

**SELECTBOARD MEETING
OCTOBER 23, 2025
Draft Minutes**

Present: Pat Haller
Julia Andrews
Deb Jorschick

Greg Barrows
Tommy O'Connor
Callie Hamdy

Guests: see attached.

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

Lori Johnson wanted to thank Dave Gauthier who got VTRANS out to clean the catch basins on the Common. She pointed out that VTRANS was here in the past week and cleaned out the culvert that goes under 128 from the Red Brick to the Common. They had also cleaned the line from there to the main exit of the Common drainage system and checked out the culvert between the Common and 1705. This brought up an ongoing issue about the stormwater issues surrounding the Common. She thinks this is something the town should investigate again.

MINUTES

D. Jorschick motioned to accept the October 9, 2025 minutes as amended. **J. Andrews** seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

BUDGET REQUESTS

Cemetery

Lynn Gauthier of the Cemetery Commission was present. They are in the process of restoring and repairing gravestones. They would like to be level funded at their previous allocation of \$9,000. They recently had trees removed in several cemeteries which was a significant expense. They want to reestablish their plan to erect a veterans monument which will require a lot of planning, money, time, and community support.

Brick Meeting House

Caroline Brown from the Brick Meeting House Society was present. They are requesting \$4,000 for fuel and electric costs.

Historical Society

C. Brown, also of the Historical Society was present. They are asking for \$3,500. They are also requesting \$800 to participate in the Vermont 250th Anniversary Celebration.

Development Review Board

Harmony Cism, Zoning Administrator and Planning Coordinator, was present. They are requesting a slight increase due to going over their last budget. This was due to a large site plan, an outlier that required a lot of back and forth with the town attorney.

Planning Commission

Max Tyler, Planning Commission chair, was present. They had increased the special project fund by \$1,000 due to anticipated public outreach costs related to 1705, Act 181 and Town Plan.

Essex Rescue

Colleen Ballard from Essex Rescue was present. They hired more staff to help staff their ambulance. Colleen had taken a deeper dive into the revenue stream and made adjustments to improve reimbursement rates. The call volume continues to go up; Westford is a very small % however. **J. Andrews** asked Colleen what she sees as drivers of increased call volume? **C. Ballard** noted that it is primarily due to the aging population, that in addition to failed government systems and the fall back being EMS systems. **D. Jorschick** asked Colleen if the recent addition of the program at CTE for emergency responders has been helpful for their staffing. They are involved and have some students coming over, but they also have their own training going on internally. Since they have changed their staffing model from volunteer to more career based they have retained staff more easily.

CUSI

There was nobody from CUSI present. They are requesting a contribution of \$4,428. It is based upon our percentage of population.

Listers

Terri Sabens, Assessor, was not present but had provided the Lister/Assessor office budget request. The department is requesting a \$865 increased due to the new software she uses. Otherwise, everything is a level funded request.

CCRPC UPDATE

Ben Bornstein, CCRPC Representative, was present. They have \$2,000 they had save to use on the mini grant for MERP which was not awarded to us. They should try to spend it and recognize some new volunteers for the fire department. They are working with the Library Director.

ROAD SCHEDULE

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, was not present. **P. Haller** went over the Road Schedule from October 10, 2025 to October 23, 2025.

REVIEW FY'26 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT

G. Barrows, Treasurer, went over the FY'26 Highway Budget Status Report.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING GRANT REVIEW/SIGNATURE

This is regarding a Municipal Planning Grant led by the Planning Commission due at the end of this month. **Max Tyler** from the Planning Commission was present. What is being written in draft form is three studies: 1.) Does Westford need additional municipal office space and how might the existing space be optimized? 2.) Feasibility study regarding the use of 1705 upgraded to commercial office space to house either some or all office needs. 3.) If it is

additional office space but we still plan to use the current town office what is the impact of that on work flow?

P. Haller thanked Max and Harmony for their hard work in such a short time. It is excellent in his book and will help the board inform the public on the options they have with 1705. **D. Jorschick** thought the board needed to be careful about being transparent with residents about this subject especially as more information comes forward.

BANNER POLICY DISCUSSION

This had come out of the new Veteran Banner request. **T. O'Connor** had put together a new policy with assistance from the Town Lawyer. It also includes the permission from Green Mountain Power to use their poles for the banners.

P. Haller questioned what happened when a banner is removed. He thinks it should be returned to who requested the banner put up. **T. O'Connor** noted that if Green Mountain Power has to do anything to the pole they bring it to the town until it can be dealt by the person who requested it or whoever sponsored it. **P. Haller** motioned to adopt the Veterans Banner Policy. **J. Andrews** seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

PUBLIC INDECENCY DISCUSSION

Something we had learned in discussions with Milton regarding a person who appeared at their town forest naked is that the individual likes to go to places that do not have public indecency policies. **T. O'Connor** had provided two examples of public indecency policies as a starting point for the board to create their own policy. **J. Andrews** felt the example from Brattleboro was more cut and dry. She did consider these are in much bigger towns that have professional police forces of that nature. She does not want to, as a board member, be called to serve a naked person a fine. She thinks we have to think through practically what we can do to enforce this ordinance, but she does feel the ordinance is a good idea. **P. Haller** thinks at the very least we have a frame work for what an enforcement officer, which we could define as the sheriff, could do. We may not be able to provide a timely response, but at the very least we could provide something and would have record of an ordinance. It could also be posted on the town forest/trails. **T. O'Connor** will call the sheriff to discuss.

