



**Town of Whitingham
Office of the Selectboard**

MINUTES OF DECEMBER 1, 2021

These Minutes are considered a DRAFT until accepted into the public record (with any corrections noted) at a future meeting of the Whitingham Selectboard.

The Whitingham Selectboard held a regular meeting at 6:30pm in the Selectboard Office of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, December 1, 2021.

Selectboard members present: Scott Reed, Chair; Craig Hammer, and Chris Walling. James Weber and Greg Brown attended remotely.

Others present: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator; Almira Aekus, Clerk/Treasurer; Stanley Janovsky, Road Commissioner; Tyler Lederer of Deerfield Valley News; Richard Lemaire and Seth Boyd, residents.

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda

Scott Reed called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. There were a few changes to the agenda since it was posted.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

None

Parks Committee update & discuss VTel Wireless

Seth Boyd addressed the board. VTel Wireless put up a wifi hotspot during the pandemic. Now that the state of emergency is over, we are being charged for it. The bill received was for 3 months with a balance due of \$409.92, which was for a 500GB plan at \$141.35 per month. Gig called to question the charge and who authorized that expense. We were issued a credit of \$333.36 and put on a \$25 per month plan for 15gb. The board agreed that the service should continue, and that plan was probably enough. Ms. Aekus will add a line item to the Parks budget for next year.

Mr. Boyd questioned if a contractor should be used for the work needed at Town Hill, the merry go round needs a hole 3-4 feet deep of concrete, the other piece of equipment doesn't need as much work. Mr. Janovsky felt the town crew could do the work. Mr. Hammer said there is a concrete contractor who can sell lesser volumes of concrete, so a whole truck load isn't wasted.

The retaining wall and monument work did not get done this year; Mr. Boyd wondered if a formal bid should go out now to get the work done. Mr. Brown questioned if there was a ballpark idea of what the stonework would cost so it could be budgeted for next year. Dana Dix has the cost of the prior improvement; the budget can be based on that amount. The board agreed that a bid should go out so a contractor can be lined up to do the work.

Next year we should see some significant changes up there, with changes to the parking, improvements to the war memorial and repairs to the retaining wall.

Ms. Aekus noted that the park improvements expenses could come from ARPA funding, the Eames Fund or Economic Development funds.

Elizabeth Weber would like to join the Parks Committee, Mr. Boyd recommended her appointment. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to appoint Elizabeth Weber to the Parks Committee, seconded by Scott Reed, four in favor, Mr. Weber abstained.**

Transfer Station:

Consider increasing tire and mattress prices

We were notified by Northeast Resource Recovery Association that pricing for all tire sizes being recycled will increase on January 1, 2022. Casella also sent a letter notifying the town that the per unit price for mattresses will increase to \$40 per mattress. The board reviewed the price increases. **A motion was made by Greg Brown to adjust the Transfer Station fee schedule to align with the cost increases set by NRRA for tires and Casella for mattresses, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.** Discussion ensued regarding the cost increase and the possibility that people might throw tires into the woods.

Highway: review and sign access permit

Mr. Janovsky presented an access permit for Lot 15 Taylor Lane (new 911 address of 223 Taylor Lane) with the recommendation that the property owner install a 15' x 30' culvert minimum and that access entrance shall be lower than the road to prevent ice buildup. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve and sign the access permit with recommendations for Bellafatto on Taylor Lane, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.**

Budget – review

Mrs. Aekus presented the first draft of the proposed budget for 2022/23. All town wages were increased by 2.5% as agreed at the November 17, 2021 meeting. The board went through the budget page by page with Mrs. Aekus. Insurance should be budgeted for position, not for the employee currently in the position. The board agreed that an article should be on the warning to raise and appropriate funds to increase the litigation and highway garage funds. We will also include articles to create a website fund to fund it.

Town Clerk – discuss shelving in vault

There is no more shelving left in the vault. A rough estimate for shelving for another bank of books (22 books) should be under \$2,000. Ms. Aekus needs permission to spend the funds out of the Records Preservation Fund. **A motion was made by James Weber to use up to \$2,000 out of the Records Preservation Fund to purchase a roller shelving unit, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Mrs. Aekus suggested using ARPA funds to digitize some of the older records that are in the vault for easy access to the public, she also suggested purchasing a wide bed scanner. The board isn't interested in spending any of that money until we are completely clear on how it can be spent.

Sewer – discuss generator(s)

Gig researched power outages for the last 5 years. It was determined that the longest outage was in 2018 of 1 day, 10 hours and 41 minutes. It affected both sewer plants. Dave DiCantio did the calculations which show that a generator is required for each plant to meet permit requirements.

