

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Wednesday June 14, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

In person at Westminster, VT Town Hall

Selectboard Present: Katrina Hamilton (Chair), Katrina Hamilton (Clerk), Stephen Major (Vice Chair), Dan Crocker (Clerk), Jason Perry and Kevin Hughes

Staff Present: Alison Bigwood (Interim Town Manager/Zoning Administrator) Charles (Chuck) Lawrence (Road Foreman) and Millie Barry (Clerk)

Others Present: Cole Streeter, Judy Coven, Chris Potter, John Ewald and Sarah Waldo

- 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 contacting the Westminster Town Hall.
- 2. Adjustments to Agenda:** None
- 3. Acceptance of Minutes:** Minutes of May 24, 2023 – Jason Perry moved to accept the minutes of May 24, 2023, Kevin Hughes seconded, motion carried by 4-0 voice vote. Stephen Major abstained from vote due to absence.
- 4. Communications and Public Comments:** Chris Potter gave an overview of the Westminster cemeteries. The supply budget of \$400.00 covers the flags, \$4,000.00 is for repairs, and mowing is \$14,100.00. The present contract with VT Hillside Lawn Services end March 31, 2024. Potter said many cemeteries have decided to limit the number of remains in each grave, space size for a lot is eight feet by 40 inches. At this time Westminster permits as many remains as can fit in a grave. Some cemeteries are limiting lots to one full burial with a casket and two cremations. Westminster charges \$150.00 per grave and other places charge between \$300.00- \$600.00. Also, the corner posts for each lot not having posts will be placed soon. Potter thanked the road crew for maintenance of the cemetery roads and mowing the sides of the road and for record keeping by clerks at the town hall. In answer to Stephen Major's question regarding the maintenance of graves, Potter said perpetual care funds paid at the time a lot was purchased should be in an account accumulating interest and the interest would be used to care for graves. He said unfortunately, Chip Stearns said the monies (for cemetery maintenance) didn't amount to anything. Potter said no stone repair work had been done for 3-4 years. He will be sending out a form requesting bids from local contractors for the retaining front wall at the Westminster New cemetery. He plans to request ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) monies for this repair. The board will address cemetery stone repair (\$4,000.00 in budget) at another meeting. Chuck Lawrence said the road crew placed American service flags at all the outlying cemeteries and will work with Potter on GPS (global position system) coordinates for these locations. Hamilton said she will invite the historical society to an upcoming Board meeting. The Board talked about the Westminster West cemetery 'hearse house'. Major said the little building next to the

Westminster West (WW) church was the 'hearse house' currently used for storage. This building at one time housed a hearse.

In another matter - Sarah Waldo questioned recent conversations regarding paving the West Road (dirt road). She believed the road should be considered a community resource and paving would compromise the safety of the road. Chuck Lawrence said his comments regarding paving dirt roads was an attempt to begin a conversation because gravel and sand were becoming more difficult to obtain, he believed the Town should come up with a plan to spend resources wisely. A possible option was to pave some of the major dirt roads to cut back on road and gravel use for the future. Judy Coven requested a separate article on the Town Meeting warning to be able to discuss a budget item for any road the Board considered paving. Hamilton said there was no plan to pave the West Road as the current budget does not cover the maintenance of current paved roads. Hamilton said the Board received two letters from WW community members regarding paving the West Road and a letter regarding trimming trees, cutting brush, putting in new drains and maintaining the ditches on Forest Road. Chuck Lawrence said the road crew is working on Forest Road.

In another matter - Perry thanked the road crew for their work resurfacing the town hall front steps.

