**Windham VT Selectboard Minutes**

**December 5, 2022 Regular Meeting**

**at Town Office and on Zoom**

**Via Zoom *Others attending via Zoom and speaking:***

George Dutton, selectboard

Michael Pelton, selectboard

**At the Town Office**

Kord Scott, selectboard chair

Richard Paré, road crew foreman

Maureen Bell

Imme Marauth

Ellen McDuffie

Tom Widger

Cathy Fales

Keith Jungerman

Abby Pelton

Leigh Merinoff

Bill Dunkel

Ron Cohen

**1. Start Recording and Call to Order**

Kord announced the meeting, started the recording, and called the meeting to order at 5:31 PM.

**2. Changes to Agenda**

Maureen wondered when work on next year’s budget will be on the agenda, and Kord said at the next meeting.

**3. Announcements/Reminders**

Kord announced that the Town Office will be closed December 14-16 when insulation is installed in the building. The LHMP Meeting is coming up on December 7.

**4. Act on Minutes from the Previous Meeting**

There were no changes to the minutes from the meeting of November 21, 2022.

**Motion:** To approve the November 21, 2022 minutes. Kord moved, and all agreed.

**5. Public Comment**

Imme commented that the attendees on Zoom could not be seen and that needs to be fixed for future meetings. Tom Widger commented on what a great job Vance Bell and Bill Dunkel did on the storm window inserts for the Meeting House. He also acknowledged Imme and the group that did the tag sale to raise funds for the Meeting House.

**6. Correspondence**

There was no correspondence to address. Michael mentioned that emails had circulated that day related to animal issues.

**Next Step:** Discuss animal issues at the next meeting.

**7. Payroll/Bills**

Michael asked that the selectboard members receive a written or verbal report from the treasure, regarding how the budget looks compared to previous years. He would also like to think about what money we have in savings or CDs and consider how we invest our money.

**Motion:** To approve the pay orders received from the town treasurer. Kord moved, and all agreed.

**Motion:** To have Kord sign for the payments presented. Kord moved, and all agreed.

**8. Staff Reports and Discussion**

**A)** Road Foreman’s Report – Richard Paré gave an update on the road crew’s current activities. They had expected to get 300 tons of salt delivered, but there is so much salt left from previous years, we delayed the delivery. The crew has been busy picking up limbs and debris down from strong winds. They’re working on Better Roads grants for needed work on Ingalls Road to address soil erosion and on the Chase Road culvert. There’s a backup plan for the culvert on Howard Hill. The grader needs maintenance service done by John Deere, and the road crew will drive it there, rather than having it trucked. Richard spoke to Crystal Corriveau about the car that went off Chase Road onto her lawn. She wants a guard rail and sign posts put up.

Michael asked if using salt is necessary or if we could use sand only. Richard said other towns have tried sand only, and by the end of winter, they have four or five inches of ice. We have cut our salt use in half to 400 tons of salt a year. This winter we might use less. George said we should do the grader’s maintenance now. Richard said we have already spent a lot for repairs, but we are not using the equipment now, so it may be a good time to have it serviced. Imme wondered about the dust that came up on Hitchcock Hill Road. Richard said they can’t treat the roads in the winter to stop dust. George asked about the mower, but there was no update. Many thanks were given to Richard.

**9. New Business**

**A)** Discuss report of personal sign with offensive language – Cathy Fales contacted the selectboard to see if anything could do done about a large, offensive sign in someone’s window. It was investigated, and the home with the sign is in Londonderry. Windham has no policy to do anything about a situation like this. Cathy said she supports free speech, but offensive language is not good. Michael said such language can have an impact on children and others, and perhaps we should think about an ordinance on this. George doubted that we could do anything about it, as free speech is protected.

**B)** Ester Fishman of the Londonderry Solid Waste Group attending the 12/19 meeting – Kord said she reached out and will be attending our next meeting to discuss the Transfer Station. She will have updates on changes and their service in general.

**10. Old Business**

**A)** Update on Town Office ventilation proposals and make award – Engineer John Penny has given us advice on what we need to do and what he recommends. After the last selectboard meeting, additional input was sought from the three vendors who gave estimates on the ventilation system. We received replies from two of these venders. We didn’t hear back from Cory Jeffers. Tim Jeffers gave some good suggestions, including moving the vents for the in and out flows.

