

SELECTBOARD MEETING
December 28, 2023
Minutes

Present: Bill Cleary Holly Delisle
Lee McClenny Callie Hamdy
Dave Baczewski Greg Barrows
Sean Cushing

Guests: See page 6

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

CHANGES TO AGENDA

Pat asked permission for the Winter Festival to restrict parking on Brookside Road so that transportation can get through. Bill had no objection; this is what we have done in previous years. Dave motioned to restrict parking for the Winter Fest. Bill seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Holly added an update to Town Office Feasibility Study to Communication.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Vicky Ross asked if we should be more proactive in advertising elected and appointed board positions? The board thought that anytime there is a town appointed position or a position that is up for election a significant effort should be made to ensure they are publicized.

MINUTES

Bill motioned to approve the December 14, 2023, minutes as written. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

ROAD SCHEDULE

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, presented the road schedule from December 15, 2023 – December 28, 2023. Bill motioned to approve the road schedule. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Dave Gauthier thinks something needs to be done about the deteriorated state of Huntley Road. Sean explained that the severe weather conditions made it hard for roads to be repaired, we have been burning through a lot of gravel. Dave also noted a culvert that was full of dirt that needed to be taken care of.

DECEMBER 18th STORM REVIEW

Sean went over the December 18th storm. We had no structural damage and many of the proactive things that we have done recently helped to prevent further damage, especially ditching. There was water over the road in several places due to culverts that couldn't handle the amount of water in those areas. The only roads with minor washouts were put together by the end of the week. Bill would like a protocol in place for the Emergency Management Coordinator, Francois Ross, and Selectboard to figure out their role in a situation like this. Francois had reservations about coordinating groups of volunteers due to the vast knowledge needed for volunteers to remain safe. George Lamphere suggested quadrants of citizen reporters.

FY'24 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT

Greg Barrows, Treasurer, went over the FY'24 Highway Budget Status Report.

WASTEWATER UPDATE

Ron Rodjenski was present. There are some alternatives to the most current Community Wastewater System project: People can act on their own properties to solve their own wastewater issues, the Selectboard could buy the Pigeon Property and put a wastewater system there, neighbors can give easements and work together, or the town can relocate the town office or library. All these have extensive timeframes and put us at risk of losing a significant portion of the current \$4 million dollars' worth of funding the town has. Another option is coming back to the Community Wastewater system and right sizing the project to alleviate public concerns.

Ron confirmed that the funders are willing to hold on to their own permit and grant processes for us. There are five or six different entities involved, and all have different timelines and priorities. The CCRPC has the nearest deadline on January 19th. Ron was directed to look at the Pigeon Property as an option. There is not yet enough information to know if it is feasible. The town learned from the State that there is a dug well on the north end of the Pigeon Property that has a 500-foot isolation zone, which ends at the Route 128 Right-of-Way. This means the entire property is encumbered by the well isolation zone. It does not prohibit redevelopment of the property but may prohibit new use. About an acre is left after wetlands and floodplains are calculated. The brownfield plume would have to be looked at in relation to a subsurface wastewater system. It travels to the north and has not been evaluated. Remediation of the brownfield is estimated at \$300,000+. The town would have to get control of the property and then find funding for the reuse. All of those are questions that can be reviewed, but there are a lot of hurdles and not enough time to do that within our current funding constraints.

Ron is not sure what the board meant by "alternatives" when given his objective. The work that Stone Environmental did recently was based on a pre-selected property the town bought for the purpose of a wastewater system. The town does not have time or money to re-evaluate other potential community wastewater properties again. Looking for new alternatives would be starting from scratch and would likely have to be fully funded by taxpayer money since the state is invested in the Maple Shade property. The State Revolving Loan Fund has said they will fund finishing a plan to put on a shelf for future use, but the rest of the funding sources for construction are tied up and other towns would be able to access and push forward. This is not a tomorrow investment; this is a 50-year investment.

Lee's personal view is that over several years the Planning Commission worked on these items in a way they thought was best for the town. Unless the Planning Commission tells the board differently there is no alternative plan that can be cooked rapidly enough for us to save any of the 4 million dollars in State and Federal funds because of the deadlines. If we do not go forward with the project, the \$4 million dollars that was going to come to the town will go away and be used by other towns. We can however look at downsizing the current system and re-evaluating the user costs.

