

Bakersfield Special Select Board Meeting
Tuesday, Jan 19, 2021
6:00pm

Meeting was called to order by Lance at 6:06pm.

Members present: Lance Lawyer (chair), Josh Goss, Sam Cribb, Terri Gates
-Gary Denton at 9:00pm

Members absent:

Residents/Guests present: Melanie Riddle, Abbey Miller, Ken Carter, Kathy Westcom, Brenda Churchill, Kyle Branon, Tom Branon, Evan Branon, George Salg, Gary Rounds, Dan Gaffney, Brian Pecor, Granger Heinlein, Tami Brennan

The Select Board interviewed Melanie Riddle for the position of Bakersfield Zoning Administrator. She told the board that she had been the acting zoning administrator for Fairfield for one year and the grant writer for the town for the past 6 years. She has her certification in non-profit management and resides in Bakersfield. The board said that they have been having a problem with people using camps as year-round residences without the proper wastewater permits and requirements and they asked her if she had had experience with that type of situation before and she said that she had. The board also said that a grant writer was needed in Bakersfield.

Sam made the motion to hire Melanie Riddle for the position of Bakersfield Town Zoning Administrator and Grant writer, offering a minimum of 10 hours/week at 18.00/hour and that pay for grant writing will be no less than 18/hour with a possible percentage of the grant. The motion was seconded by Josh and passed with a vote of 4-0.

Ken Carter from the Bakersfield Planning commission was also present for the interview and he agreed with the board that Melanie would be great for the position of Zoning administrator.

Melanie accepted the position offered by the board and agreed to begin immediately. The board requested that she be present in the office twice a week and she said that she would set her hours to be in the office soon and post them, so that residents would know when to access her in the office.

Discussion followed as to provide an updated computer for her to work on, as the computer at the zoning administrators desk is really old and time consuming to manage. The board talked about possibly purchasing a laptop for her to work on.

Kathy said that VT has passed a law saying that the towns are authorized to mass mail ballots for town meeting. She said that the Select Board needs to vote tonight whether or not the town will mass mail ballots to all residents, at the cost of the town, because to get the ballots made up and purchase the envelopes and postage, will take extra time. On the day of the general election, many of the town residents had thrown their mass-mailed ballots away and had to sign an affidavit to get a replacement ballot at the polls.

Lance made the motion not to mass mail ballots since absentee ballots are always available at a resident's request. Josh seconded the request and passed with a vote of 4-0.

Kathy also told the board that the warning for the budget needed to be completed this coming Monday night to be in time to be included on the ballot.

Abbey spoke with the board regarding the Road Budget. She told the board that they needed to add \$700.00 for the accounting software, as well as \$3000.00 for the interest on the new TAN loan and \$75,000.00 for the town's 7½% portion of the FEMA work, which includes the bridge on Goat Path Rd. This will bring the total of the requested Road Budget to \$330,000.00. Abbey and the board discussed pulling some money from the Bridge account, set to be used for bridge work needed in the town throughout the year, since the project includes a bridge. After discussion, the board decided to transfer \$30,000.00 from the Bridge account to the Road account to contribute to the money needed to cover the 7½% from the town. That way the town will be asking for \$300,000.00 for the Road budget.

Abbey also reminded the town that the State of VT won't pay their 12½% until all the projects in the town are completed, including the bridge.

The deadline for FEMA is July.

