

MEETING OF THE WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

Westminster, VT Town Hall and by Zoom Conferencing

Members Present: Kevin Hughes (Chair), Craig Allen (Vice Chair), Susan Harlow (Clerk), Toby Young, and Jason Perry

Others Present: **Russell Hodgkins** (Town Manager/Zoning Administrator), Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman), Russell Lazarek, FACTV and others by remote means (not identified)

1. **Call to Order:** Kevin Hughes, Chair of the Selectboard called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. The meeting was held in person at the Westminster Town Hall and by Zoom conferencing available through FACTV. Information to attend by Zoom (remote means) is available on FACTV Facebook page or by contacting the Westminster Town Hall.
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** The Town Manager asked the Chair to add a 9A. & a 9B to the meeting agenda. He explained that they are Prudential Committee Request and a draft letter and an Errors & Omissions from the Listers. The Chair recognized the changes.
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** August 11, 2021 - Craig Allen motioned to accept the minutes as printed. Susan Harlow seconded the motion, the motion carried unanimously.
4. **Communications and Public Comments:** None
5. **Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action):**
 - A. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - Corona Virus Pandemic (COVID) local recovery funds update** - Information on this item included in packet - Russell Hodgkins (TM) told the Board that new information was given to Municipalities that explained the funds that were previously going to the County Commissions were now going directly to Towns. He directed the Board to a chart that was in the packet showing the Town now receiving an additional \$807,436.52 and the Village receiving \$80,414.82. The town Manager expressed that this was great news but the amount was figured from a disturbing population total of 2,701 people in Town and 269 people in the Village. He continued that this, in his opinion, was very low and the amounts though great could have been more. Mr. Hodgkins then asked the Board to turn their attention to the pamphlet that was in their packets from VLCT. This document, he explained, gives a much-needed detailed description of the ways to use the ARPA funds. He pointed out a couple of items that the Committee, for the use of these funds, will need to look at. He will forward this information to the Committee when its organized. Please contact the TM if you are interested in serving on this very important committee.

- B. **Hartley Hill Road** - Legal Counsel is working on this item and currently there is no update to share.
- C. **Website Renewal:** Russell Lazarek was asked for an update on this item as he was present at the Meeting. Russell told the Board that he was very close to finishing up and will be in touch very soon to the TM for the final touches and then turning it live.
- D. **Collaborative Finance Processing Manual** - update if any - No update for this meeting. Kevin Hughes stated that this manual has been delayed for quite a bit of time and he would like regular updates coming soon. The TM told the meeting that Paul Harlow has been advised of this and that he was putting together his piece of the manual with the new Assistant Treasurer from NEMRC. Mr. Hodgkins continued that Paul received a contract for services from NEMRC and that this would be presented at the next meeting.

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

- A. **Thank You Letter** – Gazette – Kevin Hughes drafted a letter explaining to the public the July 29th storm and how the Town is working on the complete repair of its road system. The letter thanked the public for their understanding of a very touch and demanding situation and warned that the cost of this repair will be a burden to the taxpayers for years to come. Kevin asked the Board if he could place this letter in the Gazette for publication and they unanimously agreed and thanked Kevin for his efforts.
- B. **July 29, 2021 Storm - Emergency Financing** (FEMA update) - Mr. Hodgkins said that he had not received any word about the declaration of an emergency for Windham County and in fact received a brief email from Meghan Brunk (VTRANS) stating the same fact. The TM explained that FEMA and the Governor will declare this emergency when all of the data has been processed which should be very soon. The Manager did go on to say that FEMA was very busy processing the damage in Tennessee as he heard on the news that 700 FEMA personnel went to this area to address the severe damage.

Russell Hodgkins asked the Board to look at the first “Line of Credit” money request for \$225,000 that was in their packet. This request was processed by Mascoma bank in an amazingly quick and professional manner. The money was in our account within a half an hour, he continued. Kevin Hughes told the meeting that he wanted to thank Katie Dearborn and her team again for the great service and interest rate that they produced for the Town of Westminster.

