

SELECTBOARD MEETING
November 7, 2024
Draft Minutes

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

Guests: see page 6.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Casey Matthieu moved to find that premature public knowledge of matters related to evaluation of a public official would place the Town at significant disadvantage. Pat Haller seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

At 5:01 p.m. Casey moved to enter executive session for evaluation of a public official and invited Kirsten Tyler and Holly Delisle to attend. Pat seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Casey motioned to exit the executive session at 5:30 p.m. Deb seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

No action was taken.

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

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were no changes to the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carol Winfield was present asking a budget request question about Winterfest.

MINUTES

Casey motioned to approve the October 24, 2024 Minutes as amended. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

CCRPC UPDATE

Ben Bornstein, CCRPC Representative, was present. Ben and Holly Delisle met with a representative from Efficiency VT and CCRPC's point person for the MERP process in hopes of getting additional assistance. The award announcement has been delayed. BGS issued a statement that they would extend the period to respond, which is good for us.

Ben found that Jericho chose to donate \$300 to Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation (GBIC). GBIC works to attract higher paying jobs and businesses to VT and Chittenden County. They tout their training and networking opportunities as well as lobbying to bring new industries in. Ben did not find that GBIC had given grants to surrounding towns.

Regarding the traffic study, Holly noted that CCRPC recommends we include the Covey Road/Old #11 intersection in the UPWP for 2025. They think realigning the intersection would help. We would need to do a turning movement count, speed data and more to justify adding a stop sign there, which would be included in the study. They also suggested adding signs in that area. Ron cautioned us not to pause on this as we now know the hazard and would be liable if something happened. We should ask CCRPC to draft an implementation plan.

ROAD SCHEDULE

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, went over the Road Schedule from October 25, 2024 to

November 7, 2024. Casey motioned to approve the Road Schedule as presented. Pat seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

FY'24 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT

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

1705 UPDATE

Potential Engineer Review

Deb reached out to Krebs & Lansing, an engineering firm in Colchester, about working on 1705. They have 6 professional engineers and one class B designer. Greg Dixon from Krebs & Lansing was present. With Ron, they had talked about the potential of a town engineering firm for all projects, even those aside from 1705. The Selectboard needs to decide whether to seek a contract with K&L for just 1705 or for a longer term. Bill explained we had sought a different engineer from Tudhope to have a separate engineer working with the town. Max Tyler was present and commented that he had hired Krebs & Lansing for his septic design and had a positive experience with them. Pat made a motion to move forward with K&L for 1705 with potential for later projects. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Town Office Priority Discussion & Timeline Review

Ron Rodjenski was present. Holly explained that it has come up a number of times that the town office is running out of space. As we move into site planning 1705 it would be helpful to know if the Selectboard wants the Town Office renovation/rebuilding to be included or to deprioritize it. A lot of work has gone into determining what can be done with the current office space, starting with a reconfiguration plan by R. Bast in 2019 to optimize the current space. He concluded that it would help a little in the short term but would not help with vault space. The town then conducted a Town Office Feasibility study with Wiemann Lamphere using ARPA dollars. They produced both renovation and rebuild designs. They concluded that renovation would not provide a significant amount of additional space despite adding another story. The final submission of a reconstructed town office would have had a meeting space, two stories plus a basement and the design was about the size of the library.

Ron thinks this is a hard question to answer. On one side, if we are not considering the town office in the site planning, that is simpler. On the other side, redoing the work down the road when we need a new town office does not make sense to him. He believes it is more efficient to do it in one go. We do not have to go to construction drawings, but we should at least reserve space on 1705 as an option for the town office property. It will make a big difference if we know where a potential town office will go. There is still around \$35,000 in Town Office Feasibility ARPA. Wiemann Lamphere is willing to come back and do an updated Phase II.

Vicky Ross was present. She suggested that staff be given guidance and parameters to go by. In regard to reserving land on 1705 for a town office, Bill suggested expanding the footprint to avoid the need for elevators if possible. Casey asked if they want to outline an area as we go through the 1705 process. Ron suggested reserving enough space to have options within it to indicate the potential area of construction. Bill wondered if it could be a building envelope on the site plan. Ron said that is fine too. He also noted that archeology will want to look at all of 1705 and will ask what we are going to do with the property. Pat believes this will be important to know for the brownfield corrective action plan. We also must consider septic. Until we have a permitted septic system, we don't know what is possible for a new building. Bill suggested we should tell K&L that we are looking for as much capacity as possible when we engage them in a septic design. Pat believed K&L will want to know that the contamination is there, the phase I and the corrective action plan are coming.

Carol Winfield was present. She recalled that when the original 1705 project was in process one of the parts of the discussion was the River Conservancy buying the property and deeding part of the property to the town for exploration for future town office expansion. Is that border adjustment or deed alignment based on any study at that time? Could that plan still be used?