5. Unfinished Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Law Enforcement discussion – information included in packet. Law enforcement budgets were included for the towns of Fairlee, Thetford and Weathersfield, VT noting the budgets were considerably more than the amount Westminster allocated for police services. Hamilton noted there is a clause in the current sheriff's contract that auto renews, and the town will be billed for July. The contract can be terminated with 30 days' written notice. From research she believed there was a lot of work to organize a police department for Westminster. A full-time officer, depending on the size of the town, could cost \$60,000.00, with benefits included, about \$105,000.00, including a cruiser and equipment would exceed \$120,000.00. She noted the \$60,000.00 salary rate was on the low end for an officer. Without knowing the details of responsibility and duties a dispatch service would perform, dispatch costs could range from \$20,000.00 to \$100,000.00 per year. Stephen Major said the voters at Town meeting tasked the board with providing police service and had two different things they wanted, a response to small crime and patrol and crime prevention with a \$120,000.00 budget. He felt the board was required to communicate with the sheriff's department what the Town wanted for services where the state police did not respond. Cole Streeter said normally there was a trooper response from the sheriff, state police or sometimes the Bellows Falls police department providing services to accidents etc. Major added Westminster's model may be patrol and presence, not response. Hamilton said Lieutenant French (VT State Police) told her the state police currently was not contracting with additional towns due to staffing issues and were attempting to create a regional dispatch center. Perry said he learned from attending a tri-board meeting in Rockingham, Bellows Falls did not have an interest in providing police services for another town. Dan Crocker believed this was an item for the new town manager. Hamilton said at the present time, Westminster did not have another

option other than to contract with Windham County Sheriff's department. The Board discussed services provided by the department, to have a defined plan for police services to bring before the voters at the next town meeting, to have a public forum and invite the sheriff's department to attend and for the Board to be clear and unified regarding expectations. Perry said for the record he did not think the sheriff's department was doing a good job and was not in favor of giving them more money. He added from the Town's past experience the problems with the department's service would not go away and more Board discussion was required. Hamilton will present a proposal to the ARPA committee for roadside speed monitoring devices next week and invite Mark Anderson to a future Board meeting.

B. Five Year Capital Plan discussion – Post Office and North Westminster Community House (NWCH)

Information included in packet - Perry said he and Ms. Bigwood visited the buildings and the information, including his stated disclaimer, were their observations. The post office windows are old single pane and do not have screens, there is rot in exterior clapboards, the exterior door is rotted, and the roof is showing wear. The foundation is solid, the heating system looks to be very new (the post office pays for heat), and the basement windows are at grade or just below grade. The post office personnel are happy with things as they are, but the town may want to put some money into the building, priorities being siding, windows and roof. As repairs are required, post office personnel notify the landlord. If repairs are not completed or acknowledged within 30 days, the post office completes the repair and sends the landlord the bill. The Board discussed using a five-year plan to meet expenditures. NWCH – Perry said the building was very interesting and an immediate need was to drain and remove the oil tank and to cover missing windowpanes on the west side of the building and 'critter holes' in the soffit and side of building. He believed the repairs/renovations were more than could be addressed in a five-year plan. The building could not be used in its present condition. Currently, the building is used for storage for Town items. Major suggested an article on the Town meeting warning for the building to be made available to a non-profit or community group to be given away or sold if there is community support for someone to take ownership of the building. John Ewald suggested using the building as a Westminster community space as it could be connected to town water/sewer, to apply for grants and ARPA money for renovations, and begin by forming a committee interested in renovating the building. Perry noted another downfall of the building was there was little space for parking. Ewald will take the next steps to form a committee interested in the building. Major made a motion for the road crew to remove the oil and tank from the NWCH and to board up holes and windows as needed. Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote. Kevin Hughes motioned for John Ewald to solicit committee members for the NWCH. Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

