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Community Members Seek Chair's Resignation

by Tyler Moller

PLAINFIELD – A lengthy meeting ended with significant public comment relating to several actions taken by the select board and questioned Sasha Thayer's role as the board's chairperson at the board's May 11 Zoom conference.

Resident Jenni Bee brought forward two petitions to the board which sought for the resignation or removal of Thayer from the select board. The allegations focused on several actions which were passed by the board in past months, including cessation of Central Vermont TV to record public meetings, the disbandment of the hazards mitigation committee (HMC), and the movement of the public comment period to the end of select board meetings. She also said Thayer was responsible for multiple roles in a meeting on April 27, where she took minutes and hosted the Zoom meeting, which made it challenging for public admission to provide further comment on agenda items.

At the April 27 meeting, Thayer and select board member Tammy Farnham voted to disband the hazards

mitigation committee in favor of creating a new hazards mitigation planning committee (HMPC), citing the name change aligned more with the committee's advisory role to the select board, rather than acting as an independent board which created policy.

At that meeting, Times-Arden reporter Eric Blaisdell asked the board if there was a reason as to why it was decided to disband the committee in the middle of the pandemic, to which Farnham cited the need for a new committee to develop goals which were focused on planning and not action.

Bee added that two members of the former three-person committee were not re-appointed to the new one, and that the board's goal of appointing seven members to the HMPC would be nearly impossible. Michael Billingsley previously served on the HMC and reported a public comment-type event regarding COVID-19 and policies was being convened at the time the committee disbanded.

Several community members validated the concerns shared by Bee, who others alleged an issue with Thayer's

ability to handle conflict in her long-term role on the board.

Thayer defended herself and said legitimate reasons existed for the actions taken at previous meetings. The elimination of recording public meetings was addressed from a budgetary standpoint, she said, and that the decisions relating to other issues were not solely hers to make.

"I think people have been very frustrated with some things that have happened since the middle of March," she said. "I've been fascinated to see the conclusion that I did things. I think it's very disrespectful to the other members of the select board." She also noted she was concerned that she had not received any phone calls about these matters so she could address constituent concerns directly and implore residents to reach out to her by phone or email.

The discussion on the matter exceeded 50 minutes and members of the public suggested that a more appropriate forum for the discussion would be at a special meeting on the matter and recommended that either Farnham or select board member Jim Vole take over the role of chair.



Thick smoke filled the air Friday as eight fire departments put out a fire that started in an empty multi-unit apartment building on Main Street in Greensboro Bend. The building has been empty for several years and is owned by Michael Goldberg of Alameda, California.

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Building Burns in Greensboro Bend

by Emmett Avery

GREENSBORO BEND – The former Pope store building on Main Street in Greensboro Bend caught fire mid-day on May 15. According to Greensboro Fire Chief David Brochu Jr., the building was a total loss. A statement from the Vermont State Police (VSP) Fire and Explosion Investigation Unit says that the incident remains under investigation and is considered suspicious. There were no injuries reported in the blaze.

According to the VSP report, the first call came into the Greensboro Fire Department at approximately 12:10 p.m. The department arrived on scene to a fully involved structure fire, the report says. The building was owned by Michael Goldberg of Alameda, Calif. The VSP press release states that the old store was most recently a multi-unit apartment building, though it has had

no official tenants for the past several years. Upon investigation, the VSP found that "there was the possibility of unauthorized individuals in the building." And that, "Only part of the building had electrical power supply." Brochu said that neighbors had spoken of the possibility of transients in the building, but that "we have no way of proving that one way or the other." He says that the origin of the fire is as yet unknown.

Bystanders on the scene say that the fire appeared to start in the back of the building before moving through the rest of the two-story structure, eventually collapsing the roof, exploding glass from the front windows out into the street, and lighting a nearby garage on fire. The garage, part of the same property, by all accounts had already partially collapsed sometime in the last few years and was lit on fire by a falling ember. The nearest house to the burning building suffered

some melting of exterior plastic siding, but was spared the worst.

In a phone conversation with Monday Chief Brochu said that because there are no fire hydrants in the Bend, firemen had to run a combined 1,600 feet of hose from the Lamoille River to get water on the burning structure.

