

Minutes of the Select Board
Monday, February 19, 2024
47 South Main Street and via zoom

Attendance: Alyssa Johnson, Kane Sweeney, Dani Kehlmann, Mike Bard, Roger Clapp, Tom Leitz, Karen Petrovic, Chris Winters, Miranda Gray, Lily Sojourner, Rebecca Ellis

Public Attendance: See sign in sheet

ZOOM: 80 participants

R. Clapp called the meeting to order at 7:00pm

Approve Agenda: D. Kehlmann moved to approve the agenda as drafted. K. Sweeney seconded the motion. A vote was held and passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda Items:

- a.) Minutes of February 5, 2024
- b.) 1st Class Restaurant/Bar License for The Wine Vault LLC 1 Elm Street
- c.) Second Class License & Tobacco License for AGS Vermont Inc, Village Market 80 South Main Street
- d.) Second Class License, Tobacco License and Tobacco Substitute License for R.G. Blake Enterprises, Billings Mobil 758 Waterbury Stowe Road

K. Sweeney moved to approve the consent agenda. M. Bard seconded the motion, a vote was held and passed unanimously.

Public: A. Johnson stated the Planning Commission is having a Public Hearing tomorrow at 6pm in the Steele Community Room regarding the Zoning Bylaws

Update on Armory Building: C. Winters first addressed concerns in the letter the State received from the Town and Legislators. C. Winters acknowledges the need is high which makes the process rushed. The State continues to explore other options but until such time these alternative better options become available, they are desperate for a temporary solution. The intent for this location remains April 1, 2024 to July 1, 2024. There is currently legislation that may impact these dates. It is going to be more expensive to operate the Armory than the hotel/motel project which is another reason why the State does not intend to operate this shelter long term. The operation of the Armory facility will be overseen by the State but will require an out of state operator. Currently the State is still reviewing bids from 4 operators. Individuals that will be placed in the Armory shelter are the individuals currently in the cohort hotel/motel program. These are relatively stable individuals who have been in the program since June, have not caused issues and are currently connected to services which will continue. The discharge procedures if someone breaks the rules is to first attempt to assist them. The goal is not to exit someone without a plan. If a situation becomes volatile and it is necessary, law enforcement will be called.

Department of Children & Families has been in contact with law enforcement including the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety. There are no details to report from Department of Public Safety currently. C. Winters was able to confirm there will be additional strain on the Emergency services. C. Winters acknowledges he needs to follow up with the Director on the local Ambulance

Service to discuss this more. Residents of this shelter will be mostly 60 years or age or older or have disabilities.

C. Winters acknowledged the Armory shelter is within close proximity to the Brookside Primary School. Concerns are normal and the State will be in close contact with the school.

The Armory location will not be a walk-in shelter; this shelter will require a referral from the agency. Transportation for unhoused individuals staying at the Armory shelter is still in the planning phase. The state has asked GMT to have a bus stop for Shelter residents to easily access.

Board and public questions followed:

R. Clapp asked why the State abandoned the plans at the Econo Lodge in Montpelier? The State did not abandon this idea but negotiations failed. The provider was not able to make it work.

M. Bard asked if the State is willing to sign that this shelter is for only 90 days. C. Winters stated he would love to sign that but acknowledged if the site is not a success; the State may need to close it, if it is successful the State may wish to continue it operate it.

K. Sweeney stated C. Winters mentioned affordable housing 4 times in his previous comments. What is the Administration doing about affordable housing? C. Winters stated there is regulatory reform being considered as well as investments in housing. The Be Home Bill is in the Senate.

A Johnson asked how the Department envisions communication in the future? C. Winters stated he is in communication with T. Leitz. C. Winters is open to a different path of communication if that is desired.

D. Kehlmann asked to "lower the heat in the conversation." Addressing C. Winters Kehlmann stated some reactions are in response to feelings about being manipulated or in the dark. Kehlmann stated new information of 'a goal of 90 days and we will see how are going' is a very different response from what town residents were told 3 weeks ago.

D. Kehlmann then asked for more specific information relating to the operation of the facility. The State is still working to choose a provider. This will be a congregate shelter with policies regarding morning routines and lights out time each night. Residents will be free to move around during the day, this is not a lock down shelter. At this time the State is planning to have meals brought in. Someone in need of shelter will require a referral from Economic Services.

