

SELECTBOARD MEETING
December 5, 2019

Present: Allison Hope
 Julia Andrews
 Bill Cleary
 John Roberts

 Callie Hamdy
 Greg Barrows
 Nanette Rogers

Guests: None

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

CHANGES TO AGENDA

The changes to the agenda were the addition of a Conservation Commission appointment and a Conservation Commission resignation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nanette praised the road crew for the excellent work they have done tackling the multiple weather events recently.

MINUTES

The board reviewed the minutes from November 11th and 14th. Bill made a motion to approve the minutes for November 11th as written and the minutes for November 14th as amended, Julia 2nd, motion passed 3-0.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

John went over the road schedule from November 14th – December 5th. Julia moved to approve the road schedule, Bill 2nd, motion passed 3-0.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT FY'21 BUDGET REQUEST

John Roberts was present to discuss the Highway Department FY'21 Budget.

Julia mentioned that roadside mowing budget doubled. John explained he would like to have roadside mowing done twice instead of once in July as we did this year. He feels this will keep control of the height of weeds better as well as allow the second mowing to occur more quickly because the brush won't be so thick or tall. This will also help control the poison parsnip better.

John also wanted to talk about hiring a fourth road crew member. The expectations for the road crew has increased in the past 10 years. The road crew already employs a resident part time, but his workload on the crew has increased to nearly full-time work. Having a permanent fourth member will also ensure that it's easier for crew members to take time off. Allison thinks that having a fourth member will balance out in the end because road crew members will likely be putting in less overtime. John mentioned that it would also decrease how long it would take to plow the entire town since we currently have the equipment for four to be on the roads but are not able to utilize all that equipment due to their current numbers.

Bill's only concern is that he would not want resident taxes to raise unexpectedly, but since overtime is paid time and a half, the inclusion of a regularly salaried member would likely cost less. Nanette did some calculations and it would be an approximately a \$40,000 increase. John is wondering if they should wait until the deficit is paid off. Julia mentioned that in the past year they have made a sizable dent in the deficit, but it was a very large deficit. Allison suggested that they look for a new road crew member in summer with a start date of September 1st. This would allow the current year budget to stay the same and push it to the next fiscal year.

Nanette would be worried if the board proceeded with pushing the hiring of a fourth member to the next year since she feels the position is much needed, especially if one of the three current members is sick. Allison would like to go forward in putting in a new full time Road Crew Member. Julia thinks that this presents an opportunity to have rotating on-call days allowing road crew members to take time off as needed. Allison is worried about the increase in traffic and population in Westford and how that is going to affect the roads. They need to plan for this increasing population and wear in the future as well as the extreme weather events from global warming. Julia mentions that most of the extreme events they have had have been water events in the fall and the road crew doesn't have a choice but to respond to them.

FY'21 BUDGET WORK SESSION

The board discussed the FY'21 budget. Allison inquired about the outstanding tax payments. Westford has very little due in delinquent taxes, in fact our auditors often remark at how few outstanding payments Westford has which is good. The board expressed thanks to Delinquent Tax Collector Marge McIntosh.

Julia is looking at the expense budget and sees that there is a line for a grant writer which does not have an expense associated with it. She is wondering if now is the time to figure out that cost. There are things about this idea she's been thinking about, personally she is in favor and thinks overall it will generate more revenue, but also how do they execute this plan so that it's fair to all parties and beneficial to the town? Allison is a bit concerned about a grant writer supporting private institutions such as the White Church. Their organization has expressed interest in utilizing the grant writer, but Allison feels its not right to use taxpayer dollars on a private institution.

Allison would also want to limit the number of employees that report to the selectboard. She would like a structure in the town office where more employees report to Town Administrator, Nanette Rogers, since she is involved in the town on a day to day basis unlike the selectboard. She sees a grant writer and other current positions that report to the selectboard reporting to the Town Administrator in the future. She would like a less flat organization for the town and feels the staff would get more support this way. It would also change the relationship between the selectboard and employees. Julia points out that even if they report to the town administrator there is currently no structure or guide on how the position would work currently so they would still need some assistance in this regard. A structure and process for the grant writer would need to be put in place.

