TOWN OF Westford

August 8th, 2026

Selectboard Retreat Minutes

1) Call to Order –

P. Haller called the meeting to order at 8:03AM

a. Roll Call-

Tommy O'Connor – Town Administrator
Pat Haller – Selectboard
Julia Andrews – Selectboard
Casey Mathieu – Selectboard
Nick Nichols (online) – Selectboard
Lori Johnson - Resident
Lee McClenny - Resident
Vicky Ross (online) - Resident

b. Changes to the Agenda-

There were no changes to the agenda

c. Structure of Board Retreat

P. Haller shared the structure of the retreat. The meeting will have a long discussion on budget and IT. He described that usual Selectboard meetings have public comment options for each agenda item. P. Haller wants to continue that by allowing comments prior to an item being discussed. Once the item is being discussed by the board, there will be no more public comment until the board has completed the discussion. At such time there will be more time allocated for public comment.

d. Public Comment (items not on the agenda)

Lori Johnson was present. She stated that she was very glad that the Town hired a new treasurer, and wanted to welcome her. She also suggested that in order to make her as successful as possible the Selectboard look to hire an expert to assist in the transition. She would also like to see the Town improve its budget process and make it smoother this next cycle. She stated that she heard discussions around looking into working with Carl [Rogers] or Ron [Rojenski]. She wishes to encourage that task.

Vicky Ross was present online and wanted to second the statement made by L. Johnson. She mentioned that Lori and her have chatted about this topic before. She mentions that Carl is still in the game and that Ron is also well equipped to support in these types of matters alongside his business partner/wife. V. Ross states that Ron's wife is also a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and handles accounting engagement. V. Ross says looking forward to a budget season that it would be very helpful to get an assessment on the processes and to train the new Treasurer. She encourages the Selectboard to explore that set of options.

L. McClenny was present and wanted to add to the conversation. He shared that during his time on the Selectboard that the budget was always the most difficult thing. He further stated that the intellectual difficulty and complexity of the budget along with repercussions made it a difficult task. He further stated that the actions were to provide the best services while also factoring in the cost to the taxpayer. He mentioned that a large extent of the tax rate also comes from the school board through the educational tax rate. He mentioned that he remembered struggling with the process each year. He said that having competent support throughout the process is crucial. He feels that Westford is small but the sums of money are very large and it needs to be managed very carefully. He is interested in learning more about the Capital Reserve plan and thinks it's a fantastic idea. With a new Treasurer coming on board he wonders if the Town should look into moving from a cash accrual system to a different style. He said that previous Selectboards looked into that potential but it did not take effect.

P. Haller agreed with all the sentiments shared by the members of the public and that they have felt behind the eight-ball last year. He mentions that the discussion that is happening today will help.

J. Andrews interjected a clarification on comments made by L. McClenny that taxes are not set in Montpelier. Montpelier is responsible for funding the voter approved budget. L. McClenny agrees with the comment but further described that residents along with town boards and school boards have their inputs and it goes away and then they get told their tax rates.

2) Personnel Decision

a. T. O'Connor shared that the Town received one application and met with the applicant over phone and in-person. The two interviews mimicked the process of hiring for other roles. The candidate visited the Town offices and met with staff and received information about Westford and the role they would play going forward, if offered the position. T. O'Connor then recommended Molly Mashtare be offered the role of Assessor for the Town of Westford.

J. Andrews made a motion to appoint M. Mashtare as the Town Assessor

D. Jorschick seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 5-0

3) Retreat Items

a. Capital Reserve

P. Haller shared that he learned that the Town should be working on a Capital Budget Plan (narrative) and operate a Capital Budget that is voted upon by the residents. The Planning Commission is charged with handling these items. P. Haller asked L. McClenny if he had any recollection of the creation of such plan via the Planning Commission. L. McClenny stated for the record, no he was not aware of this and that he remembers that Ron [Rojenski] and Carl [Rogers] helped set up the current version that is in use.

The board walked through the Town website to review the Capital Plans that are located there.

D. Jorschick remembers her time during transition from the previous Town Clerk and Town Administrator that the task was given to Carl Rogers to set up and implement. V. Ross agreed with D. Jorschick.

