

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Wednesday, February 22, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

In person at Westminster, VT Town Hall/Remote by FACT TV

Selectboard Present: Jason Perry (Chair), Katrina Hamilton (Clerk), Kevin Hughes (Vice Chair), Craig Allen and Nathan Dugat

Staff Present: Millie Barry (Recording clerk) – Alison Bigwood (Interim Town Manager/Zoning Administrator), Remote - Pauline O'Brien (Town Clerk)

Others Present: Cole Streeter and Peter Smith, Remote – Susan Roman

1. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

Information to access a future meeting using a remote connection is available on the Town of Westminster website or by calling the Westminster Town Hall

2. Adjustments to Agenda: Katrina Hamilton requested to add under new business, G. Town Garage Heat and Alison Bigwood requested to add under other Business – A. Manager's Report – The chair noted the additions.

3. Acceptance of Minutes: February 6, 2023 and February 8, 2023 – Kevin Hughes motioned to accept the minutes of Westminster selectboard special meeting February 6, 2023, Craig Allen seconded, motion carried by 3-0 voice vote. Katrina Hamilton abstained due to composing the minutes of the meeting and Nathan Dugat abstained due to absence. Hughes motioned to accept the minutes of February 8, 2023 regular meeting of the Westminster selectboard, Allen seconded, motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

4. Communications and Public Comments:

Cole Streeter questioned the status of the trailer behind the post office parking lot. Mr. Perry noted he would have time in the coming week to look at the contents of the trailer and consider the next steps. As a citizen and taxpayer, Hughes thanked Craig Allen for his many years of selfless service, dedication, and commitment to the Town. Hughes noted Allen had moved the board through some long, arduous, and difficult situations.

Hughes thanked Nathan Dugat for his intermediate service and professionalism serving on the board to be sure the board had a voting quorum.

Hughes said Perry's consistent leadership dealing fairly and equitably with the board to be sure the board was, in almost all situations, collegiate and unanimous manner throughout the difficult year was professional and, in his opinion, Perry was an outstanding chairperson. He noted the board's adopted policy was to rotate the chair position each year. Pauline O'Brien questioned if the chairperson position must rotate? She said, due to the year of inconsistency within the Town it may be helpful to have Perry as chair another year for continuity. Hughes said his position, as a single member of the board, was to rotate the position yearly. The adopted conflict of interest policy included each board member be inclusive to attain the level of knowledge and expertise to be competent interacting as members of town government so there was not one single person caught up in the 'stickiness' of town government. Perry agreed to the rotation of the board chairperson believing if he was elected vice chair the board would have continuity.

5. Unfinished Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Adopt Personnel Policy – Hamilton said she forwarded the Town’s sick policy to VLCT (Vermont League of Cities and Towns) for review and their opinion to be sure it complied with the SOV (State of Vermont) policies. Item tabled to the next regular meeting.

B. Final Discussion before town meeting – Perry will follow-up regarding providing childcare at town meeting.

C. 5-year Capital Plan – Tabled to next regular meeting. Perry said he believed all town buildings should be assessed to figure out what was needed for repairs/renovations/upgrades adding remaining ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) monies was about \$620,000.00. Hamilton noted a plan was required before next year to utilize ARPA funds.

6. New Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Emergency Management – Hamilton introduced Pete Smith, former fire chief in Walpole, NH for many years. Smith is willing to take on the position of area emergency management director to see if he and the position fit together. Smith said he believed the fire service and emergency management went hand in hand as first responders assessed the initial call, deciding procedure and next steps. Smith said he would be in contact with Ben Masure (current interim director) and Cole Streeter. Ms. Bigwood will forward State information regarding emergency management she receives by email to Smith. Perry thanked Ben Masure for his willingness to take on the director position keeping the Town compliant until a replacement was found. Allen said the position was an appointment made by the selectboard after town meeting. This item will be tabled to the next regular meeting.

B. ARPA Scoring Sheet Approval – Information included in packet – Hamilton said the ARPA committee had received some non-positive feedback regarding their decisions. The information for the board to review was provided by VLCT (in part) are a guideline scoring sheet template and preliminary application to streamline the process for approval of projects. Community resilience, strategic value for the town and the executability of the proposal are three different areas scored. Information considered in the process is follow-up and maintenance of projects after approval. Ms. Hamilton noted Paul Banik was willing to attend the March 8th meeting to answer additional questions.

Hamilton also noted information in the packet regarding State ARPA funds. These funds were different than town monies and use of the monies was designated for specific programs.

In another matter: Perry said Larry Slason (legal counsel) was willing to attend a meeting after town meeting to review procedures and use of executive session with a new board. Both items tabled to March 8, 2023.

C. Town Manager Hiring Committee Appointment – Tabled to March 8, 2023. Hughes noted the board had discussed and officially placed on the Town website - a committee of 7 members: 1 an active selectboard member, 1 former selectboard member, 1-2 employees of the town and 3-4 members of the town. The committee will meet in person during regular business hours and the time commitment will be over several months. Hughes said Susan Roman had submitted a letter of interest, introducing her as a member of the committee. Alison Bigwood will alternate with Kelley Thayer and Pauline O’Brien as two positions. Charles (Chuck) Lawrence (highway department), Katrina Hamilton (current board), Craig Allen (former selectboard member) and Chris Potter. The board agreed the committee would meet to outline the position and a qualities of a preferred candidate. Perry suggested the committee submit

their search information to VLCT to begin the process. It was agreed the committee will compose minutes of meetings and legal counsel will be consulted for input/expertise about the process. Ms. Bigwood will contact legal counsel.

