

**SELECTBOARD MEETING**  
**February 8, 2024**  
**Draft Minutes**

Present: Bill Cleary  
Dave Baczewski  
Lee McClenny  
Sean Cushing

Holly Delisle  
Callie Hamdy  
Greg Barrows

Guests: see attached.

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

**CHANGES TO AGENDA**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**MINUTES**

Bill motioned to approve the January 22, 2024 Minutes as amended. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Bill motioned to approve the January 25, 2024 Minutes as written. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

**ROAD SCHEDULE**

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, went over the Road Schedule from January 26, 2024 to February 8, 2024. Bill motioned to approve the Road Schedule as presented. Dave seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

**FY'24 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT**

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

**APPOINT WASTEWATER STUDY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

There had been a discussion about this committee during the last meeting. Those wishing to be on the Committee submitted applications and all were present to speak at this meeting. Bill Hill and Martha Heath had been part of the ARPA Committee, and both thought the rubric process created for ARPA would be a good starting structure for this committee. Jeremy Berger was previously involved with the Planning Commission as an alternative and believes Wastewater is important to the town's future. Carol Winfield wanted to explore the wastewater alternatives while finding the best solution for the town. Paul Birnholz wanted to be on the committee to ensure that those opposed to the Community Wastewater system had a voice. Lori Johnson was present via Zoom, but had technical troubles, so Bill read her letter out loud. She wants to see solutions that make sense to the town and lives within the village center.

Lee asked Ron Rodjenski, the Planning Commission and the public if they have anything to add about the process and what attributes he thinks will be helpful to have on the committee going forward. Lee wanted to make a diverse panel so that the public can all agree that the process was fair.

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Ron volunteered to be a moderator for the committee and noted that this committee will be non-voting. He also wanted to make sure that the committee itself is ready to work. They are not just going to sit and look at papers, this will be an active role. They will then report back to the Selectboard several times. This could bridge Town Meeting Day and the new Selectboard could decide to do something different. Harmony (misspoken as Maria during the meeting) will be taking minutes, and the board will be transparent. There are a lot of moving parts between the needs, funding, and Selectboard election. He also wants the committee and boards involved to be flexible.

Mark Letorney from the Planning Commission was present. This is the best solution that the Planning Commission could produce to both bring the community together and adequately explore alternatives. The Planning Commission is very appreciative that the Selectboard is onboard with the committee and is willing to keep it on track.

Barb Peck was present. She thinks the way the candidates should be chosen is to look at their experience level. What they can bring to the team in order to expedite it and do actual work. She thinks it is important that we do not stress over who is for or against. Sheila Franz was present. She thinks it is important that the committee not be forced to make decisions based on deadlines to keep grant money. Some of the alternatives are going to require study and investigation. Tom Orfeo was present. He thinks it would be good for the committee to solicit ideas from the public. Some people seem to have strong ideas about alternatives. If the conversation is open, then everybody can feel like their ideas are heard.

Bill Cleary feels it is impossible to balance the membership as for or against the old project when you are looking for an odd number of members. He would suggest that the Selectboard have the ultimate authority to remove committee members if they are not being cooperative or productive, using the other candidates as alternatives. To him this is tough. Dave thinks that when these people come together, they are going to work hard for the town. He appreciates the ARPA model being mentioned since it was transparent and received well. With that in mind, he feels that Bill Hill and Martha Heath were highly involved during their time on the ARPA committee, adding in lots of structure for transparency. He thinks Bill has critical engineering and analytical experience. He also vouched for Martha. She has done a ton for the town and during ARPA also took on a lot of work. He has also worked with Carol on the first Winterfest.

The board discussed increasing the number of citizens on the committee. Ron explained that it is a work group. Many hands can make light work. He would get everybody involved somehow; he would rather engage people at this stage. Lee's instinct is that there's a lot of work to be done. He does not think the precise number of volunteers makes a difference. He is in favor of asking all six to step up. Bill agreed as long as everybody that applied understands that they need to put away their old rhetoric and move forward in a productive manner. He suggested four with two alternatives. Dave agrees, we are trusting that people's personal agenda will not come forward. If people cannot work together the Selectboard can work through that. The Board asked if any of the volunteers would like to step back if they choose this path?