Bill does not think the Selectboard can capture public sentiment for a re-evaluation of the project. If the funds go away, so be it. Ron's concept is based on an 11th of January deadline, and he thinks even if the Selectboard says no to the project they should at least show what a right-size option might mean. If all the funders stay on board and the costs to the non-users and town are understood at least they are saying 'no' to that option. Dave Baczewski had a desire to see what options exist for capitalizing on our pre-existing engineering. He wanted to hear Ron out on January 11th and see what is possible.

George Lamphere of the Planning Commission clarified that no funding source has pulled funding nor is any funding source threatening to walk away from the project. This level of funding from these grant programs is unprecedented and is likely to never be seen again after this point. He thinks if there is a possibility of right sizing the community wastewater system that is the best solution to go forward with. The cost of purchasing a new parcel, going through that process, and building a new town office will be a much greater tax burden on taxpayers than the current community system proposal.

Barb Peck and Lori Johnson believe that the bond funds being voted down meant the project should not proceed. Meanwhile, Pat Haller and Wendy Doane thought we could not conjecture what each person who voted was voting specifically for. A rework could be favorable to the town, and it is prudent to look at that. It would be awful to let \$4 million dollars walk away.

VAST CONNECTOR TO WESTFORD COUNTRY STORE VIA THE COMMON

Andy Doe from VAST was present. He was wondering if the Town saw value in a VAST trail on the Common, so that riders could patron the Westford Country Store. Andy described the proposed trail. The trail would be about 12 feet wide. Andy explained that due to the grooming process there would not be any impact on the grass. He expects 5-6 weeks of snowmobiling each winter with 20-30 visitors to the store per day. Suzanne Kearns and Lori Johnson from the Common Committee were not in favor of allowing snowmobiles since it is a public space, as well as concerns about the subsurface drainage system and noise. Andy explained in the last decade there has been a large environmental pressure on snowmobiles to reduce emissions and noise. Pat Haller and Bree Drapa were in favor, believing it could drive winter recreation. Bree suggested putting something out in the town newsletter and social media so people know what they can or cannot do on the trails. Bill made a motion to approve VAST's request to access the country store via the Common as proposed. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

REAPPOINTMENT TO CCCUD

Julia Andrews requested to be reappointed as Westford's representative to the Chittenden County Communications Union District Board. Board member terms are one year, and reappointment needs to happen prior to CCCUD's Annual January 17th meeting. Julia was present and gave a short description of what CCCUD does, which is mostly working to bring high speed internet to Vermonters. Bill asked if it deals with cell phone service or just high-speed internet. It was just the internet, but Julia was looking out for options for cellular service. Dave motioned to appoint Julia as the representative to the CCCUD. Bill seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Vermont Listers and Assessor's Association had provided a letter about the statewide reappraisal. Julia Andrews, as the town's representative in the state legislature explained the bill. 48% of towns are in a reappraisal order in Vermont and the number of towns able to be done by the state is 7. There's a huge mismatch between what is needed and what exists. The bill hopes to bring these things into alignment.

APPOINT A REPRESENTATIVE TO SIGN 2024 EXCESS WEIGHT PERMITS

Holly explained in the past the Town Administrator and the Road Foreman had been appointed to sign these as it has previously been a burden to the board. Bill motioned to make Holly Delisle and Sean Cushing the agents to sign Excess Weight Permits. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

GRAND LIST ERRORS AND OMISSIONS

There are two Grand List Errors and Omissions presented. The first was a lot that was purchased with a mobile home that was not included in the value of the property and added later. The second was one where somebody purchased a lot adjacent to theirs where two dwellings were combined into the larger parcel. Lee made a motion to approve the corrections and sign the form. Bill seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

FY'25 BUDGET WORKSHOP: LIBRARY

The board discussed the Library Budget. Bree reiterated that this is a leaner budget, so every dollar amount has been carefully considered and looked at. The town is currently facing an almost 10% budget increase with the current proposals. George Lamphere thought that expecting that we can level fund for three years in a row is not a good expectation and is poor budgeting. Vicky agreed, they had level funded for two years, funding with reserves, and now the library is telling the board what things really cost. The cost of the Library Building maintenance has very little wiggle room.

