



**Town of Whitingham  
Office of the Selectboard**

**MINUTES OF DECEMBER 30, 2020**

*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 dining hall of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, December 30, 2020.

Selectboard members present: Wayne Wood, Scott Reed, Craig Hammer, and Chris Walling. Phil Edelstein attended remotely.

Others present: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator; Stanley Janovsky, Jr., Road Commissioner; Almira Aekus, Treasurer; Howard Dix, Assessor's Clerk.

Others attending remotely: Richard Lemaire, resident.

**Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda**

Wayne Wood called the meeting to order at 6:30pm reading the remote meeting script. There were a few changes to the agenda since it was posted.

**Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)** none

**Stump Jumpers Snowmobile Club: request permission to ride on town road from Ick Road to vicinity of 2329 Faulkner Road to bypass a logging operation**

Carrol Havreluk contacted Stanley Janovsky, Jr. today and said they were cancelling the request.

**Assessor's: Review and sign annual report of Errors and Omissions**

There was one error to report as a result of a homestead declaration. **A motion was made by Scott Reed for the board to sign the Errors and Omissions Report, seconded by Phil Edelstein, all in favor.**

Mr. Wood questioned Mr. Dix about how things are working out with NEMRC as our Assessor. Mr. Dix doesn't seem to be very happy with the service.

**Highway:**

**discuss quotes to remove tree at Jacksonville Dam**

Mr. Janovsky received two verbal quotes as required per the Purchasing Policy. The first was from a tree company in Colrain at \$1,500; the second from Renaud Brothers at \$1,200. Mr. Reed noted that Renaud is a reputable company. Mr. Janovsky recommended accepting the lower priced bid. **A motion was made by Chris Walling to accept the quote from Renaud Brothers at \$1,200, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Review and sign Better Roads grant agreement: Stanley Janovsky, Jr., Road Commissioner, applied for a "Vermont Better Roads" grant in the amount of \$8,000 (with a \$2,000 local match required) to perform a road erosion inventory. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to appoint Wayne W. Wood to sign the Better Roads grant agreement in the amount of \$8,000, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Request to plow to 144 Saddada Road: Gig received a call from a nurse who cares for an elderly gentleman that is now residing full time at 144 Saddada Road in Heath. The nurse has safety concerns over the lack of plowing and that this man might need an ambulance at some time. She requested that the town begin plowing to this house. She also noted that if the town agrees to plow to the Whitingham/Heath town line then Heath will agree to do the same. However when the nurse spoke the Stanley Janovsky, Jr. she told him it was difficult for the gentleman to get to his horses in Whitingham. The Whitingham side of the road is the same as it was when this gentleman moved into his home in Heath. It is a class 4 road after the "brick house". It is not a town issue. The board says no.

Backhoe Craig Hammer questioned if the backhoe was shipped as promised. Mr. Janovsky had sent an email on the scheduled shipping date but has not gotten an email response from the company yet. The Selectboard would like the company to provide a rental until it arrives because they are concerned the old backhoe will breakdown and be expensive to repair. The board would like an answer as to when it will be delivered at the next meeting.

**Transfer Station:**

Review and hear from the public on the pre-approved Solid Waste Implementation Plan (SWIP) No public comments.

**Consider allowing Stamford and Searsburg to participate in HHW events**

Stamford and Searsburg are members of the Bennington Alliance Solid Waste District, due to cumbersome state rules the Alliance is looking for options for the required Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection events. They asked if we would be willing to allow their residents to attend our events for 2021. For payment they suggest that they would pay 41.7% of the event costs including advertising, set up, disposal, etc. They based that figure on 2010 census figures (Whitingham 1357, Stamford & Searsburg together 972 making a total population of 2329). Gig contacted ANR to see if we would be required to amend our certification, no response yet.

The board agrees to allow Stamford and Searsburg to attend out HHW events contingent on the state's answer about our certification. It will lower our cost and it is likely that not many people from those towns will attend.

**Budget work for 21/22**

On this draft the Selectboard budget is wrong, did not include 1.3% cost of living increase. It looks like the new tax rate could be .758 which is lower than last year (.766). The sewer budget needs to be reviewed carefully. This is still a draft version; at the next meeting the final budget should be ready for the Selectboard to approve.

Almira Aekus noted that the position of Grand Juror is no longer elected, it is now to be appointed by the Selectboard. The position of Town Agent has been eliminated by the state.

**Sewer: show of support for Priority List Application for SFY 2022**

As our sewer improvements project continues each year, we need to apply to be on the state's priority funding list. **A motion was made by Wayne Wood to show Selectboard support of continuing the sewer improvements project and the Priority List Application, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

The 90% wrap-up meeting with the engineers and State officials is scheduled for January 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Corona/COVID-19:** It is everywhere now. Many restaurants and stores are closed; Wilmington is a good place to stay away from right now. Town Meeting/election will be ballot only, Almira will use the tabulator. She is hoping the legislature will allow her to mail out all the ballots beforehand as was done for the November general election.

**Approval of Payables Warrant – December 31, 2020**

**A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payables Warrant #W2128 dated December 31, 2020, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

**Approval of Payroll Warrant – December 31, 2020**

**A motion was made by Scott Reed to approve Payroll Warrant #W2127 dated December 31, 2020, seconded by Chris Walling, all in favor.**

**Review and approve Minutes of December 16, 2020**

**A motion was made by Wayne Wood to accept the Minutes of December 16, 2020 as written, seconded by Phil Edelstein, all in favor.**

**Other business / Office Administrator – as needed**

Almira Aekus noted that soon the town website will have a new section (likely to be called Real Estate Records) where the public can look for tax bills (without income sensitivity), tax maps, and find links to property record cards and land records. The board approved.

Almira Aekus can make deposits from her desk now; she doesn't have to go to the bank unless she receives a sum of cash. It costs the town money for her to go to the post office to buy a money order, she would like permission to open a special personal checking account so that she can just write a check to make the deposit from her desk, rather than go to the bank. The board is afraid that it would open Almira up to criticism, they are not in favor of it at all.

Scott Reed said that the Town should start paying for the increase in Howard Dix's internet access at home now rather than waiting until the next budget season. **A motion was made by Scott Reed to reimburse Howard Dix \$180 to cover his back internet fees (July to December, 2020), seconded by Wayne Wood, all in favor.**

Craig Hammer questioned what the Equalization Study means. The Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) is at 100.64%, the Coefficient of Dispersion (COD) is rising, now at 16.56%.

If the COD gets to 20% it requires a reappraisal. Scott Reed questioned how we know if someone is a permanent resident versus a second homeowner who is now living here for the pandemic. Second homeowners pay a lower tax rate in Whitingham, yet their children may actually be in our school system. Unfortunately, it is an honor system, there is no way to oversee this.

Discussion ensued around reappraisal and the change in the real estate market due to the pandemic. It was suggested to wait out the pandemic and things should return to normal in a year or two.

**Adjourn**

**A motion to adjourn was made by Craig Hammer, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Wayne Wood adjourned the meeting at 7:33pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
~Gig Zboray