

## MEETING OF THE WESTMINSTER ARPA COMMITTEE – Minutes

*Tuesday, January 18, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.*

### **Institute - Westminster, VT and by Zoom Conferencing**

**Members Present:** Cynthia Stoddard (Chair), Jason Perry (SB), Russell Hodgkins (Clerk/TM), Pauline Blake O'Brien (Town Clerk), Jim Matteau (Village Chair), Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman), and Linda Fawcett

Attending remotely: Kevin Hughes (SB) .

**I. Call to Order:** Being 5:32 PM, the Chair, Cynthia Stoddard called the meeting to order.

**II. Approval of Minutes (Nov. 30, 2021):** Cynthia Stoddard asked if anyone had any additions or subtractions to the minutes presented. Hearing none, Pauline Blake O'Brien made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Jim Matteau seconded. The minutes passed 6-0-1 with Chuck Lawrence abstaining as he was not at the last meeting.

**III. ARPA Committee Guidelines: Example from Richmond, VT by John Jones:** Cynthia Stoddard tabled this discussion as the presenter John Jones was not at the meeting.

**IV. Status of Committee recommended ARPA Project – Digitization Project:** Pauline Blake O'Brien stated that both companies that gave pricing were awarded their perspective tasks and that RecordsForce were to start as soon as next week. Their job is to take the land records that are missing in the land modules and scan them into the land record files. At that point NEMRC can start the process of digitization.

**V. Report of Department Head Needs – Russ Hodgkins:** Russ Hodgkins told the meeting that he had placed all of the pending fund requests, to date, in the meeting packet as there are many to be discussed. He went through each of the pending requests including the Department Heads needs in this demanding time of the pandemic.

Cynthia Stoddard told the meeting that she talked with Katie Buckley about the new published rules for the ARPA funding usage for Municipalities. She told the meeting that the old rules were categorized, and the project requests needed to follow one of the prescribed usages. The new rules allow Towns who received less than 10 million dollars to transfer the monies into their "General Fund" and spend it where the Town needs it most. This action could possibly eliminate the need of a single audit (expenditures under \$750K) and would turn the monies into unrestricted surplus to the General Fund. This step alone could open the door for more needed projects that just could not make the strict guidelines of the other rules but are very needed within the Town. Jim Matteau cautioned that using Federal funds comes with financial responsibility and structure. All funds to be spent should still go through specific guidelines that this Committee endorses and tracks. The Government has the ability to come back and request documentation of how these funds were used and how the process of approvals was met. All of these small requests for funding will have to be documented if and when approved with the Committees minutes proving that a process was done. What we don't want to happen, he continued, is the Government coming back and asking for the funds back. All agreed this would be devastating to the Town. Russ Hodgkins asked when is the best time to move this money as the Town and Village has only

received half of their allocation to date. Cynthia responded that she would recommend after April 1<sup>st</sup> for recording reasons and when the second half is allocated then add this to the total. After hearing no further discussion about the new rules, Cynthia moved the meeting into discussions of the individual requests that were before the Committee to date. Russ Hodgkins made note that 7 out of the 12 members were present and that formal approvals can be made this evening. The Chair agreed and continued.

- Engineering Study for the Institute – Jim Matteau cleared up the study that he was seeking with the work that Russ Hodgkins had done with the mobile equipment. Jim stated that this study was to create a solid plan for the building to make it the best meeting space that the building could be addressing items such as: Ventilation, Acoustics, and Air Quality. Jim stated that before this item actually goes to the Committee for approval many things have to happen such as Institute Board approval, Village Board approval along with Selectboard approval that this is the meeting space they want to enhance. It is possible that the Selectboard could say no to the meeting space idea, and this would all be for not. Russ Hodgkins asked about getting started with Fire & Safety's free recommendations and engineering suggestions. Jim stated that he was not in favor of this as he doesn't trust the judgement of this State Department. Another factor in this discussion that was brought to the table was the fact that the Town would be spending money on this building that they don't own. Jim continued that an agreement would also need to be drafted to who owns what and who can use the facility after monies have been spent. Cynthia Stoddard asked Russ to bring this idea to the selectboard as soon as possible for their idea of direction on a meeting space and Jim was to continue his work on getting the elevator working along with talking with the other two Boards for their ideas and comments. A possible joint meeting was discussed between the Selectboard and the Institute Board if both are in agreement of this venture. Discussion was tabled until further information became available.
- iPod Proposal – Executive Dept. – Russ Hodgkins explained the proposal for 7 iPods and after a brief discussion of usage, the Committee voted 7-0 in favor of having Russ bring this proposal to the Selectboard for approval.
- Meeting Space Equipment Enhancement – Executive Dept. – Russ Hodgkins explained that he had FACTV and VTC Tech meet at the Institute to discuss the needs of the Selectboard to enhance their ZOOM meetings. The proposal was their findings for the equipment needed to run a meeting at its full potential. The Committee after a brief discussion voted 7-0 in favor of sending this project to the Selectboard for their approval.
- Onsite Tablets – Highway Dept. – Chuck Lawrence described that Windham Regional Commission has recommended this feature in all of the Town's that they represent as a modern way to document roadway changes as they happen. With Act 64 mandates, the strict recording of all road changes is not just requested but required and incidents such as the July storm last year this item would have been very valuable. After a brief discussion, it was voted on that this project go in front of the Selectboard for their approval.
- Grout Ave. – The Chair told the meeting that this item should be research further as other funding opportunities are in the works and as this information becomes clear than this item can be revisited as it has merit and should be considered. The Town Manager will contact the Water Superintendent, Lou Blanchard to see what other resources he has researched. After further discussion, it was tabled for a possible Public Forum and/or Town Meeting.

- **Broadband Funding** – The Chair told the meeting that this item was addressed by Mike Mrowicki, our Legislature, better than what we could do as his information is updated and accurate to their funding of needs and resources. No discussion occurred.
- **Fire Dept. Generator** – Russ Hodgkins asked for this item to be tabled because further information will be needed for the Committee to make a formal decision. He continued with the support of Chuck Lawrence to explain the importance of this request as it pertains the Emergency services that the Town depends on. All agreed and Russ to get more information as soon as possible.

**VI. Hybrid Meeting Space: (Jim & Cynthia)** – The Chair declared that this was already cleared up and further information was to follow after a Selectboard determination of their desired meeting space.

**VII. Public Meeting/Forum in February:** The Chair described the four items that were on the agenda for discussion. They were Facilitator, Stakeholders, Advertising, and Date Selection. Cynthia Stoddard recommended that this item also be tabled as it all changed with the new rule that could change the Committee’s review process and what is needed from the Public in the decisions of money to be allocated. A brief discussion of the need for public hearings came to the conclusion that they are necessary and will happen when the rules are formally decided upon and determinations become available.

**VIII. Other Business:** Nothing needed for this evening.

**IX. Date of Next Meeting:** February 22, 2022, at 5:30 p.m. at the Institute & Zoom.

**X. Adjournment:** Chuck Lawrence made a motion to adjourn with Pauline Blake O’Brien seconding at 6:55 PM. Cynthia Stoddard called the vote, and the meeting was adjourned.

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**Russell R. Hodgkins - Clerk**

**Minutes composed by Russell Hodgkins 1/19/2022**