

**SELECTBOARD MEETING
September 10, 2020
Minutes**

Present: Julia Andrews Callie Hamdy
 Bill Cleary John Roberts
 Allison Hope Greg Barrows
 Nanette Rogers

Guests: See attached list

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

CHANGES TO AGENDA

The August 27, 2020 and September 2, 2020 minutes were added to the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MINUTES

Bill Cleary made a motion to approve the August 27, 2020 minutes as written, seconded by Julia Andrews. Motion passed: 3-0.

Allison Hope made a motion to approve the September 2, 2020 minutes as written, seconded by Bill Cleary. Motion passed: 3-0.

ROAD SCHEDULE

The Road Foreman, John Roberts, discussed the August 28, 2020 - September 10, 2020 Road Schedule. Bill Cleary made a motion to approve the Road Schedule, seconded by Allison Hope. Motion passed: 3-0.

ST. ALBANS DISPATCHING CONTRACT

Dominic McLeod from the City of St. Albans was present to discuss the dispatching contract. There was a significant increase in the cost for dispatching for this year. The City of St. Albans is graciously offering a level fund for this year to ease into the new pricing.

Dominic provided some context and history. The City of St. Albans operates a regional dispatch center and has done so for 15 years or so. It serves primarily Franklin County and Grand Isle as well as a small section of Chittenden County. Most of those communities are very similarly situated in that they are looking for a dispatch call taker to answer all their dispatch calls for all the emergency services they have and don't have a police department. It is primarily EMS, rescue, and fire.

The challenge is how to set a rate structure that is fair and equitable. St. Albans Dispatch shifted their pricing according to population to become more equitable. In addition, they purchased some updates for their system including a new facility, a new tower and wage increases. All this costs more than what the City of St. Albans can pay so the users for the system are sharing the debt. Westford is differently situated to other towns because not all of

the town is covered and not all the services provided. St. Albans thought they sent this new pricing out at the end of 2019 however it did not make it to Westford as they had thought so the pricing came as a surprise. St. Albans has agreed to bill the Town based on the Town's budget for 2021, but the real issue is what is going to be done for FY'22. They have yet to put together their budget for FY'22 so they aren't sure exactly what direction things will go.

Julia said that the situation for Westford is that they have a good size land mass and not a lot of population. Julia can walk half a mile down the road and be in Fairfax, so if she calls Essex Dispatch with an emergency, they are not going to reach her in time. That is why Westford split their ambulance service between Essex Rescue and Fairfax Rescue so that travel times to emergencies was safe and reasonable.

The cost increase was significant enough that it gave the Selectboard pause to ask, "what happened?". How do we prevent this situation from happening again? It seems like there was a communication process, but it did not happen for Westford. Provided the opportunity to budget for the money they could have decided it would be well spent because it provides emergency services for their citizens.

Next year the City of St. Albans needs to communicate with Westford so that the Town can plan accordingly, understanding that Westford will be one year behind on funding the new infrastructure. Allison agreed. Bill thinks if they are going to have a conversation about the dispatching services and who is taking our emergency calls that this is not the forum to do so, but he would love to talk about it more at a future meeting. He had a resident mention to him that Fairfax Rescue will take a call to Northwest Medical Center and then the ambulances will be rerouted to the UVM Medical Center. He is not sure if it's an efficient use of time and fees there is more to talk about. Bill knows there are other places to contract with for service quickly looking in but as far as making it a long conversation tonight that is unnecessary.

Dominic understands that the Town is divided for emergency response times. Moe mentioned that ambulances getting rerouted to different hospitals are a hospital decision. He hopes that Westford has been happy with the service they have received, and that St. Albans dispatching has been responsive to potential issues outside of the issue at hand. Bill asked how the 12 cents per capita calculation work and does that consider that they're only servicing part of the town? Dominic replied that is why they had prorated the town and at the end of the day, it's a negotiable item. One of the principles that applies to emergency communications is that it's important to have a link between your dispatchers and the people they are dispatching.

