

SELECTBOARD MEETING
August 13, 2026
Draft Minutes

Present: Pat Haller
Julia Andrews
Casey Mathieu
Nick Nichols

Callie Hamdy
Tommy O'Connor
Abby O'Neil
Sean Cushing

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

Resident Discussion on Current Land Taxes removed, added loan paperwork for the new 2026 western Star Dump Truck.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Items Not on the Agenda

Dave Gauthier was present and questioned about the four dead trees on Common Road. They have been dead for some time, and he was concerned they would fall into the road. He wanted to know when and/or if they were coming down. Pat clarified this is the first time the trees have been discussed and suggested we contact the Fluerys as the trees are on their property, but close to the power lines.

MINUTES

P. Haller moved to approve the July 23, 2026 minutes as written. J. Andrews seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

CCRPC UPDATE

Ben Bornstein, CCRPC Representative, was present. The Land Use Review Board approved Westford's request for a less than the full amount of Tier 1B. Kirsten Tyler has been working with him on the Municipal Energy Resiliency Program and use of the remaining funds. They will be submitting a report this week and for forward with helping the Conservation Commission create educational programs with an energy resiliency component to them. They've been interacting with the CCRPC in respect to 1705. They will be meeting early next week.

ROAD SCHEDULE

Sean Cushing, Road Foreman, was present and went over the road schedule from July 25, 2026 to August 13, 2026.

FY'27 HIGHWAY BUDGET STATUS REPORT

T. O'Connor went over the FY'27 Highway Budget Status Report. The new Treasurer, Abby O'Neil, was present as well.

TOWN HIGHWAY TRUCK LOAN PAPERWORK

Community Bank is who we've worked with recently, they came back with the strongest opportunity to have reasonable payments. T. O'Connor had the loan paperwork present for the Selectboard to sign. After, the Treasurer and Town Clerk will finalize the document. P. Haller motioned to approve. C. Mathieu seconded. Motion passed 4-0. J. Andrews moved to accept the loan for Community Bank. N. Nichols seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

TREASURER FY'27 GENERAL FUND BUDGET STATUS REPORT

T. O'Connor and A. O'Neil went over the FY'27 General Fund Budget Status Report.

REVIEW AND APPROVE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AND PAYROLL WARRANTS

The Selectboard went over the Accounts Payable and Payroll Warrants.

EMPLOYEE REVIEW UPDATES

S. Cushing is conducting and finishing reviews for the road crew members. T. O'Connor conducted Sean's review. Maria and MJ's have also been done. DRB and PC have met in regards to Harmony and they have gotten a reminder to send it back. The Selectboard members are responsible for conducting a review of Tommy and a review of the reviews Tommy does of the employees.

P. Haller is hoping to use the same form Tommy has used for the employees. He asked the other Selectboard member's opinions on the process. J. Andrews thought the board is all pretty busy right now and all the members doing one task separately seems like a lot of work. She wondered if one or two people take the lead. P. Haller clarified that's how it was done the previous year. J. Andrews volunteered Deb Jorschick because she felt she had a good eye for something like that. P. Haller felt he should also be one of the reviewers because he was chair. After they complete the review they will share it with the rest of the board in an executive session.

ACCESS PERMIT APPROVAL – REPLACEMENT PERMIT

Last year the Selectboard had approved an access permit for a property at the end of Osgood Hill Road. Along the way H. Cism had misplaced the paperwork. S. Cushing had looked at it and approved it, H. Cism had provided a replacement application for approval. J. Andrews moved to approve the access permit. N. Nichols seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

DRB FEE WAIVER REQUEST – SKETCH PLAN REVIEW

A resident had gone through sketch plan reviews last July and they had not gone to the next DRB step in time and has to start at the beginning again with a new Sketch Plan Review. He is requesting a waiver of the fee since he has already paid it previously. In the past the board had approved similar requests. J. Andrews asked if H. Cism senses if this person has made progress towards getting the subdivision nailed down? H. Cism has talked to the surveyor a lot. He has all the steps laid out and once he finishes sketch plan review he'll have another calendar year to proceed. J. Andrews moved to waive the DRB fee for Allen Reynolds Jr. N. Nichols seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

Harmony Cism, Zoning Administrator was present and gave the Zoning Administrator's report. She has noticed an increase in the number of permits from last year. The board and Harmony discussed several zoning violations and how to best proceed. They also discussed the outcome of the Emerald Ash Borer Training and next steps.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

Tommy O'Connor, Town Administrator, was present and gave the Town Administrator's report.

