

Windham VT Selectboard Meeting Minutes
September 2, 2019 Regular Meeting

Present:

Maureen Bell, Selectwoman

Kord Scott, Selectman

Bob Bingham

Mary Boyer

Russ Cumming, Lister

Maureen Fitch

Sally Hoover, Auditor

Tom Johnson, Energy Commission

Kathy Jungermann, Auditor

Carolyn Partridge, District Representative

Claudia Voight

Hal Wilkins, Selectman

Vance Bell, Energy Commission

Dawn Bower, Various Commissions

Joyce Cumming, Selectboard Clerk

Bill Dunkel, Planning Commission

Ernie Friedli

John Hoover, J.P., Library Trustee

Louise Johnson, Meetinghouse Transition

Keith Jungermann, Meetinghouse Alternate

Kathy Scott, Treasurer

Kate Wright, Planning Commission Clerk

Call to order

Maureen called the meeting to order at 6:29 p.m.

Additions to Agenda/Announcements/Reminders

Kathy Scott announced that she and the Town Clerk would be sending letters out to property owners who are listed on the voter checklist but have not filed homestead declaration form HS-122.

Act on minutes: August 19, 2019 Public Hearing on Zoning Regulations and Enhanced Energy Plan Amendments and Regular Selectboard Meeting

Motion: To accept the minutes of the August 19, 2019 Public Hearing on Zoning Regulations and Enhanced Energy Plan Amendments and Regular Selectboard Meeting as presented—moved by Maureen—all in favor.

Public Comment

Ernie Friedli expressed concern over a tax increase of 25% compared to last year. He shared his frustration over the lack of details in the Town report which does not reflect spending. He noted that several other accounting matrixes have been dropped from the Town report over the years resulting in a less accurate picture of the Town's actual finances. His review showed that the Town had \$1.8 million in the bank at the end of 2018 with assigned accounts totaling approx. \$400,000, and the balance of \$1.4 million in unassigned accounts. The budget for roads increased 45% this year and a New Road Machinery fund was added. Previously, there was an equipment fund which reflected use of the road equipment as a dollar amount each month. This equipment accounting stopped being calculated years ago which he believes led to the New Road Machinery fund. He left in an agitated state before anyone could respond.

Claudia Voight also expressed concern over the recent tax increase and suggested a separate meeting be held to allow residents to voice concerns without feeling constricted by a time limit for comments. She also suggested allowing payment plans to deal with the increase.

Kathy Scott explained that the new equipment fund referenced by Ernie was set up in 2013 as a means to record equipment use hours with a monetary value. It was not funded however. She explained that the balance of \$1.8 million at year end was prior to submitting the second education funding payment to the State. In addition, there were approx. 20 payroll periods to fund until tax revenue becomes available in October.

Hal acknowledged a lack of understanding regarding the education funding formula used by the State which obligates the Town to submit \$1.6 million while our school budget is \$450,000.

Bob Bingham asked if it was possible that Ernie's assessment was correct and the Town somehow squandered tax money. Kord conceded that bookkeeping was deemed to be insufficient when the audit was conducted in 2010; however bank statement reconciliation did not disclose any financial improprieties.

Russ Cumming characterized the problem as timing-related: the budget is voted on in March at Town Meeting; taxes aren't collected until October; and the Town's budget year runs January through December. He suggested a need to change the way taxes are calculated and collected over an 18-22 month cycle.

Maureen reported that the Selectboard previously reviewed the issue of calendar vs. fiscal year with VLCT. VLCT recommends a 5-year cycle to achieve the desired end-result without undue hardship on taxpayers.

Kathy Scott noted that the budget increase was largely due to an anticipated increase in special education expenses at the school, and much discussion has been held regarding the school and the budget. The issue is education funding and the disproportionate amount of education taxes Windham pays to the State. Another factor is the number of supervisory unions (62) in the State for a student population of approx. 85,000. She said that the supervisory union spends \$.72 more per gallon for fuel oil than Windham.

Kate Wright presented 4 questions: Is this (tax increase) a permanent increase? If not, what would the reduction be? Can payments be made incrementally? How is the increase per household calculated?

Russ Cumming explained that the education tax calculation can be found at <http://tax.vt.gov/> by typing education tax in the search box.

Carolyn Partridge agreed with Kathy Scott's analysis of the situation. Regarding the equipment fund, the road crew was responsible for tracking the amount of equipment time used. She did not recall whether money was put aside based on the calculations, but suggested that Carol Merritt may know. Regarding tax bills, she noted that her taxes showed a 5x increase over last year because one form (income sensitivity) was not filed by her tax preparer. Sally Hoover reported a similar situation with another resident and Carolyn offered assistance in resolving the problem.

Maureen posed the question: Do we have to collect taxes by October 31 (received on, before, or postmarked by October 31 is considered timely) or can we grant extensions this year? Kathy Scott agreed to check with VLCT. Maureen anticipates a larger number of taxpayers than usual not paying by October 31. She suggested allowing extra time to pay the difference above last year's tax bill.

