

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Tuesday, November 19, 2024 – 6:30 p.m.

Remote and in person at Westminster, VT Town Hall

Selectboard Present: Dan Crocker (chair), Jason Perry (vice chair), Real Bazin (clerk), Stephen Major, Katrina Hamilton was absent

Staff Present: Millie Barry (clerk), Lou Bordeaux (town manager), Ben Masure (road foreman)

Others Present: Lachlan Francis (planning commission)

1. Call to Order: Dan Crocker, chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was recorded by FACT TV. Information to access a future meeting using a remote connection when available, is on the Town of Westminster website or by contacting the Westminster town hall.

2. Adjustments to Agenda: None

3. Acceptance of Minutes: November 12, 2024 – Real Bazin moved to accept the minutes of November 12, 2024, Jason Perry seconded; motion carried by voice vote (Crocker, Perry, Bazin).

4. Communications and Public Comments: None

5. Unfinished Business: (Discussion/Action) –

A. FY 2026 Budget – first draft discussion – Dan Crocker said information explaining budget changes was included in packet.

*Planning Commission – Lachlan Francis said he believed in other towns the size of Westminster there was some level of professional staff included in the commission to have a clear(er) picture of legal matters as they draft the New Plan. He added that the details in the current Plan and zoning bylaws were far removed with legislative changes in land use law in the last ten years. He believed after the new plan was completed a regular budget line to support the continuing Town Plan would be sufficient. He said the present commission would like to pass through a temporary plan (as the Selectboard recently suggested) but legal guidance from Windham Regional indicated the Town could not pass through a temporary plan without public outreach, meetings, warned hearings and then in 4-6 months begin the process again for an updated Plan. Stephen Major questioned if the Commission could send to the State the existing Plan with knowledge of the deficits and wait to hear from the State regarding required adjustments, language they insist on while the Town was working on a new Plan. Mr. Francis said Windham Regional may or may not help with the cost of professional services. He added Rockingham has a town planning department and Putney had recently hired two outside vendors to develop a town plan. Also, though Westminster did not have water and sewer, rewriting the Plan may or may not be more complex due to zoning and the sheer length of time since the Plan has been re-written. The Board discussed a possible budget over two years of \$20,000.00 each year.

Revenue:

Line 7 – Education billing fee – Mr. Bordeaux will research.

Line 12 – Dan Crocker said people should be aware of fees to put up a sign.

Line 17 – Railroad tax – the railroad pays monies to travel through Westminster –

Line 31 – Local ordinance fees – Mr. Bordeaux will research –

Mr. Bordeaux said after Town meeting, there was a plan for delinquent taxes, tax sales etc. Stephen Major challenged the wisdom in following the auditor’s advice to show zero anticipated delinquent property tax revenue for FY2025 and FY2026 budget. In his experience, not budgeting for revenue that will always happen results in a higher tax rate resulting in a surplus.

Expense:

Real Bazin questioned health insurance cost, line 48 under employee benefits increase from \$55,000.00 FY2025 budget to \$73,000.00 FY2026 proposed and FY2024 actual of \$12,219.61. Mr. Bordeaux said changes in health insurance coverage for office personnel made the difference and the numbers were projections not actual.

Mr. Bordeaux said advertising \$864.75 FY2024 actual, \$3,000.00 FY2025 budget, \$3,000.00 FY2026 proposed was used for help wanted, notices and needs were unpredictable. The amount equates to about one tenth of a cent on the tax rate.

Mr. Bordeaux said to offer the best customer service, he wanted the listers office open 4-5 hours per day to have the office regularly accessible believing this was important to serve the public. He continued there was a question if the Selectboard wanted to continue with the board of listers adding the listers operating by themselves was fine but as they were engaging with NEMRC as a professional assessor this was duplicating the office. Mr. Bordeaux said Alison Bigwood as the zoning administrator was the perfect fit to spend extra hours in the listers office.

