

Selectmen's Meeting Minutes October 5, 2020

7:00 PM Meeting called to order by Selectboard Chairman, John Esposito. Also in attendance were Selectmen Kim Roberge and Tim Berry.

Esposito led the meeting in a moment of silence.

Amy Wyman wanted to read a statement regarding Halloween. The Board asked her to wait for the general discussion on Halloween to take place after the Department Head meeting. She agreed.

Alice Luter wanted to talk about being asked to vacate her apartment. Again, the Board asked her to wait until after the Department Head meeting. She also agreed.

Rebecca Schwarz of the Heritage Commission asked about appointing Brian Billow to the Commission.

Roberge asked how Billow heard about the opening and what will he bring to the Commission?

Schwarz said that he saw her post on the internet.

Billow explained that he lives in the oldest house in the village and that he loves history.

Roberge thanked him and made the motion to appoint Brian Billow as a full member of the Heritage Commission with a term ending 2022. Berry seconded the motion. Roberge; yes, Berry; yes, Esposito; yes.

Board reviewed the minutes of September 14, 2020. Berry motioned, seconded by Roberge to accept the minutes of September 14, 2020 as written. Roberge; yes, Berry; yes, Esposito; yes.

Roberge asked if Brown would leave a printed copy of the draft minutes in the office for her from now on.

Board reviewed the minutes of September 28, 2020. Berry motioned, seconded by Roberge to accept the minutes of September 28, 2020 as written. Berry; yes, Roberge; yes, Esposito; yes.

Esposito asked if the debt schedule handed out was useful to anyone.

Roberge explained that she wanted to use it as a tool to keep the tax rate from fluctuating too much.

Berry asked if there should be a number on the cruiser line right across because we will always have a cruiser payment.

Esposito agreed because we have been replacing the cruisers every 2 years for a while now.

Berry felt we should fill that number in so that we know that expense won't drop off.

Esposito spoke about an email from Autumn Grdina asking about having a pumpkin display similar to last year that he thinks is a good idea.

Berry agreed as long as social distancing can be done during drop off.

Roberge stated that as long as Mont Vernon doesn't have a mask order, the PTA needs to have guidelines for drop off and pick up.

Grdina explained that they only had 20 – 30 participants last year. The common sense rule is: if you see anybody else there – wait in your car or put on a mask. Maybe will have several drop off spots to make it easier.

7:15 PM Department Head Meeting

Bonnie Angulas – Library Director

- Made the flip to fall decorations, planted bulbs
- We have been open for 1 month: Health of the staff is still good; we haven't had to shut down yet.
- The library collaborated with the Conservation Commission on the Mont Vernon Guidebook that showcases Conservation Land, Town owned land, trails, landmarks etc. It will eventually get onto the town website. Thank you to the Conservation Commission and Shelly Brooks.
- Sent the final paperwork in for the CARES grant. We got \$3000 to fund Hoopla for about a year. We have had 480 check-outs since the end of May. We will look to put it in our budget for next year.
- The library celebrated Tiny Town Library podcast's first anniversary.
- The Beautification Committee donated corn stalks to the library decorations.

Kevin Furlong – Police Chief

- New cruiser is ready today and will go to 2 Way Communications for upfitting.
- We are exploring new training formats; Police One online training will allow us to transfer the hours to the Police Standards and Training required hours.

- The Governor's Commission on Law Enforcement on Accountability has put forth 48 recommendations, and all are being endorsed by the Governor; including Increased Training, Police Conduct and Misconduct and Community Relations. There are pretty significant changes to implement over the next 3 years.
- Officer Wright's last shift is coming up.
- OHRV complaints are increasing. This includes Riley and Crosby Roads. These roads have not been accepted as Town roads and thus, the OHRV's can be used on them. There have been a lot of juveniles riding also.

Esposito said that those two roads have not been accepted by the Town yet, but they are bonded.

Furlong said that none of the regular rules apply because they are not Town accepted.

- Continuing to put out speed sign data. We have 5 speed poles for 5 locations. Will be budgeting for 5 more locations in 2021.
- Last month there were 100 motor vehicle stops
- 108 directed patrols relative to speed
- Friday, we completed the Sex Assault audit and were found completely compliant.
- Could you ask the office to see if the insurance company would hold a free flu clinic for Town employees?
- In order to improve our services, I am looking into the full-time officers becoming EMT's. The use of AED's has increased with untimely deaths etc. We are sometimes on a call 15 – 20 minutes before anyone else. The cost of the training is \$1,400/person. We may get a discount for sending more than one person. The pads for the AED's will have to be added to the budget because Amherst has now switched carriers and cannot replace ours any more. It costs about \$60 to replace our pads.

