

SELECTBOARD MEETING
August 20, 2020
Minutes

Present:	Allison Hope Bill Cleary Greg Barrows	Callie Hamdy John Roberts Nanette Rogers
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Guests: See attached

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was held via Zoom. All attendees attended remotely.

CHANGES TO AGENDA

Part-time Help and Excess Weight Permit added to the Highway Department. Request to Use Common for Family Gathering and BMHS Wi-Fi Cost Sharing to Serve Town Common were added to discussion. HIPCAMP & Town Zoning Regulations was pushed to the next agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MINUTES

Allison Hope made a motion to approve the July 23, 2020 Minutes as amended. Bill Cleary 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

ROAD SCHEDULE

The Road Foreman, John Roberts, discussed the July 24th 2020 through August 20, 2020 Road Schedule. Allison motioned to approve the Road Schedule. Bill seconded. Motion passed: 2-0.

REQUEST FOR “SLOW CHILDREN AT PLAY” SIGNS ON WOODS HOLLOW ROAD

Elizabeth Disney had written to the Selectboard regarding an incident where her and her sister, Cecilia Disney, were first responders to a drunk driver incident on Woods Hollow Road. Elizabeth also notes in her email how common speeding drivers are becoming on Woods Hollow Road. She requests permission to obtain and install “Slow Children at Play” signs on Woods Hollow Road close to the intersection with 128 to help improve safety for her niece who lives on there. Elizabeth also notes that one of the perks of living on a Vermont dirt road is the ability to walk and run (including with a stroller), but that this is not possible to do so safely on Woods Hollow Road.

Bill was ambivalent on the matter and opened the discussion to others. Allison had noticed that potentially the residents at Cobbs Corners had placed a sign at the intersection there about slowing down. Elizabeth was present at the meeting and confirmed it was the Cobbs Corners people who put up the signage. In the year Elizabeth’s sister has lived in Westford has noticed how much faster people tend to drive on the road. Elizabeth feels that the 35 mph signage on Woods Hollow after you turn off 128 is way far past the house at the corner so people don’t notice the speed limit until it is too late. She feels even moving the mileage sign closer to the intersection would be helpful.

Bill recalled that there are distances speed limit signs need to be from an intersection. John is not sure if this sign meets that standard as its been in place since he started as Road Foreman.

Allison brought up the ongoing traffic calming measures the town has been looking into. The speed on Woods Hollow and others has been a continued conversation. What the town is currently trying to do is collect data about the number of cars on the roads and the speeds they go so it can best be mitigated. Allison recalls that there is a "slow children at play" in the parking area of the duplex on Cobbs Corners. Elizabeth has no idea what the best signage for would be for the situation, but was glad that data collection is happening. Allison liked Elizabeth's suggestion about moving the speed limit sign if possible. It's not something the town would have noticed unless it was brought up since its been like that for so long.

Bill did not know how hard it was to move the speed limit sign and asked John who confirmed it would be an easy job, maybe twenty minutes work. John has been trying to move the radar sign around town regularly on a one to two-week rotation, but he also feels that people get used to seeing it and stop paying attention. Bill asked John if he could investigate the regulations for the speed limit sign and the intersection. Allison thought it was a great idea. She also noted she had never heard back from RPC about the traffic study. John is looking into radar speed signs that has a camera on it that would take photos of license plates of speeding cars. He thinks that would be at traffic calming remedy.

REQUEST TO PLACE UTILITY POLE IN ROW ON OLD STAGE ROAD

Vermont Electric Co-Op is requesting permission to put in a utility pole in the right of way on Old Stage Road.

PART-TIME HELP

Jeff, a retired Colchester road crew member is looking to drive a truck for the next month or two while the pandemic is still going on. While Torey is gone for guard and while the road crew looks for a new full-time employee this would be a good way to bulk out the work force. Allison had no problem with it given its written as a part-time temporary position. Allison made a motion to approve John to hire part time help if he can find a good rate of pay. Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

EXCESS WEIGHT PERMIT

Bill Cleary signed an excess weight permit for Endless Tracks LLC.

DELINQUENT TAX SALE PROCESS DISCUSSION

Marge McIntosh, the Delinquent Tax Collector, was present to discuss delinquent tax sales. This time of year is the beginning of the count down to tax sales. In 30 years Westford has had maybe 6 delinquent tax sales. It takes two years for notifications to begin (2018-2020 being delinquent). It's at this point Marge suggests the taxpayer pay the oldest delinquent taxes to avoid tax sale. Historically Westford is very lenient about tax sale, it's a lengthy process.

Right now there are four properties that have two years outstanding. The history of those properties in the last 10 years is that one of those properties has been on the delinquent tax year every year, one has been on 7/10 years, two have been 6/10 years. Marge's question is: Does the board want to go ahead as normal or do they want to delay and change the process? She has held off on sending her normal letters until she knows how the board wants to proceed.