That made sense to Julia. The contract needed to be discussed and voted on. Dominic will send Nanette a revised version of the contract for signage. Allison Hope made a motion to approve the contract as discussed and for Nanette to sign the revised contract, seconded by Bill Cleary. Motion passed: 3-0.

HIPCAMP & TOWN ZONING REGULATIONS

Dan and Louella Strobridge were present. Bill reminded the Board that Kate and Melissa suggested Bill to recuse himself from either a Development Review Board or Selectboard meeting for this issue due to his membership on both boards, which could be seen as a conflict of interest. Bill has no conflict of interest here in his opinion. Julia takes Bill on his word on that but thinks that Dan and Louella's opinion is more important than that of the Board. Dan and Louella also feel Bill has no conflict of interest so there was no need for him to recuse himself.

Julia began with the history of the project. In her understanding, the Strobidges are interested in having a campground on their land and that the Selectboard feels that this is an appropriate use for the land. Unfortunately, the Town's regulations are silent on whether this is an allowed use. The way the regulations are currently written, if it is not addressed outright, it's not allowed. Since then, the Strobidges have been given permission for a single campsite through a Home Occupation, but they are interested in having more than one site. Julia thinks there are ways they can get to solutions here, but she wanted to hear from the Strobidges first.

Dan had been thinking about doing this for a while. What they have is a primitive campsite, which is simply a place where somebody can come and camp. Presently there is a portolet available. People are wanting to get out of their COVID hot spots and big cities and be themselves. It is primitive campsites and not a campground that the Strobidges are interested in. Julia received their letter, which addressed more than the campsites, and it sounds like they have exciting plans but wanted to stick to the present issue for this discussion. In Louella's opinion if they change the regulations, the regulations should address the other items included in their letter.

Julia spoke with Melissa and was advised that if the Strobidges have more than three campsites per parcel, they would trigger regulations with the State of Vermont that would require them to have a wastewater system. The Strobidges are aware of this. Julia mentioned that no matter what they decide to do tonight, town government does not move quickly. If they set aside everything else, it will take them a month or two to create an environment where they can have what they want and then it is winter. This is not something solvable in this meeting tonight and she knows this is not what they want to hear, but she is trying to be honest.

In talking with Melissa, the Planning Commission is updating the Town Plan and then the regulations can be updated once the Town Plan is adopted, which is a long process. Another way to do this would be that the Selectboard can opt to work with the Planning Commission to create interim regulations that would allow campsites on the property. That could happen outside of the Town Plan process to fill the time gap. If they choose to do that very best scenario is that it would take a couple months. Julia noted that the Planning Commission and Selectboard have another large project on their hands with the Pigeon Property, so she doesn't feel that getting it done in November is realistic. The Strobidges were okay with this. They were thinking they would work with the Selectboard so that things are ready to go for spring. Julia opened discussion to the other board members.

Allison wished that there was an easier way to go about things, however she agrees that the soonest would likely be next camping season. She would also like to take time to read the opinions they have in the Selectboard packet. She thinks Dan and Louella's future plans for the site are pretty cool and she is impressed. Even if it's an interim piece of work, this is a gap that needs to be filled one way or another. Bill thinks it would be nice to wave a magic wand and make it happen, but it's not realistic. He applauds their creativity and thinks it's a great use of the land and fits in well with the character of Westford.

Allison was curious if Nick Nichols, the abutting landowner, had anything to say since he was present. Nick stated he was present to voice his support. So far it's been pleasant and very low impact.

Julia told Dan and Louella that they have the Selectboard's support in moving this forward over the winter.

EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION & BENEFIT PACKAGE

Allison added the Town of Georgia's benefits to the spreadsheet she created for municipal benefits. The salary tab is a starting point to another conversation where they would do a real comparison. It's a matter of looking at outliers for difference in operations or longevity in jobs. Wages and hours are all over the place across the towns that Allison researched. If folks are interested in this type of information Allison can do a deeper dive, especially into the most similar communities. She feels like Westford is in the ballpark and that they're not way off on anything, but it would be nice to see what the future may be for these positions.