Ben Crosby – DPW Director

- Crack sealing is almost done.
- No update on when Bob Sawyer will be back; it could be mid to late November before we see him.
- The 2012 International body hoist piston was leaking and inoperable. Fairfield replaced it for +/- \$2,900 for the piston and installation.
- Also found that the spreader chain was compromised and had to replace that for \$1,500. The budget line is over a decent amount.
- A couple of towns around us have Precision Weather service, and are very happy with it. They offer a free trial through January. Cost is \$1,200 - \$1,400 annually, and I want to include that in my 2021 budget.
- We are getting all the equipment geared up for the winter.

Belinda Yeaton – Town Clerk

- Applied for and got \$6,600 grant to pay for additional postage, Deputy Town Clerk's extra pay, and the voting machine.
- David Sturm is applying for an additional grant to cover all other extra election expenses.

Berry asked if the CARES grant will pay for the vote tabulating machine?

Yeaton said that it will cover at least some of it.

Randy Wilson – Fire Captain

- We have started the budget process
- Are upholding the ban on Category 3 and above burn permits.

Berry asked if the new cleaners were doing a good job with the station.

Wilson said that he wasn't aware they had new cleaners.

Roberge asked how we are showing the grants, ie; CARES act.

Brown said that she has a call into the Auditors to find out what the correct way is.

Heather Kennedy – Recreation Director

- JoAnn Kitchel and I have been discussing Halloween for months.

- Resident Amy Wyman read a prepared statement in favor of having Trick or Treat. (See attachment 1 at the end of the minutes.)

Roberge said that she would like to hear what the Town's insurance carrier had to say about the subject.

Brown stated that Primex said that someone would have to prove that the Town was negligent in its operations and that the Town was the cause of their infection, that the Town was not following the CDC Best Practices of PPE, Social Distancing etc. Primex doesn't have exclusions for this type of claim yet. An Employee that gets infected would have to be a Workers Compensation claim. How would the Town make sure everyone had a mask on and was at least 6' from the other Trick or Treaters?

Eposito said that he is not against Trick or Treating, but we could end up quarantining a lot of people in this Town; A lot of people getting sick and out of work for an extended period of time.

- Kennedy shared her screen to show different scenarios that could be used for Halloween. (See attachment 2 at the end of these minutes.)
- Rich Masters, Health Officer, said that there is not a lot of information from the CDC or State other than the regular 6' distancing, masks, wash hands etc. Being outside and 6' apart means the chances of transmission are very low, however, how do you get people to keep 6' apart? Milford is not having any Halloween. If we have something you will get people from other towns. Some of the general public will comply – some won't. This does not have to be a Town event. We don't have the authority to not allow people to go Trick or Treating.

Eposito said that Masters was right – we as a Board cannot stop people from Trick or Treating.

Roberge asked to hear from the Emergency Management Director.

Furlong said that the CDC lists Trick or Treat as a HIGH RISK activity. What level of risk are we willing to assume? If anything is done – do it at 3pm or at least during daylight hours. Doing anything in the school parking lot will probably not be allowed.

Berry said that he has read the CDC guidelines and even Trunk or Treat is listed as too high a risk. People are going to Trick or Treat whether we condone it or not. I think a Trick or Treat with rules, even those that are hard to enforce, will be safer than a free for all. There is a sign at Market Basket that says "Wear a Mask", there isn't anyone there to make you wear one, but people go running back to their cars to get one.

Roberge thanked everyone who researched this issue. Her concern, as a governing member of the Town, is the liability. We have no way to get people to stick to guidelines. Her option is #5 Virtual Activities Only. There is a 6th grade student at AMS with Covid. We can't say that the people on Main Street will put up slides or adhere to other guidelines. If we do it on Main Street, we will have a lot of people from out of Town. It is a high risk activity – the CDC says to avoid these activities. We should have no Town sponsored activities.

Kitchel said that she and Angulas went to the 43 houses on Main Street and spoke with them. 30 owners said "yes" to Trick or Treat, 2 owners did not want to participate and 8 weren't home. Yes, Trick or Treat is high risk, but so is doing anything outside of your personal families. The PTA is willing to build 6' candy slides for anyone who wants one.

Roberge doesn't believe the Town should be involved. We can set the hours, but cannot fund anything from the Recreation Committee.

Eposito said that, as a Town, he cannot support having Trick or Treat. We should set out the guidelines – people will go by them.

Masters asked if we could have no involvement, but post the guidelines to those residents that choose to participate.

Eposito said that our Emergency Management Director asked that it be during daylight hours.