The board would like to be clear on the permitting needs and generator sizing before we include the price in the sewer project.

Hazard Mitigation

Review and sign grant match commitment letter In order to apply for FEMA grant funding to update our Hazard Mitigation Plan in a few years we need to file a letter with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer stating that we will pay (or acquire elsewhere) the \$2,787.50 match required for the total grant allowed for the document update of \$11,150. We have funds in the Hazard Mitigation Fund. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to appoint Scott M. Reed to sign the letter, seconded by Chris Walling, all in favor.**

Review and sign letter of support for buffer plantings At a recent site visit of flood mitigation projects it was determined that removing a berm along the river at the Jacksonville sewer plant property is not necessary. It was suggested to simply add buffer plantings that will help fight erosion. The board does not support this project.

Approval of Payables Warrant – December 2, 2021

A motion was made by Greg Brown to approve Payables Warrant #W2224 dated December 2, 2021 as edited with addition of \$80 for VMCTA annual dues, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.

Approval of Payroll Warrant – December 2, 2021

A motion was made by James Weber to approve Payroll Warrant #W2223 dated December 2, 2021, seconded by Greg Brown, all in favor.

Approve Minutes of November 17, 2021

A motion was made by Greg Brown to accept the Minutes of November 17, 2021, as written, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.

Review of DV News Article

Mr. Lederer noted that the DV News prefers that if there are problems with the reporting to call the Valley News to correct them. The board prefers to make a note of the errors in our Minutes as we have been doing.

There were several errors in the article dated November 18th. The article quotes a sentence by Chris Walling but it was really James Weber who said that he and his kids love the library. It states “Cheveralls suggested two selectboard member sign the warrant before the meeting”, that is illegal, the selectboard only has authority to make decision if a quorum of members (3 or more) agree. Mrs. Cheveralls actually suggested that perhaps one or two Library Trustees could be designated to sign off on the library’s payables before a Selectboard meeting, and she never mentioned a snow days practice because the library has no such practice that she is aware of.

The article dated November 24th which reports on the November 17th meeting did not mention the errors that were made in the article dated November 4th which were discussed and corrected during the November 17th meeting.

Everything else seems to be reported in the articles except the corrections made, Mr. Brown asked why? Mr. Brown suggested that Mr. Lederer just state the facts.

Other Business

Christmas bonus the board discussed the annual Christmas bonus. **A motion was made by James Weber to approve \$1,350 for Christmas bonuses, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Governor's mask legislation On November 23, 2021, Governor Phil Scott signed legislation that would allow local selectboards to vote to impose a health order requiring masks to be worn in places that are open to the public. The selectboard's authority to vote on a mask mandate is temporary and would expire in April 2022. The board discussed the legislation and decided that because there is no way to enforce such a policy that they would decline. The Governor can't make a decision and is trying to lay it at our feet.

Discuss holidays the recently adopted Personnel Policy lists Martin Luther King Day (3rd Monday in January) as a paid holiday but employees must choose between Veteran's Day (November 11th) or the Friday after Thanksgiving, they cannot take both as paid holidays. It was suggested to change the wording on the last line of Section 20 of the Personnel Policy to say "*Employees may either take Martin Luther King Day or the Friday following Thanksgiving off as a paid holiday, but not both". **A motion was made by Greg Brown to switch Martin Luther with Veterans Day as the optional holiday (last line of section 20), seconded by James Weber, discussion ensued, all in favor.** Gig will update that section of the Personnel Policy for signing at the next meeting.

Highway Garage Richard Lemaire notified the board that Jesse Boyd's property on Birdville Road is (or will be) for sale and would make a good location for a highway garage in his opinion. Greg Brown will try to get in touch with Jesse Boyd.

Agency thank you notes received Gig noted that we received thank you letters from Deerfield Valley Community Cares and Brattleboro Area Hospice for the annual appropriation funding.

Review Assessor's Clerk job description – executive session

A motion was made by Chris Walling to enter into executive session to discuss employee work assignments under the provisions of Title 1, Section 312(g) of the Vermont Statutes, to include Gig Zboray and Almira Aekus, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.

With no decisions made executive session was exited at 8:24pm.

After some discussion it was decided that Ms. Aekus will speak with NEMRC about what exactly they need a clerk to do.

Adjourn

A motion was made by Scott Reed to adjourn, seconded by Chris Walling, all in favor.

Scott Reed adjourned the meeting at 8:25pm. Respectfully submitted, ~Gig Zboray