**Minutes for Capital Spending Plan Committee meeting # 2 4/22/2021 via Zoom**

In attendance at the meeting: Townspeople: Peter Hood, Peter Graymond, Theo Kennedy, Susan Clark, Sky Barsch, Liz Scharf, Randy Drury, Elias Gardner, Paul Zabriskie; CVRPC: Christian Meyer

Liz called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

Introductions were made to Christian Meyer who has taken over as Lead at Central VT Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) and attendees introduced their role in the town and interest in the project.

Christian presented a short PP to discuss the process of the Capital Spending plan process which includes taking inventory of Facilities, Equipment and Other Planning Opportunities and what kind of attributes we would be looking for when he takes inventory. For example, attributes could be: what is the expected life span, what are the operational costs, maintenance and repair costs. Christian shared an example of a spreadsheet that has a tab for the town hall. In the spreadsheet there are identified costs associated with the town hall: new roof, new siding, paint job, replacement vault, replacement plumbing, elevator repair, etc. The spreadsheet will show the year that something needs to be repaired or replaced and the anticipated cost to that repair/replacement. The spreadsheet allows you to look ahead 10+ years to determine how much you will need in money to address the spending item.

We agreed that a $5000 minimum threshold value would be included in the plan unless there was a compelling reason to include something of value that was less than $5,000.

Theo brought up the question of what do we as a community expect from our town and the services in our town? For example, what do we want out of our town hall? (a community meeting room or not?) Or what kind of fire department do we want? What is the future of our buildings? For example, in the future will we use the fire department in the same way we are using it today?

We agreed that project parameters will correspond with what we have now then we think about what we want. We discussed is it more cost effective to maintain our drafty town hall and put money into improvements like Radon mitigation, weatherization, new windows, new elevator, vault, new plumbing, and normal maintenance and repair, or do we invest in a new building? Randy said it was important for us to do the exercise of understanding the costs of fixing/replacing/keeping so that we can make an informed decision if we are looking at bonding for a new building. We would want to know that we have done our research. The consensus of the group was that we would like to compare the costs of existing buildings and how they would compare to “new” (for buildings that are nearing or past their life expectancy)

Christian discussed the process for an ongoing Capital Planning Committee (CPC) advisory committee. Once this current CPC has gone through the process of creating a formal plan, engaged with the community over the next 9 months and the plan is adopted by the Select board a formal committee should be created to oversee the future of the Capital Spending Plan (CSP). The idea is that the formal CPC would meet 4 times per year, possibly, review the plan, make changes as necessary, and use it as a living/changing tool when working on the budget in the fall with the selectboard. Members of the budget committee would be on the CPC—and in fact, the budget committee might become the CPC. The process MIGHT (these are ideas) include:

1. defining our principles (i.e. “We will provide citizens the opportunity to make informed decisions and we will create greater transparency about our spending”)—a mission behind the plan.
2. Formalizing the CPC as an advisory committee—appointed by the Select Board, for example?
3. Policies: i.e. Financials—will we Bond for large expenses? Borrow? Save? Or a combination?
4. Yearly inventory—reviewing the inventory to make sure it’s still valid (trucks and years and makes and models will change every year)
5. Project Intake Process: an application when the road foreman wants to order a truck and this form goes to the Select Board for approval
6. Evaluation/Priorities—have they changed since last year?
7. Financial Plan
8. Adoption of Annual Plan
9. Monitoring Plan
10. Evaluation of Process
11. Record Keeping (a file that has all the applications and their statuses, for example)

The above are just ideas of what would happen during the years moving forward after the initial plan is created. Keeps the process active and alive and we don’t just file the document away and never look at it again.

Christian shared East Montpelier’s website and their Capital Spending Plan documents and process as an example to strive for. They keep their plans on the site, share meeting minutes, etc.

Liz asked if the towns people had to vote on the plan at Town Meeting. Christian said no, and Peter Hood said that we wanted it ready by town meeting so that we could share it with the town and ask for their thoughts and feedback.

Susan reminded us that Democracy happens all year—we can use this process as an opportunity to engage citizens in different ways that work for them—checking out the website and looking at pictures, reading blogs, attending field trips. We want to make this a transparent process. Randy reiterated that it’s important to keep people aware of this process and don’t hope that people will come to a September event if we haven’t shared anything with them throughout the process.

Paul Z reminded us that ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) has a lot of money and that there’s an opportunity for 176 million dollars in ARPA funds for energy related projects and that we need to be fast but thoughtful about how we can use those monies which will have to be expended by 12/2024.

Sky suggested we get a Mail Chimp account to sign people up who might be interested in following along in the process—getting invites, updates, field trip dates, etc. We agreed this would be a good idea. Not sure how to pay for that, but it might be in the budget. Liz will check.

Susan discussed Committee Engagement ideas:

Field Trips (fire station, town hall, touch a truck, new grader); Blogs, website updates with Photos, videos—there are a lot of ways to get people interested. Randy and Peter H agreed that getting the community involved very good idea.

Sky set up a spreadsheet here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qhvZHSTnmJWvr5ivT5MvSQ6d9gbHdMyAduqiKkvJet0/edit#gid=0>

This spreadsheet is available for committee members to sign up for an event—liz said she would schedule the first event for a Thursday in May—visit the fire department!

Peter Raymond asked if we could have a cost associated with what we are looking at. Peter H thought that might be too tough before we start these field trips; Christian said he’d have some idea by end of June what some of the costs were.

Susan asked Christian if we can “dream big” when we are creating our plan—i.e. our Town Plan talks about a walkable village—even though it’s a big expense, can we include those costs in a capital spending plan? Christian said yes, especially when thinking about match monies that might be needed for future projects. He described East Montpelier’s “opportunity fund” that sets money aside for match.

Peter brought up the question that we ask every year at the Select Board—the cost of borrowing is low—do we budget for things every year, borrow, bond? Peter likes borrowing and bonding because the taxpayers today are paying for something they are getting today. Whereas, when you set money aside, you many never live to see the improvement that you’ve saved for.

Paul Z asked Christian if he could collect operations costs (heating, electricity, general utility costs) and Christian said yes.

Liz closed the meeting by saying that we would schedule a field trip for May, and then a zoom meeting with Christian in June to hear what he has come up with in his meetings with town officials. Liz would be in charge of scheduling the first field trip to the fire department in partnership with the fire people.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Liz Scharf, Chair of Capital Spending Plan Committee, Select board Member