Furlong said that you can't say that you support Trick or Treat on your own, but not as a Town. You need to explain why we are not supporting Trick or Treat, and put out the guidelines.

Angulas said that the Town does not sponsor Halloween, the Rec Committee just gives each house a bag of candy.

Furlong adamantly disagreed saying that the Town is very actively involved in Halloween. The PD, and the FD are both involved.

Angulas stated that Halloween is a very generous gift to the Town from the people who open their homes to the Trick or Treaters.

Furlong reiterated that bringing everyone to one area is the least safe way to have Halloween.

Roberge feels that there is no way to assure the guidelines are followed.

Kristy Fuller said that the focus here is really about the children. They are already gathering (in school) and wearing masks. Maybe giving out candy at the end of the school day, or Option #3 Handing out prepackaged candy at the McCollom school.

Berry reminded everyone that the CDC classifies that type of activity as high risk.

Fuller said that they are already gathered at school.

Berry said that is called Trunk or Treat where kids are getting candy out of a trunk or box of candy.

Autumn Grdina thinks there should be credit given to parents in keeping our school Covid free. She doesn't want to send her children to school with a mask, but she respects everyone else enough to do it. She said that she has spoken to 11 people just today – there must be a way. Walk around the Village in a one way fashion. The kids are worn out from all of this. We (PTA) will make chutes in order to give the children a Trick or Treat experience.

Kennedy likes the idea of doing it in the parking lot at the school. The kids could walk through the playground, pick up their package of candy, and get back in their cars.

Furlong said that the PD will not commit to that. Having a face to face event for every family in Town is irresponsible.

Roberge asked if we should suggest to Trick or Treat in your own neighborhood, with hours from 4 to 7.

Berry stressed the importance of communicating effectively to the residents along with the 43 homes on Main Street. The only role we can play is to effectively communicate the guidelines.

Roberge said that there are more neighborhoods than there used to be; suggesting that is letting other towns know that if you came before, it won't be the same.

Berry said to use good common sense, social distancing, and don't handle the candy too much.

Esposito promised to get the information out within the next few days.

Furlong added that sunset on Halloween is at 5:38 PM.

Roberge offered that 2 to 5 would be better.

Esposito said that the Board will get a statement together.

Angulas asked about the Friends of the Library and the Fireman's Association with the toys and necklaces – should we tell them "no"?

Furlong stated that there can be no tables at the Fire Station or Library for those handouts.

Esposito agreed and said that we should hold off on those this year.

Masters hopes that 2021 will be a better year.

8:50PM End of Department Head Meeting

Esposito addressed Town resident Alice Luter. He explained that the Board found out a few months ago about an illegal apartment at 66 Old Milford Road. We wrote a letter to the homeowner that the apartment must be vacant by October 15, 2020, however, the homeowner has the opportunity to go before the ZBA for a variance. He was told a couple weeks ago to go to the ZBA and hasn't, as of yet.

Roberge said that he has known for 2.5 months that he is not in compliance with our zoning ordinances.

Dennis Dwire, the homeowner, said that he responded the day after receiving the letter and didn't hear anything for 1.5 months, then was asked to attend the Selectmen's Meeting. He did attend and was told to apply for a variance. The next day he spoke with Esposito asking for an extension. Then I got another letter saying that I probably would not get a variance and to have the apartment vacant by October 15.

Roberge said that it is the beginning of October now, where is your application for the ZBA.

Dwire said that he had the paperwork all filled out and the check written, then he got the letter saying I didn't have enough of a hardship to get a variance.

Esposito let the Board know that Town Counsel has advised that he needs to be allowed to go to the ZBA.

Roberge said that we told him that on 8/31/20. We didn't send the letter out until 9/22 – 3 weeks after our meeting.

Esposito said: regardless, Town Counsel advises that they be allowed to apply to the ZBA.

Roberge said again that we advised him of that on 8/31.

Esposito asked Dwire if he had the ZBA paperwork.

Dwire said that he no longer had it.

Fire Chief Wilson asked about permits being pulled and construction being up to code.

Dwire explained that in 1989 there was an old garage with a small kitchenette and bathroom upstairs. He got rid of that garage, built a new garage and never put back the kitchenette and bathroom until his dad needed a place to stay (about 5 years ago). Mrs. Luter was advised to contact the Building Inspector. She contacted the Building Inspector and received a call back from Kim Roberge. She left 2 more messages for the Building Inspector and got no call back.

Roberge said that the Building Inspector should never have been referenced.

Dwire said that the information he received was that you (Roberge) were from the Building Inspector's office and there was nothing that you are aware of that can be done – it was the purview of the Selectmen.

