

**SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING
December 2, 2021**

Present:	Bill Cleary (chair) Dave Baczewski Lee McClenny	Callie Hamdy Greg Barrows Nanette Rogers
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Guests: See attached list

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was held in person and via Zoom.

CHANGES TO AGENDA

Added a request to purchase signage from the Conservation Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim and Kati Anderson were present. They were wondering what the status was of their letter they sent in September. It was a correspondence between Jim and Kati's lawyer and the Town's lawyer. The Selectboard will follow up.

Andre Roy was present. He had sent several emails to the Selectboard and had not received a response from the Selectboard members. He received replies from Nanette and Greg, Andre would like the Selectboard members to reply to communications sent to them. The Town has had community forums regarding the Community Wastewater and the 1705 (Pigeon Property) projects, but they are always held on School Board Meeting nights so Andre cannot attend. He feels this makes it difficult for community members to attend the meetings, as they must choose.

Given the wastewater project, what is the timeline and is it looking at a March vote? Andre does not think enough information has been provided about the grant money that has been received. He would like to see an actual tax rate for the tax impact for the money that will not be raised by grant funds.

As of this meeting, Andre's garbage has not been picked up. Has Myers fulfilled their obligations to other customers on Thursdays? So why do they have to be penalized because of their inability to notice the designated day? Why can't they penalize their other customers?

Bill responded that as far as the emails are concerned it is not an excuse, but in this instance, Bill thought that Nanette and Greg's response answered the question therefore he did not respond. Dave and Lee felt the same. Andre understands that however thinks that the answers should come from the committees regarding the tax impact because he feels what they have put forward is flawed. Bill responded that they have a joint Selectboard and Planning Commission meeting on December 14th to discuss all things Wastewater and 1705 so they may have a clearer answer to Andre's questions after that meeting. Bill asked Andre if he includes the Planning commission in these emails to keep them in the loop. He was not but had contacted a member of the Wastewater Outreach Committee. Bill explained that the Planning Commission is the organization that scheduled those community sessions, so that's why Bill suggests looping the Planning Commission. They are the ones that need to hear what Andre is saying. Bill wants Andre to understand that the Board has no control over when the Planning Commission schedules things and that he does not feel like the Planning Commission is purposely trying to hide information, just that bureaucracy moves slowly, and

they want to make sure the information they put out is accurate. Bill will contact Myers about the trash. Nanette spoke to Myers this morning, but they did not pick up everybody that was missed on the initial trash day.

Becky Roy was present. She sent the Selectboard an email the previous day about Myers. Her concern is that a couple of years ago they had issues where Myers was not picking up on days when roads were not perfect, or weather was inclement. She recalled when they reupped their contract, they stated they were going to work on the truck they had so that they were more accessible for Westford roads. She is confused why they are having this issue in the first place; she did not find the roads all that bad. She would like it addressed with Myers, which the Board is, but her concern is that are they starting another winter where residents must wait to get their trash picked up. It is frustrating to be told to get the trash out early in the morning and then to find out it has not been picked up, bring it back in, and back out when they are told they will come again.

FY'21 AUDIT REVIEW

Teresa Kajenski from Fothergill, Segale & Valley was present to review the FY'21 Audit. There were no significant audit findings. There were no difficulties in performing the audit. On page 2 of the report, it talks about corrected and uncorrected misstatements. Uncorrected misstatements were regarding overdue taxes and cash was overstated; this was due to the Town being on a cash basis system. They propose no adjustment to Westford's financial statements. Because Westford reports on a cash basis and because it does not do the government wide financial statement, an adverse opinion is given, which is the same as it has been for many years. The bond bank has no issue with the Town doing this. The fund financial statements are fairly stated, it is merely the two small items that make the adverse opinion.

Teresa reviewed other aspects of the report. Recording fees had a significant increase, this was due to people refinancing and an increase in buying and selling of property. Bill thanked Teresa for her time, the firm for their review, and Greg, MJ, and Nanette for their hard work. Bill asked what is an acceptable answer for what's good contingency funding? Teresa replied that two to three months of expenditures is a good amount, which for Westford is about \$200,000.

