

Barton Village, Inc.
Regular Trustees Meeting

Wednesday, May 29, 2024
6:00pm
Barton Village Memorial Hall

Attendance: Regina Lyon (Chair), Marilyn Prue (Trustee), Ellis Merchant (Trustee), Vera LaPorte (Business Manager), Allyson Howell, Art LaPlante, Lori Wells, Adrien Helm, Stephanie Bickford, Ed Barber

Agenda

Full agenda with additional details can be found at <https://bartonvt.com/agenda-minutes/>

- A. **Call to Order** – Gina Lyon called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.
- B. **Changes to the Agenda/Additions or Deletions** – None.
- C. **Privilege of the Floor** – Allyson Howell from NEKO informed the Board that they had been awarded the \$15,000 grant that they had applied for to use as a “post-flood resiliency celebration” and presented their plans for use of the funds. They intend to host a week-long event in August 2024 that will culminate with a “block party” at the ball field, with live music, art demonstrations, food sampling from area restaurants/businesses, and other family friendly activities. Allyson Howell asked for advice on how to manage such an event, and Marilyn Prue commented that in her experience with similar events in Orleans Village, many activities would be necessary to keep folks interested and engaged. Gina Lyon suggested adding face painting and asking the Orleans Fire Department and Emergency Unit to participate by displaying their trucks and equipment. Allyson Howell also mentioned the possibility of serving a giant birthday cake to commemorate Barton Village’s 150th anniversary of incorporation. The next planning session for this celebration will be at the Barton Public Library on June 7, 2024.

Adrien Helm from Greater Barton Arts informed the Board that they would also be participating in the celebration via storytelling and spoken word performances. She had spoken to the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation at the Board’s request regarding the mural she proposed painting on the block retaining wall at the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on 05/13/2024, and stated that while the DHP had no qualms about the historic nature of the wall, they felt that it would be an inappropriate surface for her project. Adrien Helm hopes that they will have a solid plan by the time of the August celebration.

Allyson Howell informed the Board that the Barton Community Giving Garden and the Westmore Association would be serving lunch in the Barton Memorial Hall on BASSI’s behalf the next day and invited everyone to attend.

Gina Lyon made a motion to move **Discussion Item K - The Orleans County Fair Association** to the beginning of the meeting, ahead of Action Items. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- A. **Orleans County Fair Association** – Art LaPlante and Lori Wells from the Orleans County Fair Association (OCFA) presented the Board with their concerns about the fairgrounds electric rate increase. Art LaPlante began the presentation by reading the OCFA’s mission statement and listing some of the various events that they host at the fairgrounds. Lori Wells explained that under the new electric rate the fairgrounds’ electric bills have increased from an average of \$10,600 annually to \$8,844 in just the first quarter of 2024 alone, during months when the fairgrounds are typically not in use. She stated that having no income to offset these bills could be detrimental to the organization and asked the Board of Trustees if there was a way to either lessen the cost or “grandfather in” the OCFA to their old rate.

For background, Business Manager Vera LaPorte explained that the rate change came about in July 2023 when it was discovered that, according to Barton Electric’s tariff, the OCFA had not been billed at the correct electric rate for many years. The rate that the OCFA should have been on was called Large Commercial Demand, and she explained that this rate is much higher because the customers billed under this rate consume enough electricity to force Barton Electric to purchase additional power. She explained that while OCFA experienced an enormous increase in their electric bills, these tariffs are heavily regulated by the Public Utility Commission (PUC).

Marilyn Prue gave Lori Wells a copy of the Large Commercial Demand tariff that OCFA falls under and further explained that it applies to customers whose usage exceeds 2,000 kWh per month for at least two consecutive months and that the OCFA fits this criterion despite not being active in the winter. According to the tariff, the OCFA is billed throughout the winter because they cannot be billed for less than 70% of peak usage for twelve consecutive months following being placed on demand. Lori Wells asked if it was correct to assume that the OCFA’s bills during their inactive months would never go down. Marilyn Prue told her that that was correct according to the tariff, which is why the Board was looking into adding a rider (sub-tariff) that would apply to the OCFA’s situation. Gina Lyon then explained that obtaining the rider would have to involve the PUC and that it would take time.

Marilyn Prue assured the OCFA that the Board was eager to help and that they would work as quickly as possible, and that Vera LaPorte was already in discussions with a member of Vermont Public Power Supply Authority’s (VPPSA) regulatory team to make it happen. Marilyn Prue advised that in the meantime, the OCFA could receive a little relief by submitting a tax-exempt form to the Village to remove the 6% sales tax that they are currently paying.

ACTION ITEMS:

- D. **Minutes from Regular Board of Trustees Meeting May 13, 2024** – After review, Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the Minutes from the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on May 13, 2024 as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- E. **Minutes from the Special Water Hearing May 13, 2024** – After review, Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the Minutes from the Special Water Hearing May 13, 2024 as presented. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- F. **Bills and Warrants** – Gina Lyon made a motion to continue working on the Bills and Warrants throughout the meeting. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- G. **Junky Yard Violations** – Gina Lyon asked Vera LaPorte how she determined who should receive a violation letter, and if the decision was based entirely on information reported by the public. Vera LaPorte stated that she drove around the Village to verify the state of the reported properties and in doing so discovered more. After review, Gina Lyon made a motion to send Junky Yard Ordinance Violation letters to the indicated property owners as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- H. **Coin Drop Applications** – After discussion, Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the coin drop applications for BASSI and Lake Region High School provided that, due to safety concerns, they move their locations close to JP Sicard’s on Glover Road instead of in front of C&C Supermarket on Church Street. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- I. **Property Liens** – After review, Gina Lyon made a motion to approve placing liens for past due electric accounts on the indicated properties as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- J. **Warrant to the Delinquent Tax Collector for Electric Accounts** – After review, Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the Warrant to the Delinquent Tax Collector for past due electric accounts. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- K. **Department Operations Updates** – Vera LaPorte updated the Board on the activities of the Village departments, most notably in Electric and Highway.

