

Meeting of the Westminster Selectboard

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Vermont State Police Barracks, Westminster, VT

Members Present: K. Sheldon Beebe (Chair), Craig Allen (Vice Chair), Toby Young, Susan Harlow (Clerk), and Kevin Hughes

Others Present: Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager/Zoning Administrator) David Dupuis, Jan Ameen, Sheriff Keith Clark and Captain Mark Anderson (representing Windham County Sheriff's Dept.) Millie Barry (recording clerk) and FACTV

- 1. Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairperson of the Board K. Sheldon Beebe. The meeting was held at the Westminster VT State Police Barracks due to construction at Westminster Town Hall.
- 2. Adjustment to Agenda:** The Town Manager (TM) requested to add 9A, appointment to DRB under "other business". The Chair so noted the addition.
- 3. Acceptance of Minutes – October 25, 2018:** Susan Harlow moved to accept the minutes of the October 25, 2018, Toby Young seconded the motion, the motion carried.
- 4. Communications and Public Comments:**

*Windham County Sheriff – Keith Clark – Information included in packet included past years coverage rate for 2000 hours of service, new rate if service decreased to 1,500 hours and 1,000 hours of coverage and detail (date, hours & patrol person) report for Westminster. Sheriff Clark and Captain Anderson addressed the Board and answered questions regarding services and an eleven percent increase in rates effective July 2019. The increase will affect all towns contracting with the sheriff's department. Sheriff Clark said putting a deputy on the road was costing more than the department was currently charging. Captain Anderson told the Board insurance for police liability, licensing, radio network and equipment costs, etc. as well as pay rates for deputies, (depending on training and experience) contributed to overall costs. An average full time police person responding to calls for service was about 500 to 600 calls a year. A full time sheriff's deputy responds to the same amount of calls. Revenue from the judicial bureau from tickets issued is an incentive to the town by design. In the first quarter of the fiscal year about \$5,000.00 was disbursed back to the town as a percentage from tickets issued. In addition, the lower the ticket amount the less return from the judiciary. Lower fines are due to enforcement by the department. Mr. Clark noted the relationship between the deputies in Putney and Westminster, working together to resolve calls, supported each individual deputy and the two communities. This relationship actually keeps costs down. In answer to Toby Young's question about what the department actually does, Captain Anderson said the department creates and submits a STARS Report, (Sherriff Town Activity Reporting System) accounting for dates and times worked, the activities actually conducted etc. to the TM each month. Sheriff Clark said the department was contracting with an independent Boston company, Power Success Corporation to look at the entire operation to find efficiencies, increase revenue sources, assess fleet management, correct staffing etc. This company will also reach out to the community for input about the sheriff's department. Sheriff Clark wants to know what they can do better. Craig Allen asked about the turnover in deputies covering the Town. Clark said Jon Griffus is currently assigned to Westminster and they believe he will be staying for a while. Captain Anderson said the reality was there were not enough police officers, recruiting by other agencies, New Hampshire offering higher rates of pay (\$25.00 to \$30.00) an hour were obstacles keeping deputies. Clark added the

department was working hard at recruiting level two deputies and believes the department can meet the 2,000 hours of coverage for the Town of Westminster.

** In another communication/public comment, Jan Ameen questioned road striping on the new paved area from the corner of Patch to Peck road. She believes the lack of striping makes the road difficult to drive, especially in adverse weather conditions. The TM said the State does the striping for the Town and due to weather conditions in the fall and late date the opportunity to have the lines painted this year was gone.

5. Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action):