John also said we would benefit by adding a heat source to the ventilation system so the warm air inside is not lost. Tim agreed that a heat source was important, as it would be uncomfortable for the staff without it. It is significantly more expensive to add a supplemental heat source, and adding this would make the total cost exceed the amount in the budget. The extra expense could be paid from the ARPA fund. All agreed that it was important to conditioned the heat. With the installation of the insulation coming up, we need to remove the previous ventilation system.

**Motion:** To give Kord the discretion to hire someone to remove the current air exchange system and block off the current ducts. George moved, and all agreed.

George wondered if we should also consider an electric source for heating that might include air conditioning. A heat pump would do that. It would cost more, but would add cooling. George wondered if we should ask for bids on a heat pump. Michael said he likes the idea of a heat pump. Kord commented that having a heat pump would please our Energy Committee, but he wondered about incorporating a heat pump into the anticipated ventilation duct work. It was agreed that we need to spec a system and get bids on that. Kord said John Penny’s advice can be sought.

**Next Step:** Kord will contact John Penny for his advice about transitioning to a heat pump.

**B)** Update on Town Office water testing – Kord reported that he has the materials for the test.

**Next Step:** Kord will take the samples and send them out in the coming week.

**C)** Update on Town Office lighting improvements – George talked to Bob Kehoe who had completed some of the work. Kord said it has all been completed now. George said it was a low-cost way to make a big difference. Kord thanked Ellen and Carrie (her assistant) for all the work they have done to improve the appearance of the Town Office.

**D)** Update on Town Office NAS data backup system – Kord said it is up and running, backing up the computers in the office.

**Next Step:** Learn how to use all of the system’s capabilities, and back up the data files as we want. Vance is assisting.

**E)** Update on VTrans FY24 Better Roads Grant Program due 12/16 – This is a priority for two projects. Richard met with Jeff Nugent from the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) about the repairs needed on Ingalls Road where sections have washed out from storms. We are mandated to do this work, as it is a repeated problem. The other project is for a culvert on Chase Road, and if that doesn’t work out, as a backup, we’ll ask for a grant to do work on Hitchcock Hill Road. There are two folks working with us from the WRC.

**Next Step:** Submit the grants by December 16th.

**F)** Discussion re Town Plan Chapter 10 & 11 – Michael has been investigating the Town Plan to a gain better understanding of it and to support it when making selectboard decisions. Chapters 10 and 11 relate to the town’s priorities and actions to support small scale business and the residential community character. The chapters suggest conducting quarterly meetings of town officers, publicizing local businesses, encouraging economic development, controlling traffic, etc. to support the preservation of Windham’s rural life. The chapters also look at the Meeting House and its possible commercial use and the possible purchase of the Windham School for its commercial use. Michael questioned whether the commercial use of the Meeting House is viable.

Michael is working on the directory of businesses. He found 43 Windham businesses on a state directory. He said we should think about Windham’s commercial development. Perhaps the new refuge/park can be leveraged to move our town in this direction. We don’t have storefront businesses or a business area, but many people provide business services from their homes, and we need to showcase those folks. In terms of quarterly meetings, Michael wondered if we would need separate meetings or if we could incorporate other town officers into the selectboard meetings. This would help us all to work on similar goals together.

**Next Step: C**ontinue to pay attention to this, perhaps by looking at parts of the plan at each selectboard meeting.

**G)** Discussion re Transportation Alternatives Grant – Michael reported that this grant is for alternative options for commuting. To qualify, we could propose pedestrian or bicycle paths for access to town buildings or on primary roads from North Windham to South Windham. We would need a 20% match, beginning with a $45,000 grant for a scoping study. That puts $9,000 on the town. We have only two weeks to do the grant. We’d need a rough plan, a letter of approval from the selectboard, and the planning commission’s support. Because this is for commuting and not recreation, Michael does not recommend this grant at this time. Kord thinks we need walking and biking paths for exercise, as it is hard to currently walk on our roads. Michael said we should think about this in the future.

