

SELECTBOARD MEETING
June 27, 2024
Minutes

Present:	Bill Cleary	Holly Delisle
	Casey Mathieu	Callie Hamdy
	Pat Haller	Greg Barrows
	Deb Jorschick	Sean Cushing

Guests: see page 5.

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m. The meeting was held in person and via Zoom.

CHANGES TO AGENDA

Added Library ARPA Request to discussion, added Financial Management Questionnaire, General Ledger Transfers to Treasurer's Report.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Maureen Wilcox was present. She commented that on Monday night's meeting a member of the Planning Commission stated a Westford Resident was a liar. She stated it was recorded via Zoom. The rules of procedure prohibit this. She feels this should not have been allowed to happen. She is requesting the Selectboard ask this Planning Commission member to resign as a member of the Planning Commission and if they refuse the requests the Selectboard dismiss them. Barb Peck, Carol Winfield, and Lori Johnson were present and agreed with Maureen.

Kim Guidry was present and commented that in the last couple of meetings it has been difficult to understand people via Zoom. She requested people announce and be clear in their comments.

MINUTES

Pat motioned to approve the June 13, 2024 Minutes as amended. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

ROAD SCHEDULE

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, went over the Road Schedule from June 14, 2024 to June 27, 2024. Bill motioned to approve the Road Schedule as presented. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

FY'24 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT

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

LOAN OPTIONS FOR REPLACING 2015 LOADER

This had been discussed at previous meetings. Holly had prepared documentation of what this would look like for the town as an un-budgeted monthly expense at both a high and low end, an average of about \$2,000 a month. The big question is if we want to approve the purchase or not? The Selectboard agreed that they did not want to go forward with the purchase.

WILDFIRE REVIEW

Garrett Bartlett and Steve Willard from the Westford Fire Department were present. Garrett had submitted a summary to the State of Vermont of the wildfire. At 19:04 they were dispatched to Sap Line Drive for a brush fire that was getting out of control. They estimated the size was $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre brushfire which had quickly gotten into the trees. They set up to the south of where the fire was located. The two biggest exposures were to two houses to the

south of the fire. It took them a little over two hours to fight the fire and they requested assistance from surrounding departments. They estimate there were 40-50 people working to get the fire under control. The following day they went back and did a survey of the damage, it was contained to the wood line with the worst of the damage being the sap lines running through the area. The total acreage damaged was over 2 acres, and it was difficult to access the area due to the difficult terrain and dense brush.

ZONING CHALLENGES FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLES

After seeing the video of the wildfire, Pat thought the area looked difficult for the fire departments to access. He had suggested the board review how they can potentially assist the Fire Department by understanding what makes things difficult for them from a Planning & Zoning perspective. Steve described a change in the newest Town Plan that were made the requirements more lax for roads in PUDs. The main question would be if Sap Line Drive is built to correct specs. Garrett had received a message from the Fire Chief in Essex, they found the road difficult. It is built to the proper width, but it has very steep banks. Larger vehicles are unable to utilize the edges of the road and have to take the entire center. Garrett feels there is room for improvement. There had also been changes for the required turnarounds which changed from every 300 feet to every 600 feet. George Lamphere from the Planning Commission was present. He explained they had made the changes after hearing from developers that the previous requirements were difficult and expensive to meet. Garrett thought that the town should also bring in the prospective rescue squads we contract with for this conversation. George thought it might be worth knowing the road is to spec.

