

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

In person at Westminster, VT Town Hall/Remote by FACT TV

Selectboard Present: Jason Perry (Chair), Katrina Hamilton (Clerk), Kevin Hughes (Vice Chair), Stephen Major and Dan Crocker (arrived at meeting at 6:50 p.m.)

Staff Present: Millie Barry (Recording clerk) – Alison Bigwood (Interim Town Manager/Zoning Administrator), Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman), Remote - Pauline O'Brien (Town Clerk)

Others Present: Peter Smith, Peg Aiken, Jim Matteau, Fran Renaud, Yvette Hendler, Paul Banik, Russell McAllister, James Comtois, Melissa Rabtoy, Remote –Lise Sparrow and others unidentified.

1. Call to Order: Jason Perry called the meeting to order at 6:37 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: Kevin Hughes motioned to reorganize the selectboard for 2023/2024 before communications and public comments on the agenda. Katrina Hamilton seconded; motion carried by 4-0 voice vote. Stephen Major noted to add a second adjustment under New Business, 6 E to address a plan for monies from town meeting. **Note due to the re-organization of the board the town meeting unfinished business will be under New Business, 7. E**

3. Re-Organization of the Selectboard – Hughes motioned to nominate Katrina Hamilton as selectboard chair for 2023/2024 year. Stephen Major seconded, motioned carried by 3-0 voice vote – Hamilton abstained from the vote. Hamilton moved to nominate Stephen Major as vice chair of the selectboard this motion did not receive a second. Hughes motioned to nominate Stephen Major as selectboard vice chair for the 2023/2024, Perry seconded, motion carried by 3-0 voice vote as Major abstained from vote. Hughes motioned to nominate Dan Crocker as selectboard clerk for the 2023/2024 year. Perry seconded, motion carried by 4-0 voice vote.

4. Acceptance of Minutes: February 22, 2023 - Perry motioned to accept the minutes as written of February 22, 2023 meeting, Hughes seconded, motion carried by 3-0 voice vote. Major abstained as he was not a selectboard member at this meeting.

5. Communications and Public Comments: Melissa Rabtoy addressed the board regarding complaints she was aware of from one person about her yard, grandchildren and her dog. She has a plan to erect a fence on one end of her yard when the weather changed but this would take some time. She has moved things in her yard, stated she was not sure what the person's issue was, she did not bother anyone, did not complain and believed the man's issue was borderline harassment. The property next door and her property do not adjoin as the sheriff deputy indicated when he visited her. She continued the man has talked to her regarding her care of her dogs and stopped multiple times to take pictures. She said she could name 10 places in town with metal and junk in the yard. Hamilton said she believed the biggest complaint was the yard qualified, no matter the size, as a junk yard as in the State of VT a junk yard is a place that collects junk if the yard is not used for agricultural purposes. Hamilton is

attempting to obtain more information from the State. Perry suggested legal counsel review the ordinance to determine and clarify if Rabtoy's yard was a violation of the town ordinance. Peg Aiken a property owner for 62 years and a neighbor of Rabtoy spoke in defense of Rabtoy. Aiken said when she sold her home there was metal in the yard that had to be removed before she could sell and Rabtoy removed the metal at no charge. Melissa helped others and never charged anyone, had grandchildren in the Westminster school system and was trying to do the right thing. She believed the person complaining could be setting a precedent. There were many places in town that were terrible, if someone complained enough and bothered people enough would that make everyone stop? The board agreed to contact legal counsel to review the ordinance. Perry said as someone was complaining about this property, the board would deal with the situation. Hughes thanked Melissa Rabtoy for coming to the meeting.

Hughes welcomed Stephen Major and Dan Crocker as selectboard members.

6. Unfinished Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Adopt Personnel Policy – Item tabled. Hamilton said Jill Muhr, a human resources consultant with VLCT (Vermont League of Cities and Towns) would like to discuss Westminster's personnel policy with board members possibly making recommendations regarding protocols and policies. Muhr is available on March 16 or via Zoom. Hamilton will contact Muhr about attending a regular board meeting via Zoom.