Barb Peck supported Martha and Bill because they were on the ARPA Committee and knew how to structure that model. Then there are four other people. This allows presence in case of absence. Paul Birnholz is more than happy to step aside for Lori Johnson or Carol Winfield. His main concern was bringing the 'no' viewpoint on to the committee. Martha and Carol were both fine with a larger group.

Lee moved to accept all 6 applicants to form an advisory committee on wastewater and charge them to produce and investigate alternative possibilities for solving the town's wastewater problems. Dave added that he is in favor of the six, but they had previously hashed out a charter. One of the first things the committee is going to do is to finalize that charter. Dave seconded the motion. Motion passed 3-0.

### **CRRP FUNDING DISCUSSION**

Ron Rodjenski maintains that the funding stack is still intact. CRRP has approximately \$750,000 obligated to the Community Wastewater Project, which has a strong component to build businesses in the Village Center. They are under direction to help 11 village centers across the state with their revitalization investments, so other projects benefit from that program, all of which are in various stages of trouble. The country store business owner has found another path for their wastewater. CRRP heard this and called Ron to ask if Westford was going to retract its funding request. The funding for CRRP is being pushed by the ARPA constraints of obligating by December of 2024. The US treasury came out with clear guidelines which means work needs to be under contract to count as obligated. Ron does not think CRRP has a lot of time. The question becomes: is there or is there not a commercial or employment growth component in the project? A lot of the conversation came down to the fact we do not know what the alternatives will bring.

Dave feels that everything he is hearing is about development. Bill mentioned there could be another system that permits another business to come in or you could build that exact system and have nothing come in. We do not know yet. It could also be a 'build it and they will come' situation, but Dave was never led to believe that you have to prove they are coming. He understands CRRPs conflict, however. They either have to believe in supporting the community, but as it stands right now, even with what we voted on in November, there was no guarantee of development or permanent businesses. It is also possible any alternative could be less costly than the store's new solution for wastewater and they may want to participate. They are currently neutral. Dave does not appreciate the pressure being put on the town. It is determined that Westford needs a solution in this area, and he would hope CRRP would allow us the time to produce alternatives. Bill agreed with Dave. Ron mentioned that in June there are a lot of organizations that must make final decisions, ARPA, CRRP, etc. We are not the only town struggling with the issue of deadlines.

Barb Peck believes the store was the linchpin for the CRRP funding. She thinks the Westford Common Hall is also trying to become a business and trying to take the position the store vacated. She's not sure Westford should say whatever we need to say to get an extension. Clayton Wilburn was present. He wanted to remind Barb and the Selectboard that his property is zoned for both commercial and residential use. He and his wife are interested in commercial possibility. He does not think it's dishonest to say we have the potential for commercial business. He also cautioned for the board to be careful when saying "Town" and "Municipal Buildings." When they say "Town" do they just mean the municipal buildings? Clayton feels that they, as private citizens, are also the town, but if the board just means municipal buildings, they need to be clearer.

Carol Winfield mentioned that on January 16<sup>th</sup> she spoke to Ellie Beckett at CRRP, and she said the \$750,000 initial grant was specifically for the Maple Shade project and that any other project could be considered, but it would potentially have decreased funding. It must contain some commercial use. Carol thinks the idea of keeping this alive by saying 'we don't know yet' is valid because what if the town bought the 1705 Property and found an interested party to renovate the existing house and turn it into a couple of offices to rent? Keeping that in play is

valid. Carol also contacted Northern Boarders and they said not to worry about their deadlines yet since they are in October. They would consider a rescope. Their offer is not contingent on the Maple Shade project. It could also just be for the two municipal buildings.

Clayton asked whether Barb and Carol were given permission to talk to state entities on behalf of the town? It does not seem to be very transparent to others for them to talk privately to the state about how the money would be used. To him it feels shady for them to talk to these government entities without direction of the town. Lee says that many people have had many conversations about a lot of other subjects. He has not yet encountered any state official or organization that has misconstrued who they are talking to. They know Barb and Carol are private citizens. Nobody has been deputized to have conversations with state officials on the town's behalf. There is a lot of information that circulates around.

