

## Meeting of the Westminster Selectboard

Wednesday, January 8, 2020

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), David Major, Fletcher Proctor, David Deen, Millie Barry (Recording Clerk) and FACTV

1. **Call to Order:** K. Sheldon Beebe, Chair of the Board called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** The Town Manager (TM) requested the Board consider hearing David Deen's comments on Connecticut River Conservancy when he arrives at the meeting. The Chair so noted the request.
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** - December 11, 2019 - Toby Young motioned to accept the minutes of December 11, 2019. Susan Harlow seconded, motion carried
4. **Communications and Public Comments:**
  - A. Connecticut River Conservancy - David Deen - Information included in packet. Mr. Deen appeared providing a graph explaining the underlying science of why river elevation changes create erosion in the CT River Valley. The River rising, flowing into the exposed bank of unconsolidated material absorbing the water. When the river falls the water leaves the bank taking soil particles with it. The River continues to flow with the water current carrying all the soil particle material down the river. As this happens the support for the underside of the bank moves away. The River Conservancy is asking the Towns along the river to consider including notice for a resolution they are presenting to address erosion in Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) re-licensing of the Wilder Dam, Bellows Falls and Vernon Dam projects. If the erosion problems continue to be unaddressed in the license, the condition will continue. Mr. Deen said the solution is to draw down less water and to have the capacity to address and identify problems when they begin. Also, Mr. Deen said there were options and the license needed to include reducing the river elevations and to address known erosion situations. Susan Harlow said she supported the resolution whole heartedly. Mr. Deen said there would be a revised application after the resolution was considered at Town Meeting. FERC would take 12 months to issue a draft license. The CT River Conservancy then has 120 days to comment on the draft license.
5. **Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action):**
  - A. School Board - Update on request for articles - Information included in the packet. Fletcher Proctor addressed the board on the ACT 46 hearing before the VT Supreme Court on January 15, 2019 at 1:30 p.m. Mr. Proctor said an important question would be if the case was 'mooted out'. The Athens School District et al, is the group most steadfast as refusing to do anything as voluntary to assent to the merger. The district is holding the line against what might be motion to dismiss the case as moot. After the hearing, Mr. Proctor said it's possible a decision could be made by the court in March. David Major spoke about two articles for Town Meeting. Permission from the voters to have a school board advisory committee and to hold an election at Town Meeting for people to be on this committee.

Legal counsel suggested changing the original petition wording so that the advisory board be strictly advisory i.e. the advisory committee to serve underneath the merged board to give advice on Westminster related items. The creators of the petition (past school board members), to create an article, believe keeping the original wording is advantageous. It would be relevant if the Supreme Court rules the merger was unconstitutional and give the group more power to work on the governance of the unified district if the court rules against the Athens School District et al. Mr. Proctor noted the committee would be elected by residents at the Town Meeting. Only residents on the check list could run for the committee. Toby Young stated she believed the board should support the original petition. If the court does not over turn the original decision, Mr. Proctor stated the only leverage over our school would be through the town (Town Meeting) and an advisory type committee. Mr. Hodgkins suggested making the term of a committee member one year. Toby Young moved to change the wording on Article 18 to the original petition wording. Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried. .

The TM/Board discussed the wording of Article 12 (information included in packet). The Manager recommended warning a special Selectboard meeting on Tuesday, January 14, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. to approve Town Meeting articles. This after legal counsel approves the complete warning.

- B. Merger Board - denied payment for additional tax bill - Mr. Major explained that the new merged board was made up of two people from each town. There are different tax payment schedules for each of the three towns and each town had a different number of revised tax bill mailings. At the meeting where the reimbursement for mailing/creating the revised tax bill was submitted, Westminster did not have representation at the meeting.
- C. Route 121 Tree Removal - Second letter sent - Craig Allen read the response to David Sault, a follow-up to a letter from Mr. Sault regarding the road crew cutting trees on Route 121 and Back Westminster Road. The Board approved the letter.

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

- A. Warnings for Town Meeting - Pre-adoption w/signatures - discussed earlier - due to time a special selectboard meeting will be warned for January 14, 2020 at 4:00 p. m.
- B. Errors and Omissions (1) - Craig Allen motioned to approve removing 50% business use from tax record - parcel 004117000, owner, Ernest H. Holder located at 585 Route 121. Kevin Hughes seconded the motion, motion a carried.
- C. 2019 Equalization Study Results - State of VT Department of Taxes - Information included in packet. The TM stated the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) the town was in great shape at 98.6 percent. The Coefficient of Dispersion at 19.81% is close to the 20% when the State would require a Town wide re-appraisal. The Selectboard will address the appraisal question in the coming year. The Manager believed there was enough money set aside to cover the cost of the appraisal.
- D. Quarterly Financials - discussion - Information included in packet - The information shows the Town is at 45.5 percent of expenditures. The Board and Manager discussed the information included and will discuss again at the next meeting.
- E. Town Meeting - discussion - The Manager said Kelly Thayer (administrative assistant) was in great shape to finalize the warning information for the Town report to be printed. Mr. Hodgkins noted Westminster Institute/Butterfield library had increased their requested

dollar amount from \$5,580.00 to \$7,500.00. Answering Toby Young's inquiry as to the reasoning of the increased amount, the manager said he believed the Dascomb Fund was not generating as much interest/income as in previous years with expenses for repair and maintenance of the building continuing to increase. Susan Harlow questioned having a budget hearing prior to a Selectboard meeting. Craig Allen suggested inviting a member of the fire department and Cheryl Charles from the current board to attend the meeting. The Manger questioned the necessity of a line item for costs for the new school advisory committee approved earlier in the meeting.

**7. Manager's Report:**

1. Town Hall - Construction of IT (server storage) room wrapping up. The fire safety inspector requested a second layer of sheet rock in the room and in every closet. The IT room had been completed, painted prior to request.
2. Broadband Kickoff Meeting - Windham Regional Commission (WRC) in Newfane, VT - January 16, 6-8 p.m. at Newbrook Fire Department. The Commission would like to pass a simple resolution stating their intent to participate in the Windham Region Broadband project and the identification of the individual who will be on the official town/lead/point of contact in this effort. The Manager said the Town residents did not need to be surveyed about the need for broadband service as lack of service had been identified as a problem in the Town. Comcast coverage does not service the entire Town.
3. Assisted Living/Senior Housing - Meeting set for January 14 at 2:00 p.m. upstairs in Town Hall.
4. RoBO call system for important announcements such as road closures, taxes due, emergency situations etc. Call-Em-All equals \$1,500.00 to \$2,000.00 per year. The Manager stated in past emergency situations he had no means to inform residents of problems. Residents would be required to sign up to be called for robotic call system. He added VT Alert was not working for Westminster. Craig Allen suggested writing an article for the Westminster Gazette about interest by residents. In another matter, Mr. Beebe questioned a follow up by the Town for a past Emergency Management problem when the Town offices were not contacted during an emergency situation.
5. Lottery for the 19.1 acre Town owned land. Legal counsel was contacted about selling 300 tickets to be sold at \$100.00 per ticket. The drawing would take place at 2021 Town meeting. The land has two building sites and is located off Pine Bank Road close to the interstate.

8. **Board and Commissions:** None

9. **Other Business:**

10. **Date of Next Meeting:** January 22, 2020

11. **Adjournment:** Toby Young motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. Craig Allen seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

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Clerk

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Date

Minutes prepared by Millie Barry 1/10/2020