

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Wednesday, August 23, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

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

Selectboard Present: Katrina Hamilton (chair), Kevin Hughes, Jason Perry, Dan Crocker (clerk) and Stephen Major (vice chair).

Staff Present: Alison Bigwood (Interim Town Manager/Zoning Administrator) Millie Barry (Recording Clerk), John Ewald (Lister), Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman), Rachel Cohen (Lister), remote-Pauline O'Brien (Town Clerk)

Others Present: Cole Streeter and Rachel Shields Ebersole, 1 person representing FACT TV – remote, Sarah Waldo

1. Call to Order: Katrina Hamilton called the meeting to order at 6:31 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: July 26, 2023 – Stephen Major motioned to accept the minutes of July 26, 2023, Jason Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote

4. Communications and Public Comments:

North Westminster Community House – John Ewald relayed to the board there was a plan being developed to use the upstairs and close the lower part of the building to use for town storage. The fire marshall visited the site saying the building was usable with a maximum of 49 people at one time. A handicap accessible bathroom and handicap ramp, exit lights and other miscellaneous carpentry was required. Ewald asked if the selectboard was behind the project and if there was a possibility of using ARPA funds for a portion of the project. In answer to Dan Crocker's question, Ewald believed there could be 10-15 parking spots on the boundary of the building with the possibility of other parking in the back. In a month Ewald will address the board after gathering more details about the building.

Hamilton said a letter had been received from Sarah Waldo regarding the maintenance on the town website. Waldo will attend a future meeting to talk about the website.

In another matter: The Board received a letter from Tammy Kissell regarding a washout on Daigle Road in front of her driveway. Hamilton believed there were ongoing issues regarding water on the property questioning if the board wanted the matter to be on the agenda for a future meeting. Jason Perry said there was a problem several years ago and believed the surrounding area was wet. The board agreed the road foreman would visit the area for a possible solution.

5. Unfinished Business:

A. SeVEDS (Southern Vermont Economic Development Strategies) Get on Board Program - Information included in packet - Rachel Shields Ebersole addressed the board about a SeVEDS program to get more people involved in community leadership roles. The program will be four Saturdays from October to January in Windham and Bennington counties for interested people to learn from others currently involved in community leadership activities. Shields Ebersole said SeVEDS was talking to area selectboards, using mail and social media to get the word out and encouraging area towns to sponsor an applicant at a cost of \$150.00. Major suggested SeVEDS also contact local school boards to reach parents possibly interested in becoming involved. The Board agreed to post information on Town bulletin boards and in the Westminster Gazette about the program. People interested would contact Shields Ebersole at SeVEDS.

B. ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Proposal – Fire Department – Information included in packet – Major noted to fulfill the town bid process three bids were required. Streeter said there were two bids received. Perry motioned to suspend the bid process for the air pack compressor due to the specialty item and receiving two bids, Hughes seconded; motion carried 5-0 by voice vote. Major motioned to accept the bid from Firematic Supply Co., Inc. for \$35,535.00 for a high-pressure breathing air compressor, Hughes seconded, motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

C. Grand List Reappraisal – Information included in packet – Hamilton read from a letter received from the VT Dept. of Taxes Property Valuation and Review. In part: based on the 2022 equalization study the COD (coefficient of dispersion) in Westminster was outside the acceptable parameters and a reappraisal order had been issued. The Board is required to respond to the letter with a detailed compliance plan within 30 days. Rachel Cohen said the listers are responsible for all steps in the reappraisal. The COD is a measure of fairness as the sales price of properties vary from assessment either way more or way less from the town appraisal, it is not atypical for properties at the high end of the market to escalate more than those at the low end of the market creating an unfairness in the grand list so properties with a lower value property are paying more than a person with a higher value property. The listers will seek bids from nine companies in VT approved by the SOV (State of VT) for a town wide reappraisal. Cohen stated the listers choose the company not necessarily using the least expensive bid but based on the best proposal fulfilling the needs of the Town. The listers have a slight preference for NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) as the Town currently uses their software and their appraiser is a contracted person. There is no assumption NEMRC will be hired to complete the appraisal process. The Town receives from the SOV a per parcel amount of money each year currently totaling \$202,619.28. The estimate to reappraise is about \$100.00 per parcel in Westminster or about \$180,000.00. Kevin Hughes confirmed the re-

appraisal in 2013 was done by the Town listers and there is now a requirement to use a certified organization. Also, the reappraisal may not be completed before 2025/2026 due to the number of towns in the State being required to reappraise. Hughes believed it was important to receive as many bids as possible, evaluating the competency of the companies completing the work. Cohen said she hoped to have a narrative about the town wide reappraisal as taxes may not necessarily go up because the grand list goes up. If the budget is the same and the grand list is larger, the tax rate goes down. The level of the grand list, per say, does not affect taxes. She continued, the assessment of someone that purchased their home in the last three years may go up quite a lot. Major suggested an article in the Westminster Gazette clearly explaining the process as the Town moves closer to the actual reappraisal. Perry and Major confirmed, per town policy, expenses of more than \$10,000.00 were approved by the board. Ewald noted a letter would be sent to taxpayers about the process of reappraisal. Perry motioned to accept the Westminster municipal response for reappraisal order letter and authorize the chair of the board to sign the letter. Kevin Hughes seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

