Windham VT Selectboard Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2022 Regular Meeting

Via Zoom:

Maureen Bell, Selectboard Chair Kathy Jungermann, various positions

Kord Scott, Selectboard Imme Maurath, various positions

George Dutton, Selectboard (joined at 5:36) Pat McLaine, Auditor

Vance Bell, various positions Abby Pelton

Dawn Bower, various positions Michael Pelton

Bill Dunkel, various positions Barbara Jean Quinn, Social Services

Jon Gordon, Fire Chief Kathy Scott, Treasurer

Louise Johnson, Town Meeting House Committee Tom Widger, various positions

Tom Johnson, various positions 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**

There were none.

**Act on minutes from January 3 Selectboard Meeting**

**Motion**: To accept the minutes of the January 3 Selectboard Meeting – moved by Maureen. Kord and Maureen voted to accept the minutes.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

**Correspondence**

There was none.

**New Business:**

**Act S. 172 – Move Town Meeting Day from floor voting to Australian Ballot and/or later in the year.**

Maureen explained the Legislature and Governor have granted us permission to move Town Meeting Day to Australian Balloting (like we did last year) and/or later in the year. Maureen proposed we do Australian Balloting. Last year’s Town Meeting had a very large voter turnout. If we do this, we must have an informational meeting up to 10 days prior to March 1st. Meeting can be on-line on Zoom. The Governor encourages this as a way to keep people safe and get more voter turnout. Date proposed for the Informational Meeting is February 19 at 1:30 PM. Imme indicated that the Auditors are trying to get the Town Reports out 4-5 days before that. The way the bill is written, you have to request ballots, but the Selectboard can vote to send ballots out to registered voters rather than having them make individual requests. Mike McLaine indicated it was more difficult to respond to individual requests for ballots and is in favor of sending them out to all voters. We will have to advise the School Board of what we are doing so their Meeting can be handled the same way. Maureen mentioned the situation to Beth McDonald and said she would let them know what we decided before they discuss it at their meeting tomorrow. Mike McLaine suggested the deadline for Candidates to submit a Consent form be extended from January 24 until February 2, which would give Candidates a little more time to submit the form and ensure that ballots could be prepared for mailing by February 9.

Maureen already has put the request in with the Secretary of State’s office and awaits their reply. The legislation for Australian Ballot enables us to do this for Town Meeting Day and for anything else that might come up this entire calendar year.

**Motion:** That we adopt Australian Ballot for Town Meetings in 2022 and also for Town Meeting Day to stay March 1, 2022 – moved by Maureen.

**Discussion:** Kord suggested that we publicize the fact that the Informational Meeting is the place to discuss any issues that arise upon reviewing the Town Report and voters should consider attending that meeting and ask questions before they vote. Maureen reminded us that notice of the Informational Meeting will be in the Town Report. We’ll check if notice can be sent with the ballot and we can also send something out by email through Ellen McDuffie’s list serve. We can also use word of mouth. **All voted in favor; the motion passed**.

**Motion:** Ballots be sent out to all eligible voters on the Registration List with return postage included – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

**Motion:** To hold the Informational Meeting on Saturday, February 19 at 1:30 PM, which is 10 days before Town Meeting Day – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

**Motion:** Provisional motion made to extend the Candidate Consent Form deadline to February 1, upon approval from the Secretary of State – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