Allison had spoken with Marge about this previously. Her question was: Are there any new people on the delinquent list? Marge is asking this of the Selectboard because this is an unusual financial time for many people, but there are not new people on the delinquent tax list. These are people that are there chronically, not anything associated with the pandemic so in Allison's opinion she does not feel the town should change how it is done at this time.

In Bill's opinion we are far too early in the pandemic to see the effects of anything Marge handles. He also does not think we need to change things around. If it is not broken, don't fix it. Bill's concern is that these are the same names year after year. How does the message get out to these chronic delinquent taxpayers that this not okay? Allison explains that they aren't getting away with anything, there is a hefty interest charge and these people are paying much more than their normal tax rate for being delinquent. Bill asked for Marge's opinion.

Marge explained she is always concerned when somebody incurs a 42% on their taxes and if they go another two years that's 60% added cost. By the time somebody gets to two years it is kind of the tipping point. In the time of the pandemic if she saw a lot of difference in the delinquent tax list overall, which she is not, then she would think there is an issue. But there is not a lot of change. Even starting at this point, paying the oldest delinquent tax is better than going into tax sale since that is a very long process. She wished some of these people would escrow these taxes with their mortgage companies since 3/4^{ths} of the list have mortgages and that would be helpful, so they won't get hit with the penalties. She does not think we will change basic behavior, there are just some people that have this behavior reoccurring.

Allison and Bill appreciated Marge bringing the conversation to them, but do not want to change anything at this time. They asked that if Marge noticed any different changes to bring it to their attention.

PREPARE FOR AUGUST 27 PUBLIC HEARING

Bill was unsure about the process. Allison explained that Taylor Newton from CCRPC had offered to present the information. George Lamphere, the Planning Commission Chair, was present. He wanted to know the process and if it was different in any way from a normal Selectboard meeting.

In Allison's opinion they should have the public hearing, take in the public info and then she would like to have an open Selectboard conversational meeting about it afterwards. Bill noticed the closely approaching September 8th deadline for the grant. George was confident things would work out and the Planning Commission is committed to working with the community, however that September 8th deadline is something to be aware of. Allison reminded George that there's a lot to the project and how much information we are able to relay to the public without losing their attention and making it easy to understand will be a big goal.

Bill agreed a Selectboard discussion about the public hearing afterward would be ideal. He and Allison were in agreement that a special Selectboard meeting before the September 8th deadline would be appropriate. Allison wanted to make sure that they don't appear to the public that they've already made a decision without their input. This is for open and public discussion.

Mark Letorney was present and wanted the public hearing to be clear that the meeting is for the Block Grant. In terms of revitalization this is an important potential project. This needs to be presented in a palatable manner to the community. Mark brought up the many surveys of what the public wants for the future of the town over the years and this sort of project meets a lot of those wants and goals. Allison thought it would also be important to convey that the way the Planning Commission is going about things for this project with the partnership is at a low cost/risk to the community. Allison thinks making the distinction to the residents that the town is not buying the Pigeon Property, the Vermont River Conservancy and Habitat for Humanity are. Mark explains that it's a complex parcel, but that ultimately the partnerships allows the Town to acquire the parcel at no cost to residents.

George hoped to quell hesitation about the Vermont River Conservancy. They have nothing to hide and are very willing to work with the town. They try to help communities like Westford gain affordable housing. They come in on the front end, secure the land and river access and then help the communities with those river accesses. He does not believe there is any hidden agenda. Mark explained that all the partners and people who he has worked with on the project so far have been very complimentary about how comprehensive Westford's plan for the project is. This doesn't mean things are going to be quick and easy, it has been tedious. We are now in the position to not only conquer the obstacles we have come across but make this something truly beneficial for the town.

During the public hearing they would try three things: answering pre-submitted questions, answering video zoom questions and answering zoom phone calls. Nanette and Vicky had discussed monitoring the chat and verbally saying the questions when they come to that part of the meeting, same with phone calls. Nanette would also like to get together with Melissa and with George about the presentation. George thinks the important thing will be figuring out how much time needs to be allotted to each item on the agenda so they have something to guide us through the different categories. Nanette agrees and thinks this would be helpful especially for the residents attending the meeting. She thinks the difficult thing will be determining how much time will be needed for questions because we have to let people speak. George and Nanette will be in contact with each other regarding this.

Bill was still concerned about the zoom format for a meeting of this magnitude. He feels this may marginalize a certain residents in town that don't have good internet, don't have a computer or don't want to participate under this format. He again brought up the possibility of doing an outdoor meeting on the common. He's not really pleased with a zoom format for this kind of meeting. George mostly agrees, but he is not sure that there is an alternative. If they look at doing multiple venues for the same meeting things will get much worse. Given public safety and given the state rules for the pandemic right now this is the best option. There needs to be a real effort ahead of time between now and the meeting for people to submit their comments and questions prior to the meeting so they can be addressed. He agrees it is not ideal, but our options are what they are.

