

## Meeting of the Westminster Selectboard

Wednesday, November 13, 2019

### Westminster, VT Town Hall

**Members Present:** Craig Allen, Susan Harlow (vice chair), Kevin Hughes (clerk) and Toby Young,

K. Sheldon Beebe was absent

**Others Present:** Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager/Zoning Administrator), Donna Dawson, Alma Beals, Charmion Handy (*Westminster Gazette*), Alison Bigwood (Town Clerk), Paul Samataro, Mark Anderson (Windham County Sheriff), Millie Barry, FACTV

1. **Call to Order:** Susan Harlow called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** None
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** October 23, 2019 - Craig Allen motioned to accept the minutes of October 23, 2019 as printed. Toby Young seconded, motion carried
4. **Communications and Public Comments:**

\*\* *Gazette* - Discussion on using Town's tax umbrella -Information in packet - Charmion Handy, chairperson of the *Gazette* said the paper does not have non-profit status limiting access to funding. She said the paper began in 2004 under the Town Activity Committee and is currently run by volunteers. Volunteers are researching their tax identification number, not sure of the status of the number and/or its origin. Ms. Handy told the Board she had met with Town Manager, Hodgkins about the possibility of the paper becoming a Town Committee, to use their non-profit status to limit banking fees and provide potential funders with W-9 form. Currently the Town contributes \$5,400.00 to the paper and according to Ms. Handy, the paper 'just about' pays its bills each month. Recently, the *Keene Sentinel* took over printing the *Gazette*, increasing the size and quality of print. Advertising is almost maxed out. Mr. Hodgkins indicated the paper would be under Town's tax status and also part of the Town audit. Craig Allen said he supported the paper but questioned liability if the paper became part of the Town. Kevin Hughes commended the volunteers on their work and questioned how much additional money was needed for the paper to be sustainable. Ms. Handy said the volunteers would like the paper to be sustainable, not a burden. Part of this would be to change its status to non-profit.

\*\* *Windham County Sheriff* - Mark Anderson - Information included in packet. Mr. Anderson introduced Captain Paul Samataro indicating the Captain is available in Sheriff Anderson's absence. He said the increase in cost for coverage for the new budget was approximately one percent. He stated his opinion that policing in VT is broken. Mr. Anderson suggested to the Board Putney and Westminster share two deputies increasing hours to provide police coverage for the greater portion of the day, approximately 80 hours per week for the two Towns with two officers shared between Westminster and Putney. Westminster was in a unique position due to its geographic proximity to Putney making officers available to back each other up. Mr. Anderson would like the

Department to have more and better community presence/engagement. In answer to Kevin Hughes, he believes the three top Westminster priorities are its geographic position on the border of NH and I-91 running through the Town, the opioid epidemic and that animal control issues may not be the third priority but are a very real and significant issue for the Town. Craig Allen spoke of the Board's reasoning in reducing police hours. These included a lack of communication between the Town and the Department, lack of police presence in the schools and in Town generally as well officer turn over. Mr. Anderson said he understood Mr. Allen and continued he had a great staff having strengths in different areas such as community engagement, stopping cars, finding drugs etc. Broadening coverage and using his staff in all areas was part of his policing plan. He said he believed there is the opportunity for a county wide model of animal control where the Sheriff's Department could provide coverage to area towns at some level, taking complaints or to be a central contact point. All town animal control ordinances would be required to be legal and consistent.