Mr. Crocker believed legal service budget line should be increased from \$12,905.40 FY2024 actual, \$8,500.00 FY2025 budget, \$15,000.00 FY2026 proposed. The Board will review this line before the budget is finalized.

Mr. Bazin questioned listers salaries. Mr. Bordeaux said \$18,000.00 was amount requested by the board of listers. He added there would be an increase in hours on the administrative line. Mr. Crocker questioned if the quality would be the same with a proposed assessor opposed to a board of listers. Mr. Bordeaux said as appointed, an assessing office would fall under his jurisdiction as Town Manager and believed it would work well. The Board discussed positives and negatives between taxpayer knowledge of the board listers as elected local officials involved in the assessment of taxpayer property and a third party objectively evaluating property.

Line 147 Post Office Maintenance – Jason Perry believed there would be more repairs required on the building. Budget indicated FY2025 budget \$2,000.00. He noted the recent expense of about \$4,700.00 for water tank and an upcoming fuel tank replacement.

Real Bazin questioned if the Planning Commission was requesting \$55,000.00 budget line for the coming year. The Board agreed to budget \$20,000 FY2025 budget and \$10,000.00 FY2026 proposed.

Mr. Bordeaux said the Conservation Commission was requesting \$750.00 for supplies, training and meetings.

Town Garage –

Mr. Bordeaux said the increase in health insurance costs was due as there would be more people using the health insurance plan. For budgeting purposes the number is maxed out in case there was a need for funds for family (children) coverage.

Line 240 – Road signs and posts - \$1,263.58 FY2024 actual, \$2,600.00 FY2025 budget, \$11,000.00 FY2026 proposed. Mr. Bordeaux said the increase was to purchase two additional, brighter radar

signs facing east/south on School Street and in Westminster West.

Stephen Major questioned the increase in use of chloride noting much of the past summer was not dry, chloride was poison killing roadside plants, maple trees and trout. He understood it was for dust control, and it cut down on road grading while noting there were pluses and minuses to its use.

Mr. Bordeaux noted Comcast cost for a telephone land line including wifi at the Town garage was about \$300.00 per month. FY2025 budget \$3,000.00, FY2026 proposed \$3,000.00.

Real Bazin questioned truck repair costs as he understood the Town bought Western Star or Freightliner and spent \$15,000.00 for extended 7-year bumper to bumper warranties. Ben Masure said many of the trucks did not have 7-year warranties. Mr. Bordeaux will research warranties on the present Town trucks.

Mr. Bordeaux noted differences in lines 286, 287, 288 noting his belief approval for a large piece of equipment should be determined by the Town voters, transfer to equipment fund, FY2025 budget \$250,000.00, FY2026 proposed 0.00. The Board agreed monies (\$250,000.00) should be budgeted FY2026 for the purchase of equipment (transfer to equipment fund). Board will discuss before the final budget is approved the detail of spending anything over a certain amount with voter approval.

Mr. Bordeaux said the bridge fund current balance was \$148,364.92 with an additional \$175,000.00 after February 2025. Board discussed Route 121 bridge and noted Goldies bridge and Butlers Pantry bridge would need work in the future. Ben Masure will research bridge rehabilitation/repair costs before the December 3, 2024 Selectboard meeting.

Transfer to retreatment – Board agreed to budget FY 2025 \$200,000.00.

6. New Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Executive Session (if needed)- none needed

7. Other Business: Real Bazin suggested considering the purchase (request bids) for a new ¾ ton, gas, 4-wheel drive (with warranty) pickup for the road foreman opposed to running a large Town truck to check roads especially in bad weather. Jason Perry said the purchase would free up a vehicle for a possible sixth road person to drive and suggested the new truck have a plow to use in an emergency. Real Bazin suggested a professional contractor build a new tomb door for the New Westminster Cemetery tomb.

8. Executive Session: - None

9. Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 at 6:30 p.m. – NOTE CHANGE

10. Adjournment: At 8:13 p.m. Jason Perry moved to adjourn, Real Bazin seconded; motion passed by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major).

Clerk

Date