Windham VT Selectboard Meeting Minutes

December 6, 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 Leigh Merinoff

Marcia Clinton, various positions Abby Pelton

Bridget Corby Betsy Thomason

Kathy Jungermann, various positions

Michael McLaine, Town Clerk and Town Moderator

Michael Pelton

Barbara Jean Quinn, Social Services Committee

Kathy Scott, Treasurer

Gail Wyman, Assistant Treasurer

**Call to Order**

Maureen announced the meeting and called it to order at 5:31 PM

**Additions to Agenda/Announcements/Reminders**

Kord would like to move Employee Evaluation and Replacement Truck Bids to Executive Session as there is salary and competitive information, respectively, to be discussed.

**Act on minutes from November 15 Selectboard Meeting**

**Motion**: To accept the minutes of the November 15 Selectboard Meeting – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

**Public Comment**

See below.

**Correspondence**

For Kord, there is an Excess Weight permit from PJF Trucking & Logging as well as a notice from Ford regarding an inspection for a potential problem with frame support brackets. Maureen left them in the Selectboard folder.

**New Business:**

**January 3, 2022 Selectboard meeting**

The Board doesn’t have any problems meeting on this day (Monday after the holiday) so we will keep this as the first meeting of the new year.

**Old Business:**

**Tractor Parade Cancellation**

Maureen wanted to point out that despite what the email cancellation notice implied, the Selectboard never discussed this issue. The cancellation came about after a conversation between Maureen and Crystal Corriveau, the organizer of the event, wherein Maureen expressed her concerns about the rising number of Covid cases and the party to be held inside The Meeting House after the parade.

Kathy Scott said she was in support of the event and was disappointed that there hasn’t been an effort to find some solutions so this could go forward. Kord expressed his agreement with this. He thought it was a good idea which brought Windhamites together despite their differences of opinion on various issues. He hopes it can go forward at some point in the future.

Maureen pointed out that in a recent email, Leigh Merinoff made the suggestion of holding this event in the warm weather, when it can be outside – maybe during one of the summer holidays.

Abby Pelton wondered if it could be re-worked to be an outdoor event. She knows that people have spent money on decorations and are disappointed. Maureen said she hadn’t heard of any alternatives and time is fleeting, this being less than 1 week before the event was supposed to happen. Maureen said that Crystal indicated the event would just be made private at this point without any Town involvement.

Maureen reiterated that the timing is not good right now and there is a lot of planning that needs to be done: Law Enforcement, Emergency Services and the rest. Abby mentioned that people will be out money because of this. Maureen said she told Crystal she’d be willing to reimburse peoples’ expenses but was told this was not necessary.

Abby offered to take this up and coordinate tomorrow with Kord.

Dawn expressed her concern about having this event in the dark at this time of year – she’s worried about the little ones. Feels that this is better suited to warm weather.

N.B. After the meeting Maureen sent an email to Abby, regrettably reiterating her concerns and asked her to take the event/party private for now. We can talk about a similar event in the future when we have time to plan for Law Enforcement, Emergency Services, Insurance, Roadblocks, Covid, if necessary and more.

At this point Maureen acknowledged that Leigh Merinoff and Betsy Thomason, who were late to the meeting, wanted to speak in Public Comments. Acknowledging that the full agenda would mean that we have to stick to a limited speaking time, they were permitted to speak.

**Public Comment:**

Leigh wants to talk about the mask mandate the Governor put into effect in November. She said that Legislators were forced into meeting and passing this mandate. She then went on to say that it’s up to the individual towns to pass this mandate which will be in effect for the next 5 months. She wants to know when we will be discussing this at a Selectboard Meeting. Are we going to bring in mask experts to talk about this or not? It is her understanding that every town will be doing this.

Maureen explained that the Governor did not issue a mandate. The Legislature has given towns the option to mandate masks. It has not come up as a concern in Windham yet, but Leigh would like to add this to some future agenda and have the discussion about mask efficacy. Maureen explained that the Selectboard is busy with Budgeting season right. Because this is shutting down the economy and schools, Leigh feels that the Town should take the time to talk about this.