Brochu said that the Greensboro, Hardwick, Walden, Woodbury, Craftsbury, Wolcott, Elnore, and Cabot fire departments were called to the scene. The Hardwick Police Department and the Hardwick Rescue Squad were also on hand. Brochu said that heat exhaustion was a "definite concern" on the day, and that Smith's Grocery deserved a big thanks for supplying water.

Anyone with information regarding this incident is encouraged to contact Detective Sergeant Michael LaCourse at the Derby State Police Barracks at (802) 334-8881.

Proud family signs outside the home of Jamie and Lance Hall in Greensboro Bend acknowledge that two of their children are 2020 graduates. No traditional in-person graduations can be held in Vermont during the Coronavirus pandemic, so many parents, friends and teachers are coming up with original ways of honoring their graduates.



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Nonprofit Seeks to Revive East Calais Store with Community Power



The East Calais store in 2018

photo by Doug McClure

by Doug McClure

EAST CALAIS – A new nonprofit hopes to leverage the power of community to bring the 170-year-old East Calais Store store back to life. The store was shuttered at the end of 2019. The closest stores are now over ten miles away.

The East Calais Community Agency (ECTC) has exercised a purchase option on the building. About \$100,000 needs to be raised for the deal to close. The ECTC will own the building and lease the storefront space to a tenant to operate.

The next hurdle will be removing fuel tanks. ECTC board member Janice Ohlsson said, "We need simultaneously try to find a solid store operator." Board member Denise Wheeler said the projected cost for removing the tanks is \$10,000 to \$15,000. Part of the expense is an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields study and an environmental corrective study, which is now in its second phase, according to Ohlsson.

"The consultant will write a corrective action plan, because we want to make sure the environmental situation

is all corrected and in place, especially with its proximity to Kingsbury Branch."

Wheeler and Ohlsson said some renovations to the building are necessary. Three apartments occupy the rest of the building, and the ECTC plans to keep those. Wheeler said one tenant "was pretty excited that we bought the store, she gave us a thumbs-up."

East Calais is a designated Village Center by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, which means the store renovations have priority access to grant funding. The

ECTC has already received two grants, one for \$18,000 from the Certified Local Government (CLG) program through the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and the National Park Service, "to help out with the renovation," said Wheeler. A second grant of \$5,000, from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), "has helped us obtain a development consultant," said Wheeler. "We've done our homework to be poised moving forward once the building is fully ours."

Ohlsson said the Preservation Trust of Vermont has "been really instrumental in helping us move forward and putting us in contact with other store owners to see what they've done." Donations can be tax-deductible, Ohlsson said.

Ohlsson said that in January Rural Community Transport started consumer bus service between Morrisville and Barre which stops in front of the store if passengers are waiting to board or need to disembark.

Ohlsson and Wheeler said the main factor in considering potential store owners is "what they want. Wheeler said, "I have heard that people want takeout meals, a

nice variety." Ohlsson said others wanted "farm fresh, farm-to-plate-type food." She said the store must make sure all the necessary basic staples are available.

"We've got to do a lot of market research," she said. "Another thing we've heard a lot about is a WiFi cafe."

Ohlsson said, "The painful reality of this whole pandemic affects things, and so what feels good as we're going ahead with it anyway. We have hours of Zoom meetings, we've got our plans. I think it'll be fun if we can at the end of closing get a whole bunch of people that live in the area to help us do some cleanup." Wheeler added "We thought about maybe having a food truck, a pop-up-kind-of thing, and events as we move forward, just to keep the momentum and interest going. During this pandemic, the whole way of fundraising, which is really a person-based kind of process, we know that has to change. And that's been difficult, but I'm really proud of us that we've accomplished this much during this craziness."

People interested in donations can visit bit.ly/local-assist or contact Denise Wheeler at 802-456-8730 or by email at rockcove@nyfairpoint.net, or Jan Ohlsson at 802-232-1028, or johlsson@gmail.com.



courtesy photo

In 1913, Warren Coates purchased the current East Calais store and operated it with his father-in-law, Austin Gove. The store was called "Coates & Gove" and it operated under that name until 1939.



courtesy photo

The East Calais store has long been a community store, shown here in its years as the C.F. Dwinell store. Clarence Dwinell owned the building from 1889-1910, and during those years the building also had apartments and housed the Good Templars' Lodge Hall.