

**SELECTBOARD MEETING**  
**October 24, 2024**  
**Minutes**

|          |               |               |
|----------|---------------|---------------|
| Present: | Bill Cleary   | Holly Delisle |
|          | Wendy Doane   | Callie Hamdy  |
|          | Casey Mathieu | Greg Barrows  |
|          | Pat Hall      | Sean Cushing  |
|          | Deb Jorschick |               |

Guests: see page 7.

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

**CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

Added minutes of October 22, 2024.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Dave Gauthier was present. He experienced issues hearing at the October 22, 2024 Special Town Meeting. Bill took this feedback and feels we have both audio and visual issues when we use that space.

Clayton Wilburn was present. He was disappointed that there was no childcare present at the Special Town Meeting. He feels the town does not support families due to lack of childcare at events. He asked the Selectboard if families were welcome at meetings? If so, is it the responsibility of the town to provide childcare or the responsibility of the parent to contain the child? Wendy would like to see there be childcare. In the past, childcare was provided, often by the PTA and adjacent organizations. Deb agreed there should be childcare so that parents can be present, and children are not a distraction. Casey agreed that families are welcome. Bill asked Clayton if he would be willing to organize this. Clayton feels this should be the Selectboard's responsibility.

Carol Winfield was present. She thanked the Selectboard and the Town Administrator for the hard work that went into the 1705 project so far and for the professional way the meeting was run. She thought it went very well.

**MINUTES**

Pat motioned to approve the October 10, 2024 Minutes as amended. Casey seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

Bill motioned to approve the October 22, 2024 Minutes as amended. Deb seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

**CCRPC UPDATE**

Ben Bornstein, CCRPC Representative, was present. Ben announced a program in partnership with Efficiency Vermont to assist low- and moderate-income residents with home improvements. Ben offered his help to anybody looking to apply. The annual legislative breakfast is in December. He went last year and found it useful and informative. He suggested the Selectboard members attend. CCRPC is working on a county-wide plan, much like our town plan. Municipalities might request which land to set aside for conservation. The county will be getting \$399 million to help pay for programs and transit infrastructure improvements. Green Mountain Transit has cut back on their service in surrounding areas, which could affect our community. Pat expanded on the Home Repair program. It is a way to help residents upgrade to a heat pump, or upgrade the insulation in their home, etc.

## **ROAD SCHEDULE**

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, went over the Road Schedule from October 11, 2024 to October 24, 2024. Bill motioned to approve the Road Schedule as presented. Deb seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

## **FY'24 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT**

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

## **1705 UPDATE & REVIEW OF SPECIAL TOWN MEETING**

The floor vote on whether to use \$150,000 of Unassigned Fund Balance for the purchase of 1705 passed 120 Yes to 28 No. Holly and Ron Rodjenski both agreed the next step is a site plan so people can see what things might look like. Potential partners will also need this. Ron suggests a timeline for public outreach, key partners, etc. The Selectboard should decide whether to continue sharing Tudhope's services with the Pigeon Trust or to hire an engineer of our own. That engineer could help with permitting, updating the wastewater permit for commercial need, and site planning and design. Bill thinks the initial site plan can be very basic. Holly agreed. Pat asked when the Phase I site assessment will happen. Holly asked LE Environmental to kick that off. CCRPC may be able to help with the cost. The Phase I ESA has to be completed within 180 days of closing. Bill asked if we need an engineer to produce the first site plan. Holly explained yes, that would have to be done by an engineer. Holly explained we would not have to go out to bid for an engineer because it is considered specialized knowledge. Wendy asked if Ron could advise when we should get a project manager. Holly explained Ron will be doing some project management for us. Deb asked if Ron is going to put together a timeline. He is, and he had also recommended the Planning Commission work on specific parts of the project. Deb offered to be part of the project management. Holly appreciated this. Ron does not anticipate this to be a strain on his budget.

Joel Fay was present. He is an abutting landowner. He requested permanent stone to better mark the property boundaries as part of the project scope.

## **CONSERVATION COMMISSION UPDATE**

Kirsten Tyler was present. Travis Rock and Kati Anderson were present at the last Westford Conservation Commission (WCC) meeting, but Kirsten feels they need to meet again before they make any decisions. Wendy and Pat attended the WCC meeting. They thought the Selectboard should bring the communication plan to the landowners. Pat volunteered to ask landowners about the communication plan and get their comments. The WCC had discussed doing maintenance checks on all trails. Bill asked if we are going to allow the Andersons to maintain the trail on their own, and are the other landowners going to have that option as well? Pat thinks so because we are waiting until the Supreme Court case on this matter is resolved. Wendy thinks we need to define what "maintenance" means in that context. We need to keep trails walkable. She does not consider Goodrich Trail walkable right now. Chris Cunningham, a member of the WCC, was present. He thinks that definition will be outlined. There is a difference between maintaining and improving. If they need to improve a trail to keep it walkable, that will be brought to the Selectboard. Ben noted that not all trails are equal, but he would welcome any draft to work on. Vicky Ross recalled that the Town Office made a list of landowners with property surrounding or abutting trails a few years ago when questions about the Library Passport Program came up. That list is available. Kirsten explained that anybody with land abutting a trail would be included in the communication for the draft.

