

**Georgia Selectboard Meeting
Monday, December 28, 2015
7:00 p.m.**

Approved: **Unapproved**

Present: Selectboard: Chris Letourneau; Matt Crawford; Tara Wright; Ric Nye; Paul Jansen; Mike McCarthy, Town Administrator

Absent: None

Public Present: Kent Henderson, Ken Minck, Fred Grimm & Suzanna Brown, Conservation Commission

Chris Letourneau, Chair, opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Mike McCarthy added the following to the Agenda:

a). Legal Expenses Spreadsheet. Informational only.

Public Appearance:

The Conservation Commission is here to discuss the proposed funding for the Conservation Reserve Fund and any questions that may arise from our 2016 Budget. There was a short meeting with Paul, Matt, Rob Meader (who was unable to attend tonight) and myself and we talked about what the ballot item may look like or more information on it. We have not seen the exact ballot item about the Conservation Reserve Fund. We would like to know more about it and we would like to work with the Selectboard in creating the item. If it would lead to further discussion of our 2016 budget, we are willing to do so to satisfy your concerns.

Kent Henderson read the following statement: In defense of the Conservation Reserve Fund (CRF), there are over twenty-seven Vermont municipalities that established local conservation funds of various kinds.

In many towns, the lump sum allocation to the local conservation fund is a line item in the town budget or is budget item under the conservation commission as the Town of Georgia process has evolved. The Conservation Commission does not know of any towns that cap their funds.

The cost of conserving land varies by the land prices and development pressures in any given Vermont municipality. Some towns need to raise much larger funds than other do. Many towns with large conservation funds have realized that these funds can be designed to accumulate to significant amounts to accommodate local land prices. With high real estate values in the Town of Georgia, the Conservation Commission has tried to accumulate an appropriate level in the CRF.

One of the most important benefits of a local conservation fund is that it can provide the local matching funds that are often required to secure state, federal, or private monies, especially grant monies.

Another benefit of having a local conservation fund is the ability to move quickly on a potential project. The chance to conserve an important parcel of land can arise suddenly. With a local fund program in place, town officials can move the proposal through the application and review process quickly, potentially before the opportunity is lost or before costs rise.

Conservation Commissions concerns about a cap are: It's setting a precedent for future generations that removes flexibility to deal with changing real estate values and ability to act in a proactive manner. It lacks a clearly defined method to replenish the fund in a timely manner that does not place undue pressure on town revenue sources. The need to develop another side fund to accommodate monetary gifts.

The Conservation Commission is happy to openly discuss our proposed 2016 budget and all subsequent annual budgets to be sure that we are meeting taxpayers' concerns. Our strategy has been to accumulate money in the account for a large land purchase, which originated with the purchase of the Lost Pond property and need to establish a Right of Way.

As the fund grew, we have drawn on the CRF more frequently over the past five years with the VT Land Trust rights purchase of the Limoge property and the Deer Brook Trail development. We also anticipate another \$25-\$30K expenditure in 2015 to complete the trail work. Further parking lot and trail work is anticipated for the Deer Brook Trail in 2016 and GCC has laid out a trail in the Town Forest and will create a trail loop on the property this year.

In a sense, the GCC is naturally "capping" the fund, by taking on these new projects, because the CRF has been allowed to grow so it can act quickly if a large property would become available.

The Conservation Commission Reserve Fund balance is currently \$183,719.00. There are currently 27 Towns that have Conservation Reserve Funds, the majority of VT Towns don't have Conservation Reserve Funds.

Matt states that the Selectboard is trying to be fiscally responsible, we had a 20 minute discussion regarding making the bathrooms ADA accessibility at the Library for a \$1,000 and all of a sudden there is a \$183,000 parked essentially off shore. We are trying to balance that a little bit. Ric states that we all need to understand that the Board is trying to cap the Town's involvement, not the total fund. If someone gave you \$100,000 tomorrow, the fund would be \$283,000, but the Town at some point, as that fund grows, could back off its commitment. We set the bar preliminarily at \$150,000, so if the funds goes over that, the Town would not contribute, until that fund got below \$150,000 again.