B. 5-year Capital Plan – Information included in packet – Perry suggested 2-3 people visit and make suggestions regarding the needs and wants of each building instead of the whole board addressing each item. Stephen Major suggested buildings such as the town garage and town equipment were items the town may need to borrow money, be one category (capital projects) versus small repairs (maintenance items) not requiring a 5-year plan or possibly to make a list of expense items over \$20,000.00. Hamilton suggested adding to the list a purpose for buildings or to consider the real estate market. Dan Crocker stated he believed the town garage was decrepit, was a capital plan expense and the town needed to focus some energy on this facility. Alison Bigwood said there was a budget item of \$1,000.00 for the Westminster West town hall. There was no money budgeted for the North Westminster Community Hall. The board noted at one time, money was allocated from the general budget to repair/replace the roof of the Community Hall. Perry believed the town had to commit to do something with the town garage instead of continually putting money into small projects, noting the new heating system could be moved to a new building. Major suggested five year plans for the three town hall buildings, the town garage, highway equipment and the post office. In another matter Chuck Lawrence contacted the State of VT (SOV) six months ago regarding the possibility of purchasing the property where the town's salt shed is located. The SOV has not responded to his inquiry. Lawrence said community members and the board were welcome to the tour the town garage by calling ahead of the visit to be sure he was at the garage. Major motioned to create a 5-year capital plan to include planning for the three town hall buildings, the post office, highway garage and town equipment. Hughes seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

C. ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Scoring Sheet Approval – Information included in a prior packet. ARPA committee members include Paul Banik (chair), Katrina Hamilton (clerk), Linda Fawcett, Jim Matteau, June Streeter, Chuck Lawrence and an advisory person. Paul Banik said the committee was criticized through various emails for monopolizing and creating favors with the distribution of ARPA

monies. Banik said the committee hopes there could be a paper form (application/proposal and information) available at the town hall or on the town website to begin the process. A facilitator/administrator is required for each proposal to answer questions and provide transparency after the proposal is approved and the monies are spent. The committee serves solely in an advisory manner, the selectboard has the authority to spend ARPA monies on any legal expense the town incurs or an expense it anticipates incurring. Monies cannot be earmarked or set aside for a future expense. Banik continued, the committee meets once a month and when an application is submitted to the ARPA committee it is scored and submitted to the selectboard. Jim Matteau noted there is a guideline to explain the process and part of the guideline is the ARPA committees' recommendations. Even though the committee may recommend a proposal it might not be approved by the selectboard. Another factor in the application is an emphasis of the cost including total cost, monies from other sources, from ARPA as well as ongoing costs, if there is continued expense after initial funding. Scoring includes how the proposal contributes to community resilience, the strategic value to the town (does it line up with the town plan goals) and feasibility. How does the proposal impact the town, will it lower or raise the tax rate. The board receives the application, how the proposal is scored by the committee, major points reviewed by the committee and if recommended for approval. Banik added the board could re-consider a proposal submitted months ago, there is a 2024 deadline to award the funds, 2026 to spend the funds. Jim Matteau noted a report is required every three months to ARPA detailing the monies spent. Hamilton noted ARPA fund approvals thus far were fire department generator, digitized land records, equipment to record meetings, town garage tablets for road and culvert inventory, a saw attachment for a highway department vehicle, bridge funding, fire department gear and a fire department washing machine. Banik requested from the town office in writing, the exact expense of each approved item, deposits to the ARPA fund and specific figures of money going out. Hughes motioned to accept the ARPA scoring sheet applications with exceptions noted, Dan Crocker seconded; motion approved by 4-0 voice vote. Hamilton abstained as she assisted in composing the score sheet.

D. Town Manager Hiring Committee (Final): Ms. Bigwood noted Chris Potter was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Major asked if the position had been advertised. The board clarified those on the committee as Katrina Hamilton, Chuck Lawrence, Kelly Thayer and Alison Bigwood alternating as 1 member, Pauline Blake, Susan Harlow or Craig Allen as past selectboard members, Chris Potter and Susan Roman. Mr. Major suggested the committee advertise the position as soon as possible, the position could be difficult to fill, and advertising may be required to a wide area. There may be a qualified person in the area having a spouse or partner locally employed. Perry said he believed the committee needed to meet, decide about advertising, and candidate qualifications. Ms. Bigwood has contacted legal counsel regarding the committee search process. Ms. Hamilton has reached out to VLCT regarding the hiring process. She said each state has its own VLCT organization sharing municipal information. There is information available on the VLCT website regarding municipal managers. A tentative search committee meeting was scheduled Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at the town hall at 8:30 a.m. Mr. Crocker suggested after the first manager's hiring committee meeting there be a proposal submitted regarding next steps in the hiring process.

E. List of Appointments (first draft) information included in packet – The board will review the appointment list. The item is tabled to another meeting.

7. New Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Hazard Mitigation Plan Survey from WRC (Windham Regional Commission) – Information included in the packet – Jim Matteau suggested the board review the previously approved hazard mitigation plan. Mr. Major requested the current plan be emailed to him. Item tabled to another meeting.

