

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Tuesday, November 23, 2021

Westminster, VT Town Hall and via Zoom Conferencing

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

Others Present: Mark Anderson (Windham County Sheriff Department), Michelle Bos-Lun, Mike Mrowicki, Cole Streeter, June Streeter, Molly Banik, Paul Banik, Cassandra Pedigo, Brandon Pedigo, Rebecca Pedigo, John Parker, Fact TV (1 person), Tony Elliott (by Zoom) and others in person not identified.

Staff Present: Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager/Zoning Manager), Darlene Kelly, Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman), Millie Barry (Recording Clerk)

1. **Call to Order:** Kevin Hughes called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Information to access a future meeting by remote means is available on the FACT TV Facebook page or by contacting the Westminster Town Hall.
2. **Adjustments to the Agenda:** Mr. Hodgkins requested to table 5H ACCD Opportunity and 6F Executive Session for Selectboard Only to the next Board meeting. The chair so noted the adjustments.
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** November 10, 2021 - Susan Harlow motioned to accept the minutes of November 10, 2021 as printed. Craig Allen seconded the motion, the motion carried 4-0. Toby Young abstained from the vote as she was absent.
4. **Communications and Public Comments:**
 - Michelle Bos-Lun and Mike Mrowicki - VT State Representatives - Ms. Bos-Lun said as a representative her entire first term, until the Special Session November 22, 2021 had been by remote means. She noted there was a rapidly rising rate of COVID (Corona Virus) at the present time in the State and that a Special Session was called because Governor Scott had indicated he would be willing to approve special legislation giving local communities the authority to pass mask mandates for their regions. She said there were two propositions pending to change the VT Constitution. Proposition 2 (to correct the existing constitutional language eliminating slavery) and Proposition 5 dealing with woman's reproductive rights giving women the right to make decisions about their individual health care. Ms. Bos-Lun said the legislature would also be discussing reapportionment, specifically the population of each community determining how many representatives are able to serve each region. A statewide commission recommended single seat districts. Local committees also met about this issue and the Westminster Committee recommended keeping the existing model perhaps adding the town of Brookline to increase population to keep two representatives. Ms. Bos-Lun said scientific research and evidence show people wearing masks consistently indoor in public spaces protected people from community spread of the virus by 53%. She continued,

in the businesses she had visited, she believed customers and staff were, for the most part, not wearing masks. As a citizen, she noted wearing a mask was not too much to ask to protect the vulnerable people in our community.

Mr. Mrowicki said the health of Vermonters was tied to the health of the VT economy and unemployment is back to where it was when the virus first began. He stressed the fact he and Ms. Bos-Lun were available to help and assist the Town when needed, to work together as representatives and partners to bring the Town's voice to Montpelier.

Kevin Hughes confirmed S.1 (information included in packet) was the legislation Governor had signed. If a local board were to approve the legislation it would be in effect for 45 days to be extended every 30 days to expire April 30, 2022. Mr. Hughes also confirmed the legislation did not provide a mechanism for enforcement if individual towns approved the legislation. Mr. Mrowicki said enforcement was left to individual towns. Cassandra Pedigo questioned why Westminster would find it necessary to initiate a mask mandate in small town businesses. Ms. Bos-Lun said though masks did not prevent all spread, they reduced the spread by 53% and were important to slow the spread of the virus. Mr. Mrowicki felt it was good to raise awareness of the importance of wearing masks as Vermont's numbers were high. Others in attendance believed masks were a choice, did not support a local mask mandate and there were delivery services available so people were not required to enter a business. Tony Elliot noted people joining together doing something in common made the process more effective. He believed everyone wearing masks in public spaces was beneficial to stop the spread of COVID. In answer to Mr. Hughes questions regarding Anne N. Sosin statements (memorandum included in packet). Mr. Mrowicki said Ms. Sosin's advice and preference was the Governor initiate a statewide mandate not a piecemeal mandate by Town. Ms. Bos-Lun said her understanding was Ms. Sosin was an advocate of masking, masks would provide more prevention. Individual members of the Board stated they did not believe a Town mask mandate was necessary. Their concerns were how S.1 would work, that wearing a mask was a personal choice and being vaccinated, keeping a six foot distance from others were options.