REQUEST TO PURCHASE SIGNAGE

The Conservation Commission was requesting permission to purchase signage. Sarah Pinto, Kirsten Tyler, and Elias Rosenblatt from the Conservation Commission were present. The Commission is asking for approval because the monetary amount for the signs exceeds the \$500 threshold for purchases without Selectboard approval. It was for two trail map signs, basic trail courtesy signs, winter trail use for Misty Meadows, a sign for each end of Seymour Trail, and one that says Private Property Do Not Enter. Lee and Dave had no questions and pointed out that these were signs the Town had been looking at installing for some time. Lee made a motion to approve the Conservation Commission's request to purchase trail signs per the quote provided, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed 3-0.

MAPLE SHADE TOWN FOREST MANAGEMENT

Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County Forester, was present. He had a draft contract for the Forest Management of the Maple Shade Town Forest. The Town had discussed using the revenue from the wood harvested for improvements to recreation trails, improving the general fund to offset the budget increases, and to have free firewood for town residents.

The harvesting of wood was mentioned in the Management Plan for the Westford Town Lands. It had not yet been implemented as Ethan was unsure what logger would want to do the project. Fortunately, Ethan found an amazing logger, local resident Evan Aiken. They feel the forest management work can begin this winter. This would help diversify not only the local economy, but also the forest habitat and regeneration which would be good for bird habitat amongst others. Ethan also uses forest management as an educational experience to show people what responsible forest management looks like. He has done this educational work in several other projects he has worked on. Additionally, he has worked with the Essex Center for Technology Forest Program to do some work at the Misty Meadows portion of the property. They are getting close to the point Evan could start working so Ethan has drafted a contract for the Selectboard to review.

Bill agreed that the educational and local approach to forest management was best for the forest and community. Ethan explained the larger trees are white pine and hemlock. The harvesting would occur over several years and would generate approximately \$5,000 to \$7,000 per winter for five or six winters, perhaps more. Without doing a detailed inventory this was Ethan's best guess.

Sarah Pinto asked Ethan what the ingress and egress and general area that is being discussed. Ethan explained they would be going in by using a portion of the Pouliot field as the road and the landing, but one of the great things about using Evan is that he knows the landowner and has already communicated. Andre Roy asked if there were any upfront costs the Town will have to bear? There was no cost to the Town as the state taxes had already paid for Ethan's services and the project will be revenue positive.

Pat Haller was present; he asked if they are going to do any chipping up in the landing? They were not. A larger operation would chip, but in this instance all those items that would typically be chipped will remain in the woods. Ethan explained that this a very low intensity project in terms of equipment. Ben Bornstein was present and stated that Evan had done the timbering on his property, and he vouched for how conscious of the land, neat and organized Evan was with his work.

Bill had a couple minor edits for the draft. Dave had no questions. Lee McClenny made a motion to authorize a signature with Ethan Tapper and Westford as well as the document titled Forest Management Contract for Maple Shade Town Forest with Evan Aiken amended as discussed, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed 3-0.

Pat commented that Ethan had also offered to give a winter walk to explain his work to residents during the Winter Festival.

DRAFT FY'23 BUDGET

The Board discussed the FY'23 draft budget. So far, the draft budget shows a reduced tax rate however there are more items that need to be reviewed and budgeted for.

Greg explained that most of the increase in administration is the salary for the Town Administrator which is going from a part time position to a full-time position. The Town Clerk and Treasurer section had a decrease as the Town Clerk had a reduction of hours because of the way the Town Administrator and Town Clerk responsibilities have been split now that Nanette is leaving the position.

There were line items for an administrative assistant for the Town Planner and for a Minute Clerk for the Planning Commission. The Board had not yet discussed these significant budget items. The Board discussed where the Grant Writer services should be placed. Nanette thought the Admin section would be appropriate and then boards and commissions would have to come to the Selectboard to request funds, and then the funds would be expended under that board or commission's budget. The Board agreed and thought this process would also increase the transparency in the Town's processes surrounding grants.

Nanette and Greg discussed placing the Recreation Coordinator's salary into the Admin section so that they could be treated equally to other town employees in terms of budget and merit raises, etc. The Board had no objection.

