

SELECTBOARD MEETING

March 2, 2023

Minutes

Present: Bill Cleary
Lee McClenny
Dave Baczewski
John Roberts

Nanette Rogers
Greg Barrows
Callie Hamdy

Guests: See attached list

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. The meeting was held in person and via Zoom.

CHANGES TO AGENDA

Added request for dumpster to aid in cleanup of property of at-risk resident, purchase larger computer monitor for meetings, and April meeting schedule to the discussion section.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Louise Jensen stated that there have been suggestions that the town office be relocated to the town garage property to remedy the lack of space in the office. She expressed several concerns regarding that suggestion such as the available of area of development is limited due to wetlands, parking needs for senior citizens, and vehicular traffic would be a mix of cars and small trucks, heavy equipment, and fire trucks. She prefers the town office stay in the town center. Lynn Gauthier noted that adding additional traffic entering and exiting the town garage property will have an impact on motorists exiting Huntley Road, which is already challenging.

Louise Jensen is aware the Town has discussed doing a traffic study on all town roads. She stated that most of the traffic occurs during the morning and late afternoon/early evening commutes. She feels this is a large expense and there may be other actions the Town could take that make more sense, such as having a sheriff present on a regular basis.

TOWN MEETING AUSTRALIAN BALLOT ARTICLES PUBLIC HEARING

The Board presented the proposed FY'24 budget. Lee began the presentation by reviewing the past year including road projects, staff changes, and the ARPA Committee process.

The total proposed budget is \$2,158,830. After reducing the budget using anticipated revenue and \$18,500 from the General Fund balance, the amount to be raised by taxes is \$1,858,163. Based on an estimated growth to the Grand List, it is anticipated the tax rate will remain the same. It was noted that this is the municipal tax rate only and does not include the school tax rate.

The highway budget is increasing by approximately \$80,000. Some major changes include an increase in salaries, gravel, sand, and diesel. Some items will see a decrease such as the amount that will be placed in the Equipment Reserve Fund for future equipment purchases. The administration budget is increasing by approximately \$31,500. Increases include salaries, financial audit, and law enforcement. Items such as trash and recycling, Planning Commission Special Projects Fund, and donations to outside organizations have been reduced. A slight increase of approximately \$4,000 is being budgeted for anticipated revenue.

Martha asked why the amount for the audit increased significantly. Greg advised that the Town went out to bid because the current audit firm is no longer going to do municipal audits.

The bids received were higher than the current cost, and additional funds were included in the event the Town is required to do a single audit. Ed Chase urged the Selectboard to hold future town meetings and public hearings in person.

MINUTES

Dave Baczewski made a motion to approve the February 9, 2023 minutes as written, seconded by Bill Cleary. Motion passed: 3-0.

Bill Cleary made a motion to approve the February 20, 2023 minutes as written, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed: 3-0.

ROAD SCHEDULE

John Roberts, Road Foreman, reviewed the February 10, 2023 through March 2, 2023 Road Schedule. Dave Baczewski made a motion to approve the Road Schedule as presented, seconded by Lee McClenny. Motion passed: 3-0.

ROAD CREW MEMBER POSITION

Nanette advised that a person has inquired about the road crew position. He asked if the Town would pay for his CDL training if he made a five-year commitment, or if the Town would hire him part time until he has his CDL. Bill was inclined to wait for a more qualified candidate, but deferred to John if there is a more immediate need to fill the position. John stated that hiring someone can wait, noting that it would be helpful to have a fourth person. Lee pointed out that the Town has budgeted for the position, and until the position is filled, the Town is saving money. Bill agreed but did not want to do that at the expense of the road crew if a fourth person is needed. Dave noted that there are organizations and businesses that pay for training, which may be tied to incentives, or offer sign on bonuses, etc. John thought it might be worthwhile for the individual to meet with a Selectboard member. Barb Peck stated that if an employer is considering someone that is not qualified, there should be a step process so the employee is clear on the expectations and compensation. Vicky cautioned the Board that paying for the CDL would be setting a precedent.

FY'23 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT

Greg reviewed the highway budget status report, noting there was an increase in revenue and identifying expenses since the last report.

MOWING PROPOSALS FOR TOWN CEMETERIES

Lynn Gauthier advised that the Cemetery Commission received a three-year proposal from Robert and Sons for mowing the town cemeteries. In the past, the mowing has been put out to bid. The Commission is fine with a three-year contract but are concerned about accepting it without entertaining other proposals. Robert and Sons mowing of the cemeteries is contingent on them being awarded mowing of the town properties as well. It was noted that the Selectboard approved the three-year proposal that was submitted for town properties. Lee McClenny made a motion to accept the three-year proposal submitted by Robert and Sons for mowing the town cemeteries, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed: 3-0.