- Mark Anderson - Windham County Sheriff - Mr. Anderson presented information regarding a significant increase in the departments' rates. The fees charged by the department cover the officer hourly rate, health, dental, life insurance, and vehicle costs etc. adding retirement costs (for employees) have more than doubled 2007. He noted across the State of VT law enforcement is severely understaffed and though he was down about four positions in July he believed he would soon be at full staff. He was working with local State representatives and the Statewide General Assembly to find solutions to decrease retirement costs. In answer to Ms. Young's question regarding services to the Town, Mr. Anderson said his service was down and the sheriff's department, at present, owed a deficit to the Town. He said the Town was getting the service they were paying for. The Town could carry the deficit (bank hours) or the department would offer a refund for service not provided. Mr. Anderson also noted Mr. Hodgkins had access to the 'Stars System' to identify the services the department was providing, they did want the Town to have information and the department could do better providing more information. He noted his department was receiving more calls previously handled by the State Police due to staffing shortages. Also, department vehicles were a

mobile office, when vehicles were seen side by side, officers exchanged information and handed off information regarding investigations communicating to help close investigations. Mr. Anderson said there was a catalytic converter problem statewide and regionally. There were previous metal dealers outside the State of VT (New Hampshire) they believed were purchasing stolen converters. Law enforcement was working with State and Federal agencies to provide resources to help solve the problem. Mr. Mrowicki said he was meeting regularly with Sheriff Anderson and noted the legislature would be talking about the increase in retirement account issues. In answer to Mr. Hodgkins questions, Mr. Anderson said he would like to provide extended 10-12 hour shifts on a regular basis to catch up on hours owed the Town or the department could provide a refund.

5. Unfinished Business (Discussion/Action):

- A. American Rescue Plan (ARPA) Committee update - Mr. Hodgkins noted the next meeting would be November 30, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at Westminster Institute. Mr. Hughes noted Jim Matteau's well thought out comments regarding ARPA funds. Mr. Hodgkins said a diverse range of projects were being discussed as well as public hearings for community input. The Selectboard would make the final decision for using funds.
- B. Hartley Hill Road - private section update if any - No update - Mr. Hodgkins noted he was waiting for written communication regarding Mr. Slason's opinion.
- C. New Website Moving/Maintenance - update - The Board approved hiring Letitia Milevsky to update and migrate current information to the new site at approximately \$300.00 to \$400.00. Ms. Harlow said maintenance of the site would be a budget discussion.
- D. Collaborative Finance Processing Manual - update - Darlene Kelly noted she believed the Town would be required to make some major financial decisions soon. Mr. Hughes noted the priority of the next meeting would be budget discussion.
- E. July 29, 2021 Storm - FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) update - Mr. Hodgkins said he was providing required data to a FEMA representative on a weekly basis and believed payments would be received throughout the process of supplying information regarding individual repairs grouped together as projects. Mr. Hodgkins said a contractor had been hired for Henwood Hill Road, the road would be repaired by January 1, 2022.
- F. 5-Year Capital Plan - update - Ms. Harlow said she believed projects on the Five Year Plan should be prioritized. Ms. Kelly and the Board had a lengthy discussion regarding saving/budgeting for five year plan projects (large expenses) equipment replacement etc.
- G. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Review - discussion page 7 and 8 - Tabled to December 8, 2021.

H. State of VT - ACCD opportunity - John Jones update - Tabled

6. New Business (Discussion/Action):

A. Mailing a ballot to every taxpayer - yes or no? Mr. Hodgkins said the clerks were given an

option from the State for the Selectboard to approve or not approve mailing a ballot to every resident. The clerks do not recommend mailing a ballot to each registered voter due to waste in material and time as well as the cost of \$3,600.00 the budget does not support. The clerks support mailing a ballot to residents if a ballot is requested.

B. Town Mask Mandate for Public Spaces - Discussed under Communications and Public Comments

C. Rules of Procedure for Municipal Boards (VLCT) Vermont League of Cities and Towns - adopt? Tabled

D. Bidding Process - discussion - Mr. Perry requested a pre-bid meeting for any contract. He stated if someone was really interested they would attend a mandatory meeting so everyone received the same information at the same time. Mr. Hughes said bidding processes, manuals, purchasing procedures etc. should be reviewed as part of VLCT best practices requesting to table the discussion for an early 2022 meeting.

E. Executive Session - Selectboard Only - Tabled

7. Manager's Report: Nothing to report

8. Boards and Commissions: Nothing to report

9. Other Business: None

10. Date of Next Meeting: - December 8, 2021

11. Adjournment: Toby Young motioned to adjourn at 8:52 p.m. Craig Allen seconded the motion the meeting was adjourned.

Clerk

Date

Minutes composed by Millie Barry 11/26/2021