Bill suggests that each organization in town puts a bit of their budget aside for the grant writer. Allison suggests that not every organization is going to use a grant writer equally each year so this could be unfair. Grants change for each organization each year. Nanette suggests that other towns might have grant writers on staff that have a structure we can follow. The Planning Commission had suggested a committee situation like other towns have, but Allison points out how many committees the town already has. Allison suggests easing into the grant writer position. Julia doesn't want to allocate money without considering the ramifications. Allison and Julia reiterated that it would not be a full-time position. Bill is against putting it in the budget because they don't even know what they'd put in regarding expenses. Everything is too much of an unknown right now. Julia argues that if they don't put it in then they wouldn't be able to even consider anything until the next year is budgeted. Julia will ask Koi Boynton some questions, since she is a grant writer. Allison asked if they can't explain it to taxpayers do they have any business putting it in the budget? Julia urges the board to remember that if Westford doesn't have somebody to write grants for wastewater then that poses an issue to some upcoming projects.

CORRESPONDANCE REGARDING MYERS TRASH PICK UP

Julia replied to the concerns of the Homeowners Association for Kings Hill. They had sent an email concerned about a repeat of last year's trash pick-up issues. Bill took a drive up the Kings Hill

Homeowners Association and observed that on North Road it had already been plowed. He drove up the hill and noted that he did slide a lot with two-wheel drive. Mountain Road was also very difficult. It might be easy for residents that have AWD SUVs to say that the roads are great, but a heavy weight garbage truck that doesn't handle well will likely find it quite challenging. He notes that Myers could make it easier for themselves by putting chains on or Kings Hill could bring their trash to one location that is easier for Myers to pick-up.

Allison recalled last when these same conversations and recommendations to Myers and Kings Hill originally happened. The Kings Hill Homeowners association was unwilling to bring their trash to one location. In the Association's opinion, this wasn't a problem until Myers was Westford's trash hauler. It seems that Myers trucks are less suited than the previous Gauthier's trucks of the past for Westford Roads. Julia also mentioned that the board gave Myers many options with how to solve this issue and service all the residents of Westford like in their contract, but they refused to put chains or even snow tires on their vehicles.

John also mentioned that on a normal day that were on Old #11 road and they only picked up the trash on one end of the road. They also didn't take the town's recommendation on where to turn on the hill and therefore got stuck and struggled, the road crew then had to spend time helping them. John checked out their vehicle at this time and attested that their tires are not adequate. Julia feels that Myers has not left a good impression on her, but she does empathize with the drivers. She thinks that Myers is not supporting their drivers by not implementing the suggested changes. Allison also mentions that the Kings Hill Association is not necessarily plowing as early as trash is required to go out. John explains that they could sand more often. Julia mentions that the ill attitude toward Myers from residents stems from last year where garbage went without pickup for about four weeks which is unacceptable. Julia doesn't feel like Myers is particularly excited to have the contract with the town.

Allison had talked to the town of Fairfax about going out to bid at the same time next year with the potential for having contractors bid on both Westford and Fairfax service or just individual service so that if they wanted to band together and get service together that would be an option. Fairfax currently uses Casella. Bill's concern in this situation is that the town prepares to go out to bid and some of the other providers are more expensive. Are they being fair to residents by giving Myers the option to say no and then increase the budget for trash pick-up? Allison reiterates how much time the town office staff spends talking to residents about trash and recycling as well how much time the road crew spends chasing down garbage trucks which leaves them with much less time to spend for school and commuter traffic.

Bill doesn't know what the answer is but does agree that it would be nice if Myers was more responsive. He doesn't understand why Myers is resistant to change. John explains that it doesn't take a lot of time to put on chains for a certain road and since they are going slow they are unlikely to throw a chain. Allison recalls that even Myers explained that their trucks are not well suited for the roads. She is not certain that the board would even award them the contract if they won the bid. Julia reminds the board that Myers isn't even willing to put on snow tires for a quarter million-dollar contract.

Bill wonders what the board should do in the short term. Julia expressed that she asked Myers to come up with a clear solution for this year. The Kings Hill Association had spent \$900+ chasing the garbage trucks with their plowing/road crew. Allison thinks the board needs to think about what the next trash contract will look like and that any new contract needs to include language that indicates trucks must be outfitted appropriately as well as potentially a clause about town services down private roads. Nanette explained that while the trucks don't go down certain private roads, Kings Hill is one of the most densely populated areas with the most difficult roads that gets roadside pickup. Julia is

concerned that if the town stops services private roads that would be a lot of residents. Greg thinks that it is not a majority, most people live on town serviced roads. But Julia's concern that a lot of the private roads currently serviced are associations that are densely populated. In her opinion it's about half the town. Allison thinks that they would change the policy to be away from curbside. Like many other private roads, she would require them to bring it to the end of the private road. This allows more equality amongst those that live on private roads. Many taxpayers that live on some private roads currently don't get curbside pickup. Allison also thinks that with the increase in new commercial properties in Westford that the next contract out for bid needs to be carefully written. Her concern is that it's a lot of tax dollars. Nanette also cautioned the new laws regarding solid waste rules that are changing in July. This would disallow food scraps in trash. Bill is reminded that the cost for town paid pickup vs dropping off your trash yourselves is a great deal. It's much more costly to take it in yourself.