TOWN FACEBOOK PAGE SOFT LAUNCH

There's been some question and ideas about having a town Facebook page as another form of communication. Tommy explained there was a lot of nuance in creating the page, it has softly launched. Information from the town and town entities will be shared. Recreation has also relaunched their page. They hope is to treat the Town page similar to Front Porch Forum where it is not required to post there, but we will try our best to post there to increase communication. J. Andrews had concerns about it becoming a vitriolic dumpster fire as Facebook can sometimes be. One way to handle that would be to shut comments off. She thinks we need a social media policy for employees as well. T. O'Connor noted that each individual post has to be edited to be non-comment, which is why he soft launched the page, so he knew how to do that before proceeding. P. Haller agreed that if we have a page it must be no comments and just to get information out. N. Nichols noted that in many places of employment, managing social media is a job in itself.

INVASIVE SPECIES DISCUSSION- JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Kirsten Tyler of the Westford Conservation Commission (WCC) had let the board know a few meetings ago about some work they wanted to do along some of the town's trails in regards to invasive Japanese Knotweed. K. Tyler was present to update about that. She asked if the Selectboard would give the WCC permission to lead the effort of removal of the invasive knotweed on 1705. They included 1705 in their quote from the invasive species specialists because it was town property. She was inquiring about adding 1705 to that work plan. The WCC has budgeted for this year \$1400 for invasive species removal out of their budget. They would be requesting \$600 from the Selectboard to cover the rest of the cost. J. Andrews thinks putting it off is a bad idea because it will cost more to remove it the longer it goes. C. Mathieu asked if surrounding properties from 1705 also have knotweed. If we get rid of it, will it come back? K. Tyler thinks no matter what we do it will be a problem. We have a significant amount, but not as bad as some other towns. The patch we have at 1705 is quite large and if we don't deal with it now it will only get worse. It will be an annual or bi-annual treatment work plan that will have to happen because of how pervasive the plant is. K. Tyler thinks the best way to deal with it is to do so as early as possible and expects each subsequent clean up to be easier once we get past this initial point.

Lori Johnson was present. She thanked Kirsten for the amount of work she's done. She wanted to emphasize some of what Kirsten had said, namely that this would be an ongoing issue to address. She thinks it's something the board should keep that in mind. Additionally, there's knotweed on other town property such as on Brookside in the ROW. If we're going to treat 1705 and the school trails, what's going to be the end point of treatment and how much are we going to treat around town for the other patches? She thinks it's going to be a large

expense. C. Mathieu wondered if there was any grant that could help us. P. Haller is of the opinion that any invasive species in the ROW is the responsibility of the property owner because it is their property so he's not looking to control knotweed in all the ROWs. J. Andrews thinks we also need to consider regarding 1705, our ultimate aim on that property is to make significant changes such as a wastewater system etc. If we leave it unchecked we will disturb it and then be further doing that work later, knotweed is also terrible for wastewater systems, leach fields etc. An investment now is a good idea. She thinks the board would look to the WCC and budget time to be thinking about adding this item to their yearly budget request. T. O'Connor indicated some areas in the budget we are expecting excess funds we could pull from, such as Mowing.

Kim Guidry was present. She hears that goats do a nice number on knotweed and suggested using goats for control. N. Nichols noted you can hire goat herds to weed and clear areas.

P. Haller moved to authorize the WCC to use their \$1400 towards the \$2095 bid from Vermont Invasive Plant Control and for us to also fund the additional \$600 to meet the total cost. J. Andrews seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

POTENTIAL SEASONAL TRAIL CLOSURE (GOODRICH, COVEY, SCHULTZ, SEYMOUR)

James Hazen was requesting the Selectboard close the legal trails during hunting season, Oct 1 – Dec 14. This would not be the Misty Meadows or Maple Shade trail systems but trails that cross private lands. The town had quite a bit of correspondence from residents regarding this. C. Mathieu asked P. Haller what the timeline on the trail maintenance document was. P. Haller anticipates getting a draft to the next Selectboard meeting, but that only involves maintenance. Initially this document had contained many of the desires of the abutting landowners that was not maintenance related such as no hiking in the middle of the night, having dogs on leash as opposed to "verbally controlled or on leash" as well as possible closing trails during hunting season. Pat had come to the conclusion that those items in the Trail Ordinance and Dog Ordinance instead of the trail maintenance guidelines. T. O'Connor had already begun working on integrating those items into the ordinances upon the Selectboard's request for review.