RECOMMENDATION OF FIRM FOR TOWN OFFICE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Dave and Nanette met with AES and Wiemann Lamphere Architects (WLA) to discuss their proposals. Based on the meeting they feel WLA is a better fit for the town. WLA seems to understand the Town's goals and are within budget. An added bonus is a former Westford resident is an employee who would be part of the project.

Bill Cleary made a motion to accept the Town Office Feasibility Study proposal submitted by Weimann Lamphere Architects and enter into a contract at a cost of \$24,480 and an estimated \$200 for reimbursable expenses, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed: :3-0.

UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM GRANT FOR TRAFFIC STUDY

Nanette contacted Charlie Baker at the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) to find out if CCRPC may be able to accept a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) grant application for a comprehensive traffic study. Charlie advised that the application deadline had passed however he will discuss internally to see if there is any room for an additional project. Charlie asked if the Town has the 20% match available if CCRPC can fit in another project. The estimated cost for the project is at least \$75,000, which is significantly more than the Town had anticipated. Dave would like to know what the deliverables are; at that cost he expects something very compressive.

Bill agreed that the cost is steep. He feels a lot of Westford's road problems are not created in Westford, but rather from surrounding towns and it's likely those towns don't care about traffic once it's past their own borders. He doesn't know what a study like this provides with regard to concrete information for the Town to make good decisions. Lee concurs adding that the information gleaned from the study could be very useful providing it is done right.

It was noted that ARPA funds could be used for this project, however if these funds are used they would need to be allocated and spent within the deadlines. Another option for the expense would be the Contingency Fund.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD APPOINTMENT

The Development Review Board (DRB) recommended Peter Armata to fill the vacant seat on the DRB. Peter was the only applicant. Lee McClenny made a motion to accept the recommendation and appoint Peter Armata to the DRB, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed: 3-0.

DISCUSS NEED FOR DRB MINUTE CLERK

After the last DRB meeting, Bill questioned if there is a need for the minute clerk if Harmony and Melissa are present at meetings. He feels the Town is overspending while Harmony is being trained. Melissa was not able to attend this meeting but informed Nanette that she feels she does not have time to take, transcribe, and edit minutes. Harmony Cism explained when she has a better grasp on how to manage the meetings, she'll be more involved in answering questions and Melissa will step back. Harmony pointed out it would be very difficult for her to take minutes. The Board will monitor the situation and revisit if necessary.

UPDATE ON MEETING WITH ESSEX RESCUE AND TOWNS OF WESTFORD, ESSEX, JERICO, UNDERHILL, AND CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION REGARDING COSTS

Lee advised that a meeting was held recently with Essex Rescue and four of the towns to which it provides services to. The group discussed the concerns towns have with the rising cost of the services which impacts budgets and how they can be more involved in the financial planning, general organization, etc. of Essex Rescue. Lee added that Essex Rescue provides a critical and valuable service to Westford residents.

Colleen Ballard, Executive Director for Essex Rescue, advised that rescue in general across the state is facing a crisis. Seven Days recently ran a story on the challenges that rescue organizations are facing, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding and staffing are very challenging for Essex Rescue. Most of the staff are volunteers however volunteerism is

rapidly declining therefore Essex Rescue has had to supplement by offering paid positions. Unfortunately, without more changes, Essex Rescue may not be able to continue to provide services. Based on this, Colleen made changes which were reflected in the budget proposals submitted to towns which will enable them to reliably keep an ambulance on the road. Essex Rescue is having difficulty filling a paid position due to the low rate of pay compared to less stressful professions. They are working with the State to find ways to fund ambulances for emergency and non-emergency transfers. Colleen advised that Essex Rescue wants to continue to serve the community and wished they did not have to ask towns for more funding to do so.

Barb Peck asked if there is data on how many elderly people live in each town Essex Rescue serves. She wonders if Westford is an aging town and what will happen if the Town does not have emergency ambulatory services available. Colleen advised that they don't have that information. She added that the average age is 65, which ranges from newborns to a 104-year-old they see on a regular basis, and pointed out that Essex has several elder care facilities. More than 64% of their revenue comes from Medicare which indicates that the largest population they serve are aging people.