### **LIBRARY GRANT OPPORTUNITY**

Pat Hechmer, Library Trustee, was present. There was a grant opportunity for the Library. They had anticipated for some time there would be significant capital grants available to libraries. A week ago, Bree Drapa and Pat attended a seminar on how these various grants would roll out. The deadline for the application was March 12. They need a municipal endorsement for the grant. They had already gotten a design approved to help the Library become more ADA compliant in November of 2022. They have not made significant changes to it. If they get the grant, it will be a fully funded opportunity. Then they are looking ahead to the next opportunity at a grant for Small Rural Libraries. Bill was concerned the construction costs were \$250,000 in 2022, but the costs are now \$400,000. He was concerned about floating that amount of money until grant reimbursements come in. Vicky Ross was present and described the different aspects of the project, such as improving pathways, providing a lift to the stage, and moving the location of the circulation desk and bookshelves. Bill wanted additional quotes, Pat did not think that was going to be a problem. Vicky does not think we can get any quotes before we have an approved project. They are also on a tight timeline since the project also requires community engagement. They intend to hold an open house on March 6<sup>th</sup> with the schematics to show to the public. Vicky mentioned that there are no funds from the town in this grant nor any matching funds. It is fully funded.

### **FY'24 GENERAL FUND BUDGET STATUS REPORT**

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

### **REVIEW AND APPROVE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & PAYROLL WARRANTS**

Greg Barrows, Treasurer, went over the Accounts Payable & Payroll Warrants.

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

#### **Letter from Common Committee Re: VAST use of the Common**

The Common Committee had written a letter of concern about the VAST trail on the Common. Bill thought that when it was discussed at the Selectboard meeting enough people were in favor of the project they should give it a chance. He is still in favor of it. Lee thinks it is important to remember that the Common is not just to be looked at, it is to be used and enjoyed. VAST produced an innovative request and they said they would try it, so they are doing so. Dave is in favor of keeping the VAST trail on the Common. The Common Committee was present at the Selectboard meeting in which it was discussed, but they wanted more time to form an opinion. He thought the process should allow for requests like that to go to the Common Committee first so they can form an opinion before it goes to the Selectboard.

Rebecca DaVanon was present. She was able to go to the last Common Committee meeting. She is shocked there's not more communication between the town and the Common Committee. What is the role of the Common Committee? She still had some questions: if they are an advisory committee how does the Selectboard bring in their opinions? How are the people on the committee selected? And how often are they rotating off? Her understanding is that this is all very informal. What procedures are there? What are they advising? What is their mission statement? How are they taking in public comment and reflecting it into the advice they give the board? It might be time for more structure in that Committee. Callie Hamdy and Holly Delisle had done some research on this. There were some boards and committees in towns that were not being treated the same as other boards and committees, the Common Committee is one of them. In 1997 the Common Committee was officially formed as an advisory role. Quickly after that it seemed that the committee was lost sight of. Members were originally appointed to three-year terms each, but that process has not been followed over the years. This is something that the town plans to work on correcting. Lee's thoughts are that Rebecca is right, and that other matters have been pressing recently which has caused a delay in fixing the situation.

#### **Carl Rogers Temporary Employment Agreement Update**

Carl Rogers had been brought on for the Admin transition. Now that the budget has been wrapped up, he plans to end his employment agreement with the Town unless the Selectboard has other things they would like his help with. The Selectboard and Holly thanked Carl for his help during the transition.

#### **COMMUNICATION**

Holly shared some numbers on what the tax rate increase could look like if the Fire Truck Bond passed on Town Meeting Day. She shared it with the Fire Department and urged them to include it in their Town Meeting Day presentation. With two different options of bond interest rate, the tax rate in 2026 could potentially go up 1.65% or 1.95%. Bill thinks with the looming potential 20% increase from the education tax the state is talking about it will be difficult to get any bonds passed.

#### **ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lee McClenny, Chair  
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy  
Minute Clerk

**GUEST LIST**

Dick Lavallee  
Tess Lavallee  
Bill Hill  
Carol Winfield  
Harmony Cism  
Jeremy Berger  
Paul Birnholz  
Clayton Wilburn  
Rebecca DaVanon  
Barb Peck  
Mark Letorney  
Tom Orfeo  
Martha Heath  
Sheila Franz  
Andrea Letorney  
Maureen Wilcox  
Kim Guidry  
Ira Allen  
Ben Bornstein  
Sue Roediger  
Ron Rodjenski  
Maria Barden  
Lori Johnson  
Pat Hechmer  
Vicky Ross