**Budget 2022 – final numbers**

Kathy Scott sent the final numbers out this afternoon. For the General Budget we are almost level funded with last year. Proposed budget is $236,413. We have surplus of $18,899. If we apply a partial surplus of $6,751 to this year’s budget, the total amount is $229,662, equal to last year. Maureen proposes to split the new balance surplus of $12,149 to the Reappraisal Fund, Rainy Day Fund, Town Office M&I Fund and Meeting House M&I Fund. Imme noted that there is also a little over $5,000 in interest in the Logger’s Fund. It is not money collected from loggers. She suggested that these funds be transferred to one of other funds. Kathy indicated the Selectboard can make this decision, but money cannot be moved into highway operations. Kord said he and Bill Dunkel had discussed the Logger’s Fund and questioned whether we are doing what we need to do to oversee logging in Windham. Loggers apparently have little incentive to get an inspection and then request return of their fee. Kathy will give a call to the VLCT regarding fund transfers to see if this interest has to stay on the Municipal side of the budget or could be applied to the Highway budget. Imme indicated that the purpose of the Fund was to ensure that the site and roads were left in good condition following logging operations but it is not clear who has the authority to make this determination. Kord said we somewhat oversee this with overweight permits; one of conditions for this is that the logger must check in with the Road Foreman to make sure that the roads are in the right condition. Enforcement is also not clear. We need to look at how the section is written in the Town Plan and how to handle it. Imme indicated that per her check last week, no one has applied for a permit since 2013. She indicated that no other towns require logging permits. Kord indicated that other towns had gotten rid of logging permits. George stated that he thought this was something we should take a closer look at because there are issues for towns and homeowners both, and that we should not get rid of any permitting. He’s concerned about the way properties are potentially left after logging, i.e., logging roads through the woods for both private and public properties. Vance said the Planning Commission just had a conversation about this. Maureen read from the Zoning Regulations, Section 503, Timber Harvesting. One form was recently submitted to the Town for permit on Hitchcock Hill and Scott Pet Roads. Permit was secured from the County Forester who handled the permit. George wants us to have a bigger discussion on this. Getting a little off topic, this issue will be discussed at the next meeting.

**Motion:**  Move the interest from the Logging Fund to the Rainy Day Fund – moved by George. All voted in favor.

Kathy Scott will get the exact figure and post to final budget before we put it to bed. Imme suggested that $5,000 be moved. Kord and Kathy will notify Beth that we will proceed with Australian Ballot for Town Meeting.

Abby Pelton raised concerns about people voting before the Informational Meeting. Maureen explained that this had been discussed earlier and that by statute the meeting must be held within 10 days of the Town Meeting Day and ballots have a different requirement which is before that. We will be letting people know in the Town Report, let’s spread it by word of mouth, Ellen’s email blast list and Kord reminded us we’re looking into putting a notation on the ballot instruction sheet as well. Michael Pelton inquired about Candidates getting on the ballot – specifically does it require a petition? Maureen explained that the Candidates Consent form is currently due by January 24, but we are asking the Secretary of State’s office for an extension to the following week. No petition is required this year.

Highway Budget – we have a proposed budget of $488,568 which is the same as last year. We have a surplus of $48,419. If we apply $6,048 from the surplus, we will ask the voters to fund $482,520, which is the same amount we asked for last year. This leaves a surplus of $42,371. When we add to that, the revenue we receive from Jamaica for road maintenance of their road, we have $49,136 which we propose to put in the New Road Machinery Fund.

**Old Business**

**Statement in support of exploring electric school buses**

Following up on an issue from the last meeting, the Selectboard thought about submitting a statement of support to the West River 100% Renewables Group in trying to get the West River Supervisory Union to use electric school buses. Maureen’s attempt at a statement reads:

The Windham, VT Selectboard supports the efforts of the West River Valley 100% Renewables Group to explore the use of electric-powered school buses instead of diesel-fueled school buses in the West River Valley.

Bill Dunkel’s and Michael Simonds’s statement that is more in line with the online petition that’s being circulated is this:

The Windham VT Selectboard joins West River 100% Renewables, and those who have signed its petition, in urging Leadership and local Windham Central Supervisory Union school boards to develop a plan to transition to electric school buses, and to research funding and grant opportunities to expedite this transition.

Bill feels that either statement would be helpful. He reminded us that we, as individuals, can sign the petition. George said the idea of electric vehicles is a good one, but many issues remain, especially in the hills like in Windham and doesn’t feel our statement should be binding.

**Motion:** To support the first of the 2 statements – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

Bill expressed his thanks to the Selectboard for this and added that there is a sub-group that has done a lot of research on this including cost, range and re-charging. He is hopeful that the Supervisory Union will make an effort to look into this. He’s also hopeful that there will be some Federal money available for this project. As far as he knows, we’re the only Selectboard as yet to endorse this. He knows the Group will be pleased. Maureen asked him to send her the contact info so she can let them know tomorrow.