TANKER TRUCK CONTRACT REVIEW

E1 is unable to complete our build request for the tanker truck, so a new company is taking over. The new company, Alexis, is able to build it to our requirements. The town attorney had reviewed the contract. The price is \$582,724 which is within the range of money that was voted on in March. They want to get this order in before the 2027 EPA regulations take effect because this would greatly increase our costs. The board discussed the town attorney's questions as well as Alexis' answers to said questions. Pat motioned to approve the contract as amended by the town attorney. Casey seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

SULLIVAN POWERS & CO AUDIT CONTRACT

The contract was very similar to last year's contract and the amount is what was budgeted for the upcoming year. Bill motioned to accept the contract with Sullivan and Powers to perform the town audit provided Greg has opportunity to review it and has no concerns. Pat seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

SET SALARIES

Holly explained the salaries provided were what was approved at town meeting day with the town budget and reflects a 4% increase for all town staff. There were changes to the Town Planner salary and the addition of the Administrative Assistant. Bill motioned to adjust the town staff salaries as approved in March and to move the Bookkeeper and Treasurer to non-exempt status by converting their salaries to hourly rates. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

TAX RATE

We do not yet have the state-set school tax rate, so Holly had provided an estimate of what that might be so the board members could see an estimated tax rate. Along with this conversation, Ron brought up that in the past we used unassigned general fund balance to bring the amount raised by taxes down. We have a reserve fund balance policy that was crafted in 2012 that does not have a lot of specifics in it. Holly will work to improve the reserve fund balance policy for future review. Bill noted that since he had been on the Selectboard

there has only been 1 year where they have not applied fund balance to pay down the taxes. That is going to be more difficult this year if we end the fiscal year on a negative note. Holly has heard from three separate mentors: Nanette, Ron, and Carl, that this is not a best practice, and we should wean ourselves off of doing it. This year all it will do is account for inflation. Bill thinks that it feels like the right thing to do, but he understands why it is not a best practice as we could get to a point without a robust enough fund balance to do this. Bill asked what the recommended practice is? Holly explained if we have consistent excess we could assign it to a specific reserve fund. Ron suggested having a tax stabilization fund that would be voter approved. It is best to specify reserves for specific purposes. We have \$416,000 last year in our unassigned fund balance, and approx. \$250,000 is in a CD.

CONSIDER DESIGNATING JUNETEENTH (6/19) AS A MUNICIPAL HOLIDAY

This had come from Bree Drapa, Library Director. Other Libraries and other Towns have Juneteenth, the anniversary of the last slaves to be emancipated, as a municipal holiday. It is a Federal Holiday. We currently have 8 paid municipal holidays. Pat wondered if we added a 9th would our staff enjoy a different day or a floating holiday? There are currently two floating holidays built in. Vicky Ross was present. She has enjoyed bank holidays for most of her career. She thinks we should see what some nearby towns do. We would want our total to be on par with towns near us, not less or more. Pat wanted to ask the staff if a floating holiday vs a specific other bank holiday would be important. Casey want to see what the other towns said. Vicky also thought the Library and the Town should compare. The Library Directors floating Holidays were just upped to 3. Bill thinks it costs the town money and we get no productivity out of staff when we close for Holidays. Dave Gauthier asked how many employees would get paid and how much money would come out for them having that day off. It depends on the day it falls on because some Holidays fall not on some peoples working hours.

LIBRARY ARPA REQUEST

Vicky Ross, Library Trustee, was present. She explained that when the library was painted 3 or 4 summers ago, they were advised the paint would last longer if the library put gutters on the building. They had an estimate from Bronson Johnson which has been honored for 3 years. It took years to find a qualified contractor able to do the carpentry prep work. They got an estimate of \$4,000 which was approved through the ARPA committee. They did not know the true cost until opening up the building. The carpentry work was recently completed and came in almost double the estimate. The gutters were installed, and they will be getting a bill for the \$4,850. Because it turned out to be so much more expensive, the Library is requesting additional ARPA funds if available. The Town is doing a deep dive into ARPA in October to ensure all unallocated funds are allocated.

Greg explained that in addition to the unallocated funds there is the interest income which is just under \$12,000. Bill would support using ARPA for half of the requested amount. Deb was in agreement. Vicky explained they spent almost all their budget last year and taking on the remaining amount would be from community fund donations.

