Windham VT Selectboard Meeting Minutes

November 1, 2021 Regular Meeting

Via Zoom: In-Person:

Kord Scott, Selectboard Maureen Bell, Selectboard Chair

George Dutton, Selectboard Vance Bell, various positions

Dawn Bower, various positions

Marcia Clinton, various positions

Bill Dunkel, various positions

David Cherry, Deerfield Valley Communication Union District Representative

Tom Johnson, various positions

Kathy Jungermann, various positions

Imme Maurath, various positions

Michael McLaine, Town Clerk

Pat McLaine, Auditor

Ashley Pinger, Windham County Sheriff’s Department

Kathy Scott, Treasurer

Gail Wyman, Assistant Treasurer

**Call to Order**

Maureen announced the meeting and called it to order at 5:30 PM

**Additions to Agenda/Announcements/Reminders**

Quick reminder about Election Day tomorrow.

Bill Dunkel – The Energy Committee has been working with the West River 100% Energy Group to build 2 community solar projects – one on Michael Simonds’s property and another in Wardsboro. These are taking a long time to get through the Public Utility Commission. Hopefully we will have the approval by next spring. Same developer is hoping to build small-scale solar projects, using these as models. If anyone has 2-3 acres that are cleared and solar-oriented, let Bill know. It’s an opportunity to make some money by leasing your land and reduce your electric bills.

Also, the Window Dressers community building project will take place at The Meeting House (TMH) from November 17 – 21. From Windham, Londonderry and Wardsboro, there are 23 customers and 182 windows to be built. This is a terrific project with benefits such as staying warmer, helping the environment and cutting down on heating bills. Imme questioned if Bill knows why Pete Newton didn’t want to put the inserts upstairs in TMH. Bills thinks it was a combination of aesthetics and the cost of the project not worth the expense, which might have been about $1000 for these very large windows. Bill was disappointed by this decision. Maybe next year!

Imme: The Veterans Honor plaque ceremony will be Sunday, November 11 at 2PM. Looking for people to help with refreshments. This reminded Bill that food will be welcomed at the Window Dressers community build, as well! And additional workers might be welcomed too. Must be vaccinated to help.

**Act on minutes from October 18 Regular and October 21 Emergency Selectboard Meetings**

Motion: To accept the minutes of the October 18 Selectboard Meeting – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

Motion: To accept the minutes of the October 21 Emergency Selectboard Meeting (to contact Attorney Bob Fisher) – moved by Maureen. Kord and Maureen, who were present, voted in favor.

**Public Comment**

Imme asked Kord to coordinate with Richard to clean up the last brush pile in TMH parking lot before the Veteran’s plaque celebration. And Imme would also like some traffic cones to block off the parking lot on the day of the celebration. Kord said he would speak with Richard.

**Correspondence**

Auditor’s report from October found that the People’s Bank credit card incurred a late fee and interest. The Auditors don’t understand why we’re incurring these charges and would like us to speak to the Treasurer about this. It seems to happen every time something is charged to the card. Imme pointed out that she deals with several other bank cards and never has these issues.

**New Business:**

**Letter of complaint about Kermit Blackwood’s animals on neighbor’s property**

On October 18 the Selectboard received a letter from Keith Bower explaining that he wrote a letter to Kermit Blackwood and Karen Watts regarding their animals coming onto his property and in some instances, causing damage. A barbeque grill became unusable and had to be replaced. Keith sent them the invoice for that. He stated that he has written to the pair previously, mentioning concern about his safety and health and it is not acceptable for the animals to be on his property.

He is also concerned about the animals constantly being on the road, or crossing it. He’s worried that a driver might have to swerve to avoid the animals and get hurt as a result. Keith reiterated his feelings today in another email.

Maureen suggested the Selectboard write a letter to Kermit advising him of this information and to serve as some kind of notice. She’s looking for comments/suggestions. Bill commented that just today, as well as a few days ago, he had to deal with piles of peacock poop on his property. And also, though it has gotten better, he recently had to clean up piles of poop from the water buffalo. He has privately communicated with Kermit about this.