To Julia, this spreadsheet represents a lot of work and she thanked Allison for her time. She feels the information is a good first step despite how overwhelming it is. The Board could choose to dig deeper at some point either prior to or during the budgeting process.

Allison wants the Board to remain proactive about the salary situation. She prefers staff feel comfortable advocating for themselves and wants to keep the great staff that the Town of Westford has attracted and employed. Expectations for positions within the municipality change constantly so it's about remaining realistic. Westford is very lucky with the staff it has, and it would be a shame for somebody to leave or to be poach by another town only to see that we were paying less than other towns in the area. Julia reminded the Board that it costs more to hire new people than it takes to retain. Bill commented on the work and time it takes training new employees.

CORRESPONDENCE

Allison apologized for a voicemail she received on August 20 from Tamarack Animal Hospital while she was out of cell services about a dog they have received. Tamarack never followed up so it seems to have resolved itself.

Nanette received correspondence from Lt. Bob Lucas who wanted to know what the Board had said about the communication email he sent. His response is in the Selectboard packet. Julia has specific questions for them, but she feels her questions are personal as a citizen and not as a Selectboard member. Julia explained that the current situation has created a lot of untrust for young people regarding police, so she'd be curious how that is handled considering that the Sheriff's office provides a service to Westford. Professionally, Bill deals a lot with police and troopers and he was very positive about the work the local troopers and sheriffs have done.

COMMUNICATION

Allison wanted to remind residents that due to the new cameras at the town garage, if you put non-metal items in the metal dumpster the police will contact you. Allison will draft a Front Porch Forum post.

AUDIT ENGAGEMENT LETTER 2020 & AUDIT CONTRACT FOR SERVICES

Greg was present to talk about the FY'20 audit. This year's letter was standard. The Town budgeted more for the audit than they quoted for the same services they normally provide. He pointed out that this is the last year of the three-year contract. He asked if the Board will want to go up for bid again? That was Allison's thought, noting that it does not mean the Town will select a different firm but it is more of a safe practice to go out to bid.

Bill wanted Greg to confirm that the first paragraph always explains how we will get an unfavorable rating because we follow a cash basis system. Greg confirmed this and said this was a common thing for smaller towns. If Westford went back to accrual, we still do not do a lot of things one would need to do for accrual basis. Allison Hope made a motion to approve the audit contract for FY2020, seconded by Bill. Motion passed: 3-0. Julia will sign as chair.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & PAYROLL WARRANTS

Greg went over the accounts payable and payroll warrants. The Selectboard members will come into the office to sign.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Bill Cleary made a motion to enter Executive Session at 8:34 p.m. to discuss personnel, seconded by Allison Hope. Motion passed: 3-0. People in attendance were Julia Andrews, Bill Cleary, Allison Hope, John Roberts, and Nanette Rogers. The Board exited Executive Session at 8:58 p.m. No action taken.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julia Andrews, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Assistant Town Clerk

GUEST LIST

Dave Lavallee
Nick Nichols
Dan Strobridge
Louella Strobridge
Lee Strobridge
Elizabeth Strobridge
Buddy Meilleur, LCATV
Gary Taylor
Dominic McLeod
Vicky Ross
Maurice Lamothe
Beth Nichols

**TOWN OF WESTFORD HIGHWAY DEPT.
ROAD SCHEDULE
August 28, 2020 – September 10, 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

- Graded Allen Irish Rd., Bill Cook Rd., Huntley Rd., Cambridge Rd.,
- Clean up from the Labor Day wind.
- Hauled in gravel for road surface work.
- Hauled in winter sand.
- Made repairs to the 2017 Western Star.
- Second round of roadside mowing.

Approved at the 9/10/20 Selectboard Meeting.