

MEETING OF THE WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD

WEDNESDAY, June 9, 2021

Westminster Town Hall and by Zoom Conferencing

Members Present: Kevin Hughes (Chair), Craig Allen (Vice Chair), Susan Harlow (Clerk), Toby Young and Jason Perry

Others Present: Russell Hodgkins, Town Manager/Zoning Administrator, Chuck Lawrence, Westminster Road Foreman, Russell Lazarek, Yvette Hendler, John Jones, Robert Wickberg, Jason Benson, Millie Barry, Recording Clerk, FACT TV and others present by remote conferencing

1. **Call to Order:** Kevin Hughes, Chairperson of the board called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** None
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** Information included in packet -Susan Harlow motioned to accept the minutes as printed, Toby Young seconded. Mr. Hodgkins noted to correct spelling errors in Yvette Hendler's name in past meeting minutes. Motion to accept minutes as amended passed.
4. **Communications and Public Comments:** Robert Wickberg questioned when the hours of the Town office would be discussed. Town Hall office hours will be discussed at the next meeting.
5. **Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action) -**
 - A. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - Covid (Corona Virus) local recovery funds (update) - Information included in packet - Mr. Hodgkins said the Town of Westminster was eligible for \$282,762.00. \$141, 381.00 in 2021, \$141,381.00 to be distributed spring of 2022. Westminster Village is also eligible to receive two allocations of \$14,081.00. Susan Harlow motioned Russell Hodgkins be the contact person to receive updates and respond to information for ARPA funds. Craig Allen seconded motion. John Jones offered to assist the Town Manager as he is in contact with the State of VT and people on the federal level. Mr. Hodgkins asked the board to review the information included in the packet, to plan and use the funds to benefit the Town. Susan Harlow mentioned the Town has until 2024 to spend the allocation. The Manager noted more information will be available and discussed in the future when funds are allocated to the regional commissions.
 - B. Bridge #5 on Route 121 - update - Information included in the packet - In an email from JB McCarthy, State of VT (SOV), Mr. McCarthy clarified the plans include access for construction purposes underneath the bridge. The plan includes 11 foot lanes and 3 foot shoulders. This section of Route 121 will be closed for 60 days for the bridge work and information will be posted in a timely manner for closure. The Town of Westminster will be responsible for notification of bridge closure and signage. The road will be closed at the Back Westminster Road entrance off Route 121 and there will be signage at the bottom of Red Light Hill with permission from Town of Rockingham/Bellows Falls. Mr. Hodgkins has notified the school system of the anticipated closure beginning in July 2022.
 - C. Website Renewal - Update - Susan Harlow and Russ Lazarek mentioned the committee would appreciate specific information from Town Commissions and Boards to include in the website. Without this information, the committee will use current information. The new site will be live at the end of June.
 - D. Collaborative Finance Processing Manual - update if any - Mr. Hodgkins indicated updates to the manual were moving forward.
 - E. Hartley Hill Road - private section (update) - Information in packet - Vicki Gragen, representing Cersosimo, indicated in an email to the Town Manager Michael Cersosimo would sign a quit claim deed. Mr. Wickberg said he had done additional research and

believes Mr. Bonds has no title to the portion of the road in question. His recommendation is to have the quit claim deed signed then write a letter to Mr. Bonds requesting he prove his claim of ownership. Craig Allen questioned if the Town became the owner of this section of Hartley Hill the amount of funds required for the road to be brought up to standard Class II condition. He requested Mr. Lawrence review the road for needed repair. Kevin Hughes requested Mr. Wickberg give the board a brief synopsis about acquisition of the property and steps to move forward with the process. Mr. Wickberg agreed to have information available for the next meeting. Craig Allen motioned to approve Mr. Hodgkins contact legal counsel to compose a quit claim deed for the Cersosimo property to be paid by Robert Wickberg. Susan Harlow seconded motion, motion carried.

- F. Town Land off Davidson Hill (update) - June 29, 2021 at 10 a.m. an auction will be held at the Town Hall to sell this parcel of land. Minimum bid accepted will be \$5,000.00 paid in cash or by cashier's check. There are four people interested in the land.
- G. Westminster School Vote and Budget Vote (June 30 and August 31, respectively) The Town Manager said the school vote for the three person board would take place June 30 at the Town Hall. An absentee ballot can be requested from the Town office. This vote is being funded by the Town. On August 31 there will be a vote for the new school budget. This budget will be for the next school year.