## **Letter from Landowner**

Bill recused himself as he is an abutting landowner. Casey asked Kirsten if there was any updates regarding property access. Harmony reached out to the WCC to let them know that

an abutting landowner was interested in selling a piece of his property or doing a Boundary Line Adjustment. If the landowners decide to do that, it will not involve the town but could provide access. The WCC told the landowners about this option. The WCC is not moving forward with that right now. Jennifer Davey and David Fisk, landowners of the parcel, were online. They have not corresponded with that landowner but are very interested in doing that.

The Selectboard received a letter from Travis Rock and Marcie Ladden requesting the termination or resignation of Kirsten for trespassing to access the parcel being considered for donation. Kirsten responded during the last Selectboard meeting that they were acting on the word of the current landowners that they were given verbal permission by the Andersons, the previous owners of Travis's land. Travis attended the WCC meeting where WCC members apologized as they did not know and did not mean to trespass. Pat had approached Travis to ask if he would rescind the request and he chose not to. Jennifer and David Fisk sent an email stating they did not know the land had changed hands. David stated that his family purchased the landlocked parcel in 1961 and since then they have had a gentleman's agreement with the adjacent landowner. For decades they were allowed to walk across his field to get to their property. After that landowner sold part of that land and houses were built, they began accessing the property via Beaver Pond Road. They are disappointed that Kirsten has been blamed for this. They invited the town to the property and to have Kirsten be vilified for her volunteer actions with the WCC is unacceptable and unfortunate, in his opinion.

Casey feels the town cannot overlook the fact that we trespassed and were aware the property was posted. David recalled seeing signs that said, "You are being watched". He does not think that constitutes an official posting. Travis explained the land was posted on September 11th due to a different issue and signage went up that day. There are at least eight signs, and they are posted per statute. There is a "you are being watched" sign but this is to notify people of the security cameras on the property.

Vicky Ross commented that she lives adjoining Seymour Trail and Kirsten has been a point of contact. She has found Kirsten to be of the highest character and highly responsive. The WCC has helped them come to good outcomes. Vicky is also a volunteer as a Library Trustee. She notes that the town has a hard time finding volunteers. She feels terrible that Kirsten, who volunteers to do this big job, is being challenged in this way and made to suffer for what seems like an honest mistake. It would be sad to lose her in the role.

Bill Cleary was present as a member of the public. He believes an email from the Town Administrator warned the WCC that the property had changed hands. To say they do not know if it is posted is a stretch to him. Holly explained there is a statute that deals with the removal of WCC members that calls for a public hearing if the person would like one. She also mentioned the email she sent to Kirsten did not say the property had changed hands, it said one of the abutting property owners had posted his property. Kirsten had responded that they would investigate access options. Kirsten further clarified that she believed it was in reference to accessing the parcel if they received the donation.

Barb commented that she often rides horses across her neighbors' properties. She asks every year and does her due diligence in case land changes hands. She does not like the fact that people do not make an effort to reach out to landowners. She does not know Kirsten but believes officials of the town should make the extra effort to reach out.

Chris Cunningham stated that he is not a lawyer but believes landlocked landowners have a legal right to visit their property. He thinks a ROW needs to be present when you are landlocked. If it gets changed it is up to the town or landowner to make changes. It was David and Jennifer that made that decision, not Kirsten. He's not sure why she's in this conversation.

Elias Rosenblatt was present. He spoke for Kirsten and her character. She is a very clear communicator and would not obscure information to access property. The WCC has had conversations with Travis, and Elias felt the last WCC meeting went well. He thinks this was an unfortunate misstep, but Kirsten was acting in good faith. The WCC acknowledged the misstep.

Bree Drapa also spoke in support of Kirsten who has done a lot of work with the Library. Bree feels that nobody loves the forest more than Kirsten. She holds a PhD from UVM in forest science. She is a person of character. Bree was online for the meeting where the landowners brought this up and she felt the temperature in the room was hot. That is something the Selectboard could have moderated down. This is a volunteer to our community. Our town is run by very few paid employees and many volunteers. Bree feels Kirsten has been mistreated in this. The Selectboard is the boss of the volunteers, and it is nice to know your boss has your back. Right now, she does not know why people would want to volunteer for the town due to the temperature and lack of support. We need to think more about how we support each other.

