

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Wednesday, January 11, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

In person at Westminster, VT Town Hall and remote by FACT TV

Selectboard Present: Jason Perry (Chair), Katrina Hamilton (Clerk), Kevin Hughes (Vice Chair), Craig Allen and Nathan Dugat

Staff Present: Millie Barry (Recording clerk), Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman), Alison Bigwood (Interim Town Manager)

Others Present: Chip Stearns (NEMRC), Lise Sparrow, Cliff Wood, Mylene Wood, Joe Ruggiero, Reilly Clark, one person for FACT TV – remote: Pauline O'Brien, Nate Stoddard, Bob Hornish, Al Wakefield, Mike Morowiki and Mark Anderson

1. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Information to access a future meeting using a remote connection is available on the Town of Westminster website or by calling the Westminster Town Hall

2. Adjustments to Agenda: None

3. Acceptance of Minutes: December 28, 2022 and January 4, 2023 – Kevin Hughes motioned to accept the minutes of December 28, 2022, Craig Allen seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote. Mr. Hughes motioned to accept the minutes of the special budget workshop meeting January 4, 2023, Katrina Hamilton seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote

4. Communications and Public Comments: Declaration of Inclusion - Lise Sparrow – Information included in packet – Lise Sparrow addressed the board regarding a proclamation made by Governor Philip Scott in 2021 hoping VT would be a state proud of being equitable to all people. They are hoping 100 municipalities will support and sign (currently there are 88) a declaration of inclusion by May 2023. The declaration came about after the George Floyd anti-racism uprisings. Ms. Sparrow said other towns she has addressed; Brattleboro and Putney adopted the declaration after anti-racist problems in their towns. Putney used the declaration after antisemitic difficulty in the town to do things better. Ms. Sparrow said there were towns taking the proclamation to the voters at town meeting for approval and in other places the selectboard approved. Al Wakefield (a founder of the process), stated the week of May 8, 2023 is designated inclusion week in VT. Ms. Sparrow said the website has one version of the declaration while Dummerston has written its own language. In answer to Nathan's Dugat's question regarding language, Ms. Sparrow noted abolish racism in all forms and there have been changes to language regarding sexual orientation/gender identity and socioeconomic status added in some instances for more specificity. Mr. Perry believed the declaration should be read to the voters at town meeting with proposed changes (if any), then adopted by the

selectboard.

5. Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action) –

A. Ruggiero – Joe Ruggiero told the board a contract had been set up with the town a couple of years ago. He noted single stream recycling was currently very expensive to get rid of. At the time of the present contract the cost to dispose of 1 ton of recyclable material was \$80.00-\$100.00. At present the cost is \$197.00 per ton. His present cost to the town is \$135.00 of which Mr. Ruggiero is absorbing \$65.00 per month. As the town disposes about 20 tons per month of recyclables, Ruggiero asked if the town would entertain some of the cost. He added the 3% cost of living added to the contract each year was under the current 7%. The board discussed increasing disposal of waste in the budget from \$100,500.00 for FY2024 to \$115,000.00 and collecting waste from \$175,440.00 to \$184,000.00 to include a 5% increase as stated in the present contract. Mr. Ruggiero said sorting recyclables was not an option as it was not profitable for him to sort by hand and a sorting machine cost millions of dollars. Mr. Ruggiero noted the cost to dispose of trash was currently about \$70.00 per month.

B. Sheriff – Mark Anderson – Information included in packet – Mr. Stearns said the Town of Putney was scheduling coverage for 40 hours per week for approximately \$104,000.00. The board agreed to a distinct article in the warning for annual meeting - to appropriate \$60,000.00 for policing services from Windham County Sheriff to let the voters at town meeting amend if desired. Per information from the sheriff's department, \$60,000.00 would cover less than 20 hours of service per week.

C. Budget – Mr. Stearns noted health insurance costs had increased from \$85,500.00 to \$102,600.00.

Computer Contract Services increased from \$27,300.00 to \$30,000.00

Town Manager clerical salary increased (by Ken Fay) 8.7% from \$32,050.00 to \$39,680.00

Finance Officer increased (by Ken Fay) from \$3,360.00 to \$56,160.00 – a position not yet filled

A contracted services line item (previously titled assistant treasurer) FY2022 was \$8,181.25 increased in FY2023 and FY2024 to \$13,000.00.

Zoning Administrator Wage was \$18,910.00 FY2023 increased (by Ken Fay) FY2024 to \$21,000.00. Mr. Stearns said his understanding was Alison Bigwood would perform this function when the town hired a manager.

Municipal Buildings - maintenance FY2023 and FY2024 \$20,000.00 to possibly paint one side of the town hall.

Heating oil line item – Mr. Stearns said at the time the highway garage tanks were replaced they were filled with #2 oil and propane. The bill was originally invoiced as the town hall in error. The invoice will be broken down to reclassify the bulk of the invoice to the highway department for FY2023.

County tax increase - FY2022 \$26,376.00, FY2023 \$27,800.00 and FY2024 \$30,500.00 due to a

proposed 25% county budget increase.

Stearns continued referring to the highway budget, transfer in from other refers to article 6 in the warning for annual meeting to transfer all surplus balances from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) fund of July 29, 2021 storm event to the general fund with \$200,000.00 to be used to reduce FY2024 taxes.