Jen Elis commented that zoom also has its advantages. Zoom is the only way those with limited transportation or young children might be able to participate. Allison reiterated that the platform has both negatives and positives, but that the meeting has already been warned. Nanette was curious when the Planning Commission was going to be sending the information to residents. George stated it would be as soon as possible. Nanette would work to help get the information out in many venues. Comments and questions would be submitted to the town clerk email.

VCDP PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION LETTER OF SUPPORT & ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW APPLICATION

The Selectboard drafted and bill signed a Letter of Support for the VCDP Planning Grant Application. This planning grant would allow the Town and community partners to conduct essential planning and pre-development work on the 1705 VT Route 128 property. Allison made a motion to approve the letter and application as presented. Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

REQUEST TO INCLUDE ARTICLE IN SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

Amanda Spector had sent an email with a request to put an article in the Westford Newsletter. She wanted to advertise the Milton Diversity Initiative. Nanette sent this to the selectboard since this is not a Westford specific event. She doesn't normally approve at her level when its not a Westford event. Bill had no feeling one way or another. Allison thinks its fine. Nanette will add it to the newsletter, Allison thinks its an important topic. Allison made a motion to include the article, Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

REQUEST TO USE GAZEBO FOR BIRTHDAY PARTY

Alicia Gage and her family are requesting to use the Common Gazebo for their son's first birthday party. They understood that the Gazebo could not be reserved. The Common Committee had already expressed their support for the birthday party given that all trash was cleaned up and that if any grilling of food occurred it would be done outside of the Gazebo. Allison made a motion to approve the event, Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

REQUEST TO USE COMMON FOR FAMILY GATHERING

Tina Hagen is requesting permission to use the Common on Saturday, August 29th to have a family gathering in celebration of her late sister Judy. The Common Committee expressed their support for the gathering. The Hagens would need to clean up any trash and the Common Committee relayed that the Gazebo could not be reserved. Allison made a motion to approve the event, Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

REQUEST TO CONSTRUCT OUTDOOR CLASSROOM ON MISTY MEADOWS

Jennifer Ellis, a 2nd Grade teacher at the Westford School is requesting permission to construct an outdoor classroom site on the Misty Meadows near the school property. The land Jennifer is looking to use is not connected to any of the trails and the entrance to the classroom would be near the concrete cylinder structure in the field near the parking lot. Construction would include cutting a small entrance, clearing small saplings as well as removing existing forest debris. Trees larger than 2 inches diameter would be left standing.

Jennifer would be the supervising teacher using the space. Under her direction the space would have stumps for students to sit on and ropes between mature trees for canopies to keep students dry. Jennifer explains that the outdoor classroom will provide a safe outdoor space for students to learn without face masks during Covid 19. Jennifer's hope is that the usage of the outdoor classroom could continue after the pandemic.

Bill was very positive about that idea. Jen Ellis was present to discuss. She had chosen the location on Misty Meadows since the school property does not have a lot of shade. She did a site visit with Pat Haller. This site is good because it has a full sightline to the bathroom. Some clearing would be needed to make the space. Usually the "leave no trace" should apply to land like the Misty Meadows, however this would leave a trace and provide an interesting new way to teach and be outside more. Bill is in favor of it. He is not sure if there is anything in the

management plan for Misty Meadows that would prohibit use. Allison thinks the cutting of saplings would be fine and these unusual times call for creative solutions. She was surprised the request came directly from Jen and not from the school itself. She wonders if other teachers will try and come to the board to clear more of the forest. Jen had reached out to the other primary age teachers. Other teachers have other spots they have already been using while another teacher has a traveling classroom method. Jen wanted a more permanent space, an actual natural and outdoor classroom. Allison appreciated the detailed packet that Jen had sent, it's a great idea. Allison made a motion to approve the outdoor classroom, Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

BMHS WI-FI COST SHARING TO SERVE TOWN COMMON

John Doan from the Brick Meeting House had written seeing if the town would be open to share the cost of installing Wi-Fi at the BMHS. Potentially this incurs a significant cost of \$1,200 a year which would be a 15% increase in the BMHS budget.

Julia, although not present at the meeting, had written an email explaining her position. To give background, Mark and Bree Drapa had written a grant that provided thousands of dollars' worth of equipment free of charge to provide Wi-Fi for the Common. They worked with the White Church and BMHS to gain their agreement that yes, they wanted the free equipment and all they would need to do is hook up internet service. In Julia's understanding that through the grant they are bound to provide service so she is surprised the BMHS would agree to it without some kind of plan and then turn around and ask the town to pony up.

