stipulates for FY11.

The Board reviewed and discussed the Capital Budget. **Nancy Driscoll** stated that if the Board level funds the Ambulance Service and then accepts the low bid on that service there is a potential savings of approximately \$9,000. **Roberta Haskin** suggested setting the Capital Budget at \$100,000 for Roads; \$100,000 for Water Supply; \$15,000 for Vehicle Replacement; and \$5,000 for computer, which would set the total at approximately \$220,000. The Board tabled more discussion on the budget until Monday, January 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 PM with a follow up meeting on the budget on Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM if needed.

Motion by **Roberta Haskin** to adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 6:40 PM. Second by **Susan Gretkowski**. Motion carried 3-0.

### Public Hearing – Proposed Charter Changes

**Brad Towne** called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. He then turned the meeting over to **Susan Gretkowski**, Vice Chair, and member of the Charter Change Committee.

**Susan** stated that the Charter Change Committee met approximately two years ago to determine whether any changes to the Town charter would be recommended. She stated that the committee recommended several changes to the charter which the Selectboard took under consideration and brought to public meetings. **Susan** stated that the Selectboard decided that a change making the Lister's appointed rather than elected would not be brought before the voters at that time. She stated that the Board is now looking to bring that issue forward this year and wants input from the Town residents on this issue. **Susan** stated that the wording of the proposed charter change is "*the Selectboard may appoint an appraiser or arrange for appraisal services. Appointees shall be competent in assessment procedures and recordkeeping, and shall serve at the pleasure of the Selectboard.*" She stated that this change is similar to the change regarding the treasurer at last Town Meeting. **Jeff Schulz** stated that there should be a change in the wording to put in Assessor instead of Appraiser to keep costs at a manageable level and not lock the Town into hiring an Appraiser for this position.

**Robert Wernecke** asked if anything came up in the previous public hearings on this subject. **Jeff Schulz** stated that the previous hearings on this issue were not widely attended. He stated that **Pat McDonald**, **Mike Domingue**, and **Muriel Morse** had attended and gave their views on this proposed change. **Nancy Driscoll** stated that she sees this proposed change as a chance to streamline and provide consistency of service in the assessing process. She stated that with the research that **Jeff Schulz** had conducted it seemed that communities that appoint rather than elect an assessor seemed to get the workload accomplished with fewer staff hours and more consistency, **but that this was by no means a personal commentary on the Listers**. **Mike Domingue** stated that he agreed with the idea of consistency but that he has been through other reappraisals and has not had the problems and concerns that have come before him at this time. **Muriel Morse** asked if other Towns hire outside appraisal firms for reappraisals. **Jeff Schulz** stated that other Towns that hire an assessor still hire outside appraisal firms to conduct reappraisals. **Mike Domingue** stated that he would like to see the figures from Towns that hire an assessor rather than elect this position. He stated that he believes the taxpayers should know how much it will cost them to make this proposed charter change. **Robert Wernecke** stated that he has observed a reappraisal in Ryegate and he noticed that they pay their elected Listers significantly less than Berlin pays our Lister. **Jeff Schulz** stated that during his research he noticed a parallel between what towns pay their assessor and how many parcels there are in town.

**Paul Irons** stated that he noticed when the Charter was changed regarding the Treasurer's position the elected term would run out before anyone could be appointed to that position and he asked how it would work with the Listers position. **Patti Lewis** stated that any elected term could be fulfilled before an appointed position could be filled. She stated that with a staggered term of three Listers and assessor could be appointed while there are elected Listers still working within the office. **Susan Gretkowski** stated that this staggered term would work in the Town's favor, giving an appointed assessor time to work with the existing Listers. **Paul** stated that what concerned him is the danger of electing a Lister and getting someone who does not fully understand or is not fully qualified for this position. He stated that if this is the case the person who is elected and mishandles the position, that person is very hard to deal with or to have replaced. **Susan Gretkowski** stated that the Board would need to incorporate some of the language from the charter changes last year regarding the Treasurer's position into the proposed changes of the Listers position regarding a hiring committee.

**Mike Domingue** stated that if the Town hires an assessor and the assessor gets mad and walks out, what is the Selectboard going to do if the Grand List has not been filed. **Roberta Haskin** stated that there is no answer to that question. She stated that even an elected official could resign regardless of the work being done or not. **Mike** stated that that is true, but that as taxpayers in the town, they would be less likely to resign without the work being completed. He stated that if the Board hires someone from outside of town, that person would not necessarily care about the Town itself or how the taxpayers feel about the work being done. **Jeff Schulz** stated that the State of Vermont Tax Department would step in and assist the Town. **Nancy Driscoll** stated that an elected official might give preference to his/her neighbors or friends and an outside assessor would not necessarily work that way. **Robert Wernecke** stated that if an elected official walks off the job the Town would be in a bind with no way to fulfill the assessor's job. **Muriel Morse**

stated that there is an oversight committee at the State level which would then step in and assist the Town in completing the Grand List and other jobs. **Mike Domingue** asked the Board to make sure to present this issue accurately to the voters. **Susan Gretkowski** stated that this is the third public hearing on the proposed charter changes and the proposed changes will be brought before the voters at Town Meeting in March. She stated that with having this position appointed a contract will be for finite period of time and the Board would need to gather references for the person applying for the position so they could get a good idea how that person has worked for other towns.

**Muriel Morse** asked where the warning for the public hearings posted. **Jeff Schulz** stated that the notices were posted at the Town Hall, Shaw's and Maplewood.

For the Select Board:

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Rebecca Richardson, Administrative Assistant