

MEETING OF THE WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD

Wednesday, January 13, 2021

Meeting by Zoom Conferencing available through FACTV

Members Present: Susan Harlow (Chair), K. Sheldon Beebe (Vice Chair), Kevin Hughes (Clerk) Toby Young and Craig Allen

Others Present: Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager/Zoning Administrator), Pauline Blake O'Brien (Town Clerk), Millie Barry (recording clerk), Martha Staskus; Hannah Boudreau (Norwich Solar Technology), Nate and Cynthia Stoddard, Fran Renaud, FACTV, Russell Lazarek, Alice Caggiano and others -

1. **Call to Order:** Susan Harlow, chairperson of the Board called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Due to Covid 19 virus and State of VT (SOV) recommendations, this meeting was held by Zoom conferencing. To join a future meeting, information is available at the Westminster town office, Town website or from FACTV Facebook page
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** None
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** December 16, 2020 – Craig Allen made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. K. Sheldon Beebe seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.
4. **Communications and Public Comments:**
 - Letter from Westminster West Library – Susan Harlow gave a brief summary of the letter and confirmed the information with Toby Young. K. Sheldon Beebe explained that he reached out to the Library and wanted to confirm that the additional money requested this year was for additional hours of the Librarian to meet the requirements of the new network. He was told the majority was for that but that there are also additional costs in joining the network that is not presently available at the Library. He explained that this was not what he remembered from the last Selectboard meeting when they said it was strictly for the Librarians extra hours required by the Catamount Library Network. Susan requested that the Article on the Warning be changed to reflect the new purpose.
5. **Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action) -**
 - A. Solar Project Review - approval - Martha Staskus and Hannah Boudreau appeared for Norwich Solar. Ms. Staskus relayed Windham Regional Planning Commission reviewed the petition and issued a conditional approval if the Town designates as preferred site. In meetings with surrounding land owners all owners were supportive of the project. The TM stated the Planning Commission believed the site is feasible use for solar with little obstruction of scenery. Areas of concern were about animal corridors, access to the site and the amount of power Green Mountain Power could accept. Overall, the planning commission approved the request noting there would be other opportunities to be sure the project and site was done appropriately. With approval from the selectboard as a designated preferred site, Ms. Staskus said the next step would be an application to the Public Utility Commission by the end of January. Ms. Staskus corrected information relayed at the past meeting. The project will pay taxes to the town based on an assessed value. The project also pays taxes to the State Education fund based on production and the land pays taxes to the Town. She believed the change of designation of the land from a wood lot to solar array land would not change the value as the equipment pays the additional tax. She read from information provided by her

legal counsel to clarify 'preferred site'. "Signing the preferred site letter is unrelated to the town's ability to participate and raise section 248 issues. It simply means the site is recognized as suitable as a general matter as should be given the preferred siting adjuster. Obviously, a complete 248 petition with supporting materials is required to demonstrate compliance with the applicable 248 criteria. The Town reserves the ability to comment and present evidence as to whether the project does or does not comply with 248". Ms. Staskus noted the road would be moved to where there is an existing culvert and access to a woods trail. The Green Mountain Power line extension will go overhead the access to a pole on Seafood Lane. K. Sheldon Beebe motioned to give preliminary approval of Westminster Back Solar project as a preferred site with information as presented by Norwich Technologies as of January 13, 2021. Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried.

- B. Warning for Town Meeting - February 27 (date of annual meeting corrected from February 29) - warning information for annual meeting included in packet. The TM reviewed changes made by legal counsel. Article 3 wording will be further reviewed by legal counsel for clarity before becoming final. Article 16 was revised to: "Shall the voters of the Town of Westminster raise and appropriate the sum of \$7,000.00 additional dollars to the Westminster West Library to join the Catamount Consortium. This money will pay for additional hours for librarian and additional annual costs associated with joining Catamount Library Network. Article 17: Revised by legal counsel reads: Shall voters of the Town of Westminster elect five (5) town residents to a Westminster Town District School Board with staggered terms as existed prior to the forced merger of Westminster into the Windham Northeast Elementary School District. Craig Allen motioned to adopt the warning with the corrections on article 3 and article 16 as discussed. Toby Young seconded, motion carried.
- C. Town Meeting - options for procedure - TM relayed there was no final word from the SOV regarding what the Town can and cannot do. The Town Clerks provided their opinion on how the Australian ballot process should be conducted in the form of a letter included in packet. The letter to the Board discussed how to keep the date of March 2 strictly voting by Australian ballot on school budgets and individuals running for elected positions. If the annual meeting can be held on February 27 to vote on articles so be it, if not postponing the date of meeting to warmer weather would be preferable.

6. New Business (Discussion/Action)

- A. Town Reappraisal - options/funding/bids - Information included in packet - After discussion K. Sheldon Beebe motioned to table issue on a town wide property reappraisal for one year. Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried. Fran Renaud suggested when the time came for the reappraisal to put the appraisal work out for bid. She also suggested when properties are appealed, the listers should have support during the appeals process to the Board of Civil Authority from NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) regarding the change in value. She added, often the listers do not know why the property value had been changed. The TM relayed AI, a NEMRC employee, was present at all grievance meetings answering questions by email or phone.
- B. Half Year Financials (quarterlies) - Information included in packet - This item was tabled to the next meeting giving the Board time to review the information.

- C. Gift in memory of Kevin Shrader - Susan Harlow expressed giving a donation in memory of a citizen would set a precedent she did not want to establish. She suggested an article in the Westminster Gazette to encourage people to give in memory of Mr. Shrader or anyone doing work/volunteering in the Town.
- D. Payment from school - election costs and postings - Information included in the packet. The TM relayed costs for additional tax bills due to absence of FY2021 tax rate would be close to \$10,000.00. Cynthia Stoddard questioned the amount the Town received in education tax to process town school bills. The Town keeps a portion of school taxes for purpose of billing education taxes.
- E. VTRANS - Certificate of Compliance (approval) information included in packet - K. Sheldon Beebe motioned to approve the VTRANS certification of compliance. Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried.
- F. VTRANS - Certificate of Highway Mileage (approval) information included in packet - K. Sheldon Beebe motioned to approve the VTRANS certificate of highway mileage, Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried.

7. Manager's Report:

- 1. The Town offices will be closed January 18, 2021 in observance Martin Luther King Day.
- 2. Town Clerk's office, due to construction noise, will be closed January 14 and 15th. The clerks will be working from home these two days.
- 3. The Manager hopes to complete the first draft of the finance processing policy by Feb. 1, 2021
- 4. Town report information will be sent to publisher January 25/26. January 26 is the last date for any corrections or additions to report. The final information regarding those running for positions will be inserted January 27.

8. Boards and Commissions:

The Manager noted the Planning Commission members had asked good questions about the solar project.

- 9. Other Business:** Mr. Beebe noted there was 2,349 feet of cable style guard rail that will require replacement as the town upgrades roads. Mr. Beebe said he would have more information at the next meeting regarding the possibility of purchasing guard rail material at a savings

10. Date of Next Meeting: January 27, 2021

11. Adjournment: K. Sheldon Beebe motioned at 7:54 to adjourn the meeting. Craig Allen seconded, motion adjourned.

Clerk

Date