Electric – Vera LaPorte asked the Board to consider possible dates for a bond vote for the repairs at the hydro plant as previously discussed at the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on 04/22/2024. The Board directed Vera LaPorte to contact Village Clerk Shelia Martin for information regarding the bond vote process and will consider meeting dates afterward. Stephanie Bickford asked the Board why a bond vote would be necessary. Gina Lyon explained that the penstock (the large steel pipe that funnels water from the Clyde River to the generators at the hydro plant) was badly in need of replacement and that this plus other repairs were estimated to cost approximately \$3 million. Though the Village had applied for a \$1 million

grant, the rest of the money would have to be borrowed, thus necessitating a bond vote. There was some discussion about the size of Barton Electric's service territory, location of the plant, and how much power the hydro plant generates (between 25% and 40% of power consumed).

Highway – Vera LaPorte informed the Board that Bridge 55 (Elm Street) was budgeted for full replacement by the State in 2029, but until then some repairs to the decking needed to be made and that DPW Foreman Andy Sicard would be tackling that soon. She also informed the Board that the water leak on Church Street would be repaired that week and that the parts and equipment necessary to repair the water leak on Main Street near Davis Court were on order. The search for a deep enough trench box to do that work safely was ongoing. Ellis Merchant suggested contacting local earthmoving companies to ask about the possibility of borrowing or renting one.

Gina Lyon asked about paving on Glover Road. Vera LaPorte informed her that paving with hot mix asphalt required drier and warmer weather than they had been experiencing and that Andy Sicard would start paving as soon as weather permitted. Gina Lyon then asked if they could investigate a reported possible tripping hazard in the sidewalk in front of Barton Chambers Apartments.

- L. Management/Staff Report – See ongoing list of items in the Board packet at <https://bartonvt.com/agenda-minutes/>

OTHER ITEMS:

Other Business – Gina Lyon asked to revisit several ongoing topics:

- ATV Ordinance – Scheduled for Regular Board Meeting 06/10/2024.
- Meeting with VHB – Scheduled for Regular Board Meeting 06/24/2024.
- Glover wastewater agreement – Mike Mainer from Aldritch & Elliott finally took a look at the agreement and has initial thoughts, mostly regarding BOD/TSS loading and cost structure. Vera LaPorte sent him several years' worth of flow data and he will return with more questions/information once he has analyzed the data.
- Water/sewer overtime disconnection/reconnection fee – The current fee is \$25 and will be updated to reflect current cost.
- Mark Bean – Mark Bean has not paid the full amount of the bill incurred by his actions in January 2024 and has asked that the Board abate the cost of his wastewater usage during that period. Vera LaPorte sent him a copy of the Village's Request for Abatement application several weeks ago and has had no response. Gina Lyon asked Vera LaPorte to pursue the final amount of the invoice and Vera LaPorte assured the Board that after recently speaking to the State Environmental Officer again, she was sure that they were in the right to collect.
- School crossing signs – Ellis Merchant stated that he thought that they should wait to install the signs until after school let out for the year. Vera LaPorte will obtain an estimate for the wiring of the signs (with lights) from Orleans Electric.
- State Budget Adjustment Act – Gina Lyon inquired about the status of the \$80,000 promised to the Village from the State Budget Adjustment Act that was signed by the

Governor in March 2024. Vera LaPorte informed her that the Village had not yet received this money and that she had not been able to determine a date that it would be paid, and she would continue to look into it.

- Facility site visits – Gina Lyon asked the Board to submit possible dates to Vera LaPorte to schedule site visits of the Village’s several facilities. Once the date is determined it will be warned as a Special Board of Trustees Meeting. Members of the community will be welcome to attend.
- Inter-department loan from Village to Wastewater – Gina Lyon asked about the status of the \$200,000 loan the Village department gave to the Wastewater department. Vera LaPorte suggested drafting a loan agreement and amortization schedule in keeping with the terms of the loan that the Board agreed on at the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on 04/08/2024 and will have it ready by the next Board meeting.
- July 4th parade – Gina Lyon stated that she had not yet started planning the event but will reach out to Anne Marie MacEachern to begin the process. She stated that she would like to create a float celebrating the Village’s 150th anniversary of incorporation.
- Regular Board of Trustees Meeting 06/10/2024 – Gina Lyon briefly went over some additional agenda items for the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on 06/10/2024. Bruce Melendy with the NVDA will be present to discuss the RIVER Project (<https://riverprojectsvt.org/>) and architects from Coe & Coe will be present to discuss future development plans for the old Barton Motors site owned by Jason Sicard.
- After hours on-call service – Gina Lyon asked Vera LaPorte for an update on the search for a new after hours on-call service. Vera LaPorte stated that she had a demo scheduled the next day with Specialty Answering Service and that she was considering two others.
- 357 Main Street – Gina Lyon informed the Board that she had been contacted by a Village property owner with complaints about how his electric service was handled several years ago. She stated that she planned on inviting the property owner, Barton Electric Lineman Steve Cutler, Orleans Electric Manager John Morley, and Vera LaPorte to a meeting to discuss his issues and hopefully find resolution.

EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEMS:

M. **Executive Session** - Legal Action: 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(1)(E) – None.

N. **Executive Session** - Personnel: 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(3) – None.

O. **Adjourn** – Gina Lyon made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:30pm.

Upcoming Meetings:

Regular Board Meeting: June 10, 2024

Regular Board Meeting: June 24, 2024