

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD MEETING

Tuesday, December 17, 2024 – 6:30 p.m.

Remote and in person at Westminster, VT Town Hall

Selectboard Present: Dan Crocker (chair), Jason Perry (vice chair), Katrina Hamilton, Real Bazin (Clerk) and Stephen Major

Staff Present: Millie Barry (clerk), Lou Bordeaux (town manager), Jackie Atwood

Others Present: Nancy Dalzell, Chris Potter – Remote, Peggy O’Toole, Susan Roman

1. **Call to Order:** Dan Crocker, chair of the Board, called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. Meeting recorded by FACT TV, 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:** November 19, 2024 – Jason Perry motioned to approve the minutes of November 19, 2024, Real Bazin seconded, motioned passed by voice vote (Crocker, Perry, Bazin).

December 3, 2024 – Jason Perry motioned to approve the minutes of December 3, 2024, Katrina Hamilton seconded, motion carried by voice vote (Perry, Hamilton, Crocker).

4. **Communications and Public Comments:** Peggy O’Toole addressed the Board saying there was a past policy where committee chairs were notified when respective committees were on the Board agenda. Benefits were keeping the committee informed and included in updates and changes and providing the Board with information from committee experience. Most importantly, notification instilled a respectful and courteous relationship with committee volunteers. She requested the Board revise the policy to notify committee chairs when committees were on the agenda. Real Bazin motioned to table item C under unfinished business (Status of Westminster West Town Hall) on the agenda until the next meeting. Jason Perry seconded, motion carried unanimously (Perry, Bazin, Hamilton, Major).

5. **Unfinished Business:** (Discussion/Action)

A. Listers budget discussion – Stephen Major read a message from John Ewald noting the communication was a public comment. In part, Mr. Ewald believed eliminating elected listers in favor of an assessor was a mistake and listed 19 duties and responsibilities of a lister. Mr. Ewald questioned where the Manager, Lou Bordeaux, believed the listers fell short doing their job and the reasoning for a lister clerk 4-5 hours each day waiting for customers at a cost of \$21,000.00. Mr. Ewald wrote that since he joined the listers the grand list has increased, and he is working with legislators to address the State’s system of taxes. Jackie Atwood agreed with Mr. Ewald’s message saying she has been a lister for 8 years. There were certain times of the year when the listers are busy but believed as a taxpayer and a lister a clerk 4-5 hours a day was a waste of money when there is no foot traffic/phone calls when the listers are in the office. The listers are trained and it takes a few years of experience to know the job well. She has offered to come meet with residents, return calls or spend extra time during grievance time. She added lister cards and town maps could all be accessed online. Ms. Atwood said the lister office was in the

back, did not have a sign and in her experience, there was little foot traffic. She added Dummerston was a bit smaller, Putney a bit larger but both towns were like Westminster paying listers 3 hours each week. Putney and Dummerston did not have a lister clerk. In addition, NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) assessor's hours vary depending on Westminster's permits and assessing needs. Also, the lister budget submitted included 5 weekly hours for a clerk to help with property transfer tax returns and other miscellaneous tasks. Jason Perry stated he believed the town was currently paying for an assessor and listers. Dan Crocker noted that elected position responsibilities would become more difficult due to State requirements and in the future, it could be more difficult to find qualified people to run for positions. Stephen Major requested clear information be presented at Town Meeting for residents to decide between appointing an assessor and clerk or remain with the current model of elected listers. Ms. Arbuckle said the reassessment would be a big process and assessors would not be sending letters, returning phone calls or visiting properties. NEMRC, as an assessor, had specific assessment responsibilities as did the listers. Peggy O'Toole questioned the lister clerk budget item of \$21,000.00. Mr. Bordeaux said in Fiscal Year 2026 the budget item was eliminated as the item was not included in budget submitted by listers. Jason Perry motioned to add to the annual warning an article to abolish the listers office. Katrina Hamilton seconded, motion carried (Perry, Bazin, Hamilton, Major).