TRAFFIC CONTROL STUDY – COVEY RD/OLD NUMBER 11 ROAD

We had had some recommendations from CCRPC. **P. Haller** wanted to know what we do next as a board. Does this mean we need a four way stop sign there? State law would not allow us to put stop signs without the study there. In addition to doing some clearing we might consider doing so. **J. Andrews** thought Sean should weigh in, although did not anticipate anything unusual.

Dave Lavalie was present. He lives on Old Number 11. He would caution a four way stop sign and instead suggested a three way stop because of the grade of the slope up the hill. He worried that if stopped people would not be able to get started again up the hill, especially in the winter. **P. Haller** shared the study with the meeting that suggested the site line deficiency in the area, which is why they were recommending a four way stop. **M. Tyler** echoed what Dave said regarding the slope of the hill. **J. Andrews** would like to get clarity if we must do the

work as described in the study or if they have leeway to do it a little differently. **P. Haller** asked **T. O'Connor** to work with CCRPC to find any of the previous studies and recommendations.

SCHOOL REDISTRICTING TASK FORCE CONVERSATION

After the public forum we had held in September we had received a few recommendations from residents in drafting a letter to the Redistricting Task Force. **J. Andrews** thought initially it was our hope the stars would align, and we had come out of the forum knowing what we would want to recommend. **J. Andrews** did not feel like we got to that level of agreement. We spent a lot of time understanding Act 73, which was valuable. We spent a lot of time listening to people not from Westford talk about Westford and as a result she does not think we got to a point where we could make a specific ask to the Task Force. Absent that she thinks they could consider writing a letter to the Task Force reminding them that the vast majority of schools in the state are rural and it will be very important in their work not to leave rural communities behind. She thinks this would be helpful, safe, and represent the community well. She would also invite people to add to that.

The rest of the board agreed. **D. Jorschick** thinks taking a stance on us being rural and going in that direction is something that will be very positive for the Task Force to hear. She would also put in that she wishes they would extend the deadline because she thinks the whole process is happening too quickly when it involves such intricate pieces. **P. Haller** thought there was not a loud compelling direction except to retain local control in some way. He knows there's sentiment for leaving EWSD because we felt like the town lost local control and the nervousness surrounding that. It seems clear to him the state is trying to find ways to prevent us from having local control by creating these large districts. This is because they do not want the small communities to have something to say about closing a small school, somebody else has made the decision to close. He thinks we should draft a letter with strong points about how important local schools are for rural communities and that we would appreciate rural schools having a strong voice in the disposition of the school district they are in.

J. Andrews thinks in Act 73 moving from Essex Junction and Essex Town having the lion's share of the votes there is a move towards precincts so maybe rural Essex and Westford would be one. But the other thing in when we talk about local control what most people think of having control of the school budget. Act 73 eliminates that ability so there would not be any local control under that definition.

P. Haller proposed that a board member volunteer to draft a letter. They could even ask Kirsten Tyler to assist as she was part of the Westford School Advocacy group. **J. Andrews** would be willing in Kirsten's absence work with Kirsten to draft something together so that way the message remains broad for the community. The task force will be presenting their maps in December, so we need to get this to them prior to that. **P. Haller** wanted the letter drafted by the next Selectboard meeting.

Carol Winfield was present. She believes Pat was spot on. The primary concern of most residents, Carol has discussed this with when working on Westford School Advocacy is the loss of the school and that is what is meant by local control. They are primarily worried that they will take children out of the Westford School and close it without Westford's permission. She thinks people mostly understand they have lost control of the budget process, but the

issue of the potential closure of the school without the community affected has been a consistent conversation with other rural towns.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER MEETING SCHEDULE

November/December meetings fall during Holidays (Thanksgiving and Christmas respectfully). The board discussed alternative meeting dates to replace those meetings. The board agreed on **November 13th**, **December 4th** and **December 18th** respectively.

REVIEW FY'26 GENERAL FUND BUDGET STATUS REPORT

G. Barrows, Treasurer, went over the FY'26 General Fund Budget Status Report.

REVIEW & APPROVE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & PAYROLL WARRANTS

The Selectboard reviewed and approved the accounts payable and payroll warrants.

CORRESPONDENCE

Beaver Deceivers

We had asked Skip at Beaver Deceivers for the dimension of the Deceivers and how far out of the right of way it would go. Skip could not provide exact dimensions, but the device would go out of the right of way. **P. Haller** suggested our next step would be contacting the landowner in question. **C. Winfield** was present and read the email out loud. She suggested reaching out to other towns to see what other towns have done regarding landowner permission.

Sanctuary Road Mailboxes

This had been brought up in March of this year. Because the resident in question and Road Foreman were not present. **P. Haller** would prefer to discuss this at the next meeting.

COMMUNICATION

Plains Road closure will be communicated.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

P. Haller moved that premature public knowledge that we are about to discuss will put the town at a significant disadvantage. **J. Andrews** seconded. **P. Haller** motioned to go into executive session and to invite Tommy O'Conner to join. **D. Jorschick** seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pat Haller
Selectboard Vice-Chair

Callie Hamdy
Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

Ben Bornstein
Dave Gauthier
Lynn Gauthier
Caroline Brown
Dick Lavallee
Colleen Ballard (Essex Rescue)
Dave Lavallee
Carol Winfield
Barb Peck
Lori Johnson
Harmony Cism
Max Tyler