Maureen made the suggestion to perhaps have a special meeting to discuss this. Kord agreed. George doesn’t think we need a mask mandate as everyone seems to comply with requests to wear masks indoors, but we should put the issue on the next regular meeting agenda instead of having a special meeting. He further said that if townspeople feel we need to have mandate, we should go ahead and do it. But again, for now it seems people comply with a requests to wear masks. We’ll put it on the next meeting agenda.

**Windham County Sheriff or Vermont State Police (VSP) for policing Windham**

Kord spoke with Lt. Anthony French of VSP in Westminster. They have backed off from providing contract policing service to towns. They don’t have enough manpower and their costs are $20/hour more than Sheriffs’ departments. They, of course, will respond to criminal complaints, but will not contracte for things like traffic enforcement. Maureen read from a recent news article confirming this exact premise – that according to the VSP, their contract with Londonderry would not be possible going forward.

Before her connection was lost, it seemed like Abby wanted to say something about the Game Warden. Kord didn’t have a chance to get to that yet but knows that our Constable Joe Lamson has had conversations with him (Kyle Isherwood) when we were having issues with game. Kord will continue to look into the policing issue.

Abby feels like using the Game Warden is all-encompassing in terms of what they can do for the Town. Without a contract, they already respond to concerns in Town. She feels like it would be good to build on this relationship.

Kathy Scott reminded us that we pay $6120/year to the Windham County Sheriff for our contract. So far, through November, we’ve raised $5927 in our share of civil fines. It would be foolish to discontinue this contract. Abby spoke again about encroaching criminal activity and the lack of response from the Sheriff’s department. For instance, if a gun is found in the car during a traffic stop, the Sheriff won’t push for an investigation the way other agencies might. Kord will continue to research the topic.

**Roads:**

**Fuel Tank Replacement**

Kord is trying to locate a new tank and check the possibility of putting it inside the Garage. He checked with PACIF (insurance company). They referred him to the State Fire Marshal, which opened a “can of worms”. It’s possible to do this, but it requires engineering and permitting. There is a section of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) code that handles this. When the Fire Marshal visited, Kord found out that in addition to all the rules governing moving the tank inside, there are also codes about where it can go outside and putting it back in the same place it was is now not possible, as it would be too close to the Salt Shed. We CAN put it across the parking area, closer to the road, from where it currently sits. We also need a containment basin (we have the old one and a new one) and an enclosure that can withstand a 60# snow load.

George asked if Kord had thought about burying the tank. George thinks you can bury up to a 900-gallon tank without too many hurdles. Kord had not and will look into it. In the meantime, we’ve been looking for tanks, which are scarce. Cota & Cota found one at a vendor and it’s on hold for us. $5318 delivered with a 10-day lead time opposed to another that was found for $6000 plus delivery.

**Conditional Motion:** If Kord finds out that we cannot bury a tank or it is cost prohibitive, we authorize Kord to purchase the above-mentioned tank – moved by George. All voted in favor.

At this point, Abby came into the building and we continued the discussion regarding VSP. See above.

**Transportation Alternatives grant**

Salt Shed – Colin Bratton from Windham Regional Commission (WRC) helped us get a grant submitted. It would cover work already (repair or replacement) quoted to us by an engineering firm to deal with foundation problems. If we are awarded the grant, we are not committed to accepting it or using it in a specific way.

**2023 Better Roads Grant application**

Annual grant that is due December 17. Not sure what we’d use it for yet, but will file for it.

**Budget 2022 – in general**

**Social Services recommendations**

They were pretty much in line with what was recommended in the past. The changes include increasing the amount to Londonderry Voluntary Rescue Squad from $1500 to $2000 and decreasing the amount to The Collaborative from $350 to $300.

**Digitized Land Records Portal – American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding**

Katie Buckley at Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) confirmed that this expense is a legitimate one for ARPA funding. She suggests that we earmark ARPA money for this for the 6 years covered (2021-2026). Maureen thinks that amount should be $10,000. Cost from New England Municipal Resource Center (NEMRC) this year is $1200 (x 6 = $7200 plus an increase over the years).

