

# Meeting of the Westminster Selectboard

Wednesday, December 11, 2019

## Westminster, VT Town Hall

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

**Others Present:** Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager/Zoning Administrator), Cheryl Charles, David Major, Fletcher Proctor, Elise Manning, and FACTV

- 1. Call to Order:** K. Sheldon Beebe called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
- 2. Adjustments to Agenda:** Craig Allen requested that the Board go into Executive Session for a personal matter and a public comment where premature public knowledge would place the Town and/or the public in a substantial disadvantage.
- 3. Acceptance of Minutes:** December 11, 2019 – Susan Harlow made a motion to accept the minutes of November 27, 2019 as printed. Craig Allen seconded the motion and the motion carried.
- 4. Communications and Public Comments:**

**\*\* Windham Northeast Unified Union Elementary School District (*Cheryl Charles*) –** Cheryl Charles, David Major, and Fletcher Proctor came in front of Selectboard to update them to the School District's status before Town Meeting describing the current situation with the new and old School Boards. David Major explained that the 33 town lawsuit has a hearing date of January 15<sup>th</sup> at Middlebury College. The results of this hearing, he hopes, will be in time for Town Meeting. He also mentioned that the Audit for last year's spending will not be done in time for the Town Report but will be available for Town Meeting on the rail. Cheryl Charles discussed the dilemma of "Authority" even if the decision is favorable. The three merged Towns (Westminster, Athens, and Grafton) didn't take the final step authorizing a new Unified School District or a Board to run the new Elementary School District. Cheryl continued with a request to the Selectboard asking to add two Articles to the Town's Warning. The first one is asking if the Town of Westminster would approve an Advisory Committee consisting of five people to be elected by the Town to have responsibility and authority to review, develop, and recommend the following items : 1. Amendments to the Articles of the WNEUESD 2. Governance structures for the operation of educational programs 3. Policy, budget, personnel, reconfiguration of grade levels, school closure, and capital decisions necessary for the operation of the schools. Fletcher Proctor stated that these are Town Articles and are an attempt to keep the Town with say in the school business and properties. David mentioned that this was suggested by the State of Vermont in one of the several meetings that were attended by the School Board. The Board chair requested that the Town Manager run this by Larry Slason promptly so that it would not hold up the process.

**\*\* Gas, Fuel, & Oil – Jan Ameen –** The Chair requested that Jan's letter be read aloud by Susan Harlow that addressed concerns about a \$36,000 increase in the Gas, Fuel, & Oil budget line. The Board will address this matter under FY21 Budget later in the agenda.

Along with the letter, the Board was given ledger sheets, graphs, and comparisons for their consideration.

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

A. FY21 Budget – Final Draft & Adoption - Included in packet was the final draft of the expenditure budget and the final draft of the revenue budget. The Board reviewed and discussed four major topics that had not been finalized.

The first being a stipend increase for the Recording Clerks. This item was addressed and a directive to the Town Manager (TM) to raise the lines by an additional \$480 split between the three Recording Clerks. This works out to be a \$10 raise per meeting.

The second item was the Town Garage with monies in for an Engineer to study the building and its needs. A directive was given to the TM to leave this item at the \$15,000 for FY21.

The third item is the Sheriff's proposal for next year for \$82,000. The Board discussed the proposal of the 40 hrs. per week for an Officer + 40 hrs. additional coverage from Putney's Officer and gave the TM a directive to leave the line for a year at the additional coverage and cost making sure that the contract gives the Town the right to void the contract if service is not being met satisfactorily.

The fourth item to discuss was the Gas, Fuel, and Oil line item. After studying the information from Jan Ameen, Toby Young asked what the reason for the increase was and will it go down in the future. Craig Allen explained that the trucks being purchased right now are saving fuel but cost more to operate with special emissions oil that saves on the environment. He also explained last year's use of fuel and how the tanks are filled in relation to the fiscal year. The TM told the Board, that our sand, gravel and stone pits are further away and last year, with Board approval, we purchased additional sand from a closing pit. A full Road Crew with new leadership has played a part such as working in two shifts for the mud season last year. More equipment owned by the Town to meet the Act 46 requirements has also played a role in this increase. In conclusion, there were many things that caused this increase and with depleted sources of aggregate, it's not going to get cheaper in his opinion. The Board gave the TM a directive to leave this line item at \$82,000.

Susan Harlow told the Board she was not comfortable leaving the wage increase at 3% year after year. She feels that this adds to the surplus unnecessarily and it should be reduced to 2%. After a brief discussion, Kevin Hughes told the Board that the National average was 2.133%. Susan agreed to this decrease and a directive was given to the TM to lower the wage increase proposed to 2.133%.

The Town Manager, after the conclusion of the expenditure budget discussion asked if the Board was going to adopt this budget or hold a special meeting next week for final adoption. The Board Chair asked for opinions about the next step and it was jointly decided upon to approve the budget as amended. K. Sheldon Beebe made a motion to adopt the budget as amended and Kevin Hughes seconded. The motion passed and the Chair requested that a revised copy of the new totals be sent out to the Board as soon as possible.

- B. Land Gift - Island Corporation - discussion - The TM told the Board no further information was available to discuss.
- C. Route 121 Tree Removal - letter dated October 16 – No new information available.

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

- A. Town Report Dedication/Citizen of the Year – Executive Session. Susan Harlow made a motion to go into executive session for these items. Craig Allen seconded and the motion passed.
- B. Warnings for Town Meeting (draft) – The TM asked the Board for guidance to what they wanted on the Warning. The TM explained that the first 15 Articles are either cut and dry or pending signatures for appropriations. Article 16 – After a discussion, the Board decided to ask for permission to spend up to \$10,000 to create a feasibility study on the possible purchase of a parcel of land with a house and commercial building for the purpose of sand and gravel processing (approximately 154,000 cubic yards). Article 17 – Repair of Henwood Hill with the Town Manager to get a realistic cost for repair with possible grant opportunities. Article 18 – remove from the Warning until possibly next year. This was for the wall repair/replacement at the cemetery.
- C. Executive Session – Personnel matter (2) & a Public comment - Craig Allen motioned to go into executive session to discuss two personnel matters and a public comment matter inviting the TM to just the first personnel matter. Susan Harlow seconded and the motion passed. Will be held after date of next meeting.

**7. Manger's Report – 12-11-2019 -**

- 1). Town Hall – Construction to begin on the IT room on Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> of December and the major work to start January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020.
- 2). Broadband Kickoff Meeting – SB invited to join the Windham Regional Commission in Newfane for this initial meeting. Further details will be emailed when they become available.
- 3). Assisted Living/Senior Housing - schedule a meeting – The TM told the Board that a meeting has been set for December 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM at the Town Hall.
- 4). SB Christmas Party – It was agreed to keep the same time of day and place for this gathering and further information will follow. Toby mentioned she will be gone from January 17 to the 26<sup>th</sup>.
- 5). Town Hall Schedule -
  - Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> will be closed at noon and reopen on the 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - Dec. 31 will be closed at noon and reopen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January.

**8. Boards and Commissions:** None

**9. Other Business:** None

**10. Date of Next Meeting** - January 8, 2019 at 6:30 PM

**The Board moved to executive session at 8:23 p.m.** Upon coming out of Executive Session at 8:36 PM, the Chair declared no further business was needed for this meeting.

**11. Adjournment:** Susan Harlow made a motion to adjourn with Craig Allen seconding the motion and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:39 PM.

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**Clerk**

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**Date**

Minutes prepared by TM 12/12/2019