Bree Drapa was present. She explained that as a member of the ARPA committee she has stayed out of the gutter project. She recalled that the library gutter project was the highest scoring project of all projects approved by the committee. Dave Gauthier asked about snow protection for the gutters. He does not see this protection added. Vicky explained that the system is gutters and covers. They had vetted it all before going on this path, so she is not prepared to go over every single pro vs con. They decided installing gutters was better than the drawbacks that they present.

Deb made a motion to fund \$2,070.75 of ARPA money to help the library pay off their gutter project. Casey seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

1705 UPDATE

Holly will be contacting David Tudhope for his written opinion on the wastewater capacity. She did receive an initial draft of a more robust access permission form from the Town Attorney which will be presented to the board at the next meeting.

FY'24 GENERAL FUND BUDGET STATUS REPORT

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

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This is the yearly financial management questionnaire. Greg had a question that he needed the Selectboard to answer regarding if they have attended financial training. None of them have. Greg then went on to explain the Financial Management Questionnaire to the new Selectboard members. The questionnaire required a Selectboard member signature.

GENERAL LEDGER TRANSFERS

Bill motioned that the selectboard authorize Greg to transfer funds from the general ledger to the individual reserve funds. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

REVIEW AND APPROVE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & PAYROLL WARRANTS

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

CORRESPONDENCE

Request for Town/Selectboard Support for Open Meeting Law Compliance

Lori Johnson had written in her official capacity on the Common Committee requesting assistance with being able to meet the new Open Meeting Law standards. Holly had received questions from several boards so had gone to VLCT with those. Hybrid meetings are only for State non-advisory bodies. Municipal bodies are not required to have them but if a resident or press member has a written request, the body must provide access virtually if it would not cause undue hardship. That request from the individual would have to be made within 48 hours of the meeting, and only for a single meeting. Another piece of that is recording meetings. Only non-advisory bodies have to record all meetings, those meetings must be posted in a designated electronic location and be available for 30 days after. Those rules do not apply to advisory bodies. Holly is happy to have one on one sessions for those who want to learn to use Zoom. She is also happy to work with anybody who needs to figure out how to post the meetings on the website. Lori Johnson was present and thanked Holly for the presentation. Bill motion to give Lori formal permission to work with the other members of the Common Committee to see who will run Zoom if they get any requests. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

There had also been several correspondences regarding the Selectboard and Planning Commission joint meeting. Bill had responded. This satisfied the other Selectboard members.

COMMUNICATION

There was no communication.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Bill moved to find that premature public knowledge of matters related to personnel and property acquisition would put the town at a significant disadvantage. Pat seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Bill motioned to enter executive session for matters of personnel and property acquisition at 9:00 p.m., and invited Sean Cushing, Harmony Cism and Holly Delisle to attend. Casey seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Pat motioned to exit executive session at 11:22 p.m. Deb Seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Pat motioned to adjust the approved salaries of the Town Highway Department as follows: Sean Cushing, \$1, Reggie Smith \$1, and Dick Stygles \$1. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 11:23 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cleary, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

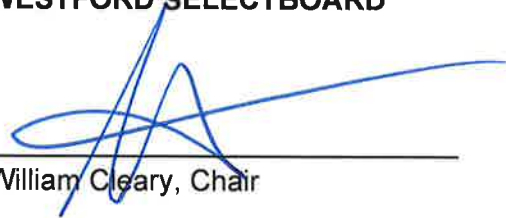
George Lamphere
Dick Lavallee
Vicky Ross
Harmony Cism
Carol Winfield
Dave Gauthier

Kim Guidry
Ira Allen
Garrett Bartlett
Sheila Franz
Barb Peck
Lori Johnson


Ben Bornstein
Ian Gehlbach
Maureen Wilcox
Mark Letorney
Steve Willard
Bree Drapa

ADOPTED THIS 25th TH DAY OF JULY 2024.


WESTFORD SELECTBOARD



William Cleary, Chair



Patrick Haller



Casey Mathieu



Deb Sawyer Jorschick



Wendy Doane