Toby Young asked about the different process of road repair that was happening specifically on Old Athens Road. She had never seen this type of repair with stoned ditches, etc. Chuck Lawrence explained that he was fixing the roads to the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) specifications that he was told to follow. Chuck

continued that he was putting the roads back to this design and was told that FEMA would pay for these upgrades as they are according to the States mandates for ACT 64, stormwater cleanup. Susan Harlow asked about Henwood Hill at the closed section. Chuck Lawrence said that he met with the State along with Russell Hodgkins and was told to wait for FEMA's declaration before he could fix it. The Town Manager explained that the fix was not the large project that was brought in front of the taxpayers, but the creation of a stoned wall with very large stone. The excavation would be approximately 10' tall by 10' deep into the road bed, reset the guardrails that have been compromised, and dress up the road surface with compaction. This fix, the State said, would be covered by FEMA. Mr. Hodgkins told the Board that this work will be publicized for competitive bidding with a completion of late fall to early winter. Worse case, the Town would have to wait until next spring.

Kevin Hughes explained that he, the Road Foreman, and the TM met with Nate Stoddard on Camp Road Ext. Mr. Stoddard asked for the meeting to discuss a water problem stemming from a pond across from Camp Road. Kevin continued that he believes that this issue needs to be investigated and stated that he would like to see two things happen. The first, is that the Town should do as much as possible to help the situation. Second, he would like to possibly address this issue with the neighbor who owns the pond with a possible letter to get her ideas of the problem. The Town Manager assured the Board that he and Chuck Lawrence will visit this site and try to come up with a plan to mitigate the concerns.

- C. **July 29, 2021 Storm - Process and Format** – The TM described a draft of a letter that was in the Board's packet which requests Federal aid for private homeowners within the Town of Westminster who experienced damage from the 7.29.21 storm event. The letter declares the Town as the main sponsor of this request, but the paperwork, proof of damage, and financial hardship would be the burden of the homeowner to prove and document. This letter allows the individuals to apply for assistance and without the Town's direction, would not be eligible. Mr. Hodgkins explained that we have approximately 6 houses that have experienced severe damage and are in need of this aid. Kevin asked what was needed for this to happen and the TM told them he needs authorization to send in the letter. Susan Harlow made a motion to allow the TM to send the letter to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) agreeing to be a sponsor for the residents of the Town of Westminster. Craig Allen seconded the motion and without further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Kevin Hughes asked the Town Manager to explain the suggestion of a call tree service created and maintained by the Town. Russell Hodgkins told the meeting that he received a call on Saturday night from Kevin Hughes expressing concerns of the possible storm coming in and damaging our already compromised road system. He wanted to get the word out that it was not safe to venture on these town roads which were still in need of repair. The Manager told him that he had brought this up two years ago and the idea was not recognized as an essential part of the emergency

management system at that time. Kevin told the meeting that he thought this idea should be brought back to the public as this would have been essential in explaining the original storm event but also the threat from the second storm. The Board agreed and authorized the TM to look into this service again.

Kevin Hughes brought up the fact that this storm brought his attention to the fact that some people in Town do not have adequate homeowners' insurance to cover storm damage. He would like to investigate a town wide insurance from a private carrier that could be used in a bulk rate situation that could be offered to our taxpayers. This bulk rate could possibly save these folks serious money with affordable coverage for this type of incident. The Board agreed that this would be a worth while inquiry.

Chuck Lawrence asked the Board for permission to throw a barbeque to show appreciation for the work on this storm event. The party would be at the Fire Station if its free and would be for the Fire Department, the Road Crew and the Selectboard.