T. Leitz asked about the 90-day timeline. C. Winters stated there are temporary shelters in Brattleboro. The State is attempting to purchase a hotel in Bennington. There are mobile sites in Rutland and Burlington. There is a broad strategy to lease hotels/motels opposed to nightly rates of \$130/night. The State continues to fall short and recognizes they will not be able to house everyone. The Armory project is a temporary bridge to that goal. Individuals at the Waterbury Armory will be targeted. Those who have been in the program for the last six months with a goal to move people to more permanent solutions but as folks leave, beds at the site will remain open to house others.

K. Sweeney asked if this program lasts as long as the hotel/motel program if there is stop gap of being housed and not being housed? C. Winters stated there are many other forms of housing such as supportive housing and rapid rehousing. The State has a large network of resources for people who are or are near homelessness.

Barbara Walton asked Commissioner Winters if this is a permanent structure? C. Winters stated there have been several long-term use plans identified by the State for this building. Currently work has begun on temporary partitions and a sprinkler system. Barbara then asked why so many residents at the facility? C. Winters explained the building will house 40 in the square footage available.

Sally Dillon asked if Vermont State College in Montpelier is for sale? C. Winters confirmed the State is considering this location. Sally then asked if the residents at the Hilltop since July 1st would meet the criteria for the Armory? Miranda Gray would need to look at the list, people move in and out so data changes. Sally provided details regarding the number of calls law enforcement has had to respond to at the Hilltop. C. Winters stated the Hilltop is not run by shelter providers like the Armory will be. In order to be sheltered at the Armory, people will need a referral from the State Economic Services to the provider.

Tamatha Thomas-Haase reiterated that the end of Armory Drive floods essentially creating an island. With a vulnerable demographic of people at the shelter, what considerations are being made? The State is currently discussing this with Vermont Emergency Management to ensure there is an evacuation plan.

Elizabeth Danyew asked for clarity about the referrals? C. Winters explained the State does not have much control over how the hotels are run. The State pays for rooms but without oversight of the hotels. When the hotel/motel program began, there were 1,300 households in need of shelter. Today there are approximately 500 households. While the State does not have oversight of the hotel/motel program like a provider would, the motels are in constant communication with Economic Services to report if someone has left and the reasons why. Egregious offenders are removed from the program for at least a 30 period. Danyew also asked if the providers are profit or not for profit? C. Winters stated there is a mix. What will the communication between the providers and the Town be like? C. Winters believes the most effective way will be for the providers to have direct communication with the Town.

Whitney Aldrich asked about the metrics of determining if this program is a success? Some of the metrics are people finding housing. If people are moving through more quickly, it is a success. Not a success is if the Town is experiencing difficulties. Monitoring providers closely as a measurement of success.

Christie Bowdish stated this feels like a Band-Aid for 90 days or so. She asked what that State believes they can accomplish in 90 days that will eliminate the need for a stop gap solution? C. Winters stated when the cohort time ends on April 1st, there is a place to hold individuals that still require housing. The Armory property is available for a short-term solution. Burlington is finding success with new affordable housing units which takes time and units.

Em Lamson asked what is the status of the permits needed? T. Lietz stated the Town's position is that the State requires a Change of Use permit. T. Lietz then detailed the process and timelines for permits. C. Winters stated BGS is handling all legal issues and permitting.

Chris Viens spoke of the risk of drug use, drug abuse, and drug sales at the shelter. C. Winters stated people experiencing homelessness are complicated people just like you and me.

Noah Taufest asked the question if the voters or the Select Board have a decision on this matter? C. Winters stated it is a permitted legal use of a State-owned building. He hopes for a path in partnership.

Tautfest asked for additional information regarding the State's comments that the Armory is not the ideal scenario. C. Winters stated in many ways the Armory is the best the State can do with the resources they have. Some hurdles are community opposition, workforce, and costs to operate shelters. Winters stated the State has tried a lot of different things and many have failed. There needs to be a longer-term vision and investment in affordable housing.

Eliza Novick-Smith expressed it is difficult to hear this is emergent when the state has been paying for folks to live in hotels for 3-4 years now. To imply a new emergency seems harsh for those that are still unhoused. Town residents have an expectation of knowing what the plan is much like the State has an expectation of plans when they are negotiating a contract.

John Callan works in Burlington where he feels homelessness is not controlled. His children work in the Waterbury community. Callan asked if the shelter rules will be published? The State will need to published the RFP once it is signed.

