Windham VT Selectboard Meeting Minutes

January 3, 2022 Regular Meeting

Via Zoom: In-Person:

Kord Scott, Selectboard Maureen Bell, Selectboard Chair

George Dutton, Selectboard Vance Bell, various positions

Dawn Bower, various positions Liz Dalton

Marcia Clinton, various positions Cindy Smith

Russ Cumming, Lister

Bill Dunkel, various positions

Jon Gordon, Fire Chief

Louise Johnson, Town Meeting House Committee

Tom Johnson, various positions

Kathy Jungermann, various positions

Imme Maurath, various positions

Michael McLaine, Town Clerk and Town Moderator

Pat McLaine, Auditor

Abby Pelton

Michael Pelton

Carolyn Rubin

Barbara Jean Quinn, Social Services Committee

Kathy Scott, Treasurer

Michael Simonds, Energy Committee

Jay Warren

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**

Kord asked to give updates on the Fuel Tank repair and the new truck.

Maureen announced she’ll be attending a webinar given by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) focused on planning for 2022 Town Meeting Day.

**Act on minutes from December 20 Regular and December 23 Special Selectboard Meetings**

**Motion**: To accept the minutes of the December 20 Regular and December 23 Special Selectboard Meetings – moved by Maureen. All voted in favor.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

**Correspondence**

There was nothing that won’t be covered in New Business.

**New Business:**

**Window Dressers recap, electric school buses, community solar and other info from the Energy Committee – Bill Dunkel**

Many members of the Energy Committee were in attendance – Bill Dunkel (chair), Tom Johnson, Dawn Bower, Michael Simonds and Vance Bell. Bill gave a recap of the Window Dressers project. They are a non-profit based in Maine that produces low-cost, energy-efficient storm window inserts. Windham combined with Wardsboro and Londonderry in a community build that took place in The Meeting House November 17-21, 2021. They made about 188 inserts for 23 customers in the 3 towns; 86 were made for 11 households in Windham. These inserts will decrease greenhouse gas emissions, reduce energy costs and make homes warmer. Fourteen other towns in Vermont also had community builds. Bill felt this was a successful venture done safely in the middle of Covid. Bill thanked Vance for his dedication and long hours of work. Many people commented on the great process and outcome of the work. Bill has heard from several people in Town that they are very pleased with the product and their homes are already warmer this winter. Window Dressers recommends storing the inserts upright with a little cushioning, so the plastic won’t get punctured. Hopefully more Windham residents will want to be a part of this next year.

For Community solar projects, West River 100% Renewables Group is a consortium of 6 other towns (Newfane, Brookline, Townshend, Grafton, Jamaica and Wardsboro) working together to promote renewable energy in the West River Valley. The group has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with 3 small companies that will finance, permit and build small-scale community solar arrays. They think a reasonable profit can be made by small-scale projects (100-150 kw) on about 1 acre of land with approximately 500-600 solar panels. Two projects are before the Public Utilities Committee (PUC): one from Wardsboro and one on Michael Simonds’s property. Michael said he just heard from the developer today. It’s been 6 months since they filed their application. The Agency for Agriculture Food and Markets gave their comments about a month ago. This is a project that everyone agrees is a good one: it can’t be seen from public spaces, and it doesn’t interfere with wetlands. The process is taking a lot of time and should be streamlined. They still don’t have approval, but Michael is very hopeful that they will have approval by spring. Michael and the developer have submitted comments to the Energy Committee in the Legislature, on how the process can be streamlined and less expensive. We need to accelerate efforts for solar in Vermont. The Wardsboro project has not yet cleared either. The West River Group hopes to stimulate a lot of towns with good solar orientation and no constraints against development. The Group has hired a consultant who will help identify 190 potential sites in the 7 towns. The towns will review the sites, determine viability and contact the landowners to see if there is interest for entering into a lease agreement for installing panels. It is hopeful that 20 or more sites could be identified and set up using this model. If the process could be streamlined, this might be able to be replicated throughout the State.

In cooperation with the West River group, there are 2 more projects: one to get an electric school bus operating in the West River Valley. There is a petition circulating which requests School Superintendent Bill Anton to investigate making a viable conversion to electric school buses. Ellen McDuffie sent out an email link to the petition. If you need a copy of the email, please let Bill know. The plan is to get the petition to Bill Anton by mid-January with at least 200 signatures; 144 have already signed on.

The charging/recharging process is very easy and ideal for a school bus. If the Windham Selectboard wants to support this effort, this would be appreciated. There may be grant money available. Maureen offered to prepare a resolution of support, with Bill’s assistance, and present it at the next Selectboard meeting. Vance suggested that the Schoolboard might want to support this as well. Michael Pelton suggested that we look at the maintenance costs and the impact of lithium mining before making this decision. He also suggested that we look at how to use electric buses to meet other needs of the community. Pat commented that Neighborhood Connections has a new bus available for community needs.

**Anti-hate statement – Cindy Smith**

Cindy Smith and Liz Dalton are asking the Town to adopt an anti-hate statement. A meeting was held in Townshend in response to a nazi flag being hung near the school around the time of the Jewish High Holidays. They both feel it would be nice if Windham would preemptively adopt a non-binding resolution that affirms positive values and encourages respect of other people and perspectives. Newfane, Jamaica and Townshend have already done this. The suggestion for the statement is, “The Town of Windham affirms the civic value of constructive debate, respecting peaceful differences of opinion. It is vital to our growth as a community and in keeping with the dynamic history of our beautiful village that we provide an inclusive, welcoming and productive environment for residents, stakeholders and visitors alike, regardless of differences in viewpoint, identity and background.”

