

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Tuesday, July 9, 2024 at 6:30 p.m.

In person at Westminster, VT Town Hall and remote by FACT TV

Selectboard Present: Dan Crocker (chair), Jason Perry (vice Chair), Real Bazin (clerk), and, Stephen Major, Katrina Hamilton was absent.

Staff Present: Millie Barry (clerk), Chuck (Charles) Lawrence and Lou Bordeaux (Town Manager)

Others Present: Alisa Allbee Daignault, David Dupuis, Nancy Dalzell, John Ewald, Justin Mason & Tom Jones (Green Mountain Power), Chris Potter, Sam Potter, 1 person from FACT TV and remote, 1 unidentified person

1. **Call to Order:** Dan Crocker, Chair of the Board called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. Information to access a future meeting using a remote connection (when available) is on the Town of Westminster website or by contacting the Westminster Town Hall.
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** None
3. **Acceptance of Minutes:** June 25, 2024 – Real Bazin motioned to approve the minutes of June 25, 2024, Jason Perry seconded; Mr. Lawrence said half the cost of the shared roller with Rockingham (item under Town Manager’s report) of \$13,000.00 is to be paid by Westminster. Motion to accept minutes with correction carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin), Major abstained due to absence.
4. **Communications and Public Comments:** Alyssa Allbee Daignault asked for clarity on term limits for Development Review Board (DRB) and if the Zoning Administrator had been invited to the Board meetings about the Buck Adams project. Jason Perry said, in his opinion, the process was done, it was in Environment Court and there was nothing the Zoning Administrator could do now. Mr. Crocker said DRB term was 3 years, the next vacancies would be appointed in 2026. Mr. Potter noted the term of two non-resident members was up in 2024 and the Board voted to re-appoint the two members. Alyssa Allbee Daignault said, (in part) she volunteered last year to serve on the Board in an email sent to the Zoning Administrator.
5. **Unfinished Business:** (Discussion/Action)
 - A. **John Ewald – Listers Budget –** Mr. Crocker said the Town Manager had posted the 6/11/2024 agenda as he stated (time stamped information included in the packet) and believed Mr. Ewald owed the Town Manager an apology for calling him a liar at the prior meeting. Mr. Ewald said he had checked the Town website multiple times and could not find the agenda and was sorry he made the impression the Manager lied. Regarding lister salaries, Mr. Crocker said now was not the time to adjust salaries for the listers. Mr. Major noted in 2023 and 2024 the Town spent far less in the lister budget category than budgeted. Fiscal year 2025 the amount budgeted was \$5,000.00, significantly less, giving the impression of underutilization of the budget the last two years. Mr. Bordeaux said in November at budget season, Mr. Stearns, NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) or the Manager had requests from the listers that were different. Total FY 2024 total lister budget was \$40,758.00 and FY 2025 is over \$52,000.00. In addition, the Manager said when he began working on the budget he had been employed by the

Town for about four weeks, reminders did not go out to departments to submit budget requests, and this could have been a miscommunication. The Manager said the lister clerk (salary of \$21,000.00) was added for the pending property reevaluation. As the reevaluation has been pushed back, there may be a component of the \$21,000.00 lister clerk salary for the working listers. Millie Barry noted during any week there were multiple lister questions from researchers, attorneys, real estate people and the public Alison Bigwood answered on a regular basis. It was difficult for people to leave a message and make an appointment to wait for answers. Mr. Ewald said he believed things would be better to have each lister in the office three hours per week and re-stated his belief Rachel Cohen and Jackie Atwood were underpaid. There were no grievances after sending 100 changes/re-appraisals to Westminster residents due to Ms. Atwood's work and Ms. Cohen is taking an all-day training to reduce reliance on an outside appraisal firm. Mr. Crocker re-stated the listers were underpaid, their salary would be addressed in the new budget process and questioned why Ms. Atwood and Ms. Cohen did not attend the meeting. Mr. Ewald suggested the Board rescind a Board mandate to visit 20% of Westminster properties each year. This would help as his job was to check property listings for correctness. Mr. Perry suggested possibly having a full-time hired lister position and for the lister clerk to be a hired position as well. Mr. Major noted Mr. Ewald was giving a lot of service to the town at a remarkably cheap rate.

- B. Pilot Project for adjusting Town Hall hours – Mr. Bordeaux said the hours for the Town Hall pilot project would change to Monday-Thursday 7:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. and on Selectboard meeting nights the office will be open until 6:00 p.m. The trial will begin Monday, July 15 to Monday, September 16, 2024. A report will be presented Tuesday, September 24, 2024 to the Selectboard.