Maggie Burke Director of Waterbury Ambulance Service has a couple of concerns. The State has said the Armory will house elderly, disabled and pregnant individuals which all have a higher call rate. The Waterbury Ambulance is a non-profit organization that already struggles financially. Due to circumstances most of these individuals will be under insured or not insured. She is concerned about her crew suffering burnout and the financial impacts due to lack of insurance. Will the State work with her on a proactive and progressive approach to care and allow health checks? Will the State reimburse for calls? C. Winters acknowledged receipt of Maggie's email regarding these topics and stated he will be in touch with Maggie directly.

Rob Hofmann stated he and his wife previously lived in Brooklyn NY where there was a homeless shelter at their church. He encouraged townspeople to embrace helping less fortunate individuals suffering homelessness and not generalize them.

Scott Mackey is concerned about the rush because the process needs to be successful. He encouraged the State to bring Waterbury a proposal that is in scale with our community and let residents look at it and discuss it. Perhaps then the community will back it.

Ezra (no last name) would like to know if there is a guarantee of no sex offenders in this shelter? C. Winters stated the State knows a lot about the people and there will not be sex offenders.

Brit (identifying herself as a business owner in Town) stated she is also concerned about the rush.

Rob Dombrowski stated it is more expensive to do this than maintain the hotel/motel program. He has concerns because he has worked and seen drug use at a local hotel/motel program.

Al Lewis stated he has been in Waterbury long enough to have three experiences when the state hastily pushed something on the Town residents. First was a juvenile jail, then it was a women's prison and now a homeless shelter. He wonders if the now vacant Williston State police barracks would be a more suitable location and had handouts of his research.

Todd Volitis stated this will be a Village problem, not a Shaw Mansion, Perry Hill or Hollow Road problem.

Wade Hodge hoped this program can help people in need. Hodge would like to know if Department of Children and Families has considered the potential failure modes? C. Winters stated it is a conversation

that needs to happen with law enforcement. We need to continue to communicate with the Town, Ambulance, and school district.

Theresa Wood stated Commissioner Winters alluded to potential change to the budget adjustment act that may extend the deadline for folks in hotels. House sent to Senate a proposal; Senate has a counter proposal. The folks that will be eligible for this will likely have housing at hotels until June 30th.

Short Recess

Meeting was called back to order at 8:54pm

Entertainment Permit – GoodFire LLP: Employees from GoodFire LLP explained they wish to have a celebration of their one-year anniversary. They have extended an invitation to the local community. There will be an 80's tribute band and food truck at the store on Sunday April 7th from 11-5pm. The owner has arranged with the VT State Police for traffic control. The Board asked the organizers if they have any idea of how many people will attend? They do not know but feel there will be a lot of people in town due to the eclipse. Staff stated it is a small event being held outside; they expect roughly 30 people at a time. R. Clapp expressed apprehensions about crossing Route 100. GoodFire LLP has 22 parking spaces at the store, there will be people crossing to the Cider Mill for the overflow spots. GoodFire LLP would not consider doing this without state police present. K. Sweeney thanked the organizers for coming back with updated plan and updated mapping. **K. Sweeney moved to grant GoodFire Cannabis, LLC an Entertainment Permit for Sunday April 7, 2024. D. Kehlmann seconded the motion. A vote was held and passed unanimously.**

Organizational Meeting for Town Meeting: Rebecca Ellis joined the Board to discuss the motions that will be needed at Town Meeting. The Board reviewed all the articles of the warning and assigned individuals to state each article at Town Meeting.

Duxbury and Moretown Fire Protection Contract: T. Leitz stated the respective boards have not objected to the draft contracts he sent. **K. Sweeney made a motion to approve the 04/01/2024 – 03/31/2025 Fire Protection Contract for the Town of Duxbury. A. Johnson seconded the motion. K. Sweeney moved to approve the 04/01/2024 – 03/31/2025 Fire protection contract as written for the Town of Moretown. A. Johnson seconded the motion; a vote was held and passed unanimously.**

Meeting Agenda: Move 100on100 to the April agenda. Add Debriefing of Town Meeting and Armory Update. Move Animal Control Ordinance and Eclipse Parking up.

Executive Session: **D. Kehlmann moved to find that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage in regard to contract negotiation. A. Johnson seconded the motion, a vote was held and passed unanimously.**

D. Kehlmann moved to enter into Executive Session. A. Johnson seconded the motion; a vote was held and passed unanimously.

Adjourn: Following executive session where no action was taken the meeting was adjourned.