BUDGET EXPENSES

Carl Rogers was present. He and Holly had prepared a new expense sheet for the board. The board members wanted to take the document home and review it in more detail before meeting again. Carl suggested going through some of the highlights but thinks having a special meeting would be good as well. The board went through the Budget Expense sheet.

FY'24 GENERAL FUND BUDGET STATUS REPORT

Greg Barrows, Treasurer, went over the FY'24 General Fund Budget Status Report.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AND PAYROLL WARRANTS

The board reviewed and signed the accounts payable and payroll warrants.

CORRESPONDENCE

Westford Covered Bridge Proposal

The Brown's River Covered Bridge in Westford has some noted damage, mostly rot. There are groups interested in making repairs to the bridge and preserving it. Steve Miyamoto from the VT Covered Bridge Society was present and reviewed the damage in question. Caroline Brown, who had pioneered the bridge's original restoration, suggested ARPA funds could be used to help fund repair and there are national covered bridge societies that could provide funds. The bridge would cost \$42,000 to repair.

Lee asked if there is something we could do that would be more expensive now that would remove the necessity of doing this work another 20 years from now. Miles Jenness from Vermont Heavy Timber made a proposal for repair that covers some items that would keep it lasting a fair amount longer. Bill suggested pursuing at least one more quote. Tim Aiken, who built the Historical Society building is a heavy timber framer and he could look at the proposal. Lee mentioned that he thought the bridge had historic value. The Brown's River Covered Bridge is the second oldest in the State of its kind.

Animals in Road

There was another complaint about the animals in Brookside Road. This time goats were both in the road and on the land of another property owner. Holly is currently exploring how we may change our dog ordinance to a general animal ordinance. Bill thought that it would be a good

time to contact the animal's owner again to let them know this is continually happening. When they had been notified of the pigs, they mitigated the issue. Callie will take steps to contact the property owner and report back to the board.

COMMUNICATION

Unemployment Insurance Research Update

The Town currently self-insures with the state. Holly did some research and found that there are two other options to mitigate the future risk if the town faced an unemployment claim: Become part of VLCT UI Trust, which is an insurance policy we would pay for protections. It is not too late to sign up. The other option would be to change from a reimbursable status with the State of Vermont to a Taxable status, but that would have to wait until next year. Holly recommended the VLCT trust for better timing and pricing. The Selectboard asked for more time to consider.

Dispatch Services Research Update

Holly reached out to the Chief of Police for St. Albans and asked what their contract covered. It only covers Fairfax Rescue calls for Westford, which was 123 calls last year.

Town Office Feasibility Study

Dave and Holly had met earlier this week and discussed the progress of this project so far. They will meet with the firm selected for the project to get a full update and bring it back to the board in a later meeting. Current information about the Town Office Feasibility Study is available to the public on the Town Website.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Bill moved to find that premature public knowledge of matters relating to town personnel would put the town at a significant disadvantage at 9:52p.m. Lee seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Bill moved to enter executive session to discuss personnel and invited Holly Delisle and Carl Rogers to attend. Lee seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Executive session adjourned at 10:27 p.m. Lee motioned to make a final employment payment to John Roberts that correctly reflects the sick and annual leave that he took in his final weeks of employment. Bill seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lee McClenny, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

Francois Ross
Vicky Ross
Caroline Brown
Louise Jensen
Kim Guidry
Ira Allen
Andy Doe
Pat Haller
Maureen Wilcox
Sheila Franz
Carl Rogers
George Lamphere
Nanette Rogers
Barb Peck
Dave Gauthier
Suzane Kearns
Ben Bornstein
Carol Winfield
Ron Rodjenski
Lori Johnson
Joe Franz
Julia Andrews
Wendy Doane
Dave Lavallee
Dick and Tess Lavallee
Pat Hechmer
Bree Drapa
Steve Miyamoto
Miles Jenness

ADOPTED THIS 11 TH DAY OF DECEMBER 2023.

WESTFORD SELECTBOARD



Lee McClenny, Chair



David Baczewski



William Cleary