- A. New Dog Ordinance – October part 2, update if any: Susan Harlow requested to table discussion on the draft ordinance until input was received from legal counsel.
- B. Property Sale – Zdunek update if any needed: The TM said there were no updates other than there were more interested parties.
- C. Mandich – NH law suit update if needed: The TM said that the New Hampshire Court Judge ruled to serve Mr. Mandich by newspaper because he is avoiding the Sheriff's Department. The court has extended the deadline for the newspaper of choice.
- D. Treasurer Appointment – Paul Harlow update: Mr. Hodgkins let the Board know Mr. Harlow is working with Kelly and has met with the school and fire department. The work is going well. In addition, the gray area the office is working on is phasing out the need for NEMRC.
- E. Treasurer Job Description – update: Mr. Beebe said once the 'gray area' was resolved, there would be more information about the job description for FY20.
- F. Hearse Building – budget or article?: Mr. Hodgkins told the Board Ruth Grandy, representing the Historical Society, let him know the Society was willing to pay half of the cost of a new hearse building, half being approximately \$9,000.00. The Society would like to see the hearse displayed by the spring. Susan Harlow questioned if this would be an article or part of the budget. The Manager explained the process of the building at the Westminster West Cemetery being torn down by the road crew and disposal of the building would be added to the cost of the estimate for the building of \$18,000.00 +/- . Toby Young stated the design should be agreeable. Craig Allen questioned if the Manager had looked into donating the hearse and how the building and grounds would be maintained. Jan Ameen asked if the Town would consider giving the land to the Historical Society to build their own building and why would the taxpayers pay to display the hearse. The TM stated the hearse (used in Westminster) was given as a gift, owned by the Town and the Society wanted to keep it in Westminster. The Manager will request someone from the Historical Society attend a future meeting to speak to the Board.
- G. FY 20 Budget (Revenue and Expenses):
 - The Board and TM discussed at length reorganizing the finance department, eliminating the assistant treasurer's position and increasing Kelley Thayer's hours from 37.5 to about 40 hours per week to cover financial responsibilities. Also, discussed was changing her position to a salaried position due to the possibility there could be overtime during the collection of taxes or other things. Jan Ameen questioned the possibility of Kelley receiving a fifteen percent raise in pay, paying the assistant \$21.00 per hour and the treasurer \$20.00. Ms. Ameen also questioned the shift of staffing where the Manager was taking on more responsibility such as health officer, collecting taxes, doing clerical work and her concern of him having control over the entire Town. She stated her tax dollars were paying for a town manager. Toby Young suggested looking at the State statues for town managers for clarity. The Board also discussed health insurance costs for the highway crew, the

budget for the crew, now at 6.5 persons with the possibility of going back to a seven person crew. The Lister budget, detailing line items was discussed. The Listers are requesting an increase to \$15.00 an hour from \$13.50 for 18 hours per week. Lister expenses, including GIS mapping, training and travel were reviewed. Jan Ameen said the rise in property taxes of about 19% over two years was concerning and the Lister department by itself, had a ten percent increase. She asked the Board, Manager and individual departments to level fund.

- Regarding the North Westminster Community House roof repair budget item - Craig Allen suggested fixing the roof to maintain the building and then approaching the voters with a future plan. The Manager told the Board half of the roof repair (south side) would cost \$9,800.00 for strapping and medal roofing by Stetson Roofing. The entire repair would be \$26,600.00, an increase from a previous estimate of \$18,500.00. This increase due to 30 percent increase in medal costs. Toby Young said the repair was more of an emergency than a year ago due to the roof deterioration. The Board decided to put a tarp over the worst area and pursue other bids. At Ms. Ameen's suggestion of taking on a five year loan to repair the roof, Kevin Hughes cautioned the Town taking on loan debt because of rapid interest rate increases. The Manager and Board discussed budgeting the repair over two years.
- The Manager said the Sheriff's Department increase was sixteen percent as opposed to Sheriff Clark's statement of eleven percent. The TM also noted other than patrol, monitoring roads, their reporting did not provide details of other policing. In the absence of a full contract, the Sheriff's Department would bill the town for specific response to calls in the Town. The Board and Manager questioned the feasibility of 2000 hours of coverage for mostly road patrol. In the case of no Sheriff's Department contract the Town would depend on State Police first response if an officer was in the vicinity. The present contract of \$70,000.00 provides for a faster response rate for citizens. Craig Allen noted the Sheriff had done a good job of patrolling and resolving issues in the past. He suggested the possibility of reducing the number of hours to 1,000 or 1,500 at a rate of \$51.00 per hour. The TM stated the amount of traffic tickets issued had remained constant at about \$80,000.00 in fines but the judicial bureau was keeping a larger percentage of the fines. The Manager stated costs for the State Police would be about double the amount charged by the Sheriff according to past years testimony. The Board decided to table the decision concerning a contract with the Sheriff's Department.
- In revenue FY 20, if nothing changed the tax rate would go up .0079.