J. Andrews asked if we are now just currently talking about closure for hunting season tonight? That was true. P. Haller noted this came up last year and that board had agreed to it unanimously. Most of what the town is trying to do with the maintenance policy is trying to show goodwill to our neighbors. The Town has a Right of Way (ROW), but we also need to be mindful of the properties those cross and to address things in a neighborly fashion. P. Haller suggested because we're not passing an ordinance that it cannot be permanent this time and suggested a temporary closure for this year only until it is brought up for review in an ordinance. He thinks that closing the trails for hunting season is a good effort. He didn't hear complaints last time it was closed but did hear from the residents with trail across their lands that they were appreciative, and they felt it was a great step forward.

C. Mathieu said there seems to be increased use in the trails when discussed. Opening day hunting season there's been a crowd of people going through there, which is what triggers these discussions. The town needs to be neighborly, most of these landowners are hunters. There's a lot of back history to it. J. Andrews sees both sides and came with an open mind. For residents, is it people using the trails to not access hunting, they're just using the trails for

a theoretically to curb people from hunting? One of the landowners indicated that's what it felt like to them. P. Haller noted people are using the trails, in the recent past whenever we're talking about hunting season it sparks people to go check out that trail. He thinks there might be some speculation of trail use to curb hunting, but we can't know if that's really happening. What they do see is when they closed it last year they didn't have residents saying, 'what you closed it??' etc. He also said the town hasn't been maintaining the trails because of the in progress maintenance document. So, use is currently down. T. O'Conner clarified that the closure would only be for general public/recreational use and would have no bearing on the individuals who need to use the trail to access their trails and have legal access across the trails for that use.

Marilyn Thomas was present. She asked what's the reasoning for closing the trail for hunting season? P. Haller believes it is to offer a neighborly gesture for the land owners who hunt on their properties that have town trails through them. From his understanding, when the trails are open to the public not only does it disturbs the direct hunt, but the animals stay away from those properties. M. Thomas understands hunting; she doesn't understand how somebody said safety. Milton Town Forest isn't closed during hunting season and hunting is allowed there. Most people are aware during hunting season you don't go out opening season and ending season, mornings and evenings. She doesn't understand why it's a big deal. The landowners bought those properties knowing public trails go through those properties and people use it on a regular basis and always have. A lawsuit has already been settled saying it's a ROW, but it is still the town's. The trails are dear to her heart, and she hates to lose them. Ken Tardie was present. The town spent \$30,000 keeping Schultz trail open to the public and now the new owners are trying to close it again? He's a hunter and he's hunted off Goodrich and Schultz before the previous owners were fighting about it. He's had people drive by him on ATV and it never bothered the deer at all.

Kirsten Tyler was present. She saw the email to the SB requesting the trail closure during hunting season. She'd prepared a statement which she read aloud: She was speaking for herself and not WCC. She respectfully opposed imposing a seasonal closure on the Goodrich, Covey, Schultz, or Seymour Trails. These four trails are not informal paths; they are legal trails and public ROW that existed before the current requesting landowners acquired their properties. They were roads back in the 1800s. Land crossed by a legal trail is owned subject to the public's established right of passage. That right should not have to be renegotiated whenever a landowner objects to trail use. The Town should listen respectfully to landowner concerns, but it must also protect the public interest. If one request is enough to close a ROW, even temporarily, it creates a precedent for similar requests based on other hunting seasons, privacy, dogs, noise, or simply a preference for less public use. One by one, these requests can gradually erode public access one exception and one season at a time. Westford's adopted policies point in the opposite direction. The Trails Ordinance says trails should remain open for public use and prohibits obstructions that hinder or prevent public travel. The land-use regulations reinforce that principle. They prohibit residential fences and walls from obstructing a public ROWs. They also urge any development to connect and extend existing trails, preserve pedestrian access through new subdivisions, and avoid interfering with access to public recreational areas. Our policies in Westford have been to preserve the continuity of public access, not narrow it. The Trail Use Guidelines are also clear: Westford trails are public and open to all. During hunting season, the established guidance is be aware, leash dogs, and wear orange. The Town Plan also reinforces

this, identifying Westford's legal trails as public ROWs that were once public roads connecting Westford with neighboring towns. It records that when the Town attempted to discontinue them in 1973, the Superior Court found that they had been discontinued in error and required their reestablishment as legal trails. The Town Plan calls for Westford to continue the use and conservation of public trails, improve access and connectivity, and promote responsible trail use through education.