D. Year to Date Financials – Information included in packet - Alison Bigwood said an additional \$20,000.00 was approved at the 2022 town meeting so the fire district would be taken care of when the hold harmless and pilot (in lieu of tax payment) is no longer in existence. The minutes for the meeting read the fire district is to receive an extra \$20,000.00. Their portion of hold harmless and pilot is 13.42% of the taxes received totaling an extra amount of \$22,613.80 with this amount as of yet unpaid. Per the meeting minutes, Ms. Bigwood said the money had been obligated to the fire district's savings for the future purchase of a new truck.

E. Road Foreman Report – As Mr. Lawrence was absent, Perry reviewed the report submitted by Lawrence.

1. The road crew has been coming to work early to address mud while roads are still frozen. Perry said there had been calls about the muddy roads and believed there was a large influx of people previously unaccustomed to dirt roads. There are no current road closures and the roads will dry out soon.
2. The mandatory pre-bid paving meeting held 2/22/2023 was attended by Bazin Brother, Springfield Paving, Pike and All State Asphalt.
3. Streeter Construction is working on the break/training area above the office at the town garage to expand the office space to add room for records and office equipment.
4. A town highway employee is taking a State funded welding class in Rutland, VT.
5. The ARPA chair requested the selectboard complete the application to apply for funds if the new ARPA scoring system indicates the project is favorable. Lucas Decamp is available to attend a meeting to answer questions regarding the heating system.
6. In 2024/2025 the Town is scheduled to replace loader 2, a 2000 John Deere 544 with 8,500 hours. Also, scheduled for replacement is truck #1, a 2017 Dodge 5500 with 60,446 miles. Lawrence will begin looking at price and availability to determine options as there is a 6-8 month wait for equipment. Perry said a new loader purchased today would never last 23 years and if a town were to attempt to keep a loader 23 years, they would need to budget approximately \$30,000.00 for emissions and electronic equipment once the warranty was up. Perry said it cost a lot of money to upgrade equipment. He said there had been calls and questions from the public regarding material dumped on Kimball Hill Road South. He said a truck got stuck requiring the material to be unloaded and the material would be picked up in the future.

Millie Barry noted a large tree across the town road on the back side of the Oak Hill Cemetery blocking the road and decreasing the automobile and truck traffic in the cemetery. Barry questioned the possibility of installing gates due to the continual traffic, often after dark. Allen suggested calling the Bellows Falls Police Department as one half of the cemetery was located in Bellows Falls. Perry said he would contact Chris Potter for input.

In another matter, Allen suggested giving each of the seven town trucks a name to be determined by individual Westminster Center School classrooms. This was a fun activity involving children and sometimes easier to remember names than numbers and truck make. Allen said he would be willing to pay the cost of lettering the names on individual trucks. Perry will discuss the suggestion with Chuck Lawrence.

F. Executive Session – Contractual issue – Kevin Hughes motioned, per subsection 1 VSA 3-13 where

premature public knowledge would clearly place the municipality (Town of Westminster), the public body, a person or persons involved at substantial disadvantage to move to executive session and invite the interim town manager to consider two contracts where contractual discussions have occurred long before two new board members join the board. He added it was important incumbent board members be present for discussion even if no action is taken. Craig Allen seconded; motion carried 5-0 by voice vote. The executive session will be after Other Business on the agenda.

G. Town Garage – heat - Perry questioned the specific heating system recommended by Lucas Decamp for approximately \$38,000.00 and stated F.W. Webb had assessed and measured the town garage recommending the quoted system was the most efficient to heat the building. There is a 12-week wait for the heat equipment. In answer to Allen’s question regarding the bid process, Perry said Cota and Cota had been contacted with no response. He did not know if a third company was contacted to bid. Ms. Bigwood said there were dollars available in the highway department budget for the required 50% deposit. Hamilton motioned to spend the money on the deposit for the recommended heating system for the town garage. Allen seconded the motion. Allen amended the main motion to: Purchase a heating system for the town highway garage and authorize Ms. Bigwood to sign a contract not to exceed \$39,000.00. Hamilton seconded, motion carried 5-0 by voice vote.

7. Boards, Committees and Commissions: None

8. Other Business:

A. Manager’s report – Information included in packet is ‘Stars’ report, titled Windham County Sheriff’s Office. Bigwood said the report, accessed online, indicated there had not been a sheriff present in Westminster from January 1, 2023 to the present. The report did show Ashley Pinger (animal control officer) had been present on multiple occasions. The Town continued to be invoiced for sheriff’s department coverage as per the contract and she has emailed the sheriff regarding Paul Quido’s concerns with little response from the department.

B. Due to neighbor complaints on Back Westminster Road, Ms. Bigwood had contacted Ashley Pinger (animal control officer) as some tagged animals from Westminster Meats were roaming loose on neighboring properties.

C. The last payment to the SOV for Westminster Meats has been submitted and the account will be closed when the payment is received.

D. The audit report may not be ready for town meeting. Ms. Bigwood is working on addressing a list of questions recently received from the company and the actual report will be provided on the Westminster website when it is available. Ms. Bigwood believed the report delay was due to a long list of situations/circumstances in the town this year.

Ms. Hamilton said the tags on Westminster Meats animals were for identification. The animals come from all over the USA and their roaming is a federal issue due to the potential spread of disease. She said each incident of a roaming animal should be reported to the SOV.

9. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

The board moved to executive session at 7:56 p.m.

The board reconvened regular session at 9:08 p.m. with a motion from Katrina Hamilton seconded by

Craig Allen. No action was taken.

10. Adjournment: Craig Allen motioned to adjourn at 9:10 p.m., seconded by Kevin Hughes, meeting adjourned by 5-0 voice vote.

Clerk

Date

Minutes composed by Millie Barry 2/23/2023