**5. Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action)**

- A. Mandich Lawsuit - update - Information included in the packet. The TM (Town Manager) said the Town had won the lawsuit in the amount of about \$540,000.00. Presently Westminster has filed with the court recordings of registry to deeds attaching liens on Mandich property.
- B. FY21 Budget - update and discussion - Included in packet was budget actuals and FY21 first budget draft. The Board reviewed and discussed a part of the upcoming budget for approval in December 2019 by line item. Some things noted were increases in IT fees that include better, expanded service, computer assistance and the back-up of all records, The increase in health insurance costs for Town employees and the cost of the Town audit. Also, Increases in Lister areas included the Listers have requested the same pay increase as other Town employees receive when the percentage is approved. The TM said electric fees have increased statewide and the school will not be included in the regular Town meeting or Town report possibly reducing report fees and costs.
  - WCS - Windham County Sheriff - The Board briefly discussed the budget for the sheriff department and the current officer serving Westminster. The TM said there were many, many calls from Westminster residents detailing their contacts to the VT State Police. Often there is no response by the State Police (especially if there is no apparent emergency or the emergency has passed). The State Police information is relayed to the Sheriff's Department 24-48 hours later.
  - WSWMD (Windham Solid Waste Management District) assessment (estimate) - The TM said the district's budget has passed. Westminster's assessment went down \$929.00 or about 4%.
- C. Land Gift - Island Corporation - discussion - The TM said another proposal by Stewart Reed asks permission to gift the land to the Town with Ball Mountain Association covering the insurance costs and having operating rights to the land. At the current time there is no agreement/permission for path/walk-way on one side of

the river. The TM said it was a great piece of land for hiking but at the present time the trail is to 'nowhere'. He added without permission/agreement to locate a path there is added liability to the Town. Susan Harlow stated she believes the liability is not a crucial issue and that the Town should accept the land gift and preserve as public land. The Board will wait for further details.

D. Route 121 Tree Removal - letter dated October 16 - Information included in the packet. The TM said the right of way was 50', 25' from the center line of the highway. The Town Highway crew cut a few trees that were hanging over the highway past the 25' right of way. Craig Allen is to visit with the Owners and come to a conclusion.

**6. New Business - (Discussion/Action)**

A. Credit Card - Service Change - Alison Bigwood - Ms. Bigwood told the Board that due to a change in management there was no longer the need to change the credit card company but we did change Bank depositor.

B. Executive Session - Personnel matter with Town Clerk - Craig Allen motioned to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter inviting only the Town Clerk. Kevin Hughes seconded, the motion passed.

**7. Manger's Report - 11-13-2019 -**

1). Second Tax Bill update - Information included in packet. A second bill for municipal costs to send additional tax bills to residents due to the absence of school tax rate. The bill was re-sent to: Windham Northeast Unified Union Elementary School District.

2). Dog Matter - deadline November 8 - update - The owner of a dog that recently bit a person has been referred to the State of VT. The dogs on the property are not registered and there is no health/vaccination record available.

3). Assisted Living/Senior Housing - schedule a meeting - Included in the packet is list of people interested in being on a committee. A meeting will be scheduled for mid-December to include Susan Harlow and Kevin Hughes.

4). Town Report Dedication - Selectboard - Included in the packet was list of past Town report dedication and Citizen of the Year honorees.

5). Citizen of the Year - An article will appear in the **Westminster Gazette** for Citizen of the year nominations. Susan Harlow requested to review suggested nominees for Citizen of the Year (not chosen) in prior years.

6). New Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse Program - Information included in packet. This is now a federal bank of information that police officers can access on any CDL driver. VLCT (Vermont League of Cities & Town) is opposed to this federal program. The Board will address this issue at an upcoming meeting.

7). Town of Westminster Bridge #5 - The TM stated due to an error the State sent a financial, management report required for replacement of bridge #5 to the Town of Vergennes. The reports have now been signed by Mr. Hodgkins and returned as required. The request for the widened bridge deck has been approved. Work will begin sometime 2021/2022

**8. Boards and Commissions:** The TM said work continues on the Town Plan

**9. Other Business:**

\*Meeting Schedule - As the second regular monthly meeting is December 25, the Board will consider meeting December 18 if necessary.

**10. Date of Next Meeting** - November 27, 2019 at 6:30 PM

**The Board moved to executive session at 8:22 p.m.** Upon coming out of Executive Session at 8:38 PM, the V.Chair declared no further action is required at this time.

**11. Adjournment:** Toby Young made a motion to adjourn with Kevin Hughes seconding the motion and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:41 PM.

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**Clerk**

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**Date**

Minutes prepared by Millie Barry 11/14/2019