

**TOWN OF ROCKINGHAM
BELLOWS FALLS VILLAGE CORPORATION
Merger Committee Regular Meeting
Tuesday, November 24, 2015**

Present: Colin James, Peter Golec, Evelyn Weeks, Ann DiBernardo, Nancy McAuliffe, Thomas MacPhee, Sanford Martin, Joshua Hearne, Stefan Golec

Absent: Susan Hammond

Also Present: Kristi Morris, Facilitator; Willis Stearns, II, Municipal Manager; Kerry Bennett, Recording Clerk; Southwest Mutual Aid Chief Philip Tyrell; Rockingham Chief Dennis Jeffrey; Saxtons River Chief Art Smith; Bellows Falls Deputy Chief Steve Cenate; Andrew Smith; Laurie Rowell; Eleanor Landry; Marjorie Ladd; Deborah Wright; Catherine Bergmann; Joel Love; Joe Brissette

Press: FACTTV Joey Powers & Alex Stradling; Joel Slutsky, The Shopper; Susan Smallheer, Rutland Herald

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m. by Facilitator Kristi Morris. Morris reviewed the Rules of Procedure for those present.

Additions to the Agenda for Routine Administrative Matters and/or Pressing Matters that will require ratification at a future meeting: None

Approve Minutes of October 27, 2015: *Ann DiBernardo made the motion to approve the minutes of October 27, 2015 as printed. Motion was seconded by Nancy McAuliffe. Motion passed unanimously.*

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda (3 minutes per person): None

Agenda:

1. Plan of Merger Document (presented at 10/27/2015 meeting): James asked that Stearns review the document. Stearns stated that following a recommendation by a member of the audience at a previous meeting, the Committee instructed him to review other town/village's plans of merger. Stearns noted that 5 to 7 documents were reviewed and the present document was taken primarily from the plan of merger from Bradford and Essex, two communities very similar to ours. Stearns also noted that the Bradford and Essex documents had previously been approved by the legislature. James stated that the Committee had worked on the Charter document for 9 months and were then presented with this Plan of Merger. Stearns stated that the request to review and compile a plan of merger was at a recent meeting. Stefan Golec asked James if he had specific concerns. James stated that he did not but was unsure where the Committee goes from here. Morris asked the Committee if they wanted to proceed as previously and read each paragraph. The Committee discussed this and also decided to amend the rules to allow public comment during this process. *Peter Golec made the motion to amend the rules to allow public comment during the reading of*

this document. Motion was seconded by Stefan Golec. Motion passed with 7 in favor and 2 opposed.

Morris read the first paragraph Merger of the Village and Town in its entirety.

- Joel Love stated that the Committee did not solicit input and asked what justification it had for jamming this through. Andrew Smith stated he was disappointed and felt the Committee saw the merger as a “fait accompli” and there was no objectivity in place. Deborah Wright noted that a Plan of Merger has to incorporate a Charter.
- Jim McAuliffe disagreed with these comments and felt that the Plan of Merger document was straight forward and addresses all the issues.
- Laurie Rowell and Joe Brissette asked that more copies be available. Morris called a 10 minute recess and more copies of the document were made and distributed by Stearns.
- Morris called the meeting back to order and again went over the charge of the committee, the responsibility on the Selectboard and Trustee level and the voters.

Morris read the second paragraph, Properties transferred and liabilities assumed in its entirety.

- Love stated that this has very little content stating that a document should have 100’s if not 1000’s of back up documents and none were present.
- Rowell asked if there was a list of lands and buildings. Stearns stated that the list of assets was included in the packet as was provided to the auditors. Rowell asked if a list of indebtedness was included. Stearns stated that it was not. Rowell asked what that number was. Stearns stated that it was \$30,000 for the Village and all other debts were held by the Water and Wastewater funds.
- Bergmann stated that at the last meeting the only list that was included was the insured property list and asked about the Village forest and other land. Stearns stated again that this was provided in the packet for tonight’s meeting.
- Stefan Golec asked if a list of Town assets and indebtedness was included. Stearns stated that the only lists requested were for the Village.
- Smith noted that the paragraph states “liabilities assumed” and stated that others may come to light. Stearns again stated that this was word for word from a document already approved by the legislature.
- Love stated that the residents of the Village have these interests and are entitled to some compensation and asked how this would be done. Morris stated that all assets, as well as all liability, would be incorporated into the Town.

Morris read the third paragraph, Properties held in trust in its entirety.

- Rowell asked if there were any properties held in trust. Stearns stated that there were not.
- Love asked if this would include trademarks. Stearns stated that it would.

Morris read the fourth paragraph, Settling the affairs of the Bellows Falls Village Corporation in its entirety.