Ms. Hamilton said the town received \$396,951.29 reimbursement from FEMA in November. For other funds to be disbursed, the federal portion had been obligated and as the government closes projects there is additional paperwork required from the town taking 6-12 months for the funds to be received. A large project including Hartley Hill, Davidson Hill and Bemis Hill Road totaling \$176,984.00 have not been disbursed. The town may request this money by writing a letter requesting a drawdown now to receive 75% of the remaining funds. When the federal government completes all paperwork and processes, the remainder of the funds will be disbursed. Stearns said emergency relief funds from the State of VT will be distributed when all projects are closed of about 10-17.5% dependent on the town road classifications. Stearns said when \$176,984.00 was received these monies would be revenue to the FEMA storm fund creating surpluses the town can move. After discussion to use \$200,000.00 to reduce taxes or use for bridges, roads, building maintenance etc., the board agreed to leave the article to reduce the tax rate.

Stearns continued, wages for the highway department increased from \$393,000.00 FY2023 to \$424,658.00 FY2024. These numbers were derived from Mr. Fay and included an 8.7% pay increase July 1 and two part time positions at \$25.00 per hour.

Retirement expense FY2023 \$21,700.00 increased proposed FY2024 \$28,665.00 as VT Municipal Retirement System employer contribution is increasing by one half percent.

Health insurance FY2023 \$90,750.00 increased by 20% to FY2024 \$110,000.00.

Liquid chloride FY2023 \$12,000.00 (increased by Ken Fay) FY2024 proposed to \$17,000.00

Perry and the board agreed the increase in the chloride budget was discussed at a previous meeting.

Stearns continued repairs and parts FY2023 budget \$53,000.00 (increased by Ken Fay) proposed FY2024 to \$73,000.00. Year to date FY2023 actual was \$19,858.45. The board noted the increase was due to increased costs for parts and labor.

Transfer to equipment fund FY2023 budget \$175,000.00 FY2023 YTD \$213,000.00 increased FY2024 proposed budget \$230,000.00 to cover a new 10 wheeled truck and debt payment.

Hughes said interest earnings FY2024 proposed was \$6,000.00. He said assuming a return of .50 return on the actual balance that is averaged, starting the year at zero, the aggregate was .426 or \$25,000.00 interest earnings using all current statements. He said if the town was to be proactive in this sector, the interest earnings could be about \$50,000.00. He was working from the actual statements, that the town was paid interest on the aggregate. Mr. Hughes said at this time last year interest rates were zero. Hughes said if the town were to make a change to a Sweep fund the interest earnings could be \$46,000.00 on the aggregate. Hughes said the town

would not lose anything even if interest rates were to drop. The board agreed to change the proposed FY2024 interest earnings to \$22,500.00. Hughes said the town did not invest money. The facts were that interest rates were zero percent on federal funds at this time last year, at present increasing 6,800% to an aggregate of 4.38%. The money market has moved from zero to 1.38%, with a Sweep account interest could 3.5%. Hughes (being conservative) used 2.38 and the earnings could be \$25,000.00. The town was not investing any money or risking any asset, the discussion was about how radical cash and cash return has become. Interest earnings was dependent on the financial institution and if the institution provided a Sweep account there would be a substantially higher rate of return. Changing FY2024 proposed interest earnings to \$22,500.00 could reduce the tax rate/money to be raised by taxes. Stearns noted changes to article 3 on the warning for annual meeting - to see if the voters will raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,632,577.00 to pay the indebtedness of the town, repair highways and pay general expenses of the town for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 ending June 30, 2024.

Article 5 changed from \$96,720.00 to \$60,000.00 for policing services from Windham County Sheriff.

Separate articles increase expenses and the amount to be raised in taxes.

Article 6 to authorize FEMA storm funds of \$200,000.00 to be used to reduce FY2024 to be raised in taxes would decrease the amount to be raised in taxes to \$1,966,379.00. The current year was \$1,936,000.44. Assuming the grand list remained the same, the tax rate would be .6813 versus last year's tax rate of .6750.

Craig Allen moved to accept the sum of indebtedness to raise for taxes the expenditure budget of \$2,632,577.00, Kevin Hughes seconded; motion carried 5-0 by voice vote.

Mr. Allen moved for the voters of the Town of Westminster raise and appropriate the amount of \$60,000.00 by article 5. Mr. Hughes seconded; motion carried 5-0 voice vote.

Mr. Allen moved the voters of the Town of Westminster authorize all surplus balances from the FEMA/storm fund of the July 29, 2021 storm event to be transferred to the general fund with \$200,000.00 to be used to reduce FY2024 taxes to be raised. Mr. Hughes seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote

Ms. Hamilton moved to adopt the warning as presented with modifications, Mr. Allen seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

The board agreed someone from the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) committee present to the board to use ARPA funds to upgrade a bridge. Stearns said the bridge fund current balance was \$107,000.00. Hamilton said the last projection for the Route 121 bridge was about \$224,000.00.

6. New Business: Discussion/Articles

A. Articles for town meeting – discussed earlier

B. Executive Session – if needed - Ms. Hamilton moved to go into executive session and invite Alison Bigwood, interim town manager being that premature public knowledge would clearly place the municipality, the public body, a person or persons involved at a substantial

disadvantage as outlined in 1 VSA 313 of VT State Statutes. Allen seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

7. Boards, Committee and Commissions: None

8. Other Business: None

9. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 25, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

The board moved to executive session at 8:36 p.m. reconvening regular session at 8:54 p.m. No action was taken.

10. Adjournment: Kevin Hughes motioned to adjourn at 8:56 p.m. Nathan Dugat seconded, meeting adjourned by 5-0 voice vote.

Clerk

Date

Meeting composed by Millie Barry 1/13/2023