6. New Business:

- A. Justin Mason – Green Mountain Power – Mr. Mason and Tim Jones presented information to the Board on a project from the Putney town line to the Goodell Farm on State highway right-of-way to strengthen the power system bringing the best magnitude of storm hardening resiliency technology for overhead and underground cable and conduit. Green Mountain has an ACT 250 exemption (for a few seasons) to rebuild/replace with the stipulation they approach each Town Selectboard and explain the projects. They are working with telecommunication partners as they rebuild and re-locate lines to put communication conduit above and in underground lines on Route 5 and the secondary roads. Their technology shows burying conduit on secondary roads in the road is the best process and this roadwork will be in conjunction with the Town highway department. Green Mountain Power replaces/bands culverts or if possible, go to the edge of the culvert without disturbing the culvert. They leave the roads to the Road Foreman's specification. Trenches will also be dug in the woods and in cross lots. Mr. Bazin said the transfer from the short, old poles to the new poles had been on-going on Route 5 5-10 years and believed the Board should be able to dictate the time frame to complete installation to include the telecommunication lines.
- B. Conservation Commission appointment – information included in packet – Jason Perry motioned to appoint Jim Calchera to the Westminster Conservation Commission, Real Bazin seconded; motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major).
- C. Personnel Policy revision – information included in packet – Mr. Bordeaux reviewed the

changes noting the changes were very basic. In part, “he did not change the essence of the current policy to involve State discussion. The primary changes were the incorporation of existing policies into the personnel policy”. Mr. Bazin noted he had not had the opportunity to review the old and new policy. Jason Perry motioned to table the personnel policy until the next meeting. Real Bazin seconded; motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major).

D. Public Records practice adoption – After confirming the records practice was working, Real Bazin motioned to adopt the public records practice, Jason Perry seconded; motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major).

E. Town Manager’s Report – Information included in packet –

- The State is offering an energy efficiency and conservation block grant. The Manager is exploring options for this opportunity.
- Mr. Bordeaux noted a lot of effort went into revising the Personnel Policy. The previous version went into effect in 2013.
- Meetings included with the road foreman regarding purchasing issues and the town managers group discussed grants and contracts.
- Upcoming Meetings include Wade Masure from VLCT (Vermont League of Cities and Towns) and Wendy Harrison regarding Act 250. Real Bazin motioned to accept the Town Manager’s report, Stephen Major seconded, motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major).

F. Road Foreman’s Report – information included in packet –

- The excavator is at United (Springfield, VT) for emission control issues.
- An engineer has determined there was no structural damage after a contractor hit the James Road bridge. The cost of the evaluation was paid by the contractor.
- A new welcome sign has been ordered for Route 5 south and a second sign ordered to have on hand. The new sign is the same size as the prior wood sign, is plastic composite, is anti-graffiti and less likely to fade.
- Culverts have been ordered for River Road, Westminster West Road and Davidson Hill Road.
- Allstate will chip seal the Heights Road and a portion of the Westminster West Road from Bemis Hill to the Saxtons River line during the week of July 15.
- 5,500 gallons of magnesium chloride have been received and is being applied as needed. Wetting the road before applying chloride to retain moisture and use less has worked well. Mr. Bazin noted different dirt roads where homes and vehicles were covered with dust from road traffic and applying chloride to short sections where there were residential properties close to the road was a priority. Mr. Bazin questioned the reasoning of purchasing chloride in the new budget year opposed to purchasing with funds left in the chloride budget (\$6,600.00) before July 1, 2024. Mr. Bordeaux said he could ask NEMRC to encumber the the remaining funds into FY 2025 budget.
- The highway crew continues to mow to keep up with the rapid growth of grass and brush.

- The crew has been flushing culverts throughout Town in anticipation of the new norm of flash flooding.

G. Executive Session (if needed) – Jason Perry motioned to move to executive session after other business on the agenda to discuss a contractual matter. Real Bazin seconded; motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major).

7. Boards, Committees and Commissions –

Chris Potter requested a meeting of the new cemetery commission to include the 2 sextons to figure out what they have as there were a lot of accounts to do with the cemeteries. He is researching State of VT regulations to understand how the money can be spent. He said when he sold a grave in Westminster cemeteries (\$150.00) the money was added to the general fund. Mr. Bordeaux said information from NEMRC (Chip Stearns) was Mascoma had changed account numbers, and he was tracking accounts. Mr. Bordeaux will provide dollar information to the commission before they meet. Stephen Major agreed to serve on the commission. Mr. Potter noted the Westminster West cemetery was quickly filling. Mr. Potter will organize a commission meeting when there is information from Chip Stearns.

8. Other Business:

Sam Potter noted his belief the Environmental Court did not have anything to do with the violations submitted to the Zoning administrator. He questioned if the administrator was allowed to do anything about the violations while the case was pending in court. Sam said the two zoning violations were submitted by two different people and nothing had been done about the violations. Mr. Perry said he would review the violations himself. Chris Potter asked for a meeting with the Zoning administrator and the town attorney as he did not feel this problem had been addressed in any way. Mr. Major suggested making an appointment with the zoning administrator to understand the particulars of the zoning infractions. Chris Potter said a letter had been received from the #2 Town attorney about the infractions and he had met with the zoning administrator. Sam Potter questioned if the Zoning administrator had not addressed the infractions and the Board indicated the infractions had nothing to do with the Board, who was the person to talk to. Mr. Perry said the zoning administrator would deal with any clear violation. Mr. Bordeaux requested the information regarding infractions be emailed to him. Sam Potter said the original complaints were submitted by David and Elaine Judd. Chris Potter took the complaints to the zoning administrator and believed the administrator forwarded the information to the attorney. There was no answer or communication regarding the complaints.

9. Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday, July 23, 2024 at 6:30 p.m.

10. Executive Session: Board moved to executive session at 8:14 p.m.

11. Adjournment: Board reconvened regular session at 8:57 p.m. no action taken. Jason Perry motioned to adjourn, Real Bazin seconded, motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Bazin, Major)

Clerk

Date