- Joe Brissette asked if the Town Clerk & Town Treasurer were the same. Stearns stated that they were not.
- Smith noted that the asset list provided showed Village land totaling \$171,000.

Morris read paragraph five, Town Manager, in its entirety.

- Love felt that the position of Municipal Manager should be dissolved and a Town Manager hired. Stearns stated that the Municipal Manager has a contract and all contracts would be assumed by the Town.
- Marjorie Ladd felt the Manager should recuse himself from this committee. Morris stated that Stearns is not a member of this committee and is here as advisory.

Morris read paragraph six, Town Officers, in its entirety.

- Deborah Wright noted that the State Statute was not defined here and should be. Committee agreed and this will be added.

Morris read paragraph seven, Police Department, in its entirety.

- DiBernardo asked why the name would remain as the Bellows Falls Police Department. Stearns stated that this is a licensed name.
- James asked if the police services would remain in the Village or be town-wide. Stearns stated town-wide.
- Joel Love asked if it was likely that there would be increased vehicles, staff, etc. Stearns stated it was.
- Rowell asked about renaming the department. Stearns stated that they would have to maintain the current licensing.

Hearne made the motion that the wording from 10.3 in the previous Charter document be inserted here. Motion was seconded by Colin James. Hearne stated that if this has a chance of passing the Village has to get some areas under control and he is hearing that the Village would have to cut \$400,000 to \$500,000.

- DiBernard noted that the State Police barracks in Rockingham is closing and rural Rockingham will not have the coverage it has now. Hearne stated that the barracks is closing but the patrol areas are not changing.
- Martin asked if Saxtons River would continue to contract with the State Police and asked if we knew if the State Police would be stopping this service. MacPhee stated that he was under the impression that the State Police would only be responding to major crimes and will do coverage on the interstate only.

Hearne stated he would rescind his motion at this time. James rescinded his second as well.

- Wright stated she felt this committee was back at an impasse and are choosing not to discuss the issues.
- Morris again explained that it was this Committee's responsibility to develop a document that will then go back to each Board. At that point the Boards will then be required to hold two public hearings each.
- Steve Cenate stated that the policing services in the area are stretched very thin. Cenate also stated that rural Rockingham was under the impression that there is no crime or drugs in Rockingham or Saxtons River and this assumption is false. Cenate stated that times have changed and we have to think outside the box. Town wide policing would provide protection for the residents of the entire Town. Cenate also stated that it is hard to predict costs until this actually happens at which time the Chief would make a proposal to the voters.
- Doherty stated that he thinks this Committee needs sub-committees to research the facts.
- Hearne noted that this document would result in a 36¢ tax increase for Rockingham which would result in an additional \$600 a year on a \$180,000 home.

Morris read paragraph eight, Fire Department, in its entirety.

Peter Golec stated that the Rockingham and Saxtons River Fire Departments are independent. Stearns stated that they are both hose and reel companies staffed by volunteers. Rockingham Fire Department is funded in part in the Town of Rockingham budget and Saxtons River in the Saxtons River Village budget. These would continue to be run as they are now.

Stearns noted that major equipment for all 3 departments are purchased by the Town and feels that all fire safety should be a town-wide function.

Love asked how the Town could take over the Saxtons River Fire Department without a vote of Saxtons River.

Doherty noted that there used to be a fund for the purchase of trucks and asked if this still existed. Stearns stated that it did but it has not been funded for several years. Stearns also noted that both Saxtons River and Rockingham are both in need of new vehicles. Morris stated that cuts like not funding a particular fund is a directive of the Board.

Andrew Smith asked if there would still be three fire chiefs. Stearns stated that there would.

Cenate stated that no one is looking to take over another department. However, if funded as one there are many more opportunities for grants and funding and multiple departments are more likely to get funding than if a department were to apply on its own.

Rowell suggested that the Committee check with its attorney as she believes it is illegal to include Saxtons River Fire Department in this document.

McAuliffe stated that she felt that the Committee was getting nowhere at this time. Morris also noted that the next regularly scheduled meeting is set for a few days before the Christmas Holiday and the Committee was in agreement to cancel this meeting and continue in January.

2. Financial Information (presented at 10/27/2015 meeting): January 26, 2016 agenda.

Set Agenda Items for December 22, 2015: Committee in agreement to cancel this meeting.

Other Business: None

Adjourn Nancy McAuliffe made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. and set the next meeting for Tuesday, January 26, 2016 and to continue with the same agenda. Motion was seconded by Ann DiBernardo. Motion passed unanimously.

Attest: _____
Kerry Bennett, Recording Clerk