Tom Branon shared his experience from the previous Sunday evening on East Bakersfield Rd, with the Select Board. He said that he wasn't at the meeting to complain but was looking for solutions for road safety which he felt was a moral obligation, because there could have been two fatalities around 7:00pm on Sunday...his brother and himself. Tom said that he, and his brother Tim, headed out on Sunday, before dark, to Cold Hollow to do some plowing and sanding...one truck with studs on and the other truck full of sand. After plowing and sanding, they headed home with no sand left. Tim was climbing the steep hill on East Bakersfield Rd, Tom following behind, when Tim got about 20 feet from cresting the hill and lost momentum. The truck stopped and wouldn't climb higher, so Tim threw the air brakes on. Tom stopped about 200 feet below Tim and tried to back further down the hill, but the truck just slid sideways so he moved forward to about 100 ft behind Tim and radioed home. Tom had planned to return to Cold Hollow and pick up some sand but when he tried to move the truck again, it slid into the ditch. Tim and Tom both got out of their trucks and met between the two trucks to discuss what to do, when Tim's truck started to slide down the hill towards them. The brothers jumped into the ditch and the truck continued down the hill, remaining on the road, crashing into the lower truck, and together the trucks spun around until their front ends were facing down at the base of the hill. Tom called Kyle and Evan to bring the sander and help them, but their sander was frozen and when they got it unfrozen, it had a gear needing repair. Then, Tom texted Abby to get the info out and she called Josh who got a hold of Mac saying that the hill on East Bakersfield Rd was a sheet of ice and Mac said that he would head right out.

Tom said that Mac arrived and sanded good by hand and Tom and Tim were able to get their trucks back to their place. They said that if their boys had been able to get their sand truck there, they would have handled it themselves and the town never would have known anything about it.

Granger Heinlein said that he also had had an incident last Sunday. He had spent most of the morning plowing and headed up Witchcat Rd till just before you reach East Bakersfield Rd and there was a truck in the ditch and asked if he needed a hand. Granger said that he was driving a fairly heavy pick-up with a trailer behind and after he stopped, he couldn't proceed up the hill and started sliding backwards, almost going off the road. He had to back most of the way down the hill to get a run to make the hill. He said that Carl Stone had pulled 3 vehicles out on East Bakersfield Rd on Sunday. He said that Witchcat was not sanded at 10:30am.

Gary Rounds said that he had lived there permanently for around 4 years and that he has pulled out UPS trucks and others. He said that he would usually give the town an A in the wintertime, not so much on the summer work, but it seems like the last few storms, which were pretty much continuous, that the sand was not put down like it should have been. He said that he hadn't been able to see the sand on the roads. He said it might have seemed that way because of the continuous snow. He said that it snows out there when it isn't snowing elsewhere.

Evan Branon said that he is on those roads all the time and that it just doesn't seem like those roads are taken care of like the roads in Fairfield. He shared concern that if something happened, an ambulance or a fire truck would not be able to make it on those roads because of zero sand. He was concerned that his father's and uncle's lives had been in danger.

Brian Pecor requested guardrails be installed to prevent motorists from falling down the 20ft drop into the brook by his house when they went off the road. He said it happens at least once a year, every year, and sometimes more than once. He just recently helped a guy who had gone over, get his dog out of the back of his vehicle down in the brook. Brian said that the intersection is bad in winter and summer, and that he has asked for guardrails every year. He said that the Fire Dept wanted guardrails there as well. Brian said that he was afraid that he would wake up some morning and find somebody floating in the brook. He said that there used to be guard rails there but the posts rotted and they have never been replaced. Someone said that a stop sign there might help as well, but Brian said that a little sand and guard rails would be better than a sign and may save a life. Brian also said that Gary Rounds had come down to his house because he was having chest pains and he knew, if he needed, an ambulance would never make it up to his house.

George Salg said that he had lived up there 30 years now and said that he could recall a number of times when residents had gotten stuck and haven't complained and everyone just dealt with it themselves and pulled people out. He had come across Tom the other night and was glad that Tom hadn't been cut in two. He said that this is just one instance, but the road conditions were habitual.

Sam said that the board is currently arranging for a paging system to be implemented so that the Highway commissioner would be on call and reachable 24/7, since the weather on one side of Bakersfield can be different from the other side. Sam also said that the subject of the guardrails had just come up at the Fire Dept meeting that they had had last week. He also said that he believed that the VCLT had regulations regarding guardrails protecting drop offs beyond a certain foot drop. The board also said that if the town puts up the guardrails, whoever hits and removes them, would be liable to pay to have them replaced.