B. Manager's Report – Westminster General Ledger Financial Information included in packet – Ms. Bigwood said for the board's information the Westminster tax rate would increase by .10 (ten cents) per 1,000.00.

Ms. Bigwood requested the board invite Chip Steans from NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) to the next board meeting to discuss the many accounts (estimate of 15-16 bank statements) containing minimal funds to possibly consolidate the funds. Mr. Hughes motioned to invite Willis Stearns to address the board with the interim town manager regarding funds and fund placement March 22, 2023. Jason Perry seconded; motion passed 5-0 by voice vote. Ms. Bigwood will invite to the meeting the trustees overseeing the various accounts.

C. Road Foreman Report: Chuck Lawrence said the last storm was a challenge due to the wet heavy snow with a loss of gravel into the stone lined ditches.

1. #6 truck is at ATG due to a DEF (diesel exhaust fluid) pump malfunction. The repair should be covered under warranty.
2. Truck #1 is out of warranty and has an ABS (antilock brake system) sensor problem with an estimated cost to repair of about \$1,000.00.
3. Truck #5 recently received a brake job, including rotors, calipers and pads done by the highway department.
4. The alternator on loader #1 was recently replaced by the highway department.
5. Cory Noyes recently completed a three-day State funded welding course including stick, MIG, gas welding and the use of torches. There are several crew members now qualified to weld. There is a follow up course later in the fall Cory will attend.
7. The highway department has the asphalt trailer (heated trailer) belonging to Bellows Falls to cold patch road holes.
8. Streeter Construction has put up walls to create a new break room space upstairs over the offices (using a storage area) at the highway garage. Additional office space was needed for office equipment etc. due to the highway department taking on additional responsibilities.
9. Paving bids were due March 9, 2023 at noon. Gage Street, Church Avenue, Oak Hill, Alden Street and Grout Avenue are all scheduled for paving. The highway department has notified the Aqueduct Society regarding the schedule to pave Grout Avenue, hoping they will seek funding to update water lines on Grout Avenue as the avenue will be taken back to dirt before the paving is done.
10. The price of Chloride increased from .96 (ninety-six cents) per gallon to \$1.09.

D. Executive Session (if needed) – Ms. Hamilton said she did not believe an executive session was needed.

E. Tasks (planning) from Town Meeting: Mr. Major spoke about the increase of funds voted at town meeting from \$60,000.00 to \$120,000.00 for crime prevention or police protection. The current contract

with the sheriff's department ends June 30, 2023. Jim Comtois stated free dispatching was available from the State Police Barracks and possibly the town could recruit a patrol person to do in-house police work. Ms. Hamilton said she received information from Cole Streeter Golden Cross Ambulance was not going out of business. Mr. Comtois noted there were 40 volunteers involved with the Westminster Fire Department, many were EMT and first aid qualified, suggesting the town possibly consider funding it's own ambulance service. Hamilton noted the fire department was currently covering a record number of calls for the size of the department. Perry said an ambulance discussion should involve the Prudential Committee, the Westminster Fire Department and Chief, Cole Streeter. Perry said \$200,000.00 voted by the voters at town meeting would remain in the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) fund. Voter approval was required for specific use of these funds. An article is required for a special warned or the next town meeting.

In another matter, Perry said an email received from Sheriff Anderson disputed the information presented by the selectboard and Ms. Bigwood at town meeting. Kevin Hughes motioned to invite Mark Anderson to the next selectboard meeting March 22, 2023 or to another meeting (if more convenient for Anderson). Mr. Perry seconded the motion. Mr. Major suggested researching alternative police protection to present a competitive bid or contract at a meeting with Anderson. Hughes said there had been multiple meetings with Anderson and he did not believe any meeting with Anderson would prejudice or change the present situation or impact a proposed contract offered to Westminster. Ms. Bigwood said the town was contracting with the sheriff's department for 103 hours per month the town was not receiving, and past history documented when the Town was paying the department for considerably more service hours, the hours were not provided. The board agreed Anderson's concerns be addressed and to discuss the matter. Motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

In another matter, Hamilton said voters at town meeting recommended adopting a declaration of inclusion for the town. This matter will be discussed at a future meeting.

8. Boards, Committees and Commissions: None

9. Other Business: None

10. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

11. Adjournment: Kevin Hughes motioned to adjourn at 8:21 p.m. Dan Crocker seconded, motion carried by 5-0 voice vote to adjourn.

Clerk

Date

Minutes composed by Millie Barry 3/11/2023