

Barton Village, Inc.
Regular Trustees Meeting

Monday, August 12, 2024

6:00pm

Barton Village Memorial Hall

Attendance: Gina Lyon (Chair), Marilyn Prue (Trustee), Ellis Merchant (Trustee), Vera LaPorte (Business Manager), Denis Fortin (Hydro Facility Manager), Crystal Carrier (VPPSA), Sam Douglass, David Billado

Agenda

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

Audio recording of the meeting can be found for 30 days following the official approval of these minutes at the next Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on August 26, 2024 at <https://bartonvt.com/agenda-minutes/>

- A. **Call to Order** – Gina Lyon called the meeting to order at 6:02pm.

- B. **Changes to the Agenda/Additions or Deletions** – Crystal Carrier requested that Item M – Hydro Facility Project Update be moved to the beginning of the meeting, ahead of Action Items. Gina Lyon made a motion to move Item M – Hydro Facility Project Update be moved to the beginning of the meeting, ahead of Action Items. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

- C. **Privilege of the Floor** – State Senate hopeful [Sam Douglass](#) (R - Orleans District) addressed the Board and answered questions regarding his policies and positions, most notably affordable housing, affordable heating, gun control, and crime. The State primary is August 13, 2024.

ACTION ITEMS:

- D. **Minutes from the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting July 22, 2024** – Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the Minutes from the Regular Board of Trustees Meeting July 22, 2024 as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

- E. **Bills and Warrants** – Gina Lyon made a motion to continue working through the Bills and Warrants and approve them by the end of the meeting. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

- F. **2023 Audited and Internal Financial Reports** – Crystal Carrier explained that the inclusion of the Internal Financial Report was intended to show the Board the differences between how the auditors formatted their report versus what she typically presented to the Board. The biggest differences were in how they calculated pensions and depreciation of governmental funds, but other than the significant shortfalls in the Water and Wastewater Departments, she was satisfied

with the outcome. Marilyn Prue asked why the auditors booked the FEMA receivables for CY 2023 when the Village had not yet received the funds. Crystal Currier explained that because Business Manager Vera LaPorte had signed and submitted the Damage Description & Dimensions document for the 2023 flood, the auditors insisted that it must be booked for CY 2023 despite the funds not yet being obligated by FEMA. Crystal Currier disagreed with their decision because it artificially inflated the amount of money the Village had in 2023, but the auditors had final say. Marilyn Prue brought up the working capital ratios for the various departments and explained that a “good” ratio (dividing current total assets by current total liabilities) would be 1.5 to 2 or higher, and that all the Village departments with the exception of the Wastewater Department had a “good” ratio. Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the 2023 Audited and Internal Financial Reports as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

- G. **Monthly Financial Reports for Period Ending 06/30/2024** – Discussion included with Monthly Financial Reports for Period Ending 07/31/2024 because July 2024’s financials also reflect June 2024.
- H. **Monthly Financial Reports for Period Ending 07/31/2024** – Crystal Currier explained that while the Village Department currently had plenty of cash, it was operating at a loss of approximately \$18,000 because taxes for 2024 had not yet been collected. Pageant Park was performing particularly well. The Highway Department was also operating at a loss due to tax collection and the FEMA funds not yet being obligated. She explained that most municipalities borrow against taxes with a Tax Anticipation Note to help bridge the gap, but that Barton Village has not yet needed to. The Electric Department was doing very well and despite the Water and Wastewater Departments operating at a loss for the last few years, they were currently stable. Crystal Currier noted that labor for the Water Department was overbudget, mainly due to overtime and doubletime associated with weekend testing, but that should reduce as the Wastewater Department employees perform the water testing alongside the wastewater testing. Overall, through July 2024 the Village was maintaining its budgets. Gina Lyon made a motion to accept the Monthly Financial Reports for Periods Ending 06/30/2024 and 07/31/2024 as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- I. **Vermont Trappers Association Annual Rendezvous** – The Board of Trustees received a request from the Vermont Trappers Association to waive the Firearms Ordinance for the purpose of discharging firearms at their Annual Rendezvous held at the Orleans County Fairgrounds on September 21, 2024 and September 22, 2024. The Board has historically approved their request. Marilyn Prue made a motion to approve the Vermont Trappers Association’s request to waive the Firearms Ordinance for the purpose of discharging firearms at their Annual Rendezvous held at the Orleans County Fairgrounds on September 21, 2024 and September 22, 2024. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.
- J. **Water Department Purchase: Chlorine Analyzer** – The water plant’s chlorine analyzer has not worked properly for several weeks (not flood-related), and Water Plant Operator Lucas DiMauro has had no remote control or data monitoring other than daily testing. Replacement parts and a service technician have been unsuccessful and a new chlorine analyzer should be purchased. The chlorine analyzer sourced will cost \$9,674.75 and includes installation. Gina Lyon made a