Luter said that Roberge called her back, and asked – do you work for the Building Inspector?

Roberge said no.

Esposito said that he is advising Mr. Dwire to file for a variance with the ZBA. If there is any stipulation that you cannot meet, you will have to have the tenant vacate the apartment.

Wilson said that we still have the issue of the inspection of the apartment.

Dwire offered that the actual garage has a permit.

Wilson explained that when you put in the kitchenette and bathroom and living quarters over a garage – inspections need to be made.

Esposito said that one of our biggest concern is that someone is occupying an unapproved apartment. The Board doesn't appreciate being put in this position. It is embarrassing. If it doesn't get approved by the ZBA, you will have to have the tenant vacate.

Luter said that she understands.

Roberge asked if the cleaning crew come into the Fire Station.

Wilson said that the FD is not using the Town crew – they kept their own person.

Yeaton said that she needs a letter stating that the Board accepts unanticipated funds.

Berry asked the Town Clerk about opening her office.

Yeaton said it won't be before this next election.

Esposito reminded the Board to get their thoughts on Halloween in to the office for the statement to be published.

9:15 PM As there was no further business before the Board, Berry motioned seconded by Roberge to adjourn. Berry; yes, Roberge; yes, Esposito; yes.

Respectfully submitted,
Laurie Brown

Attachment #1

I offer my support for a decision to hold a socially distant trick or treating evening on Halloween in Mont Vernon. These thoughts and opinions are mine as a resident of Mont Vernon; I do not make these statements as an employee of the Library, or in my role as President of the Friends of the Library.

People have serious fatigue from virtual events. Trick or treating is an activity that already takes place outside, and with some extra guidance and care, can be done safely.

The following guidelines have been suggested by the NH Municipal Association:

- Wearing cloth face coverings
- Social distancing when waiting to get candy- discourage congregating in front of houses.
- Using hand sanitizer while out trick or treating
- Houses handing out candy should set up a socially distant candy distribution method, outside (such as a candy chute, slide or zipline), rather than standing in doorways and giving candy from a bowl.

In addition, I would suggest one way sidewalks on Main Street to keep trick or treaters moving in the same direction. It will feel just like shopping at Market Basket!

Mont Vernon has a unique and well loved Halloween tradition for trick or treating. There is an opportunity here to create community connections and involvement as we all think outside of the box together. The Candy Slide decorating contest in Weare, NH, which is sponsored by their Police department, is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when town governing bodies and town residents come together and find creative solutions.

Several other towns in southern New Hampshire are holding either Trick or Treat, another Halloween event, or in some cases, both.

Rather than offering a virtual activity or doing nothing, I encourage the Select Board to seek and utilize creative solutions for Mont Vernon. There is a safe way forward for an evening like this.

I'd like to end with a quote:

"I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government."

— Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience

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Attachment #2

Spectrum of Options

Option 1

- Traditional Trick-or-Treat

- As we've held in years past

Option 2:

- Modified Main St. House to House Trick-or-Treat with COVID precautions

- Mask wearing required (not Halloween mask)
- Navigate in one direction for north/south
- Require only families to walk together with 6 feet distance
- No congregating
- Only stop at Village houses with lights on
- Maintain 6 feet distance to distribute candy (table/apparatus/no bowls)
- Limit screaming/yelling
- Carry hand sanitizer

Option 3:

- A Halloween Walk with pre-packaged candy pickup at the end

- Walk down Main Street in costumes ending at candy pickup
 - From MVVS parking lot, down Cemetery Rd, south down Main St., Fire Station, down Pinkham, back to MVVS
 - Mask wearing required (not Halloween mask)
 - Navigate in one direction for north/south
 - Require only families to walk together with 6 feet distance
 - No congregating
 - Limit screaming/yelling
- At McCollom Field - park in the school parking lot and walk in one direction with only family members/car-riders to McCollom Field to pickup candy and loop around the other side, continuing in one direction back to their car
 - Same precautions as above

Option 4:

- Pre-packaged Candy Pickup with no Walk

- Either with or without community candy donations
- Prepackaged, quarantined candy
- Location TBD

Option 5:

- All virtual activities, with the suggestion to remain in their COVID "Bubble" (neighborhood, family, close friend group) should residents choose to independently Trick-or-Treat

- Provide safety tips and good use of judgement

Option 6:

- Other Suggestion?