Kirsten thinks it would be a good idea to come up with a compromise. The SB can post hunting-season notifications on the website, WCC can post hunting season signs on kiosks that include the same message as we use in Maple Shade: be aware, wear orange, and leash, and WCC can add high-vis vests at all trails, like we do at Maple Shade. She doesn't think that closure should become the default response to a landowner's request. Public ROWs should remain public.

Jim Anderson was present. He thinks the landowners are under no responsibility to accommodate the towns people. He thinks the trails are forced upon the land owners. He thinks they are invasive to people's property and doesn't just include the boundary of the paths.

Heidi Tardie was present and asked for clarification for what Jim was saying about property owners "granting use", she thought that was untrue. The ROW is the town's legal right of way. Her and Ken live on Machia Hill Road and have lived there for a long time. Their property is close to the trail. They walk and ride horses on them. She's confused on why she would be denied her right to walk on a public trail during hunting season. She would put orange on, and the question is if you're good neighbors what's next are you going to close driving on Machia Hill to everybody that doesn't live on Machia Hill Road? Her and Ken have problems with people coming on their property when its posted. So why do the trail abutting land owners get special treatment when they also have issues with their property? She finds this whole thing very weird. Hunting season is inherently dangerous, but on the other hand it's a right for the people. You don't buy property on a public trail and want to close it after. It wasn't a secret; you can find the lawsuit. Don't buy the property if the trail bothers you. Per the lawsuit the trail was required to be disclosed to them when they purchased the property.

Carol Winfield was present. She reiterated the points from Heidi and Marilyn. They are legal ROWs. It was ratified by the superior court in the 1970s and there's a procedure that needs to be followed to reclassify a public trail before it can be true. The speculation to the motivation of walkers on the trails is totally unsubstantiated and irresponsible to throw out in her opinion. The idea that the trail is not just a narrow trail is not the issue at hand and is irrelevant tonight. She agrees about being neighborly, but she doesn't think it is neighborly to everybody else in town that wants to use the public trails because people that recently came to town bought land on a public trail and then turn around and don't like that there's a public trail. She sympathizes with them, but the public trails were disclosed. Anybody who has been in Vermont more than a few months knows about hunting season and a lot of residents recreate outside year round. Whose going to limit access to the trail for some other reason next?

Dave Lavallee was present. He echoed what was said. They're public trails, just because its hunting season is a slippery slope and it's a public area you should be able to walk through. We shouldn't be closing them down at the whim of a few people. Lori Johnson was present.

She agrees. Why are we closing the trails for the request of just a couple being neighborly to them. What about everybody else? They're disenfranchising the rest of the town and people should be able to make their own decision on if they want to go on the trails or not. Barb Peck had written indicating there is state statute that the SB cannot close the trail without following lengthy legal procedure. Lori thought we should look into that and consider the other people in town. We're being unneighborly to 2 but what about the other 1,998?

N. Nichols asked if there's any information on what Lori had brought up re: Barb and state statute. J. Andrews had the statute referenced pulled up. It is part of a misc. transportation bill. The only thing she finds in there is that the town has the right to maintain legal trails (but not any infrastructure around it). She doesn't see anything about a legal process. T. O'Connor had testified on that bill. Closures have to be defined. Mud season, for example, is very ambiguous. Closures can be done for protection on an environmental level. The town has the legal standing. J. Andrews notes that this is 57 page bill and she is not a lawyer. P. Haller noted that if they closed the trail they would empower the town administrator to find out what legal steps we must take to do such a closure.

Ben Bornstein was present. He noted the actual ask is a permanent closure of the trails during hunting season with no end date. He would appreciate that clarified. A permanent closure is an encumbrance. There is a reference that raises concerns about safety and that causes him to be concerns because this is his driveway to access his property. If there's a safety concern for all of the public there's a legitimate safety concern for him and his family. They talk about neighborliness, but he's been available. He may not live in Westford, but he's incredibly involved in Westford itself and has been a diligent steward of the land for over 65 years. He's not just a landowner and he finds that insulting. In the past he has granted access to his property to one of the requesting landowners for the purpose of hunting, such as tracking an injured deer they were unable to take down amongst other requests. He's not opposed for the sake of being opposed, but he would like engagement and consultation. He was not told about this ahead of time and it impacts him. He's tried to be a team player but a permanent closure and only leaving him and his family subject to those safety concerns is not very neighborly. He's gone through 3 final court decisions regarding his right of access and egress for all purposes. To create an encumbrance, he's not open to the suggestion they're less than because somebody built a house. He doesn't feel that's very nice. The whole idea of the trail maintenance policy was open scope and wasn't meant to exclude. All the trails through private property are different from each other for a blanket decision. P. Haller disagreed that it's an adverse encumbrance.