Public Engagement – Potential Planning Commission Partnership

There was some concern that the Planning Commission (PC) felt left alone with the public and not engaged with the Selectboard. Bill stated that if the Selectboard asks for help from the PC for public engagement in 1705 they will have the full backing of the Selectboard. We want to engage the public to hear what they want to see on the 1705 property. Holly suggested a joint working meeting of the PC and the Selectboard with limited public engagement. They should decide what kind of public engagement the Selectboard wants and give the PC support on how to do that. Ron suggested a few public engagement sessions where the PC could ask for input on the frontage of the property. Ron also suggested using the VCDP plans as a start without the housing component. Bill agreed with that plan. Ron sees that the town, the Selectboard and the PC are restarting the process, even though there is a lot of information on 1705. We should make it clear that we're looking at things in a new light.

Steve Willard suggested a pump from the river for a fire hydrant on the Common. We have no pressurized hydrants in the town center, and this is a big asset to protect. Max Tyler asked if we're interested in how to utilize the rest of the space. Bill noted we do not want to give away the town office space or the wastewater space.

BUDGET WORKSHOPS

Highway Department

Sean Cushing presented the FY'26 Budget Request for the Highway Department.

Westford Fire Department

Garrett Bartlett, Fire Chief, was present to provide the FY'26 budget request for the Fire Department. They are looking at a 2.2% increase from last year. That was due to equipment maintenance and repair.

Library

Vicky Ross, Library Trustee, was present to provide the FY'26 budget request for the Library. Their request is a little over 4.42% increase. Bree Drapa, Library Director, was present and thanked the Selectboard for attending the previous joint meeting they had. They appreciate and do a lot with the funds that are given. They also supplement with grants. Bill noted that in the past they have overlooked Bree as a Town Employee. They have adjusted things so that things are fair between the library and town office. Vicky noted that the library expects to be invited to the salary discussions for a joint executive session.

Town Clerk

Callie Hamdy, Town Clerk, was present to provide the FY'26 budget request for the Town Clerk and Elections Department.

Treasurer

Greg Barrows, Treasurer, was present to provide the FY'26 budget request for the Treasurer's office.

WASTEWATER ALTERNATIVES COMMITTEE (WAC) UPDATE

The Committee is trying to figure out the impact the 1705 purchase has on WAC's mission statement. The Selectboard was also unclear about funding further engineering work. A lot of energy is now being put into 1705, and WAC is being asked to look at other properties. They

sent a permission slip to Westford Common Hall but have not yet received a response. WAC is trying to focus on civic outreach. If they are not getting any positive responses and the Selectboard has not indicated any funding resources, what is the mission? Is it to create a list of potentially interested landowners and then stop? That would be no cost. Or is it to report back when they have a signed permission slip and then they would talk money? Pat added that the Brick Meeting House and the Fleury property are being pursued. Pat said that to be effective, we need to know what the town really wants to do. He thinks they need to align with the community to find out what they want in the town center. Casey agreed, what capacity do we need? What does build out look like and is there any buildout? Deb thought this was premature because we are looking at 1705. Pat worries that we do not know how much capacity is available on 1705 yet. He would like to know what parties are interested we cannot find the capacity needed. He would like to continue looking at the other properties to identify them as potential and get permission from the civic buildings. Bill and Holly had talked about public engagement for 1705. During that process we are going to start fleshing out concerns people have about the town common district. This might tell us what parts of our town plan need to be worked on.

Max Tyler, PC member, stated that how much capacity we need is unknown. He agrees with Pat. Lori Johnson, WAC member, was present. She thinks the list is good to have but it feels premature since there is no funding to do anything. Deb noted that without money to back anything up, it feels unnecessary.

Rebecca Davanon was present. She feels that the WAC's mission should not be changed as it would remove options for her family. Their mound system is installed, but that's a best-fix and limits the use of their property. She knows 1705 will take priority, but there will not be additional capacity for residents. Anybody else on the Common whose system fails will not have capacity. She does not want to be left behind.

Ron noted that the municipality has certain statutory duties. The town plan has a bunch of goals and objectives. It mentions a community solution for wastewater. If there is a committee working on the problem, the mission statement must be clear. The town plan and WAC mission statement has this tiered approach for municipal needs, then civic needs, then public needs. How hard does the town of Westford want to work to solve the village center problem? The town started out with a big project, the Maple Shade project, and now has gone the other way by only trying to serve the Town Office and Library with 1705 and looking for alternatives. Does the Selectboard want to invest in private residential systems so every house can have an ADU? Ron does not think the Selectboard intended to have an open-ended research project. As soon as we start to look at building multiple sites, we generate a municipal system. Bill asked if it would be reasonable to pause WAC again with the goal that we do a survey to ascertain people's opinions, then once we have that information, we can make a better decision to disband or not. Pat thinks we do need to focus on the parts of the town plan that Maple Shade highlighted strong disagreement with. We need to find out what the public wants. We need to talk about the implications both of having a community system and not having a community system. He thinks we need to find out what the public wants as far as development in the village district area. Ron noted that redoing a town plan is an 18-month process, but redoing certain items could be a 6-to-12-month process. Steve Willard believes we would have contention either way because the wastewater vote was so close. Bill thought of maybe moving this subject to another agenda for longer discussion.