- D. Truck Purchase: Financing Discussion** - Russell Hodgkins told the Board that a decision as to how to pay for the new dump truck needs to be settled out as the delivery is coming soon. He brought the Board's attention to the fact that there is \$50,077 in the Equipment Fund and the cost of the new truck is \$133,264, leaving \$83,187 to be borrowed. Susan Harlow asked what the options were for this purchase. The TM told the Board that in the request for proposal, ATG had shown two options to borrow the money with either a two year note or a three year from Daimler Truck Financial. He continued that either option can be achieved with the budget amount left in the Equipment Fund as the two year note payment is \$44,017.88 and the three year is \$29,804.99. Craig Allen asked about just doing a bank loan for the truck for the remainder of the money needed and doing it for a shorter term. The Manager said that that would take a special Town Meeting to ask the voters. Kevin asked if the payments are in the budget already approved, then a Town Meeting wouldn't be necessary? The Manager told the Board that it would be good practice to announce this transaction at the March Town Meeting but could follow the Daimler proposal now to still receive the truck in November. Chuck Lawrence asked if this was going to mess up the equipment purchase schedule if it was done this way. The TM explained that the purchase for the backhoe this year and the truck next year will only be flipped in sequence and that this would not affect purchase timing to come in future years. After a brief discussion, Kevin Hughes asked for a motion and Jason Perry made a motion to purchase the new dump truck using the two year option presented by Daimler Truck Financial. Susan Harlow seconded the motion and it passed 4-0-1 with Craig Allen recusing himself from the vote. After the vote, Craig Allen explained that if the Board had postponed the purchase of the truck until next year, the manufacturer had just announced a \$20,000 increase for the exact model of the truck the Board just purchased. Chuck Lawrence commented that the backhoe was the same fact. Waiting another year would have shown a significant increase to the cost of the backhoe. Chuck continued that these increases should be reflected in

his equipment budget next year. Kevin agreed to take this under advisement for next year.

E. **Five year Capital Plan - previous to new** – Susan Harlow was recognized by the Chair and she shared that she had been in touch with Chuck Lawrence about the needed repairs for the Town Garage. Items such as two new bays, insulation, heating system, fuel & gas tank replacements are being looked at and priced. The storm has pushed back Chuck's efforts on this, but he promised to get back after it as soon as possible. Craig Allen mentioned that he has been in contact with a heating company and an insulation company to meet at the North Westminster Community House to analyze the needs for this building as well as pricing. He continued that he could use these same two resources for the Town Garage. Kevin Hughes stated that this is a work in progress, and this seems to be a good start. All information will be forwarded to the Board and the public as soon as possible.

7. **Manager's Report:** Mr. Hodgkins noted that the Town Hall entrance revival along with the trash Bid has been pushed out until mid-September because of the storm. He recognizes that the trash information needs to be completed by early November so that the budget can reflect the new pricing. He mentioned that legal counsel is behind on 5 issues that have been on their docket for some time. The TM stated that he just emailed the list to Salmon & Nostrand that day. Kevin Hughes asked to be forwarded the email sent.

8. Boards and Commissions: Nothing to report

9. Other Business:

A.) **Prudential Committee Request** – Draft Letter - Mr. Hodgkins drafted a letter for the Selectboard to review from the request of Katie Dearborn. Katie has asked for process clarification on the Hold Harmless & PILOT payments forwarded to the Town for the Fire District from the State of Vermont. The letter states how the Town will process this transaction without changing the approved budgets of either the Town or the Fire District. Toby Young told the Board that she doesn't understand why this is needed especially when the Town's accountant stated that he had never seen this before and was against this transaction. The TM assured the Board that this was just to create a paper trail for the District's grant application. Craig Allen made a motion to authorize the Board Chair to sign the letter to the Fire District on behalf of the Selectboard to change the payment format at explained in the letter presented. Jason Perry seconded the motion and it passed 4-0-1 with Toby Young abstaining.

B.) **Errors & Omissions** – The TM explained that the property owned by Michelle and Ronald Bos-Lun was surveyed in 2019 and the assessment for this year did not show the corrected acreages that were found from the formal survey. Craig Allen made a motion to accept the reduced value for parcel # 007011.000 in the amount of \$6,700

because the acreage is found to be less from a formal survey. Susan Harlow seconded and the motion passed 5-0.

10. Date of Next Meeting: September 8, 2021, at 6:30 PM. Toby Young told the Board that she will be out of Town for that meeting and will not be able to attend.

11. Adjournment: Toby Young motioned to adjourn the meeting; Susan Harlow seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Clerk

Date

Minutes composed by Russell Hodgkins 8/26/2021