James Hazen was present. Ben's been a good neighbor, and it has nothing to do with that. He thanked Ben for his stewardship. In his opinion if the town wants to be neighborly, recreation is a big part of why he bought his land and it's important to him. The amount of people walking the trails is borderline harassment in his opinion. He's not going to mow his lawn when somebody has a family dinner. Nobody should go for a walk when its hunting season there's plenty of places to walk in Vermont. He understands the precedent it sets.

Kati Anderson was present. She had no idea about hunting until she met Jim. She is appreciative of people that understand it but there's a lot of people that don't. She counts of venison meat for her family. The purpose of the temporary trail closure would be twofold:

safety yes but minimizing the number of domestic animals of the trail decreases the risk for an accident. Off leash dogs is a big issue for her. The number of people that come to her property on hunting season when the foliage is not that nice makes it hard to not see it as a purposeful process to interrupt hunting. She appreciates everybody who mentioned that they should have known about the trail when they bought the property. They did know and it was not a surprise. They were surprised by the harassment they've experienced. They keep their property posted, but they still have hunters looking to access their property. They didn't reach out to Ben because he hadn't come forward. They have had other neighbors expressing being thankful for the lack of hunters on the road.

P. Haller disagreed with Ben in regards that closing trails is an encumbrance on his ROW. He doesn't think it's an encumbrance any more than our lack of maintenance as well as how do we know how far one might go in suggesting they can't access their trail because of risk because of what others legally can do. He respects and understands the viewpoint but doesn't think the town can be put in a position of indicating what is the perceived risk and try to govern a perceived risk on things we do not have control of such as hunting. He suggested that if that was the logic they could turn the logic to the landowners themselves, but that wouldn't be correct either. They can't have a subjective rule, where when somebody feels they're not at risk because of legal activity that we can't close our trails. P. Haller was still in favor of doing a temporary trail closure but doesn't think there should be any permanent closure of the trails. P. Haller motioned to close the trails temporary from Oct 1 – Dec 14 to the general public except for all those with legal rights of access and egress. C. Mathieu seconded.

Dave Gauthier asked if somebody goes on a temporarily closed trail what happens? Just because they say the trails are closed, there's no enforcement what good is it? J. Andrews noted it does deter a good number of people. N. Nichols commented that he feels like the larger emotion and frustration that occurs outside of hunting season is getting mixed in with this discussion, especially in regards to closing the trails. He would love to have the trail maintenance guide done and see if that could help reduce tension around this issue. He has not heard persuasive argument to permanently close the trail. He liked what Kirsten mentioned about finding a compromised way to help everybody manage. He would love for ideas like that in regards to this issue and feel it should be another major focus. Motion passed 3-1. P. Haller, N. Nichols, & P. Haller voted in favor, J. Andrews voted against.

FIRE TRUCK BOND UPDATE

They have been looking into the fact that we had a bond vote in 2024, and we now know we're going to have to do a re-bond vote. The board had talked about having a communication plan about this. J. Andrews had drafted a first draft and passed it to Tommy. The 2024 vote unfortunately it was not warned correctly in newspapers at the time and therefore the bond bank will not issue a bond because we did not complete things properly. We have to go through the process again. It will be on the back of the General ballot in November.

CORRESPONDENCE

Lots of correspondence was received in regards to the temporary trail closure potential.

Turn around on a driveway, was given to Harmony

Town Planner, potential of sharing a town planner with Fairfax.

Common Drainage

Julia had sent in that the inclusion statement is ready for review.

New Library Director Robin

Kim Guidry thanks to those putting up curb signs.

COMMUNICATION

Communicate about Temporary Trail Closure once Attorney approves.

New Common Use form will be the only accepted form for Common Use. Old form is no longer accepted by the town.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pat Haller
Selectboard Chair

Callie Hamdy
Minute Clerk

GUEST LIST

Dave Gauthier
Harmony Cism
Carol Winfield
Michael Miller
Kirsten Tyler
Kim Guidry
Ira Allen
Dave Lavallee
Dick Lavallee

Ben Bornstein
Lori Johnson
James Hazen
Kati Anderson
Jim Anderson
Marilyn Thomas
Ken Tardie
Heidi Tardie