6. New Business (Discussion/Action)

A. Year to Date Financials – Tabled to next meeting.

- B. Westminster Listers Discussion – Hamilton said as the SOV (State of Vermont) had changed their computer system, the listers requested an extension for submission of the grand list to the SOV. 102 grievance letters were mailed last week based on changes in property values and appointments for grievance meetings are being scheduled for June 22, 2023. Mapping is up to date including changes and listers cards are available online. Ewald said the grand list had increased over the last year by over one million dollars. Personally, he has taken a 12-hour lister course and is learning a lot, adding the responsibilities of being a lister are challenging. He stated the SOV was possibly taking over the property value appraisal system as there were about 100 VT towns looking at reappraisal. Bigwood said in the future, it would be helpful to have more information from the listers before grievance letters or other information was mailed to help answer taxpayer questions. Perry noted possibly having a lister present in the town office would be helpful. Ewald believed overall lister presence in the town hall was good. Hamilton said the listers were elected, volunteering their time and possibly there needed to be a person hired to work full time in the office.
- C. School Board Vacancy – Hamilton said anyone interested in the position vacated by member Molly Banik would send a letter of interest to the WNESU (Windham Northeast Supervisory Union) office.
- D. Personnel Reviews Follow-up Information – Hamilton said VLCT (Vermont League of Cities and Towns), human resources department said job performance reviews could not be completed without an employee job description. The Board discussed employee contracts and the duties listed in employee contracts. Hughes said, for the record, the Town ran into problems when an employee did not have a contract. Perry read from a statement provided by Larry Slason (legal counsel), “contracts are not necessary and are not generally provided to employees covered by the Town’s personnel policy. Contracts are more typically provided to administrative employees like town managers not covered by personnel rules.” Hughes disagreed with Larry Slason’s opinion. Stephen Major motioned to request town employees to write up descriptions of their job, Hughes seconded, discussion ensued. The Board agreed a manager/administrator would write a job description for employees he/she supervises. Motion carried by 4-0 voice vote; Stephen Major abstained from the vote.
- E. Town Manager Search Update – Hamilton stated the first-round resume collection ended June 12, 2023. Thus far there are 12 resumes with one potential candidate based on the Town’s parameters. The ad will be run again with the next deadline July 9, 2023. Hamilton noted some candidates did not like the proposed salary. Ms. Bigwood said there were search committee members wanting to have a meeting, she added the stated salary was not a flat rate, there was the potential for a higher salary depending on candidate qualifications etc.
- F. Town Manager Report –
1. Bigwood said Sully’s Pest Control sprayed the exterior and sills of the building due to an ant problem.
 2. Monday, June 19, 2023 is a holiday approved by the Board.
 3. End of the year financials will be completed by Chip Stearns June 15, 2023.

4. The annual audit process will begin in July.

5. Kathy Blake treasurer of Fire District #5 (North Westminster sewer) no longer wants the treasurer responsibility. Bigwood has been working closely with Blake to resolve the unpaid sewer bills by North Westminster and Kissell Hill residents to the Village of Bellows Falls. Scott Pickup and Bigwood are working with legal counsel on property liens for the delinquencies. Legal fees will be paid by the fire district. When the liens are established for the properties, Bellows Falls Village will assume responsibility for further collection of sewer charges. She said delinquent charges for the last two bills is more than \$50,000.00. Scott Pickup is requesting future meetings with North Westminster and Kissell Hill residents owing money be held at Westminster Town Hall with the Board present.

6. Trash tags will be mailed to residents June 16, 2023.

G. Road Foreman Report –

1. Road Grading and brush cutting continues by the road crew

2. Lawrence is waiting for the police report for insurance monies to replace wooden guardrails taken out by an automobile accident on the Back Westminster Road.

3. A new road crew employee has been hired.

4. The crew will be digging the parking lot surrounding Vernon Temples office in North Westminster due to an abandoned 12-inch culvert pipe that has failed. The pipe is not on any road plan Lawrence has access to.

5. The highway department has hauled about 120 loads of trees and debris from all parts of Town due to the last winter storm. There is minor work to be completed in WW.

6. A Passive grant has been received for new equipment including jackets, reflective pants, and Kevlar vests for road crew members. This new clothing was 100% paid for by the VLCT grant.

Dan Crocker commented the crew was doing a really nice job grading dirt roads with a concern someone should go through with a shovel after grading to do the ‘turn outs.

Perry requested Lawrence communicate with the Interim Town Manager when a new employee is hired.

G. Executive Session – Contractual Matter – Kevin Hughes motioned to move to executive session and invite the interim town manager after other business on the agenda. Perry seconded; motion carried 5-0 voice vote.

7. **Boards, Committees and Commissions** – None

8. **Other Business:** None

9. **Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday, June 28, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

The Board moved to executive session at 9:01 p.m.

The Board reconvened regular session at 9:34 p.m. Stephen Major motioned to accept a one-year employee contract for Kelley Thayer, Jason Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

10. Major motion to adjourn at 9:36, Hughes seconded, motion passed 5-0 voice vote.

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Clerk

Meeting composed by Millie Barry 6/18/2023

Date