6. New Business (Discussion/Action)

- A. Open Meeting Law - discussion - information included in packet. Toby Young asked the board to review the VT Statutes regarding what is allowed in requesting an executive session during a Selectboard meeting. She said the open meeting law had been in place for many years and was very specific. Susan Harlow suggested stating the VT Statue, referred to in Title I General Provisions when the board was going to executive session.
- B. End of Year Financials - General ledger budget status report information included in packet - The board discussed cost of living (Cola) percentages and had a lengthy conversation about replacing or repairing the 2005 backhoe. This backhoe is scheduled (in equipment replacement schedule) to be replaced in 2023. Mr. Lawrence asked about the boards thoughts regarding a repair estimate of \$16,983.00. This estimate (from Nortrax) was given not knowing, exactly, what the problem is with the backhoe. In the past year road crew personnel rebuilt the rear end and replaced the differential. Mr. Allen questioned if the backhoe was being used less with the purchase of the new excavator and if a different size backhoe could be sufficient in light of the excavator purchase. Mr. Lawrence said they relied on the backhoe and a 310 John Deere or 420 Caterpillar are options. Jason Perry said it was a utility vehicle and the trade value would be lower and replacement cost would increase in the next year. In answer to a question by Kevin Hughes, Mr. Lawrence said on a scale of 1-10, the vehicle posed a hazard risk of 8 to the public or crew. The vehicle is becoming unpredictable. Mr. Hodgkins said the Town received \$65,500.00 in grant money for road expenses. If this surplus was applied to Town highway budget and \$11,500.00 was used from the equipment fund, the deficit would be about \$25,000.00 to buy a new backhoe outright. Craig Allen requested Mr. Lawrence present a proposal at the next meeting including a specific vehicle, options, cost, trade information etc. In answer to Kevin Hughes question, Mr. Lawrence confirmed this vehicle was essential to maintain the roads in the Town of Westminster and it poses a liability issue as to safety. Mr. Hughes asked the board to seek legal opinion the Board was acting in accordance to the rules permitting the board to replace this essential vehicle.

Susan Harlow requested the Board go back to the five year capital plan suggesting the board list all buildings, capital projects and options to fix, replace. This to include condition of

buildings, equipment and estimated costs to improve or replace. The board will begin this project in July of 2021. Russ Lazarek said this project could include roads and their condition and costs to repair/maintain. Mr. Jones said he believed there were a lot of grants available for Town roads and buildings.

- C. Employee Cost of Living Adjustment FY 2022. Current social security cost of living increase is 1.3 percent. The Board approved 2 percent increase in 2018, 3 percent in 2019, 2.8 percent in 2020 and 1.6 percent in 2021. As a financial advisement professional, Mr. Hughes believes the 1.3 percent social security administration recommendation is not an accurate representation of what the average citizen is experiencing, believing the cost is higher. As a taxpayer, he would lean toward a more generous interpretation of the COLA rule.
- D. 2005 Backhoe repair replacement versus repair. Information under “Financials” discussion.
- E. Next meeting for the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan - June 21, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall or by Zoom conferencing. Information included in packet is the current plan due to expire. Mr. Hodgkins requested Mr. Hughes and Toby Young attend the meeting (if possible), representing the board. There is a survey on the Town website citizens can complete for personal recommendations for the Town of Westminster infrastructure. Mr. Hodgkins will also email or send a survey upon request.

7. Manager’s Report -

- 1. Delinquent Tax - update - (12 parcels) - One parcel was redeemed 6/9/2020, four parcels are abandoned.
- 2. Construction - Town Hall - Work is mostly complete. There is a list of items needing correction or repair.
- 3. Tax Grievances - There are four grievances to be heard 6/10/2021.
- 4. Town Office Closure - Town Hall will be closed July 2 and July 5. July 5 is recommended holiday. July 2nd closure is due to two employees taking personal days on July 2 leaving one person in the office.

8. Board and Commissions - Craig Allen motioned to appoint John Jones as Windham Regional Commission Representative. Toby Young seconded, motion carried. Susan Harlow motioned to appoint Russell Lazarek as a Windham Regional Commission representative. Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried. Mr. Hodgkins thanked the two new representatives noting the commission was important to the Town.

9. Other Business - Craig Allen requested, at the conclusion of Town Meeting, after articles are approved or disapproved, to provide the voters with a final number. Not to change the number but to provide final information.

10. Date of Next Meeting - June 23, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. at the Westminster Town Hall.

11. Adjournment - Toby Young motioned to adjourn at 8:05 p.m. Susan Harlow seconded, meeting adjourned.

Clerk

Date