Nanette had an email from two residents on Old #11 who already had trash issues. The residents are willing to bring their trash down to the intersection of Kilburn Lane to avoid the issues of last year. John didn't see an issue with it. Nanette is wondering if they should go ahead. Allison thinks that if the residents feel more confident it will be picked up that way than they should go ahead.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION APPOINTMENT

The Conservation Commission is asking that the board approve Kristen Tyler. Julia will move to appoint Kristen Tyler to the conservation commission. Bill 2nd. Motion passed 3-0.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION RESIGNATION

Lauren Gibson submitted her resignation from the Conservation Commission. Julia moved to accept, Bill 2nd, motion passed 3-0.

EMPLOYEE HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS

Allison had not heard from Blue Cross Blue Shield so she feels that means they should go ahead with switching to MVP. The difference in cost is so large and MVP covers all current employees' primary care. Allison says that the platinum option is better than what most employers offer. As the town grows, she wonders what the next step is. Nanette recalls that in the past the town has offered only a high deductible plan. Nanette feels that conversations about this needs to be on the agenda after town meeting. Julia thinks it's time to look at the work plan and the opt out. Julia just doesn't feel comfortable dropping that on employees 20 days before the plan changes. Discussions on this will start after town meeting.

GATHER AT THE TABLE COMMUNITY DINNER – REQUEST FOR FUNDS

Bridget Downey-Meyer sent an email regarding the Gather at the Table Community Dinner. Gather at the Table Community Dinner is an event taking place January 11th at the Essex High School. The organization wants to ensure that the dinner is accessible to all, meaning that the dinner is free. They are seeking donations from multiple municipalities, schools and local organizations. They are requesting a \$500 sponsorship from Westford.

Julia reminds the board that the town does donate small amounts to other organizations like meals on wheels. Gather at the Table is looking for a large amount of money. She doesn't feel like this is a fair contribution since it would be equal to Essex's contribution, Essex is a much larger community. Allison likes their goal of an annual dinner and being part of the community is something that Westford needs to be involved with. Julia suggests donating around \$100 or \$150. Julia could ask the Westford Food Shelf to dip into their reserve because it is an event that provides a free meal, Allison also suggested dipping into the Turkey Trot funds. Julia moved that the board provides the committee with a \$150 donation towards the dinner, Allison 2nd. Motion passed 3-0.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Planning Commission is recalling their request for a permanent road committee.

Allison sent out an email regarding the town's policy on fixing private driveways after weather events. Many residents have been calling the Highway Department asking if they can fix their private driveways. Town Policy dictates that the town will only fix a private driveway if it is impacting the road in any way. It is not okay to think that we should be fixing private driveways when there are weather events such as the Halloween storm. Nanette wonders if this should be part of a policy handbook that is handed out to residents, putting them in written form so that they are accessible. Allison thinks that the policy is common sense and that there is no need for physical literature. Nanette thinks that having it in black and white so that town employees have something to reference for response is important. Allison thinks that the policy has been clear, the town does not replace mailboxes.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Allison Hope, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Assistant Town Clerk.

TOWN OF WESTFORD HIGHWAY DEPT.
ROAD SCHEDULE
Oct. 25, 2019 – Dec. 5, 2019

Work to be done

- Plow, sand and salt when needed.
- Roadside brush cutting.
- Continue to fix washouts as weather allows.

Work completed

- Graded Cambridge Rd., Learned Dr, sections of Old Stage Rd., sections of Woods Hollow Rd., section of Brookside Rd. sections of Osgood Hill Rd., sections of Old # 11 Rd., sections of Pettingill Rd.
- Ditching on Rogers Rd.
- Brought the 2017 Western star to J & B International to fix a crack in the rear differential.
- Brought the 2014 Western Star to Charlebois for a few small items to be repaired. (oil pan gasket, interior lights)
- Salt shed was built.
- Put plows on the trucks and got ready for plowing.
- Checked on Beavers around town and removed the dam on Cambridge Rd.
- Serviced the remaining equipment and trucks.
- Installed, changed and removed some signs.
- Flood damage repairs to all roads.
- Replaced culverts on Woods Hollow Rd. and Rogers Rd.
- Sanded and salted roads several times.

Approved at the 12/5/19 Selectboard Meeting.