D. Errors and Omissions – Kevin Hughes motioned pursuant to 32 VSA S 4261 correcting omissions from the grant list dated 8/16/2023, parcel 003013.000, owner: Barnett-Brandon, Sue E., location: 1677 Route 121. Grand list value \$50,800. Reason for error and omission request was applying veterans' exemption incorrectly omitted by listers reduces parcel value by \$40,000.00 to \$10,800.00. Jason Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

E. CDL (commercial drivers license) drug testing feedback – deadline September 10, 2023 – Major questioned if the current State policy was up to date. Perry believed the policy was a DOT (department of transportation) random drug test policy opposed to a personnel policy. Perry motioned to accept the VLCT (Vermont League of Cities and Towns) drug and alcohol policy as presented. Hughes seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

F. Managers' Report –

Town Hall Roof Repair - Alison Bigwood told the board two bids were received for the town hall roof repair.

Fuel bid deadline is August 30, 2023.

Elevator repair – There have been some issues finding someone to repair the elevator as well as scheduling a company to do the repair.

Bigwood will be out of the office August 30 - September 1, 2023 - Labor Day (9/4/2023) the office is closed, Kelley Thayer is out of the office 8/28 and 8/29 and Pauline O'Brien is out of the office 8/28, 8/29 and 8/30/2023.

Bigwood also noted due to the DRB (development review board) denial of a second carport application the property owner has appealed the decision to the State environmental review

board.

Major questioned the two roof repair estimates included in the packet. Bigwood said the request was made to contact slate roofing companies after historical society personnel noted leaks and wet ceiling tiles during a heavy rainstorm. The Board requested Bigwood follow up with W.E. Brown Roofing for additional bid specifics and seek other bids for the repair. Hughes stated he believed there were serious leaks, and his opinion (at the present time) was to fix the essential things, do partial repairs until the issues of a major replacement/repair were brought before the taxpayers for their approval to spend monies. He added over the last six years his information was that some taxpayers were not happy with the monies spent in the renovation of the town hall, work not disclosed and not approved prior to being done. Major disagreed believing the taxpayers tasked the selectboard with keeping their investment in the town hall in good repair. He stated from reading the Jancewicz bid, there was a lot of work to be done and delaying the work could add more damage. In addition, it was important to preserve not only the historical society collection, ceiling insulation and the integrity of the building overall. Major motioned to seek other bids for the Town Hall roof repair and maintenance. Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

G. Road Foreman's Report –

Zach Rawling will test for his class B CDL license 8/30/2023. Lawrence noted the Town is now a certified SOV trainer for a CDL license.

Mowing and Grading continue throughout the town.

Lawrence has met with Conservation committee members regarding the purchase of a beaver deceiver to maintain the water level on both sides of the road behind Allen Brothers farmstand. The committee has received a grant for one deceiver. Lawrence requested to spend \$5,000.00 from the highway budget culvert fund to place one deceiver at the outlet in the vicinity of ATG to maintain the water level and another deceiver closer to Henwood Hill road. He noted Tim Allen was in favor of placing both deceivers and the road crew cleans the culvert(s) 25-30 times per year. Perry confirmed Skip Lyle would do the work and maintain the equipment after it was placed. Hughes motioned to authorize the highway to spend up to \$5,000.00 for a beaver deceiver to be placed in the vicinity of the Henwood Hill road marsh. Perry seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice.

In others matters: Major motioned to approve the road foreman and town managers' reports acknowledging they have heard the reports. Hughes seconded; motion approved 5-0 voice vote.

Lawrence confirmed there were six full time road crew members, and three part time people made the seventh position. He believed as the part time people did not received benefits it was

less expensive to have the three part-time people.

H. Executive Session – Perry motioned to move to executive session inviting the interim town manager and road foreman after ‘other business on the agenda’. Hughes seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote.

7. Boards, Committees and Commissions: Kevin Hughes motioned to accept the resignation of Richard Crocker, effective 8/22/2023, from the Planning Commission. Perry seconded; motion carried by 4-0 voice vote. Dan Crocker recused himself from the vote. In an email to Hamilton, Crocker believed the committee was overdue in completing the new town plan and recommended it may be necessary for the committee and plan to ‘re-set’ to adopt the plan. He noted additional issues of not enough commission members, the death of the previous chair, COVID and the lack of a town manager and zoning administrator as other problems.

8. Other Business: Perry recommended advertising for the planning commission open position.

9. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

The Board moved to executive session at 8:02 p.m.

At 8:47 p.m. Major motioned to reconvene regular session, Crocker seconded; motion carried to by 5-0 voice vote.

Recording Clerk Note: In parenthesis and bold forwarded by the selectboard chair to the recording clerk.

“Stephen Major made the motion, Dan Crocker 2nd. Mr Major made the following motion; the board had a discussion with the town manager and road foreman regarding the proper implementation of the purchasing policy and bidding process, to be followed from this point forward and directed them the review the purchasing policy as well as the personnel policy. Mr Crocker seconded, 5-0 voice vote”

10. Adjournment: Stephen Major made a motion to adjourn at 9:06, Kevin Hughes seconded, meeting adjourned by 5-0 vote.

Clerk

Date