Dale Rodgers was present and attended the WCC meeting. He felt at ease at the end of the meeting because he thought it was clearly resolved. He thought both parties had agreed that it was a mistake. It is surprising to hear a request for Kirsten's resignation. She is one of the hardest workers in town. He feels we need to work together and keep things neighborly.

Pat believed the last meeting did go off the rails. The Selectboard needs to maintain the situation and ask members of the public to speak to them instead of each other. Pat asked Kirsten if she wanted a public hearing. Kirsten did not know what the process would entail and asked for a chance to respond. Pat explained the public hearing would allow for both sides to be heard by the Selectboard before a decision is made. Kirsten wrote a letter to the Selectboard that explained what happened, the landowners of the parcel are present to back up her claims. She didn't know what else to say except that she has integrity, and she is not a liar. Wendy felt this conversation was like a mini hearing. They might be able to come to some agreement in executive session then discuss next steps. Casey thanked Kirsten for her time.

#### **ACCESS PERMIT & ROAD NAME REQUEST**

Keith and Shelly White on Plains Road requested an access permit and road name for their new subdivision. Bill was willing to make Kody Way the road name and to approve the access permit if Sean approves. Sean had not reviewed this yet; Holly explained the location and Harmony provided Sean with the map. Pat motioned to approve Kody Way and the access permit. Wendy seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

#### **PLOWING & SANDING BIDS REVIEW**

The board had decided to put out an RFP to alleviate the road crew's load this season. They received three bids. Sean explained we were looking at a winter with just two road crew members, but between writing the RFP and now, we have hired a third road crew member. Sean feels the bids are high. The board read the individual bids out loud. Casey defended the prices. They could use a lot of sand, which is the most expensive piece, and they need the required equipment. The bids are reasonable for what it would cost to do the work, but it is also high considering what we are budgeting for. Bill thought we should hold on to this information in case our new hire falls through.

#### **TOWN OFFICE FRONT PORCH & RAMP RFP**

Holly gave the Selectboard a draft to review prior to the meeting. Bill wondered why we are putting emphasis on landscaping. Holly stated there is current landscaping and aesthetics are important. There were no other objections from the board. Holly asked if we wanted to send

the bids out this fall and do the work in the spring, or put the bid out in the spring? The board felt that it was unlikely the work could happen this fall. Deb and Wendy also expressed a desire to budget for this. Holly clarified that there is money set aside for this work in the capital reserve. Casey fears we will not get many bidders for this due to timing. Pat motioned to approve as amended. Casey seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

#### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO WORK IN ROW: COMMON ROAD**

Jeff Hutchins, owner of Morgan Brook Farm and J Hutchins, Inc., is helping the Fleury's repair a culvert under their driveway and wanted permission in case he affects the ROW. Lisa Hallstrom was present as a representative of Morgan Brook. Wendy moved to approve the request to work in the ROW, Bill seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

#### **SET NOVEMBER SELECTBOARD SCHEDULE**

The board discussed their November Selectboard schedule. They moved a regularly scheduled Selectboard meeting to November 7<sup>th</sup> and November 21<sup>st</sup> to account for the fact a normal meeting would have fallen on Thanksgiving. They discussed potential budget workshops.

#### **BUDGET WORKSHOPS**

##### **Lister/Assessor**

Caroline Brown was present. If we can find a replacement for Caroline she would like to retire at the end of FY'25. The NEMRC appraiser spoke to Terry Sabens who is a grand list maintenance person. She had provided a budget for that work. It would come to about \$22,800 per year as an employee working 8 hours a week. (\$55 per hour). Holly had also reached out to NEMRC to see if they could take on the work but has not heard back. The Selectboard could also put out an open job posting. Holly and Caroline think that getting someone who knows the job is important as it takes a long time to learn this work. Bill asked how many people does Holly or Caroline think they would be interested in the job. Caroline explained it is difficult to find people.

##### **Historical Society**

Caroline Brown was present and provided the WHS budget request.

##### **Essex Rescue**

Coleen Ballard from Essex Rescue was present and provided Essex Rescue's budget request. They are asking for a 5.5% increase, for a per capita rate of \$19.56. The increase is the CPI increase they provide to employees every year. Westford's call volume went up 50% in the past year. They are seeing a 6-7% increase in call volume annually. They are still facing staffing issues. Colleen wants the rescue to be more self-sufficient. They are maxed on their call volume and already calls over to mutual aide. The cost for everything continues to go up, including call volume.

##### **Fairfax Rescue**

Michael Wheeler and Kathy Jochim from Fairfax Rescue were presented and provided their budget request. They brought Georgia into their service so they can level fund their budget request. We are also level funded for the next 3 years. Kathy commiserated with Colleen that volunteerism is down. They are now 70% volunteers. The expenses come from their advanced life support providers. Kathy also hosts classes which help maintain their volunteerism.