Julia also points out that the Wi-Fi access has benefits to the town and organizations that are paying for it. It allows vendors to take Square payments, to real-time promote events and will be crucial in providing the learning hubs this fall for school age children. To her, this doesn't seem like a cost that should fall to the taxpayer.

John Doane was present at the meeting. He explained that they recently had Wi-Fi equipment installed and it was donated. They have yet to be able to activate the Wi-Fi service because they are being classified as a business and not a resident by their business provider. It's more like \$100 a month and that has not been budgeted with the current budget year. Before committing to this they wanted to see if the town was open to sharing the cost.

Nanette asked if the BMHS was a non-profit. They are. Nanette was curious if the internet provider would recognize that. Lori from the Common Committee has been taking that on so John does not know the answer to that. The current equipment installed as is has improved the library and common Wi-Fi by 50%. If the BMHS can provide Wi-Fi they would double the public Wi-Fi coverage at the gazebo. George asked if this would be a separate Wi-Fi network of the one that was just installed on the common or would it be the same. John was unsure, but his understanding is that it is one public Wi-Fi all coordinated on the town common. The BMHS had anticipated \$35 a month, but clearly that is not the case now.

Bill wonders if the BMHS can do what Nanette suggests and ask the internet provider about their non-profit status before asking the town for money. John thinks that's prudent and somebody from the BMHS will contact the internet provider.

ST. ALBANS DISPATCHING CONTRACT FOR SERVICE AND INVOICE

Previously payroll warrant the town had noticed a 50% increase in their bill from the ST. Albans Dispatch from last year. But they also didn't have a contract yet. Now they have a

contract that has not yet been talked about or signed. Allison asked if Nanette had heard from STD about an explanation for the increase. Dominick from STD explained they had bought new infrastructure that would explain the increase. Dominick said that they had relayed this information last time they had talked budget, but Nanette could not recall ever hearing the information before. Allison would like Dominick to come speak to the Selectboard about this. Greg is interested in knowing if this is a one-time charge or reoccurring. Allison would like to speak with STD and explain to them that the town cannot pay the invoice until a conversation is had.

TERMINATION OF BUYER AGREEMENT FOR 1705 VT ROUTE 128 PROPERTY

Allison made a motion to terminate the Buyer Agreement, Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0. Julia had already talked with Heather about this. Allison thanked Heather for her work.

LIBRARY TRUSTEE RESIGNATION

Laurie Wight has resigned from her position as a library trustee. Allison made a motion to accept Laurie's resignation and thanked her for her service. Bill 2nd. Motion passed 2-0.

CORRESPONDENCE

Allison had a call from Don Pouliot. He said that his son in law wanted to get approve to show outdoor movies at the common. Allison suggested he talk with Nanette to get on the agenda. Allison explained to him that to show public movies one needs a license. For the Selectboard to approve they would need him to have that license. Allison suggests talking with the library since the library has movie licenses.

Nanette had talked with Lt. Dan Lucas advising the board regarding nationwide law enforcement and the public feeling. Allison was confused at the last two sentences of the email which stated: "please respond with written response at earliest convenience". She feels that the community is going to have a broad spectrum of responses so she doesn't feel the Selectboard could accurately represent all of those views, so she was unsure what they were asking of the board.

We also received an email from an employee regarding an update to their work status during the pandemic. Allison is fine with this given that Nanette feels it will work and that they continue to check in. Nanette thinks it will work.

COMMUNICATION

The Planning Commission will communicate for residents to submit their questions to Nanette and then Nanette will share the agenda.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & PAYROLL WARRANTS

Greg went over the accounts payable & payroll warrants.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julia Andrews, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Assistant Town Clerk

**TOWN OF WESTFORD HIGHWAY DEPT.
ROAD SCHEDULE
July 24, 2020 – August 20, 2020**

Work to be done

- Grade roads.
- Add gravel to Old Stage Rd.
- Continue with FEMA work.
- Ditching project on Old Stage Rd.

Work completed

- Added gravel to sections of Old # 11 Rd. (6 loads), Rollin Irish Rd. (25 loads), Seymour Rd. (40 loads), Bill Cook Rd. (1 load), Covey Rd. (4 loads), Plains Rd. (10 loads), Manley Rd. (50+ loads) Common Rd, (3 loads).
- Graded most of the roads.
- Cut some brush on Osgood Hill Rd.
- Hauled in gravel for road surface work.
- Hauled in winter sand.
- Repair to the Cat Excavator.
- Rogers Rd. culvert will be done by the end of the week.

GUEST LIST

Elizabeth Disney
Buddy Meilleur
Tami Rickert
John Doane
Jen Ellis
Vicky Ross
George Lamphere
Mark Letorney
Dave Lavallee
Becky Roy
Marge McIntosh