motion to approve the purchase of the new chlorine analyzer in the amount of \$9,674.75 to be paid for with the Water Department Capital Reserve Fund as presented. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

K. **El Dorado Billing Software** – Crystal Currier and Vera LaPorte recommend moving utility billing from the software that is currently used (NEMRC – New England Municipal Resource Center) for customization, ease of use, and efficiency. VPPSA had been seeking new utility billing software for several of its members for quite some time because of NEMRC’s limitations. El Dorado would automate several processes, including online bill payment, autopayment, and paperless billing as well as providing an online portal for customers to be able to download their bills and start/stop service, which are features customers have been requesting. The total cost of implementation would be \$21,030, with \$17,700 to be paid for by the Electric Department, \$1,665 by the Water Department, and \$1,665 by the Wastewater Department. After discussion, Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the purchase of the El Dorado Billing software in the amount of \$21,030. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

L. **2024 Tax Assessments** – The 2024 tax assessments as approved by Barton Village voters at the Annual Meeting on 03/12/2024 (Village, Water, and Wastewater) and the Second Annual Meeting on 04/30/2024 (Highway) to be raised by Tax Collector Shelia Martin are as follows:

- Village – Tax Rate .1682 (Grand List \$431,715.50 – raise \$72,578)
- Highway – Tax Rate .8297 (Grand List \$431,715.50 – raise \$358,180)
- Wastewater – Tax Rate .1312 (Grand List \$499,622.00 – raise \$65,540)
- Water – Tax Rate .1308 (Grand List \$526,252.00 – raise \$68,804)
 - TOTAL TAX RATE 1.2599

Gina Lyon made a motion to approve the taxes to be collected as approved by Barton Village voters at the Annual Meeting on 03/12/2024 and the Second Annual Meeting on 04/30/2024 as presented. Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried. Marilyn Prue made a motion to approve the 2024 tax rates as approved by Barton Village voters at the Annual Meeting on 03/12/2024 and the Second Annual Meeting on 04/30/2024 as presented. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

M. **Hydro Facility Project Update** – The Board discussed the coordination of the upcoming informational meeting on the Hydro Facility Project. It was decided that the meeting would be held in the hall versus the theater, and that presentation handouts as well as a simple informational one-sheet including a history of electric rate increases would be available.

Marilyn Prue and Gina Lyon asked Hydro Facility Operator Denis Fortin for clarification on the cost to decommission the facility if the voters did not agree to financing the repairs and upgrades. Denis Fortin explained that the facility’s Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license was valid until at least 2043 and that the facility would have no value without the license. His recommendation would be not to decommission the facility but to make it temporarily inactive, which would still require supervision and labor, as well as the employment of a firm to work with FERC. Crystal Currier asked what it would take to decommission the facility if necessary, and Denis Fortin explained that the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR)

would have to be involved and that all the structures, including the dams, would have to be removed, which had the potential to cost millions of dollars.

Ellis Merchant asked how much the electric rates would increase if the repairs and upgrades did not happen. Crystal Carrier estimated that there would be a 12.4% rate increase over a 20-year period by purchasing power to make up for the hydro facility's generation loss, which did not include any decommissioning costs. She also estimated that rates would increase by 7-11% with the repairs, but there was room for variability with the rising costs of construction (increasing the rate) and eliminating some of the project components required by grant funding, which the Village did not receive (reducing the rate). Crystal Carrier advised that it would be less expensive to proceed with the project than to buy replacement power.

