



**Town of Whitingham  
Office of the Selectboard**

**MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 24, 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 dining hall of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, February 24, 2021.

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

Others present: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator; Stanley Janovsky, Road Commissioner; Almira Aekus, Clerk/Treasurer; Barb Landers, resident.

Others attending remotely: John and Johanna Robohm, David Twitchell, Donald Nelinson, Elizabeth Fournier, Gail Anderson, Julie Muller, Leon Corse, John Keegan, Aysha Peltz, Marshall Dix, Seth Boyd, Wayne Corse, Don McKinley, Terry Morse, Allison Maynard, Gretchen Havreluk, Jenepher Burnell, residents. Jessica Cassarino, Visiting Nurse/Hospice and Mike Eldred, Deerfield Valley News.

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

Wayne W. Wood called the meeting to order at 6:30pm reading the remote meeting script.

**Hearing of questions regarding budget, Warning(s) for Town Meeting, town report and/or sewer bond/project**

Johanna Robohm asked about the raises of the Selectboard Office Administrator and the Town Clerk (24% and 14% respectively). The Selectboard explained that Gig Zboray has many more responsibilities now than when she was hired, and that Almira Aekus hasn't received a raise other than cost-of-living in many years. Mrs. Robohm noted that many taxpayers are having a hard time making ends meet. The proposed budget reflects a small reduction in the tax rate.

John Robohm questioned the line item of telephone/ambulance. It was explained that there are two phone lines in the Jacksonville Fire House and this is the second line for the fax machine. It was questioned why it is budgeted higher than the fire department phone line, Mrs. Aekus will look into it and respond directly to Mr. Robohm.

Mr. Robohm questioned the local agreement projected tax rate on page 25 of the Town Report. Local veterans and the Mason's Lodge receive an exemption, both of which were approved by the taxpayers.

The projected tax rate is lower based on the highway's fund balance; they didn't spend all the money that was budgeted for the 19/20 fiscal year.

Mr. Wayne Corse noted that he went to the Town Clerk's office on a Friday and the door was locked, he questioned if her hours will go back to being open on Friday since she got a raise. Mrs. Aekus responded that due to the pandemic she lost her office assistant, she uses Friday to catch up on all the required filing, posting, etc.

RT Brown is here to address any questions related to the SEVEDs/BDCC funding request. No questions were asked.

Mr. Leon Corse questioned the new line items for "internet (municipal building)" and "IT Services/Cyber Security" on page 15. The Municipal Center now has a fiber internet connection, and the town has engaged a cyber security firm because so much information is accessed online now that needs to be protected. Mr. Corse also questioned the proposed Town Garage on the Twitchell property. The offer was withdrawn today (see below). He then questioned why the Administrative Assistant salary has been increased more than the equipment operator is paid. Mr. Wood answered that Mr. Corse is comparing apples to oranges, the jobs are completely different.

Jessica Cassarino is attending on behalf of VNH if anyone has any questions. No one did.

Mrs. Robohm questioned Gretchen Havreluk about why the Economic Development Group wants money and what they did with their \$10,000 last year. EDG plans to create digital advertisements to use on social media to entice families to move to Whitingham. They might also find ways to use the funding to help local businesses to recover from COVID-19.

**Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)**

Barb Landers spoke to the group. She thanked the highway garage committee for their work and time but is thankful that the Twitchells pulled their offer to sell the farm to the town and that it will remain in the Twitchell family. She noted that the highway crew does a great job. The letter read by Barb Landers (written by Barb and Dave Landers) is made part of and attached to these Minutes.

Wayne Corse suggested that the Garage Committee should create a list of criteria for a future garage site and then go out and look for properties that meet that criteria; asking the owners if they would be willing to sell. He agreed with Mrs. Landers that a future garage site should be on a state road if at all possible. He mentioned that he is aware of 3 sites on the Wilmington Cross Road that would be a better option than the Twitchell Farm.

**Justice of the Peace position, meet with interested candidates:**

Julie Muller feels that now is a good opportunity for her to serve the community, she has lived here since 2004, she is currently the president of the Lions Club.

Donald Nelinson is also in a position now where he can serve the community.

John Keegan noted that this is the first town meeting he has attended, and it is very interesting. He has been living here since 2008.

Gig noted that the Selectboard makes a recommendation to the Governor who makes the appointment. There is no need to make a decision tonight. The board will likely deliberate at another time.

**Fire Department: “new” fire truck status, discuss auctioning the old truck**

The new truck is still being worked on. When the new radio for the backhoe arrives the service man will install the fire truck radio at the same time.

Mr. Janovsky provided a contract for an online auction company. The town would have the right to refuse any bid. There is a fee of \$30 per motorized vehicle for the auction company to come down and take photos and get a description of the vehicle.

**A motion was made by Wayne W. Wood to go ahead and sign the contract with the auction company with the understanding that the fire truck will not be auctioned until after it comes out of service, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

**Highway Department:**

Nothing tonight.