George thinks too much fuss is being made about the birds in the road – that people should drive slowly near this “active farm of sorts” and Kermit is making an admirable effort to keep the mammals locked up. We need to encourage Kermit’s movement in the right direction. When Maureen questioned if Kermit should be keeping these birds in this sort of farm, George said that the genetic work Kermit is doing is significant to Kermit and others.

Ashley interjected at this point that she’s been in touch with Bill asking him to let her know the next time the animals stray onto his property because she has warned Kermit that the next time, there will be fines for this.

Regarding the situation with Keith, she spoke with him and advised that the destruction of the grill is a civil ordinance. Maureen pointed out that property damage is in violation of our Animal Nuisance Ordinance, making this a municipal issue. Ashley will take another look at this.

Regarding the animals in the road, the last time Ashley spoke with Kermit, he said he was renting the property across the street for the animals. As for the birds in the road, Ashley says it’s hard to justify punishing this when further up the road there are signs to watch for dogs. Maureen thought the unofficial nature of those signs made them meaningless, but Ashley said no.

Vance chimed in that from his personal experience, farmers don’t let their animals cross roads in dangerous situations. He wants to know that if someone were to hit one of these animals, whose responsibility would that be? Ashley said that Kermit mentioned to her that some of his animals were purposely hit. He hasn’t filed any formal complaints though. Vance feels that Kermit is being totally irresponsible regarding the keeping of his animals.

Hearing Bill’s comments tonight, Ashley is ready to serve a fine because Kermit was given until the end of November to build fences for these animals, but still, in the meantime, had to keep them off his neighbors’ properties and has failed to do so.

Bill has been in communication with Kermit several times. He sometimes gets responses from Kermit telling Bill the actions he (Kermit) will take, i.e. cleaning up the poop. That’s as far as it gets though – the action is never done. Other times, Kermit doesn’t even respond to Bill’s complaints. If Bill thought Kermit was making an effort, he would feel differently and doesn’t think things would rise to this level.

Again, Ashley doesn’t feel like Kermit is being a responsible owner and is ready to issue fines. Kord feels that we have to let Ashley do her job. If we do respond to the complaint, Kord suggests that we just say it has been turned over to the authorities.

Ashley just reiterated that she needs people here to tell her what’s going on. She can’t act unless she knows.

Dawn wanted to comment that several times lately, she’s seen the ducks in the road, sometimes just sitting there in such a way that she could not get around them. It’s annoying. And Dawn corrected Maureen in that it was not the birds who caused damage to the grill, but the water buffalo.

Maureen got word that David Cherry, who is speaking about the Deerfield Valley CUD needs to leave the meeting and would like to speak next if that is OK. No one had issues with this.

So, **Old Business Deerfield Valley Communications Union District (CUD) update**

Deerfield Valley Fiber Optics is serving 24 towns, including Windham. The State created a Vermont Community Broadband Board which just awarded us $4.1 million to complete the details engineering preparation and we are planning to start construction in Spring 2022. The group expects to get significant additional funds in 2022. Windham falls in Phase 2 (of 3) because we have some residents with high speed fiber optics, with construction starting at the end of 2022 into 2023. We are partnered with Great Works Internet from Biddeford, ME and will be transitioning from a volunteer organization to one hiring managers and support staff for these projects. The 24-town Governing Board has been slimmed down to an Executive Board which will vote on actions between Board meetings; David was appointed to that Board. Group is very encouraged. Federal Funding has thus far come from the American Rescue Plan Act; more funding is expected and will be funneled through the State. The Broadband Board is coordinating. This project is one of the first in country. The group is acquiring fiber optic materials now, in advance of need so there is no chance of being without it. There will be no cost to Windham taxpayers, fees will be competitive and service will be of high quality, with a symmetrical service of 100 gigs up and 100 gigs down. Maureen asked if the report could be made public; David indicated that Ellen will put it in next edition of News and Notes.

**Horsenail Hill Road “Welcome to Windham” sign**

Kord said a resident living on Horsenail Hill Road noted that it is another entrance to town that does not have signage. Donna Koutrakis made the original signs (on Route 11 and Windham Hill Road) which might need some TLC. If anyone is interested in making some new signs, let the Selectboard know.