**Town Meeting Warning**

This has changed slightly as Kord added an Article which we’ll get to. Articles 1 and 2 are good. There is an outstanding issue that Mike McLaine and Maureen hope to have resolved by tomorrow. It has to do with the position that Howie Iris holds with Leland & Gray that was supposed to have been voted on last year, but was not on the ballot. We’re trying to figure out the exact title and whether it belongs on the Municipal Warning or the School Board Warning. Articles 6 & 7 are about the General Budget and Roads Budget we just discussed. Article 8 for New Road Machinery was not voted last year but is being added back in this year. Suggestion to correct “voter” to “voters”. This should be available for signature by the SB this week. Article 10 is about establishing the Maintenance & Improvement Fund for The Meeting House. It is accounted for in the budget, but because it’s a new fund, we have to ask for voters’ approval.

Upon figuring out the placement of the Leland & Gray position, we’ll get this document ready for signature and to the Auditors so they can get the Town Report done.

**Roads**

**Update/decision on plow truck purchase**

Kord indicated that all manufacturers are having supply chain issues in getting components for the kind of truck we want. We can’t get a firm price until we get into the queue as a buyer. We have prices from two vendors: Patriot Western Star and Reed International. Prices have been in flux and there is a backlog of orders. New order processing has been closed. Kord indicates we need to get into queue if we hope to have a truck by fall 2022 for winter 2023 and even with that, we may not get a truck by winter. Prices for 2023 and 2024 models from International differ by about $16,000. Western quote may go up (it is a few months old). Combined prices for cab, chassis and truck body are $176,955 (Western Star) and $178,050 (International). Warranty for 7 years is different from each of the vendors; Kord isn’t clear yet where they differ. At this point, including Viking body and dealer warranties, but not trade-in allowances, International would be $190,792 and Western Star $184,755. There is also the chance that the Viking quote of $67,000 will go up. Net cost to own (including 7-year trade-in allowances) differs by about $24,000 with Western Star ($106,755) being lower than International ($130,792). Kord feels that we should decide on the truck without looking at the trade-in values. George suggests picking a truck now and deciding on warranty at a later time.

In terms of finances, this is how we stand right now:

New Equipment Fund balance $73,674

2021 Budget Surplus $49,137

Total Available Fall 2022 $122,811

New Cost w/Warranty ~ $190,000

Additional Funds Required $67,189

Trade-in for current 2010 truck $13,000

(might change as it will be 1 year older)

Kord believes each dealer would put us in the queue with a verbal commitment and reminded us that they said we could back away if we don’t get Town Meeting approval. This would be the best way to get timing and firm pricing.

Kord said Richard has not had a chance to look at the truck yet. George said that he did not want to approve this until Richard has looked at the truck. The problem has been that the dealers do not have trucks in stock. George suggests taking a look at similar trucks that are in use by neighboring towns. Kord said he and Richard will see what they can do.

We currently have an New Machinery Fund Article asking for $30,000 which would also help with payments. If we had to, we could borrow from the State Equipment Loan Fund to which you make 1 annual payment in July. A reminder from Kord that we have other expensive road equipment (loader, grader) that will need to be replaced in the future. Maureen asked Kord to update the long-term equipment replacement plan; that would help us to see what we are looking at over a longer period of time.

**Plan:** Richard to look at a local Western Star truck and make a decision about which one he would want. Kord will bring the proposal for long-term plan for road equipment to the next Selectboard meeting. Selectboard to discuss again and determine which truck to purchase.

**Update on fueling station**

Kord said the station (tank, pump, electrical) is functioning again. Roofing material and siding were delivered last week; just need to assemble them.

**Update on FEMA project**

Kord met with the FEMA project manager. FEMA and the town have signed off on the different projects; all projects submitted are being covered. Due to the size of the Wheeler Road project, FEMA might come to look at the temporary repairs, but it’s not definite. Kord needs to review costs on each of the different projects with the Treasurer once the Town Report is finished.

**Payroll/Bills**

Kathy wanted to let us know there is a check made out to her: $4,450. A previous check issued to Henderson Hydroseeders has gone astray. It’s been cancelled and Kathy put the charge on her credit card.

The check to P&L is for work done on the fuel tank enclosure. Same for Sparky Electric. Kathy wasn’t sure if this was clear.

**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 6:54 PM – moved by Kord. All voted in favor.

Next regular Selectboard meeting is scheduled for February 7, 2022 at 7:03 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Bell

Acting Selectboard Clerk

(With terrific assistance, once again, from Pat McLaine)