B. Status of North Westminster Community House – Mr. Crocker noted Board discussions about the building over many years, there was limited parking, and the building did not meet the expectations of a community house. Stephen Major suggested clear proposals to present at town meeting, such as a developer or Town emergency shelter. Jason Perry motioned the Town Manager draft a potential article for town meeting for potential sale of the North Westminster Community House, Real Bazin seconded, motion carried (Perry, Bazin, Hamilton, Major).

C. Status of Westminster West Town Hall – Tabled to next meeting

D. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget – Second draft discussion – Answering Stephen Major's question, Mr. Bordeaux said the last page included changes, transfer to equipment fund, transfer to bridge fund and transfer to retreatment fund. Real Bazin said the increase from fiscal year 2025 to 2026 was \$199,285.00. Ms. Hamilton noted if one cent equals \$28,000.00, the increase is .07 (seven cents) for every hundred-dollar increase. Mr. Bordeaux said it was an auditor request not to budget monies received from delinquent property taxes. Mr. Major noted the dollar amount of growth in the grand list and surplus generated from receipt of delinquent property taxes impacted the tax rate. Real Bazin motioned to approve the budget, Jason Perry seconded. Real Bazin motioned to rescind Jason Perry's motion to approve budget, Jason Perry seconded. Jason Perry motioned to table approval of budget to January 14, 2025 meeting to know the surplus monies available and percent increase in the grand list, Katrina Hamilton seconded, motion passed (Perry, Bazin, Hamilton, Major).

6. New Business: (Discussion/Action)

A. Bid Results – Request for Proposal Pick-up truck – information included in packet for three quarter, 1 ton truck including plow and sander. Board discussed engine size,

warranty specifics and trade. Real Bazin noted his proposal to purchase a smaller, two-man truck to use checking roads, attend meetings, education purposes etc. opposed to using a large truck. Jason Perry noted Ford could be serviced and maintained locally. Real Bazin motioned to approve purchase of Ford F-250 from Formula Ford, 6.8 engine, \$63,834.00, Jason Perry seconded, motion approved (Perry, Bazin, Hamilton, Major).

B. Engineering Grant – Retaining wall/bank stabilization project. Dan Crocker read information in packet on cost of engineering for a stabilization project on Route 121. Grant awarded/approved by State of VT for \$22,500.00, 90 percent of \$22,500.00 was reimbursable. Mr. Bordeaux said a professional services bid did not require bid process. Katrina Hamilton motioned to accept the bid for engineering services for retaining wall and slope project from Everett Hammond not to exceed \$22,500.00. Real Bazin seconded, motion passed (Perry, Bazin, Hamilton, Major).

C. Town Manager’s Report – information included in packet -

- VC3 IT (Information technology) company continues onboarding process.
- A group of people from Putney visited Westminster Town Hall to tour the building and talk about potential renovations at the Putney Town Hall.
- Attended VLCT tax sale webinar noting the tax sale law in State of VT changed significantly in 2024. The recommendation is to not force a sale for a year until the new law matures.
- Windham County Solid Waste Management district approved the district’s FY26 budget at their December 12th meeting.

D. Executive Session – None

7. Other Business:

Chris Potter requested a Cemetery Commission meeting to update cemetery rules and focus on the Westminster West cemetery where stone repair is needed, and burial space is limited. He will research options for a new vault door and sign for the New Westminster Cemetery. Mr. Potter noted the Town may want to update rates for cemetery burial sites. Real Bazin suggested cleaning and sealing the cement stones in the new wall in the spring. Cement is porous and salt from plowing will impact stone. Jason Perry questioned how monies for sale of burial lots could go directly to perpetual cemetery care.

Katrina Hamilton questioned Mr. Potter about the historical society workshop to clean stones in the Westminster West cemetery in May 2025. Mr. Potter said cleaning stones would help the appearance of the cemetery.

8. Executive Session – None

9. Date of Next Meeting – Tuesday, January 14, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

10. Adjournment: At 8:34 Katrina Hamilton motioned to adjourn, Jason Perry seconded, motion to adjourn passed by unanimous vote

Clerk

Minutes composed by Millie Barry 12/19/2024

Date

SB 12/17/2024 Page 3 of 3