P. Haller discussed that during the previous budget preparation the board missed moving reserve funds that were earmarked by the library. His suggestion was to put $5,950 into reserves during the next cycle. J. Andrews suggested that funding can also be bumped back one year. The new suggestion would be:

FY 28 $5,950
FY 29 $3,950
FY 30 $3,950
FY 31 $1,100

J. Andrews looked over the Fire Departments Reserve numbers. She would like to learn more about the specific needs of the Department. C. Mathieu mentioned that several pieces of equipment are aging out. He further suggested that the town review the possibility of joining with another town to better support the department. D. Jorschick agrees. The board has agreed to ask the department to attend an upcoming meeting with numbers in regards to:

- call volume
- mutual aid calls
- current coverage needs
- calls that are not responded to

P. Haller is going to invite the Fire Department to a meeting in the near future.

T. O'Connor points out in the state statute there is a provision allowing for an appointed committee to curate the Capital Program and assist directly the Planning Commission's work on Capital projects. The remaining steps would not change as the document would be presented to the Selectboard and then to the residents.

J. Andrews feels that the Road Foreman needs to be on such a committee. She asks for a better understanding of the equipment currently owned and its current status. C. Mathieu did a brief rundown of his understanding of the current operational status of machinery.

The board walked through a Budget Status Report in relation to each reserve fund.

T. O’Connor discussed that the office staff will need to improve the tracking that happens through the internal systems as those have been lacking and are not able to provide a clear image of status.

The board also walked through the administration section. D. Jorschick mentioned that some of the items are actually more day-to-day and should be reflected in the budget process and not the Capital budget. Many of these items should be put into the maintenance budget.

The board also wants to have the Town Clerk work on a plan to discuss needs for documents over the next 10 years. The discussion is to review what space would need to be added and is there any possibility for off-site storage items.

V. Ross stated a couple of thoughts. She mentioned the new routine for next cycle but wanted to make sure the board is going to catch everything up for the current cycle. She would like to see the reports updated prior to sitting down to create the next budget.

P. Haller says yes and that the task has been assigned to T. O’Connor.

V. Ross mentioned that her mention in the chat is that the process should be to put money into reserves for items that exceed $5,000 and that items that fall below that threshold should be placed into the general budget process. She further shared that she agrees with J. Andrews on moving the library reserve plan as described earlier versus trying to “double” fund in this next cycle. V. Ross did mention that it would be wise to consult with the auditors to ensure that doing so is an acceptable process.

L. Johnson wanted to summarize the discussion that just happened. The first point was getting updated information of what is actually needed in each department and to update the paperwork as specified. P. Haller agreed but discussed that there are two processes as well. One is to update for immediate use, and the other plan is to update the long-term outlook. The second point is that the Town will update each line item to reflect currently how much is available to use. J. Andrews further shared that the Planning Commission seems to have a large task already and that adding the budget would possible “break the camels back”. T. O’Connor says that a vote to create the Capital Budget Committee would assist in the process of updating the Capital Program and then that committee supports the Planning Commission.

D. Jorschick mentioned her concerns about proper accounting procedures as it pertains to Capital Reserves. N. Nichols agrees that adding Carl to the process is a good idea, just that keeping in mind the current budget and not wanting to over spend from the current budget. V. Ross shared Carl’s background as a retired Town Manager from Barre and is well versed in Capital Budgets.

L. McClenny brought back the planning around the Fire Department. He mentions it is similar to a landmine and that it will be a difficult task. The historic trend is that volunteer based services are dwindling. He also reminded the board that the Fire Department is not under the direct supervision of the town and is responsible to the Secretary of State's office.

b. IT Needs

The board reviewed the current contract with our IT service provider and an older proposal. The conversation was around whether or not to end the current contract and sign a new one. The board agreed to look into the current contract. The main conversation was around breach of contract, improvement of services, and consequences of changing.

The board further looked into items that would improve functionality of the office. The items discussed were payroll services that allow employees to use digital clock-in and clock out process. The same software also provides more up-to-date and accurate accrual rates. The board also looked at beginning to transfer away from paper checks for vendors and access the ACH payment process.

Another topic of discussion was asking T. O'Connor to research software platforms that perform the same functions as the New England Municipal Research Center platform but may provide higher quality outputs for the Town of Westford.

P. Haller motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:44 AM

J. Andrews seconded the motion, it passed unanimously.