Kate Wright explained an issue affecting residents whose taxes are paid into an escrow account as part of their mortgage. The mortgage company may consider the tax increase permanent and therefore increase the monthly mortgage payment in order to amortize the increased tax amount. John Hoover noted that some mortgage companies offer the homeowner the option of paying the increase up front in order to avoid an increased monthly payment.

Carolyn noted that little accountability is available regarding the \$40,000 - \$45,000 special education increase in the school budget. It was rumored that the student needing services moved to Brattleboro. It was also rumored that Special Education services may be required for (an) other student(s). She expects to know more when the School Board meets again on Monday.

Bill Dunkel asked if the Town has a strategy to challenge its status as a sending town. Carolyn responded that the issue goes back to Act 60 which was adopted in 1997-98. She explained that Windham is designated as a sending town based on its having lots of real estate and very few students.

A suggestion was made to involve the other Towns negatively impacted by Act 60 when taking the funding issue up with the Ways and Means Committee. Kathy suggested a dual approach to include the Education Secretary.

Maureen will try to get answers to some of the questions posed tonight and report back at the next meeting.

New Business:

Adopt Zoning Regulation Amendment from August 19 hearing (to be effective 21 days hence on Sept. 23)

Motion: That the Selectboard adopts the Zoning Regulation Amendment as presented by the Planning Commission at the August 19 public hearing—moved by Maureen—all in favor.

Adopt Enhanced Energy Plan Amendment from August 19 hearing (to be effective 21 days hence on Sept. 23)

Motion: That the Selectboard adopts the Enhanced Energy Plan Amendment as presented by the Planning Commission at the August 19 public hearing—moved by Maureen—all in favor.

Person and dog living on corner of Windham Hill and Abbott Roads

Maureen received several complaints about a noisy dog at the intersection of Windham Hill and Abbot Roads. She contacted the resident who explained that the dog was barking in response to a bear sighting and claimed that the dog is not left outdoors overnight. The resident agreed to control the dog's barking and the situation seems to have improved. The resident intends to move to Townshend next month.

Tornado

Kord has been working tirelessly to secure funding to remove the downed trees and damage caused by the recent tornado. He has reached out to Windham Regional Commission, V-Trans, and FEMA, to no avail. It is possible that the Dept. of Forest, Parks and Recreation may be able to provide foresters to help with clean-up. The Forest, Parks and Recreation supervisor is presently on vacation; Kord will follow up. Harrington Road remains closed due to the tangle of trees which will require heavy machinery. Safety is also a concern in the clean-up effort.

Old Business:

Bids for Town Office construction

Kord reviewed the bid submitted by Finn Hill Construction for repair of the south wall door and siding at the Town office. The bid included \$1500 for removal of the steps. The contractor does not have the heavy equipment needed but it is possible that the road crew may be able to remove the steps using the loader and save the Town

some money. Bob Bingham reviewed the issue and agrees. The location of the septic system must be identified first to avoid damage which may result from driving heavy equipment over the septic system.

Motion: To award the bid for the Town Office construction project (repair of south wall door and siding) to Finn Hill Construction per the bid submitted excluding demolition and removal of steps—moved by Kord—all in favor.

Kord noted that repair of rotted floor joist(s), if any such damage is present, is also not included in the quote.

Roads

Final Update on Paving Job

Maureen reported that the road shoulders and line painting were done and the paving project is completed. Kathy Scott noted that one additional bill was received which she has asked Everett to review.

Correspondence/Payroll/Bills

Maureen shared a letter from V-Tel offering to provide an information session for Town officials and residents regarding the fiber optic network and its reliance on consumer provided power. Information on battery backup systems and extended battery packs will also be included. The service is offered at no cost to the Town or residents. Kord agreed to review the matter.

A letter was received from the Windham County State's Attorney's office re: resolution of a case involving burglary or attempted burglary of the school and/or Town office building(s) a few years ago. The resolution includes an order for restitution if damages were incurred and can be documented. The letter was given to Kathy Scott who will follow up with the Windham County State's Attorney's office.

A liquor license was received from the 4th Corner Foundation for an upcoming event. Correspondence was received from the State of Vermont Department of Labor, as well as from People's United Bank. Payroll and bills were reviewed and approved as necessary.

Executive Session – Personnel Vacation issue

Maureen reported that this item will be addressed at the next meeting.

Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the regular Selectboard meeting at 8:01 p.m.—moved by Hal—all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Cumming
Selectboard Clerk

(Attachments listed on last page)

Attachments:

- Letter from Ernie Friedli dated September 2, 2019
- Summary of changes to Windham's Zoning Regulations dated 7/3/19—Adopted by Selectboard 9/2/19
- Summary of changes in the Enhanced Energy Plan Adopted by Planning Commission 6/12/19—Adopted by Selectboard 9/2/19
- Bid submitted by Finn Hill Construction and Specs for Town Office south wall door & siding project
- Letter from VTel dated 8/26/19
- Letter from Windham County State's Attorney's Office dated 8/23/19

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