Sheila Franz was present. She thinks we are hitting the heart of the issue which is the town plan. She does not think the town plan needs to be redone in its entirety. She thinks the historic town center is not the right place for development and she thinks the form based code

needs to be looked at. She wonders if the school is going to downsize. She feels the state is forcing us to do some things we do not want to do. She does not think it has to be contentious. Maura O'Brien was present. She thinks the question is what we want to do with the town center. She thinks WAC has been focused on finding septic, but the vote that went down in November 2023 uncovered a lot of concerns and misinformation and misunderstandings of what the town plan had in mind. She likes the idea of a survey and public engagement, then take the good parts of the town plan and find ways to implement them.

Carol Winfield agrees the town plan needs to be revisited, which is not WAC's focus. If WAC got a permission slip back from a landowner tomorrow would the Selectboard give them \$5-10,000 to investigate that property? If not, she wonders what are they meeting for? Perhaps it is time to pause WAC until we find out more about what we want to do next.

Clayton Wilburn was present. In terms of Maple Shade, if the view of the town is to not utilize it, why not sell it? Pat made a motion to pause WAC. Casey seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

PRIVATE ROAD ISSUE – HEMLOCK RIDGE ROAD

Pat made a motion to rescind Hemlock Ridge Road due to 911 numbering and zoning issues. Casey seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

ARPA PROCESS REVIEW

Holly explained that VLCT recommends expending all ARPA funds by the end December 2024 or we could lose them. She suggests writing checks to the organizations with outstanding ARPA funds. The rest would be put into Salaries & Benefits. Ron recommended a motion to put unspent funds into the general fund for FY'25. Some towns have used these funds to create their first community funds. Ron recommended reviewing this with our auditors. Bill thought we should do what we need to do to not lose the money. Bill motioned to write checks to the organizations with remaining ARPA funds. Pat Second. Motion passed 4-0.

EXPENDITURE REQUEST – IT INFRASTRUCTURE & TAX MAPPING

Holly stated that the switch and the firewall are what is being paid for. Both of those are critical infrastructure. Along with that comes a wall mounted rack that holds it. This would replace the large former server tower. This infrastructure is paid for because we delayed purchasing two computers this year. The second piece is the tax mapping. This would save us money. Our tax mapper is no longer available to continue tax mapping for us. Cartographic Technologies who we contracted to update our maps online also provides tax mapping. The initial set up fee is a little more than \$3,150 and the annual service is \$885. Our current tax-mapper is budgeted for \$5,000 a year. Bill made a motion to approve the firewall upgrades. Pat seconded. Motion passed 4-0. Bill motioned to enter into a contract with Cartographic Technology for tax mapping. Deb seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

CEMETERY ACCOUNTS MIGRATION TO COMMUNITY BANK

Deb made a motion to move the cemetery accounts to community bank. Casey seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

SET DECEMBER SELECTBOARD SCHEDULE

The board discussed the December Selectboard Schedule.

REVIEW 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 AND PAYROLL WARRANTS

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

CORRESPONDENCE

Conservation Commission Chair

There were several correspondences in support of the Conservation Commission chair keeping her position.

Holly noted that the board did choose not to ask Kirsten to resign.

Special Town Meeting & Childcare

Ed Chase, former Moderator, wrote an email regarding the vote at the special town meeting.

There were also communications about childcare at the Special Town Meeting. Our Recreation Coordinator suggested the Girl Scouts. There are at least two trained Girl Scouts that would be willing to babysit it if we could coordinate. The school locks down everything but the gym after hours, so we would have to work with the school to unlock parts of the building. A resident was displeased with the noise at the Special Meeting, and they do not think the town should be responsible for childcare. The same resident requests we improve our audio when we meet at the school gym. Rebecca and her husband, Clay, got several direct correspondences that they forwarded to the Selectboard due to their negative and disrespectful tone. Bill stated that he agreed with the emails. Pat did not agree with them and was disappointed in their mean-spirited nature. He was sorry this happened to Rebecca. He feels they have been seeing this tone for other issues. He would like this attitude to change.

Sheila Franz suggested that Ira Allen be on the cover of the Town Report this year. Last year it was dedicated to Nanette Rogers. Bill liked the idea. Deb agreed.

Carol Winfield wishes the tenor of Front Porch Forum was not quite as caustic and accusatory.

COMMUNICATION

Announce we are pausing WAC.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cleary, Chair
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy
Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

Ron Rodjenski
Dave Gauthier
Garrett Bartlett
Dave Lavallee
Ben Bornstein
Lori Johnson
Rebecca Davanon
Greg Dickson
Kim Guidry

Harmony Cism
Maureen Wilcox
Vicky Ross
Carol Winfield
Max Tyler
Sheila Franz
Pat Hechmer
Bree Drapa
Martha Heath

Ian Gehlbach
Lynn Gauthier
Barb Peck
Dick Lavallee
Steve Willard
Stacia McIntosh
Maura O'Brien
Ira Allen