Option 7:

- Cancel all town Halloween activities

A` La Carte Options

- Printable/Downloadable "I Spy" activity will be available for the week leading up to Halloween, families can walk Main Street (or their own neighborhood) any time throughout the week and complete on their own - encourage "Spy with your eye"/Don't touch or approach
- The Recreation Department will collect images of decorated Jack-o-lanterns from Residents and display them all on the Facebook page for those who remain at home
- PTA may sponsor a Jack-O-Lantern display on the Green
- All residents are encouraged to be festive and decorate as they would ordinarily, but make it clear that this does not imply trick-or-treating and homes should not be approached unless they have made personal arrangements

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Additional Information/Things to Consider

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- There are positives/negatives and benefits/risks to all the options
- Need to consider needs of our specific community (layout of main street, size of first responder crew, town liability, etc.)
- Emphasize Distance -- Barrier -- Time, based on DHHS recommendations.
- Should consider surrounding communities too - Most Towns have either modified or canceled their traditional Halloween Events. I took a look at approximately 40 local communities and in that limited search vast majority are modifying and about 20% are canceling.

- Many towns have made accommodations and suggestions to residents to remain in their own neighborhoods to minimize the spread and are providing safety precautions to encourage this. They are also kindly requesting that non-town residents not visit their towns.
- Many residents have expressed the desire to have trick or treat, and some have voiced not to - if we went according to the numbers of in-school to remote learners on who would attend it would be about a 70/30 % split.
- I've requested that email addresses/contact info be collected from Village Residents in order to communicate more effectively. JoAnn is working on this.
- Consider comfort level, health and safety of Village residents passing out candy.
- Attempt to provide options that are inclusive of all.
- Principal Sarfde is planning to allow children to parade in their costumes outside, one classroom at a time. She will video them all doing so while socially distanced in the morning, and then let them all "see" each other via the video in the afternoon. This is helpful to know because it tells us that many kids will have an opportunity to "parade" in their costumes.
- Without a town event, we are likely to have many individual and neighborhood trick-or-treats or parties, especially since Halloween falls on a Saturday. Chief Furlong plans to have extra patrol on regardless due to it being a weekend and holiday.
- The recent COVID cases in our schools would need to be monitored closely, and should we proceed with any of these options, residents should be informed that all plans are subject to change in the weeks or days leading up to Halloween.

Other Requests

- We would ask the Friends of the Library and the MVFD if they would donate small trinkets and glow-sticks to add to the candy bag. This would be quarantined in the same manner as noted above. If we choose to have a walk and set up on McCollom Field, perhaps they can set up a table for distance pickup.
- The MVVS PTA would like to display Jack-O-Lanterns on the green. An idea for this would be to have them displayed (perhaps on buckets or hay bales) 6 feet apart around the perimeter of the green, provide a large time window, and have folks practice social distancing when dropping-off/picking-up. The PTA would dispose of any remaining pumpkins the next day.

Details to Discussion

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1. Candy Collection for Option 2 (House to house)
 - a. Would have to work out how to collect and distribute, perhaps have residents pick up bags at the town hall or Heather/JoAnn drop off.
2. Candy Collection for Option 3 and 4 (Walk or Pickup)
 - a. Purchase only by Rec Department
OR
 - b. Collect from Residents
 - i. The week of 10/19 thru 10/23, leave in quarantine until 10/27, fill buckets and leave until Saturday

- ii. Propose bins left at town hall step or McCollom porch/I will move daily for that week.
3. Candy organized only by JoAnn/Heather five days prior (in the Town Hall community room), wearing masks and gloves. Pre-registration for MV residents only required (for quantities and scheduling)
4. For Option 4 - Pick-up at the Town Hall parking lot during the day of Halloween. Pick-up times will be broken up alphabetically by last name. Residents will remain in cars. Candy will be distributed curbside (wearing masks and using hand-sanitizer) via a loop through the town hall parking lot. Children may wear their costumes but remain in their car. Families will be encouraged to treat their bags as they would any groceries that enter their homes.
5. Hours - perhaps modify/lengthen
 - a. Walk - increase to 3 hours to reduce density (4-7 or 5-8)/make earlier?
 - b. Pickup
 - i. Will base length upon number of registrants
 - ii. Will conduct during daylight hours

The Town Of Amherst is encouraging folks who plan to Trick or Treat do so in their own neighborhood and not in the Amherst Village. In years past the Amherst Village has been a popular destination for Trick or Treating and can see up to 2,000 Trick Or Treaters on Halloween from both Amherst and surrounding towns.

We respectfully ask that people from outside of Amherst also follow this suggestion and Trick or Treat in their own towns and neighborhoods. We also ask participants to be courteous and to visit houses who have their outside lights on and have made it obvious they are participating in Halloween. Anyone who is Trick or Treating should be familiar with both the NH and CDC Halloween event guidelines.

Trick or Treating in Amherst has been set by the Board of Selectman as October 31 fom 6-8pm.