##### **Developmental Review Board**

Harmony Cism, Zoning Administrator, was present and provided the DRB's budget. They are requesting level funding.

### **Zoning Administrator**

Harmony presented her budget. There is an increase in the salary line now that Harmony is working full time. She also requested her education budget be increased. It is an overall decrease for the Planning and Zoning budget, but an increase in the Zoning side. Deb asked if Harmony thinks she'll need a part time assistant in the future. Yes, eventually she would.

### **Planning Commission**

George Lamphere was present and provided the Planning Commission budget. It is level funded.

### **Donations & Miscellaneous**

Bill went through the various Donations and Misc. Requests.

### **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**

#### **Selectboard Communication Suggestion**

A resident had suggested using an email list in conjunction with Front Porch Forum to communicate with residents. Pat thought this might cut down on miscommunication and misinformation being spread by non-town officials. Pat also thinks that many people ask questions of the Selectboard on FPF knowing we will not answer them. Pat and Wendy have both had people tell them they no longer use FPF. Holly will research some options.

#### **Essex High School Robotics Team Donation Request**

Max Drapa and Izzy Cady from the Essex High School Robotics Team were present to discuss their donation request. Westford makes up 70% of the Robotics Team at EHS. Deb asked how they would use the money. They would buy parts to build their robot for competition. Ben Bornstein spoke in support of robotics teams and the impact they have on students. Mark Drapa was present as support and mentor. He has been a volunteer for the Westford robotics program for the last 10 years. It is the premier program in the state of Vermont. They have 5 teams at the Westford school, including the same level as the high school for 7-8<sup>th</sup> graders. It is student driven. Pat made a motion to support at \$300 and to consider putting this into the budget for future years. Deb seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

#### **Campaign Sign Request**

Brenda Steady sent an email asking where she could or could not place campaign signs.

#### **Winterfest**

Carol Winfield asked for a \$1,250 donation for Winterfest. Wendy asked how much we had given in the past. We have not donated to Winterfest before. Pat thought it would be fair to support them like we do 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Turkey Trot, etc. Deb recommended \$250 like the other events. Deb made a motion to approve the \$250 donation for this year and seeing a budget request during the budget season going forward.

Wayne Brown thanked the Selectboard for their efforts on the public hearing for the 1705 vote.

Callie confirmed Voter Registration for the attendees of the Special Town Meeting.

The BRELLA Acceptance Letter was received.

**COMMUNICATION**

There were no communications.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Bill moved to find that premature public knowledge of matters relating to evaluation of a public official and property acquisition would put the town at significant disadvantage. Pat seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

At 9:40 p.m. Bill moved to enter executive session for matters relating to evaluation of a public official and property acquisition. Deb seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

At 10:27 p.m. Deb motioned to exit executive session. Casey Seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

No action was taken.

**ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 10:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cleary, Chair  
Selectboard

Callie Hamdy  
Minute Clerk

**GUEST LIST**

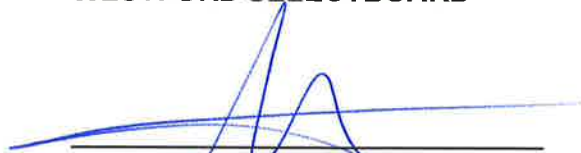
Dave Gauthier  
Ben Bornstein  
Colleen Ballard  
Dick Lavallee  
Kim Guidry  
Rebecca DaVanon  
Vicky Ross  
Heather Armata  
George Lamphere  
Kathy Jochim  
Keith White  
Elias Rosenblatt  
Chris Cunningham  
Max Drapa

Ira Allen  
Barb Peck  
Maureen Wilcox  
Sarah Pinto  
Dave Lavallee  
Mike Wheeler  
Travis Rock  
Lisa Halstrom  
Joel Fay  
Lynn Gauthier  
Peggy Rogers  
Dale Rogers  
Bree Drapa  
Izzy Cady

Harmony Cism  
Sheila Franz  
Tina Scanlon  
Carol Winfield  
Clayton Wilburn  
Lori Johnson  
Kirsten Tyler  
Martha Heath  
Jennifer Davey  
David Fisk  
Caroline Brown  
Alex White  
Mark Drapa


ADOPTED THIS 7<sup>th</sup> DAY OF NOVEMBER 2024.

**WESTFORD SELECTBOARD**




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William Cleary, Chair



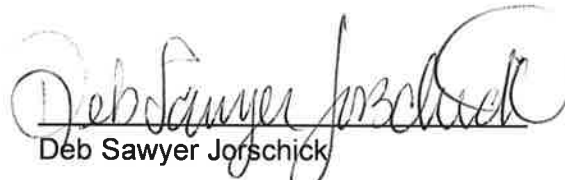
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Patrick Haller



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Casey Mathieu



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Deb Sawyer Jorschick

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Wendy Doane