Dave wanted to discuss the Town Planner administrative assistant. He believes the work is there to validate the need for the assistant. He would like more details on what and how we are going to accomplish this. What is the job description? Bill does not know how we are going to attract somebody to fill the position for the low rate that is proposed so he feels the position is going to be very hard to fill. Dave asked if this was part of a larger discussion surrounding staffing? It does not solve any problems if the position is not filled, but we could certainly use it so having those funds available would be important. Bill feels the whole picture may look different depending on how the bond vote goes, the workload may decrease or increase depending on that.

Nanette and the Board discussed bumping up the amount allocated to town wide mowing to account for increased fuel costs and to avoid an issue like we had the past year where things were not being done properly.

The Board discussed law enforcement. They will investigate not only options with the Chittenden County Sheriff, but the Essex and Milton Police. Nanette thought that perhaps one of these entities could also serve as our dog warden. Bill thought that the Town had numerous speeding problems and many discussions about said problems. He was not sure if increasing law enforcement would help this. How do we get the most bang for our buck? Bill thinks it will be difficult to find another department, all departments are having staffing issues.

The Library offered to fund the Summer Concert Series. Bill asked if we should remove the Summer Concert line item. Nanette was not exactly sure how to manage that. Bill explained that once the money goes away the concerts would be back in as a line item, but does it need to remain as a placeholder in the meantime? Dave's understanding is that it would be easiest if the money is donated to Michael Kirick who organizes the summer concerts. If that is the case, they should do that. Greg will talk with Vicky. The Board agreed to set the line item to zero and that the check would be delivered right to Michael.

The Westford Historical Society was requesting \$2,000; this is the first time they have submitted a request. Dave questioned if Westford wants to take this expense on for the rest of time? He was not sure the Board was adequately discussing the money they give away to organizations around town. Bill believes that many of these organizations are seeing a decrease in normal revenue because of COVID, but Dave is right that these things end as reoccurring expenses year after year. Lee calculated that it is a very small portion of the budget for all the organizations, under 1%. Lee feels the fairest way is that to have a sense from the organization what the money is for and is this the only year it is needed? That

presentation from the organizations would be helpful. Nanette explained that in some towns all donation items are Australian ballot items.

John Roberts, Highway Foreman, was present. There is a 1% decrease from the current year budget in the proposed Highway Budget. Bill thinks John has been very creative with his budget to compensate for rising fuel costs. Bill asked John if there is a line item where we are making a transfer into the Capital Budget? Yes, there was. The Board discussed reapportioning some surplus money. If there was money to get taxes lower, Bill was all for it. Dave does not want to short the roads because the Town has an obligation by State Statute but the cost of diesel, sand consumption and more are unknowns, so we do not want to take too much risk. If we were going to take some risk, we could take it on the reserve account and make it up with FEMA money.

Lee agreed with everything that was said, say we had a \$50,000 surplus and we deduct \$50,000 from the next years budget and roll the \$50,000 in there. How do we ensure our accounting does not show us as overspent? Greg explained it would show as overspent. Dave supports John's increases that he asked for, his only question being the \$20,000 for the building improvements. John does not know what the Board is comfortable putting back into that, but he sees where we need it for the concrete pad and landscaping. Because of the water running into the garage this is a necessary improvement that would cost approximately \$35,000.

DRAFT CAPITAL BUDGET

The Board tabled this discussion until next week.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence

COMMUNICATION

There was no communication

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Lee McClenny made a motion to enter Executive Session at 9:25 p.m. to discuss personnel, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed: 3-0. People in attendance were Dave Baczewski, Bill Cleary, and Nanette Rogers. The Board exited Executive Session at 10:10 p.m. No action taken.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Bill Cleary, Selectboard Chair

Callie Hamdy
Assistant Town Clerk/Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

Sarah Pinto
Andre Roy
Ben Bornstein
Becky Roy
Dick Lavallee
Theresa Kajenski
Jim and Kati Anderson
Ethan Tapper
John Roberts
Kirsten Tyler
Elias Rosenblatt
Pat Haller