**Discuss request to rent office space April-July**

Peckham Industries will be paving VT Route 100, they are looking to rent office space with internet access. Their construction office/trailer will be stationed at the highway garage. They will provide the town with all the millings from the project. Most often they will have one person but at times have a second person in the office space. Gig had invited them to come tonight but they did not attend. Gig will put the topic on the next agenda and invite them again.

**Discuss contract policing, review and possibly sign contract**

Scott Reed and Gig met with Wilmington Chief of Police Murano and Scott Tucker, Town Manager. After the meeting, a contract was provided. Whitingham will receive approximately 10 hours of police services per month at variable rates depending on the officer's hourly rate plus minor fees. Their philosophy is to provide education around safety to change behaviors and not necessarily to issue lots of tickets. They now have an embedded social worker which will benefit us. The contract is for a trial period April 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup>.

**A motion was made by Scott Reed to appoint Wayne W. Wood to sign the policing contract with Wilmington for the trial period of April 1 through June 30, 2021, seconded by Chris Walling, four in favor; Craig Hammer opposed; motion passed.**

**Corona/COVID-19**

Gig noted that as of yesterday 16.4% of Vermont's population has received at least one dose of the vaccination. Vermont is near 200 deaths from the Corona virus.

**Approval of Payables Warrant – February 25, 2021**

**A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payables Warrant #W2136 dated February 25, 2021, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

**Approval of Payroll Warrant – February 25, 2021**

**A motion was made by Scott Reed to approve Payroll Warrant #W2135 dated February 25, 2021, seconded by Chris Walling, all in favor.**

**Review and approve Minutes of February 10, 2021**

**A motion was made by Wayne W. Wood to accept the Minutes of February 10, 2021 as written, seconded by Phil Edelstein, all in favor.** Elizabeth Fournier noted that Minutes of February 10<sup>th</sup> were not posted on the website. Gig apologized for the oversight and will post them on the website and email them to her.

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

**Mowing Bid for Town Hill** After much discussion back and forth between Gig and the chair of the Parks Committee it was decided that Mowing Bids for Town Hill for the 3-year period 2021-2023 will be posted now and opened by the Selectboard at the March 10<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Mr. Robohm questioned the vacation buy back line item of \$10,000. Mr. Wood explained the new policy.

Mr. Corse noted that the report on page 4 of Town Report lists him as a member of the Broadband Committee but he resigned on July 15, 2020. Mr. Corse also noted that the Highway Garage Minutes of June 12<sup>th</sup> were not posted on the website. Gig will email them to Mr. Corse and make sure they get posted to the website.

**Adjourn**

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

Wayne W. Wood adjourned the meeting at 7:52pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
~Gig Zboray

**Post Meeting Notes:**

Allan Twitchell stopped by the Selectboard Office on Wednesday morning and notified Gig that the Twitchell family met and decided to pull their offer to sell their land to the town for \$20,000 for a potential highway garage site. The notice was too late to remove the related articles from the ballot.

The median household income (MHI) survey of the sewer users was completed showing an MHI of \$41,000 which falls below the state MHI levels and qualifies the town for grant funding for the sewer project.

Barb and Dave Landers

Maple Hill Lane

Part-time resident for 23 years, full-time resident for 7 years, 30 years total

We'd like to begin by thanking the Highway Garage Committee for their hours of hard work and commitment to the renovation or replacement of the current town garage. At the same time, we are very pleased that the historic property that was proposed for sale to the town for the Highway Garage will remain within the Twitchell family. Preservation of this beautiful farmland benefits our entire community by protecting our history and promoting our identity as, "a mountain oasis, a vibrant community, a small town bursting with beauty and charm" according to our town's website. We need to maintain a clear delineation between residential and farmland areas, and commercial/municipal areas.

The Highway Garage employees do a wonderful job for our town and we all agree they deserve a safe and clean workplace. Please refocus your efforts to make the current Garage a clean and safe environment for the employees that work in and around the site every day. Fix what you have first and take more time to find a longer-term solution if indeed one may be required.

If a new Garage is necessary, it must satisfy 2 criteria: it should be located on a state road (ie Rtes 100 or 112), and it should be in a commercial zone where the infrastructure is already in place to handle its operations. No residential areas should be considered. These two criteria are critical, otherwise the quality of life for the residents of the town will be forever altered. Our ability to allure visitors and attract and retain residents will be lost, leading to a shrinking tax base to pay for these and future capital projects.

As we all further understand the complexity of this project, we request that there be transparency in the direction the Selectboard and Committee are taking and open communication about the issues being faced and solutions being considered. Interviews with all neighbors that could or will be impacted by a proposed site should be conducted to get important feedback as part of the data gathering process to evaluate the merits of the proposed site.

We'd like to thank the Committee again in advance of their work going forward. We recognize this is no easy task, and we appreciate their efforts in finding out-of-the-box solutions for the long-term benefit of our community.

Thank you very much.