Kathy points out that we have $2000 in a designated Audit Fund. We don’t have an audit in mind at this point, but remember that that money could, at some point, be applied to other things. Kathy has a call into the State regarding the status of NEMRC products as a result of this year’s tax bill problems. She is waiting to hear back.

We asked Michael McLaine to explain about this portal. With a grant at the beginning of Covid, we were able to digitize and add to the NEMRC portal, all Land Records from 2004 to the present. Given Windham’s location and Town Office hours, it seemed like putting this online was a good fit – it helps title searchers, in that they don’t have to come to the Office. Many of the larger towns use this type of service. We thought we’d give it a try for a year at about $1200. The result is that the Town has received about $200 in copy fees. More people might have used the service, but not paid for copies. There is a link to this portal from the Town website ([www.townofwindhamvt.com](http://www.townofwindhamvt.com)).

Kathy asked Mike if he knows if NEMRC will hold this contract for the foreseeable future. Are there any other players? Yes, there are other systems. Towns around us that use NEMRC are Weston, Jamaica, Londonderry, Peru and Ludlow. Manchester and Springfield use COTT systems. Mike doesn’t know the cost of that system. NEMRC thinks that since all of our land records are on NEMRC (we are married to them), it makes sense to continue to use them. In a light-hearted moment and because of the issues Kathy had with NEMRC and tax bills this year, she said she had a separation agreement with them right now! Kathy may look into these other companies because of the problems she had.

**Roads**

Maureen put Kathy’s proposed budget on the screen. Kathy is proposing that we level-fund the budget, at the bottom line. All the numbers aren’t in yet, but we will have a surplus at year end. Because of this, we can work our way around any increases in things such as fuel, retirement funds, payroll Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).

Kord and Richard Paré (Road Foreman) agree that the budget can be level-funded. Kord can take us through this line by line if anyone wants. We are going to make a truck purchase. We will also have a surplus from this year’s budget. Kord would like to see that surplus go into the Equipment Replacement Fund. A reason for most of the surplus is that we were able to carry out some work we would normally fund in the budget by using designated funds in anticipation of getting grant reimbursements.

Michael Pelton is concerned, from an emergency preparedness point of view, about second egress roads like the Ingalls/Old Farm Road connection. Can a road like that (and others if they exist) be upgraded to handle emergency traffic under the ARPA funding or even the Roads Budget? Maureen will look into the ARPA issue. Kord will think about it from a Roads standpoint. This specific road is a Class 4. Maybe the Better Roads grant would be appropriate for something like this.

As for the Municipal budget, Kathy believes we’ll be able to level-fund it as well. She will have a better picture by the next meeting. We will discuss both budgets again at that time.

Repaving Fund – last year we appropriated $90,000 for Repaving and $15,000 for Bridges and Large Structures. Right now, we have $219,727.24 available in the Repaving fund. We are probably not going to receive State money for paving for a few years. We do have the big culvert project on Rt 121 coming up. Between the 2 funds (which are interchangeable) we have over $300,000 right now. Kord will think about funding requests for these funds before the next meeting. Kathy thinks the amounts we asked for in the past are legitimate and should be asked for again. Also, we have over $70,000 in the New Machinery Fund.

**Payroll/Bills**

Everything looked in order to the Board.

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

**Executive Session to discuss Employee Evaluations and Replacement Truck Bids**

**Motion**: To move into Executive Session at 6:52 – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor. Maureen asked the members of the public to sign off.

Before they signed off, Abby mentioned that the school is doing a kindness campaign and will be posting signs around Town.

**Motion**: To exit Executive Session at 7:16 – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

We discussed employee evaluation letters which will be sent out soon. Also reviewed replacement truck bids. No actions were taken.

**Adjournment:**

**Motion**: To adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 7:17 PM – moved by Kord. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Bell

Acting Selectboard Clerk