Abby Pelton said she liked the statement. George agreed and would like to incorporate it on our Town website. Kord also liked the statement and wondered if the statements had made a difference in the other towns. Cindy said people in Townshend were happy to have statements posted and to condemn what had happened there.

**Motion:** To adopt the above-mentioned statement and post it on the Town website – moved by Maureen. All in favor.

**Audio/visual equipment**

George asked what kind of investment the Town wanted to make. A projector runs from

$1,000-4,000. A laptop costs $1,000-2,000. Microphones are in the range of $500-5,000. He would recommend spending $2,500-3,000 for the projector, a laptop for $1,200 and microphones in the $1,000-5,000 range. Maureen said the projector the Selectboard currently uses belonged to former Selectboard member Frank Seawright; he said the Town is welcome to keep it. The Town bought 1 microphone but the speaker and laptop presently being used belong to Maureen. There is American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding available for this equipment. Maureen will send information on the projector model to George who will prepare a more detailed proposal for purchasing this equipment. Maureen suggested that we need a camera as well, as we currently only using the one on her laptop. George said those are not expensive. Michael Pelton suggested considering using a smartboard and purchasing a package.

**The Meeting House roofing bill**

Asa Goodband did some roofing repairs at The Meeting House and submitted his bill for $1400 to the Town. Kord confirmed the bill will be paid by the Town but reimbursed to us from The Friends of The Meeting House, who are responsible for the maintenance of the outside of the building. Dawn will take care of the reimbursement upon her arrival back in Town.

**Town-wide property reappraisal**

We received notice from the State regarding the Equalization Study results and Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). We are at 83.75% which is below the 85% threshold and necessitates a reappraisal. Kathy Scott suggested that a first step may be to appeal the determination based on a number of properties that are not now taxable. Suggestion is to get Town Attorney Bob Fisher to look at this to consider if we should appeal this decision. Petitions must be received by close of business on the 35th day after the letter was mailed – December 23.

Kord reminded us that the last time the Town had a reappraisal done, there were problems with the company that did it.

In the last year and a half, properties in Town have been selling at high prices. Russ gave Maureen a copy of a pamphlet entitles A Citizens Guide to the CLA. Maureen thought it was helpful in understanding what this is about and will get copies to Kord and George.

We need to start thinking about how to pay for a reappraisal.

**Town Meeting Day Warning**

Maureen shared a draft of the Warning with articles. According to legal counsel from the VLCT, we do not need voters to accept the Town Report prepared by the Auditors. Michael Pelton asked what we are doing to let people know if there are errors. Bill Dunkel stated that the Selectboard could ask if people have comments on the report and ask them to raise any concerns about inaccuracies. Maureen explained that if we are allowed to and subsequently approve use of Australian balloting like we did last year, there will be an online informational meeting held up to 10 days prior to Town Meeting Day. This will give us the chance to talk about Town issues. If it appears that people want to leave this Article in, we can certainly do so. Abby suggested telling people that they could wait to vote (early ballots) until after the info meeting. Kord asked Maureen to bring this issue up at the webinar tomorrow. Michael Pelton asked if the Town Meeting could be help upstairs in The Meeting House. Another option would be to hold Town Meeting outside at a later date (subject to Legislative permission.

Maureen will have the Warning ready with all the numbers at the next meeting. Kord said the Auditors work hard to provide the checks and balances needed to make sure taxpayer money is being handled properly. And a reminder that the Town Report is the Auditors’, not the Selectboard’s. It will be finalized in the next 2 weeks.

**Budget 2022**

We are getting closer to final numbers. We’ve already voted to level fund the Municipal and Roads budgets for the year. In order to accomplish this in the Municipal budget, we need to apply $10,419 from the $18,414 2021 budget surplus. This leaves a surplus balance of $7,995. We have an additional $21,327 from non-tax revenues (civil fines, Town Clerk and office fees, zoning fees), leaving us with a total of $29,322. Maureen and Kathy Scott propose establishing a Meeting House Maintenance and Improvement fund with $5,000. Because it would be a new fund, it is subject to voter approval. They also propose defunding the NEMRC and Audit accounts and moving those funds into the Reappraisal Fund, along with $6,000 from the surplus. That would leave $13,322 from the surplus to put into the Rainy Day fund for unanticipated expenses.

Kathy noted that our fee for the Transfer Station decreased by about $4,000.

**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.

**Roads:**

Kord said the Garage fueling station is back in operation and asked Mike McLaine to notify the Fire Company.

Regarding the new truck proposal, Kord hopes to have final numbers ready by the next meeting. Mack, due to a backlog of orders, has declined to bid on a truck. One of the International dealers also backed out, citing that they won’t compete against other International dealers. We are down to International and Western Star trucks. Richard will be evaluating them and Kord hopes to have sufficient information at the next meeting so we can make a decision.

**Adjournment:**

**Motion**: To adjourn the Selectboard meeting at 7:03 PM – moved by Kord. All voted in favor.

Next regular Selectboard meeting is scheduled for January 17, 2022 at 7:03 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Bell

Acting Selectboard Clerk

(With terrific assistance from Pat McLaine)