**Project Management through the Windham Regional Commission (WRC)**

We received an email concerning our interest in Project Management, like that being provided by Margo Ghia for the culvert on Route 121. The Commission wants to know if we and other towns have need to hire somebody to do this type of project management with all types of projects. They want to know if towns want this assistance and anticipate needing assistance in the next 2-4 years. Big FEMA projects require a project manager. Kord had wondered, before the survey, and questioned Chris Campany of WRC, if it was an option to hire Margo for the other FEMA project. On FEMA grants, administrative expenses are reimbursable. There are expenses to managing these grants. Both Kord and Maureen indicated this would be helpful. Most of our projects are road-related, but we’re also in the beginning discussions of a salt shed. George agreed we should tell them we have some interest in this. Maureen will get back to Windham Regional Commission.

**Google Maps**

Maureen successfully requested a name change on Google Maps from Windham Congregational Church and its designation as a church to Windham Meeting House as a community center. Imme asked if the name change would change our historical status. Tom Johnson indicated that the centers of Windham and South Windham are both registered historic districts. He did not find that the church was registered as a historic building; Vance thought it was and will look it up. In the meantime, Bill Dunkel read that according to the Town Plan (page 11), Windham Village received National Historic designation of Historic Places in 1984. Both The Meeting House and South Windham are also on National Register of Historic Places.

**Old Business:**

**Deerfield Valley Communications Union District (CUD) update from David Cherry**

See above

**American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) ideas**

Maureen has listened to 3 of 4 webinars from Town Fair, all are full of ideas. One idea from Gail is to use ARPA money to rehab delinquent tax properties the Town now owns. Imme thinks low- to moderate-income housing, maybe tiny houses, would be a good idea. The Town could sell the properties.

**Air exchange system for Town Offices**

George said the Selectboard needs to use the right procedure, and should get quotes from different people. George hasn’t gone to look at the system with Mike yet.

**Audio/Visual equipment for municipal meetings**

George asked what kind of equipment the town has. Essentially the Town has a microphone. The speaker and computer are Maureen’s. The projector might be privately-owned. George will price out a system with several microphones.

**Roads:**

**Hydroseed Grant award**

Town applied for this and was awarded the grant for up to $6,000 with 20% match. This will be very helpful for next year. Richard will look for options for purchase this winter.

**VTrans Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Grant for the salt shed**

In conversation with Chris Campany (WRC) Kord found out that options for this funding not only include bicycle paths and sidewalks, but salt sheds too. The specialist for handling this grant is Colin Bratton. He came to Windham and felt like this was a likely location for a salt shed grant. Kord will send him the report from the structural engineer; Colin will look at whether we can apply for this based on what we know already. Due date for this grant application is November 15. But there are others. Richard is sold on the concept of keeping the sand outside now; having it exposed to sunlight makes it easier to load and unload. If it does freeze up, it thaws quickly in the sun. A number of options are available (put it near the existing building, tear the existing building down) but we first have to determine if Windham could apply for this funding. Having a dedicated salt shed might be helpful to keeping road equipment in road-worthy shape. There are maintenance issues for vehicles being parked in the current salt shed.

**Discuss replacement plow truck pricing, if available**

Kord has calls out to Lucky’s and a Western Star dealer in NH. They are both getting cab and chassis prices together. He has prices on two International chassis.

Maureen noted that Windham Hill Road was paved. Kord said that VTrans sent a message asking which roads really needed to be lined as they were having trouble getting paint. Imme asked why Horsenail Hill never got lined. Kord responded that it is a Town road and would cost money! Windham Hill was done by the State.

**Payroll/Bills**

Everything looked in order to the Board. There were several tax refunds, Social Services payments and a big payment to the school.

Motion: To approve the bills and authorize Kord to sign off on them for the Selectboard – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

**Adjournment:**

Motion: To adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 6:50 PM – moved by Kord. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Bell

Acting Selectboard Clerk