Gina Lyon stated that she could envision some voters asking to sell the facility rather than make the repairs but noted that they couldn't expect "top dollar" for a rundown facility. She predicted that anyone interested in the purchase of the facility would request that the repairs be made ahead of the sale or expect to buy it for very little. Ellis Merchant asked what to do with the proceeds if the facility was sold. Could the money be given to the Village taxpayers? Crystal Carrier explained that while that was possible, the need for buying replacement power would still exist and that given the pressure that the State is putting on increased electrification, rates would continue to rise. She further explained that the Public Utility Commission (PUC) had been involved in utility sales in the past, and that they could dictate what the Village would be able to do with the proceeds if the hydro facility were to be sold.

Gina Lyon suggested hosting an open house at the hydro facility for the purpose of showcasing the repairs/upgrades required and answering questions since only Ed Barber from the Newport Daily Express attended the Village facility tour on 06/26/2024. She then stated that the question she had been hearing the most was about why rate-payers who lived outside the Village were not permitted to vote. Crystal Carrier explained that she was certain it was statutory, but that she'd find the actual State statute to be sure. After a brief discussion the Board agreed to host an open house at the hydro facility on Saturday, August 24, 2024 from 9am to 11am and to include the statutory language, once found, on the one-sheet to be available at the informational meeting on August 26, 2024. Gina Lyon also suggested drafting a letter to the editor about the project to be submitted to the Chronicle along with the open house invitation.

Discussion then turned to the availability of absentee ballots and the process required. The Board was unsure of the process and when the absentee ballots should be made available and directed Vera LaPorte to confirm the details with Town Clerk Kristin Atwood.

- N. **Tariff Rider** – The draft tariff rider for Large Commercial Nonprofit Intermittent Service is ready for review. Highlights include:
- Considered an 18-month pilot program and will be reviewed at the end of the term for efficacy
 - Customer's monthly peak load does not exceed 15% of their total annual peak load for at least six (6) months of the year

- Remove the remand ratchet in exchange for a higher demand charge per kWh (\$13.81 to \$18.00)
- Eligible customers must commit to participating in efficiency measure/programs and meet annually with Barton Village to review business prospects
- Will go into effect November 1, 2024

Gina Lyon stated that she liked the tariff rider and that it made sense. She asked about next steps, and Vera LaPorte explained that after the pilot period ended there would be a separate process with the PUC to make it a permanent tariff. Gina Lyon directed Vera LaPorte to send the tariff rider to Art LaPlante and Lori Wells after the meeting.

- O. **Flood Update** – See ongoing list of items at <https://bartonvt.com/agenda-minutes/>
- P. **Department Operations Updates** – See ongoing list of items at <https://bartonvt.com/agenda-minutes/>

OTHER ITEMS:

- Q. **Other Business** – Gina Lyon updated the Board on the Memphremegog Watershed Project. The project is moving forward and will hopefully completed this year.

Gina Lyon asked about applications for the HR/Financial Lead position. Vera LaPorte confirmed that the Village had received several and that she and Crystal Currier had narrowed it down to three that were particularly qualified. Gina Lyon requested that Marilyn Prue assist in the interview process and she agreed. She requested that the three resumes be sent to the rest of the Board.

Gina Lyon asked about scheduling a meeting with the folks from UCONN-TAB regarding brownfields. Vera LaPorte confirmed their availability in September and Gina Lyon suggested the regular meeting on September 23, 2024.

Gina Lyon inquired about following up with the Junky Yard Ordinance letters. Vera LaPorte informed her that now that the flood damage is mostly under control she can return to it.

Gina Lyon made a motion to enter Executive Session for the purposes of discussing Legal Action: 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(1)(E) and Personnel: 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(3). Marilyn Prue seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEMS:

- R. **Executive Session - Legal Action: 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(1)(E)**
- S. **Executive Session - Personnel: 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(3)**

The Board came out of Executive Session at 10:00pm with no action taken. Gina Lyon made a motion to adjourn. Ellis Merchant seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

- T. **Adjourn** – The meeting adjourned at 10:00pm.

Upcoming Meetings:

Special Board Meeting: August 21, 2024

Special Informational Hearing: August 26, 2024 (before Regular Board Meeting)

Regular Board Meeting: August 26, 2024

Special Meeting (Hydro Project Voting): August 28, 2024