Josh said that this is the first accident that he has heard of on that corner, probably because all of the residents are being so self-sufficient.

Brian Pecor said that they didn't come to the meeting to complain.

Kyle Branon said that they knew that the roads are not to be perfect and that accidents are going to happen and that the Road Crew can't be everywhere, but what brought us here is kind of the final straw of Sunday night. What brought us is the safety concern...people are going to be on the road and the professionals on the road need to make sure that the roads are passable for ambulances and fire trucks and you have elderly drivers etc. He stressed that it is not about sheet metal, saving vehicles, it's about safety. He said that he had had something pointed out to him by the Burlington Rd Crew. As a Road Foreman, in charge of the roads, that road safety should be his main concern. And that the Select Board controls the budget, and that the Road needs should be provided for. The Road crew shouldn't have to worry about spending too much money on sand or extra runs and cutting down to save money. He said that if we don't speak up, how will it change.

Brian Pecor said that there is twice as much traffic on the roads than 10 years ago and even more so because East Bakersfield road has been closed and you can't continue through. He said that roads traveled hard need more sand.

Tom said that he would be willing to supply fuel for the grader and he was willing to give a dozen or so loads of sand and stone to put down on the roads in the summer. He said maybe they do a little more damage to the roads but let's fix our crappy roads, so we won't wreck them. He said the roads were crappy before Tom Branon started hauling sap on the roads. Evan said that even now, they were always bringing up material to throw it in some hole.

And that the numbers on the roads are increasing, the roads are going all night long, and that businesses are coming in and have a right to use the roads.

George said that there are ways to help improve the roads and we can work together to make the roads safe.

Josh thanked them all. He said that he lives on the Main St. and he doesn't travel the back roads because they are slippery. He said that the town would welcome and appreciate any material given to the town for the roads and would preferably make sure that it got used on roads that you guys are using.

Tom also discussed with the Select Board the difference experiences that he had had when he dropped into the Bakersfield and Fairfield garages unannounced.

George said that he sensed there was agreement that there could be some improvement on the roads and asked how they could work together to make it better. There was the suggestion by the group to have the plow runs begin earlier.

The board was asked what the road care procedures were and if the expectations were clear to the Road crew. Terri said that the board needed to make sure that the Road Crew knew that expectations.

Lance said that the plows were to come out if there was 2 inches of snow on the road and of course if there was ice. It was also mentioned that there is no bare road policy in the State of Vermont and Bakersfield does not have a bare road policy. Josh said that Mac responded right away when Josh called him on Sunday night. Josh hadn't learned about the accident until the following morning when he stopped in to check with Mac and see how it had gone the night before. Josh said Mac told him about the accident and that Mac was clearly upset about what had happened.

Tom said that the Town needs to make sure that it is run like a business and that they are paying someone who does the best possible job.

The Select Board thanked them all for coming in and that they would take all they have said to heart.

The attendees thanked the Select Board for listening and the board told them to keep coming if something doesn't change. George said he was willing to help in anyway. Josh told them all that the board met every 2nd and 4th Monday of each month and anyone was welcome to stop in.

Terri said she had also received complaints about King's hill not being plowed and sanded up to the point that the town had agreed upon this fall. A resident said that he bought his own sander to take care of the road so that he could get through. And that he had asked the town to load him up with sand and

they had said that they could not load anyone up with sand. And Josh pointed out that that was because the board had previously told the road crew that the town could not load private residents with sand. The board said that Mac could back up the road and lay down some sand, since there was no place for the town trucks to turn around.

After some discussion, the Board talked through the general budget and agreed upon asking for \$265,000.00 for the General budget amount needed to keep the town running.

The board also asked Tami to get information on the cost of an answering system in addition to the pager and see if that would be more effective when implemented.

Terri made the motion for the board to move into executive session at 9:23pm. The motion was seconded by Josh and passed with a vote of 5-0, since Gary had joined the meeting.

The next Regular Select Board meeting will be on Monday, Jan 25, at 7:00pm.

Meeting minutes were recorded by Tami Brennan.