The Selectboard and Conservation Commission had a general discussion regarding the CRF and its funding. The Conservation Commission will withdraw their request for 2016 funds considered for the reserve fund if the Selectboard would consider not capping the reserve fund. They believe it will be easier to work amongst the boards to figure this out annually rather than capping the reserve fund.

The Selectboard thanked the Conservation Commission for coming in and they will take this under consideration and have another discussion on January 4, 2016 at their budget meeting. Kent Henderson will come in to discuss this further with them on the 4th.

Review of Minutes:

Minutes of the December 14, 2015, regular meeting were reviewed and discussed. Motion made to approve the 12/14/15 regular meeting, with changes, made by Paul, second by Matt. No further discussion. Ric and Paul abstained, all others in favor.

Review of Warrants:

Motion to approve Check Warrant Report PR #50 for period end 12/17/15; Check Warrant Report PR #51 for period end 12/24/15; Check Warrant Report AP #101 for a transfer to Citizens Bank; and Check

Warrant AP #102 for a transfer to Citizens Bank, made by Matt, second by Paul. No further discussion. All in favor.

Motion to approve Check Warrant Report AP #103 for the general fund, made by Matt, second by Paul. No further discussion. All in favor.

Selectboard Concerns:

- a). Paul had a question regarding who is getting Cash-In-Lieu for health insurance. Krissy, Amber and Mike Ferrone had it for 2015.
- b). Chris received a phone call from Carol Jones regarding her property. Mike states that it is a very complicated story and the Town employees have done everything to our degree and ability to help. The tangle up has been at the State level. We are still working with them. This should be discussed in executive session for further information.

Unfinished Business Report:

- a). Budget discussion if necessary. No discussion at this time. There is a Budget Meeting scheduled for January 4, 2016.

New Business:

- a). Authorize Town Administrator to explore possibilities for PACIF Equipment Grants and VTrans Better Backroads Program Grants. It is the general consensus of the Selectboard for Mike to pursue these when they become available.
- b). Review 2016 cemetery mowing and maintenance plan. To be discussed during Budget.

Administrator's Correspondences and Tasks:

None

Treasurer's Correspondence:

None

General Correspondence:

- a). Northwest Regional Planning Commission: Funding request effective July 1, 2016.
- b). Town of Georgia Library Trustees: Meeting Minutes from November 9, 2015 meeting, Meeting Minutes from December 14, 2015 meeting, Agenda for January 11, 2016 meeting.
- c). Georgia Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes from December 14, 2015 meeting

Commented [K1]:

State of Vermont Correspondence:

- a). Vermont Environmental Conservation: TNC Report for Town Library.

- b). Vermont Department of Taxes: Certified Equalized Education Property Value.
- c). VTrans better backroads grant info sheet for 2016.
- d). VLCT / PACIF 2016 Equipment grants information.
- e). Act 250 Permit – Harrison Quarry. Cover sheet only in packet. Full decision 58 pages available.
- f). Application for Certificate of Public Good – solar project 1961 Ethan Allen Highway. Full application info available.
- g). Application for Certificate of Public Good – Vt. Gas update Sandy Birch Station. Full application info available.

Brochures, Newsletters, Workshops, and Advertisements:

None

Items for Signature:

None

Legal Correspondence:

None

Confidential / Executive Session Items:

- a). Contracts, Legal.

Motion to go into Executive Session at 8:05 p.m., is requested at this time to discuss Contracts, labor relations agreements with employees, Arbitration or mediation, grievances, other than tax, pending or probable litigation, or confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the Town of Georgia involving the Town, specifically finding that premature general public knowledge of the subject matter would clearly place the Town at a substantial disadvantage, made by Matt, second by Ric. No further discussion. All in favor.

Motion to come out of Executive Session made at 9:15 p.m. by Paul, second by Matt. No further discussion. All in favor.

Motion out of Executive Session to approve the Bovat Road Town Agreement with American Tower, and for the Chairman to sign on behalf of the Selectboard, made by Matt, second by Paul. No further discussion. All in favor.

Motion to adjourn at 9:35 p.m. made by Matt, second by Paul. No further discussion. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted by Krissy Jenkins

Monday, January 4, 2016, Budget Meeting @ 7:00 p.m.
Monday, January 11, 2016, next regular meeting @ 7:00 p.m.