

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Wednesday, May 10, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

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

Selectboard Present: Katrina Hamilton (Chair), Kevin Hughes, Jason Perry, and Dan Crocker (Clerk), - Stephen Major was absent

Staff Present: Allison Bigwood (Interim Town Manager/Zoning Administrator)

Others Present: James Comtois, Yvette Hendler and Mark Anderson

1. Call to Order: Katrina Hamilton, Chair of the board 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: Kevin Hughes motioned to accept the minutes of April 26, 2023, Jason Perry seconded; motion carried by voice vote 4-0

4. Communications and Public Comments: None

5. Unfinished Business:

A. Sheriff/law enforcement discussion - Mark Anderson - Hamilton said she had talked with Sheriff Anderson about the town possibly hiring its own law enforcement officer or constable. Anderson said he would like to continue contracting with Westminster going back to the previous arrangement with Putney. He believed there was a gap in communication in the past with the former town manager about services. Mr. Hughes said he understood the department was having difficulty hiring qualified personnel. Anderson said there had not been a problem in the last year, his department is fully staffed for their current obligations, they are not staffed for the increased demand for their services. In answer to Jason Perry's questions, Anderson said built into individual town contracts his department provided 24-hour dispatch and there is a person that dispatches for other agencies. The sheriff does not have a holding cell on their premises but has relationships with police departments and law enforcement agencies to take a person into custody. He said there were a lot of details to take a person into custody and dispatching. Anderson mentioned three scenarios, a relationship/contract between Putney and Westminster costing the same amount of money for the same amount of patrol hours and a deputy responding to either town or the current 20-hour contract. Regardless of either contract there is also Regional Highway Safety Task Force, a federally funded grant providing one full time deputy engaged with area law enforcement agencies to target traffic safety. These are federal funds targeting impaired and distracted driving working on enforcement. There is one

education program providing help with teen driver safety programs. Ticketing money goes to the States general fund regardless of the person writing the ticket, the second-place money goes is to a municipality if there are details written into statutes such a speed related violations on municipal roads, enforcing truck weight limits etc. In 2020 (during COVID) the department stopped far fewer vehicles statewide to limit the spread of COVID due to a variety of directives issued by the SOV (State of Vermont). Coming out of COVID he believed approximately one quarter of the traffic stops were occurring currently than in 2019. He said this was a statewide issue. Anderson described the process in a lifestyle of a traffic ticket. He said Putney has authorized their budget for 40 hours of coverage, but his department has not signed the contract. He believes the prior contract with Putney worked well as the geography, population and relationships worked well. Perry said he believed the board and town hall personnel were frustrated as in the past calls for specific coverage were met with, 'the town is out of hours.' He believed even if the town was out of hours, the call should be responded to and invoiced in the next week or month when there may be more hours not used. He believed there was a communication breakdown. His opinion was if the town had their own coverage they could work with the person, controlling where they patrolled and addressing specific complaints in the town working together as opposed to outsourcing the work. Anderson believed the cost could be \$300,000.00 a year operating costs not including capital costs such as cruisers, radio costs etc. VLCT (Vermont League of Cities and Towns) is working with sheriffs to support regionalized policing. Addressing the issue of the town running out of service hours, Anderson said the entire contract with the town has been exhausted while his department continued to provide services and there is one hour remaining in fiscal year 2023 contract. They are working an average of 30 hours per week on a 20 hour per week contract. Anderson said he recommended the 40-hour arrangement with his department at about \$104,000.00. Dan Crocker asked if there would be a single officer covering both Putney and Westminster? Anderson said ideally this is the program he would run but sometimes his officers are recruited away to other agencies. Hughes said the usual complaint was no one knew where the sheriff was patrolling. He believed there would be fewer complaints if there was a visual deterrent. Anderson said the department had inherited more call volume from the State due to staffing issues and there was a considerable amount of paperwork with any police work. He used the example of one DUI (driving under the influence) incident taking about four hours of paperwork. Hamilton said doing nothing was not an option, if the town did not sign another contract, was there another option? Anderson said an hourly contract could be negotiated with the town for the same or more hours. He believed Putney was interested in going back to the prior arrangement. The regional policing discussion would continue regardless of whether there was a contract with the Town of Westminster. Anderson said Vermont is flexible when it comes to mutual aid, he works with Bellows Falls, Brattleboro and other police departments realizing there is not enough rural policing. They would continue mutual aid with the Town of Westminster but the coverage would have to be reviewed with mutual aid. Anderson said his contract could be modified to have flexible hours and to cover problem areas in town.

Dan Crocker noted he understood staffing issues noting the communication breakdown with the department was one large problem and the town wanted to improve communication. Anderson agreed genuine conversation solved many problems.

B. 5-year Capital Plan Discussion –

Hamilton asked if the board wanted to look at the buildings to determine and address needs in the upcoming budget or to determine a purpose/use. The board discussed starting a meeting at a specific building, continuing the meeting at the town hall and determining a list of needs for each property. Ms. Bigwood will research the current USPS (United Postal Service) contract.

6. New Business (Discussion/Action) –

A. Final Approval for FY 2024 Wage Increases – Kevin Hughes asked to affirm the prior FY2024 wage increases, that the board agreed it was approved and to move forward. Hamilton confirmed the approval.

B. Certification of Highway Roads and Bridge Standards – Jason Perry motioned to accept the certification of compliance for town, road and bridge standards and network inventory dated May 10, 2023. Perry added the board was adopting minimum requirements for State approved template dated June 5, 2019. Hughes seconded the motion, motion carried 4-0.

C. Town Manager Search Committee Update – Hamilton said they have contracted with MRI (Municipal Resources, Inc.). This company is in the process of posting an ad for their recommended venues. Seven resumes have been received and MRI will respond to resumes and follow-up with the board about prospective candidates.

D. Town Manager Report –

Alison Bigwood said the trailer in the yard of the post office was gone.

Paul's Pest Control will be coming to address a problem in the Town Clerk's office. Pauline O'Brien she believed the issues was much worse than 2 years ago.

Ms. Bigwood said the wall in the Town Clerk's office was shifting. She left a message for Matt Brennen with no response. Cole Streeter has looked at the problem.

Due to funds the school district has received for fiscal year 2023 it has been reported the school district owes the town a total of \$56, 247.91 to go back into tax revenue line.

Two audit letters are included in the board packet. The audit for the town and fire district will be available at the town hall.

E. Road Foreman's Report – Ms. Hamilton reported as Chuck Lawrence was absent.

Lines were painted on roads today.

Mr. Lawrence is working with Westminster Cares, Chris Harlow and VLCT to create a wood bank. Westminster Cares will oversee the project once it is established with volunteer cutting, splitting, and distributing firewood. The project will be on Chris Harlow's land and he is

discussing liability issues with VLCT.

Mr. Lawrence is reviewing equipment and prices for future equipment purchases.

Lawrence is in the process of getting proposals for the catch basins in Gageville.

Used guard rails will be picked up and installed on Piggery Road in the coming week.

Green-up Day had produced more tires than usual.

Jason Perry noted the two current loaders were pre-emission and a new loader would cost a great deal more money. He suggested sending oil samples out and possibly putting money in the current loader to get 10-15 more years of use.

F. Executive Session – None

7. Boards, Committees and Commissions: None

8. Other Business: Jason Perry suggested reviewing employee scoring forms. Mr. Hughes will bring documents to the next meeting to review the scoring system. He believed the person being reviewed be able to score themselves.

9. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 24, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

10. Adjournment: Jason Perry motioned to adjourn at 7:38 p.m. Kevin Hughes seconded the motion, the meeting was adjourned.

Clerk

Date