Bill asked if Essex Rescue is responding to some of the same patients over and over again. If so, should there be a different scenario for those people rather than sending an ambulance? Colleen explained this is one of the weaknesses in the health care system. Medical offices don't have enough staff therefore patients are having difficulty seeing their primary care provider. It's common to respond to a call for a patient that has tried to see their provider but was unable to. She noted that first responders are the Ubers of medicine and that is a problem. Unfortunately, social work issues, mental health issues, overburdened primary care providers, lack of transportation, etc. are contributing factors to this situation.

REQUEST DUMPSTER TO AID IN CLEANUP

A request was received asking for a second larger dumpster to aid in the cleanup of an at-risk resident's property. The bill for the first dumpster was just under \$1,000. The Town has submitted a request for reimbursement from the Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD). After reimbursement, the Town will have approximately \$1,500 remaining in its Clean Up Fund. It is anticipated that a second dumpster would cost approximately the same, therefore depleting or almost depleting the available funds. It was noted that CSWD allocates funds each year and municipalities are able to accumulate the funds to a max of \$2,500. Martin Messimer advised that the cleanup is going well and other projects can begin once the property is cleaned up more. He thanked the Selectboard for the Town's help.

The Board discussed arranging for a larger dumpster. If the cost for the larger dumpster exceeds the amount available in the Clean Up Fund, Amanda Spector advised that the Mutual Aid Group will find the additional funds to make up the difference. She echoed the property owner's update that the progress is going well.

Lee McClenny made a motion to authorize expending up to the remaining balance of the CSWD Clean Up Funds for a dumpster to aid in the continued cleanup of the Messimer property, seconded by Dave Baczewski. Motion passed: 3-0.

PURCHASE OF LARGER COMPUTER MONITOR FOR MEETINGS

The Selectboard would like a larger screen for virtual meetings. Nanette provided the Board with some larger computer screen options. The Board would like to consider a wall mounted TV instead of a computer monitor. This option would increase available space on the table as well as allow all those present see the virtual attendees and documents that are shared. Dave

Baczewski made a motion to approve the purchase and installation of an appropriately sized monitor/TV using ARPA Funds from VT0255-02, seconded by Bill Cleary. Motion passed: 3-0.

APRIL MEETING SCHEDULE

The April meeting schedule was adjusted to reflect availability of board members and the Town Administrator. The meetings will be held on April 6 and April 20.

CORRESPONDENCE

Lee received an email from Laura Williams with a link to Division On Addictions requesting that the link be published on the Town's website. Julia Andrews stated that when she worked in the nonprofit sector, she received a lot of these types of requests. She suggested that if the Town wants to put addiction help information on the town website that the Town reference state or local organizations. Lee thought Julia's advice was sound.

An annual community update was received from the Air National Guard.

A notice was received from the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) advising of the creation of a municipal access portal for members. Town officials will receive unique login information to access the portal.

Julia Andrews advised she created a Town Meeting report from the House side of the legislature and would like to have printed copies available at the town office. Nanette suggested putting some at the library as well. Lee was pleased to help communicate the legislature.

COMMUNICATION

A message was sent to VLCT expressing the Town's opposition to Bill S.57.

FY'23 GENERAL FUND BUDGET STATUS REPORT

Greg reviewed the FY'23 General Fund Budget status report.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AND PAYROLL WARRANTS.

The Board signed the accounts payable and payroll warrants.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lee McClenny, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

Lynn Gauthier
Louise Jensen
Irene Wrenner
Colleen Ballard
Ed Chase
Sheila Franz
Joe Franz
Bob Hoppe
Liza Kilcoyne
Lori Johnson
Gordon Gebauer
Kim Guidry
Ira Allen
Martha Heath
Peter Bartlau
Amanda Spector
Dave Lavallee
Mike O'Keefe
Harmony Cism
Vicky Ross
Francois Ross
Ben Bornstein
Martin Messimer
Julia Andrews
Barb Peck

TOWN OF WESTFORD HIGHWAY DEPT.
ROAD SCHEDULE
Feb. 10, 2023 – March 2, 2023

Work to be done

- Plow, sand, and salt when needed.
- Truck maintenance.
- Remodeling work in the break room.

Work completed

- Plowed, sanded, and salted several times.
- Service on the grader.
- Graded several roads.
- Patched potholes on several roads.
- Hauled in some gravel for pothole patching.
- Maintenance on the trucks (grease, tighten tire chains, bed chains).
- Installed a new plow remote air valve on the 2020 International.
- Posted the roads for mud season.

Approved at the 3/2/23 Selectboard Meeting.