H. Farnsworth Purchase: Craig Allen, after a conversation with Mr. Farnsworth, said everything was set except for the closing.

6. New Business (Discussion/Action):

- A. Unsafe/Abandoned Building Ordinance – Toby Young said she would like to see this item dropped asking what buildings were being discussed. The Manager explained there were two buildings on the main street wide open with drug paraphernalia present a few years ago and the buildings were unsafe with rot. Another example was the mansion on Hartley Hill, in the state of almost falling in. Ms. Young said she supported making buildings safe, if the Town can help the Owners find a way to remedy unsafe structures. Mr. Beebe asked about guidelines under public health rules citing another property in North Westminster that would soon be a problem. The Board agreed to table the decision until January 2019.

- B. Windham Solid Waste Management District (WSWMD) – Budget Update - Budget information included in the packet was passed at the WSWMD meeting. The TM relayed some members were in favor of using all of the money from the solar to offset expenses, some were in favor of keeping part of the monies to create a fund so WSWMD's budget would not be over each year. Other's were in favor of keeping all of the solar monies. Their compost program has been very successful. This item will be discussed at another meeting.
- C. Town Hall – Phase III Funding? Mr. Hodgkins asked if the Board would decide to continue re-doing the first floor and if so, how this would be paid for. Presently there is enough money to cover about half of the costs of the phase III. The uncovered costs are plus/minus \$100,000.00. Estimates have not yet been received. When the present phase was completed (all paid for), Mr. Beebe said a new meeting room would be complete, the elevator would be installed, the handicap bathroom would be complete as well as the front doors. Phase III is the reconfiguration of the office space. In addition, since the installation of the lift, there would be more storage, eliminating the need to rent a mini storage space. This item was also tabled.
- D. Town Report – Dedication (Executive Session): Mr. Hodgkins said a decision for dedication and citizen of the year needed to be made before Christmas.
- E. School Merger – Update with discussion – Mr. Beebe and Mr. Hodgkins attended a meeting of the Westminster School Board and learned the State is telling the Town they would be required to sell their buildings to a new district created through the new merger between Westminster, Grafton, and Athens. Westminster would have three quarters to seven eighths of the assets of the new district. The new boards would be two people from each town, Athens, Westminster and Grafton creating a budget voted on at a special town meeting before July 2019. Westminster has joined the lawsuit with Mr. Beebe stating at present time, legal fees for the lawsuit are being donated. In addition, if the present situation is not over turned, the present boards would be disbanded and the new board created in the next two weeks.
- F. Camera Placement – The road crew has suggested the possible placement of a camera to cover one of the new speed limit signs. Mr. Beebe stated he did not believe a camera was necessary at this time.
- G. Cemetery Deed – Toby Young moved to accept conveyance of two burial lots, 101 and 102 in section E of the new cemetery at a cost of \$300.00 to Michael Randall. Susan Harlow seconded the motion, the motion carried

7. Manager's Report:

- 1. Town Hall Renovation – Phase II update: Discussed previously in the meeting. The elevator is operational waiting to be inspected. Work will begin on the front doors and the new bathroom depending on weather.
- 2/3. Town Report Dedication – Citizen of the Year will be advertised in the *Westminster Gazette*.
- 4. Henwood Hill Road Slide – A dirt slide took place on the North Westminster side of Town. The bank moved causing the slide, the road has since been repaired.
- 5. The Town has added \$329,000.00 (previewing permits for the present year) to the Grand List.
- 6. Westminster West Town Library – The Library has requested to use the Town bulk mail certificate for their annual appeal. With input from the Post Office, the Library is able to use the certificate if the Library meets USPS mail specifications. The Board approved use by the Library.

- 8. Boards and Commissions:** Susan Harlow attended a meeting of the Conservation Commission stating the meeting was well attended. Ms. Harlow also said the Commission was doing a good job.
- 9. Other Business:**
- A. Ed Harty has shown an interest in becoming a member of the DRB. Susan Harlow moved to appoint Ed Harty to the Development Review Board. Kevin Hughes seconded the motion, the motion carried.
- 10. Date of Next Meeting – November 28, 2018.**
- Note:** The meeting scheduled the day after Christmas was briefly discussed.
- 11. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Clerk

Minutes prepared by Millie Barry 11/16/2018

Date