

Town Administrator's Report for Selectboard Meeting on April 11, 2016

Burns Property Agricultural Lease—Review Proposals and Award Lease

A notice of the lease opportunity was released on February 26, and three proposals were received from: Chris Fortin, Richard Preston, and Mack Farms. Bidders were allowed to propose alternatives to making lease payments, including bartering to brush-hog some or all of the parcels listed in the Town's RFP for brush-hogging. Additionally, the Proposal Form requested information about the proposed agricultural use.

Each proposal takes a different approach in terms of payment/barter, and the proposed uses are also somewhat different. So far I have analyzed the lease proposals only with respect to the financial cost/benefit to the Town.

Because the allowed barter is for brush-hogging, the brush-hogging bids were analyzed to determine the lowest bidder for each parcel (though the Selectboard may decide to base the selection on the lowest bidder overall rather than per parcel). The lowest brush-hogging bids were plugged into a matrix that includes the lease proposals. \$0 was entered if a lease proposal included brush-hogging a parcel (i.e. there would be no cost to brush-hog any parcel that would be brush-hogged via barter). Any proposed lease payments were also entered into the matrix.

The result indicates that the Fortin proposal would result in a cost to the Town of \$650, the Preston proposal would result in a cost to the Town of \$1,945, and the Mack Farms proposal would result in a cost to the Town of \$310. Again, this assumes the brush-hogging contractor is selected on a parcel by parcel basis; and it does not take into account any of the other information asked for in the Proposal Form.

Brush-hogging Contract—Review Bids and Award Contract

The selection of the lease proposal will impact the selection of the brush-hogging contractor—so the lease needs to be determined first. As discussed above, the Selectboard will need to decide whether to select a brush-hogging contractor on the basis of individual parcels or the total cost. The contractor(s) will be selected to brush-hog only those parcels that aren't covered by the agricultural lease/barter agreement.

Interview Applicants for Committees/Boards/Commissions

Applicants have indicated their interest in being reappointed or appointed for the terms indicated.

Arbor Day Declaration

Larry Hamilton has requested that the Selectboard approve the declaration in time to be published in the Charlotte News in advance of Arbor Day.

Lewis Creek Association—Contract for Monitoring Water Quality

LCA has been involved with monitoring water quality in the region for many years. A contract was requested to comply with auditing requirements. This contract is for the current fiscal year, ending June 30th. It's to be paid from the Conservation Commission's budget, which has sufficient funds.

Better Roads Grant Application for East Thompson's Point Road

The application is to obtain funds to address run-off issues associated with the Mack Farm's field on the north side of East Thompson's Point Road, just east of the intersection with Greenbush Road. Lewis Creek Association (LCA) has been facilitating work on the application with an Ahead of the Storm Grant, which allowed them to hire the engineering firm of Milone & MacBroom (MM). Marty Illick of LCA and Jessica Louisos of MM have been in contact with the landowner, the Road Commissioner and a representative of the Selectboard. I believe all are on board with the proposal.

Senior Center—Selection of Contractor for Energy Audit

The Energy Committee budgeted for an energy audit of the Senior Center. The project architect indicated that a pre-construction (i.e. prior to construction of the addition to the entryway, which is scheduled to begin during the first week of May) energy audit would be desirable. A request for proposals was distributed to six energy consultants, and three proposals were submitted. The proposals were reviewed by the Energy Committee at its meeting on Wednesday April 6. The Committee recommends that Building Energy be hired to conduct the audit; of the two firms that were substantively responsive to the RFP, they had the lower cost.

Appoint Joseph Rheume as Interim 911 Coordinator

Lindsay Bryce had been appointed the 911 Coordinator. There's a need to have a coordinator appointed in the near-term, and tasks of the coordinator are linked to those of the Zoning Administrator, so it will be good to have the Zoning Administrator trained and familiar with the process.

Planning & Zoning Administrative Assistant

Lindsay Bryce started working with the Town as the Administrative Assistant on March 1st and she left employment by her own decision on March 25. (She took the week of March 7th off as unpaid leave). In discussions with her prior to her leaving, she indicated that she felt she did not have a clear sense of her role, and that it seemed there was not enough work to engage her. There were probably several reasons that Lindsay did not work out, or that the position was not a good fit for Lindsay, including her own interests.

But I do believe a significant contributing factor was that Jeannine and I were primarily focused on training the new Zoning Administrator at the same time that Lindsay was starting. This focus was appropriate, in my view, considering Jeannine's limited time to provide such training, and considering the importance of the position of Zoning Administrator.

I do think it's important that the position be filled, and I believe advertising should begin immediately, as I believe the job description is still be appropriate. However, considering the fact that the new Town Planner will be starting employment soon (April 18), and the fact that there appears to be a relative lull in real estate and construction activity (and therefore permitting), I recommend that we wait 3-4 weeks after the Town Planner has started before we interview for a new Administrative Assistant. This will allow the new Zoning Administrator and the new Town Planner to settle into their positions a little bit.

I do want to note that, while the Administrative Assistant position primarily supports the Planning & Zoning Office, it also supports "town administration" by, for example, posting committee's agendas and minutes to the town web-site, keeping records of committee appointments and resignations, and updating the web-site calendar to include fundraising events that use town roads and facilities. While these may seem like insignificant and easily accomplished tasks, without such staffing this office has less time to work on the more broadly administrative tasks itemized in the Selectboard's workplan.

Additionally, the tasks of the Administrative Assistant should not be seen as insignificant or unimportant. For example, the Snelling Center for Government says the following (in part) about maintaining town web-sites:

Websites are a critical piece of town infrastructure, and they need to be maintained just like roads, bridges, and town greens. An adequately resourced website, supported by town budget and town officials, will build the foundation for towns to promote and advance public opportunities to participate in government. When resourced adequately, municipal websites are a powerful tool to promote economic development and communicate with visitors in a way that they are accustomed to.

Using volunteers to develop, manage, and carry out critical functions of the website such as updating meeting minutes undermines the credibility of a government website. Although many Vermont towns have done this in the past, a town website will remain a valuable resource only when we can create a culture where our town officials are supported in their roles as website administrators and content contributors. We don't rely on volunteers to carry out critical functions in our business operations, and we shouldn't rely on this practice in maintaining town infrastructure. <https://snellingcenter.org/towns-can-manage-new-open-meeting-law-changes/>

So, I do recommend that the Selectboard maintain the position as previously approved, and authorize advertising to fill the vacancy immediately with the goal of hiring by mid-May.