**Next Steps:** Keep this in mind, and look for other grants for recreational paths on roadways.

**H)** Update on fuel tank donation to Chester Snowmobile Club –The selectboard voted 11/21/22 to donate the tank to the club. Keith Jungerman said he attended the club’s meeting, and they are excited to have the tank. He thanked the selectboard for this. Keith said they discussed our selectboard’s requirements that the tank be put in a retaining case. They will clean and paint the tank and put in their containment vessel.

**Next Step:** Make sure we get the agreement signed from the club.

**I)** Update on Discussions re short-term rentals – Michael reported that there are ways we could tax these, and Bill Dunkel offered to provide input from the Planning Commission. Michael is not keen on taxing these, and he said it is important to think of all parties concerned. It’s good to support businesses, and to not make it too challenging for them. In Colorado, short-term rentals have eaten up long-term rentals, and we don’t want that to happen here. It is important to consider other models we might follow. Taxing could be overly complicated, and since the state has a hands-off policy, it would be up to us to decide what to do. The planning and zoning folks need to think about this.

Bill mentioned that Mac had found five properties listed online from Windham, which aren’t many. Maureen said she did a quick check on Airbnb, and she found 10 short-term rentals. Tax and regulation might drive these short-term rentals to become long-term rentals. But that’s an assumption. There is also a difference from those who rent out on occasional, and those who are making a business out of it. Do we want to put up barriers? This is complicated. Do we want to consider this since we only have a few short-term rentals?

Abby Pelton said we need to provide structure and possible incentives, and maybe not taxation. There may be a nice balance that benefits everyone. Leigh said she needs places for people to stay short-term, and she would not want to discourage anyone from renting their place. Imme said she read about people coming into homes that aren’t appropriate for rentals, and she would not want our firefighters put at risk because there are no controls on fire safety. Tom said we should get a licensing fee or something.

**Next Step:** Get more input from others in town and from other towns that charge fees/taxes. Mac will look again to determine how many short-term rentals there are.

**J)** Update on Aircraft Flyovers – Michael emailed the Air National Guard Vermont, and they provided their fly days. However, they don’t fly down here. They think the planes are coming from a base in Springfield, MA. Leigh said she would like to know when the planes are flying, and she hopes the board will continue to investigate this.

**Next Step:** Michael will continue to pursue this with the Springfield base.

**K)** Update on Workshop on Solutions for Local Housing Needs (12/1) – Michael reported that he was unable to attend the workshop, but did some work on the topic. The VHIP program has been expanded with grants of $500 - $30,000 to replace plumbing, etc. They are being more liberal with the way they are giving out money, to ensure that rental properties are safe and well-functioning. Londonderry has done a needs assessment with VHIP which can shed light on our situation as well. The assessment is designed to build a strategy to deal with housing challenges, including goals and action steps. We might want to consider this before the town plan is next revised. Tom Widger mentioned the Perry Lane project in Londonderry, which is another example of affordable housing.

**Next Step:** Keep this topic on the parking lot for further discussion.

**L)** Update on acquiring constable equipment requirements – Constable Jim Lawler secured traffic cones and a safety vest from Richard. He still needs a first aid kit and perhaps other equipment, but he has what he needs now to address traffic issues.

**M)** Update on Kord/Jim’s meeting with Sheriff Mark Anderson – The meeting took place to introduce Jim as Windham’s constable and to consider Jim’s possible cooperative effects with Sheriff’s Department. Mark was acceptant of the idea of towns having more active constables. Jim will need a radio if we expand his role, and Mark mentioned a good one. They also discussed traffic enforcement, and Mark described the STARS system which we can log into that shows what the deputies are doing. This way we can actually see what activity is happening here. The STARS system also prevents any questions about towns being charged for activity that they aren’t getting. A constable could participate in the job of enforcing traffic control. Michael said another alternative is what Landgrove is doing, installing seasonal speed bumps to slow people down. We might also consider putting up electronic speed signs that show drivers how fast they are going.

**Next Step:** Make decisions related to this before budgetary decisions are made and before the contract with the sheriff’s department is renewed.

**N)** Update on conversation with Bob Fisher about burned house – Kord spoke to Bob today, regarding the burned yellow house on the corner of Abbott and Windham Hill Road. Neighbors have approached the land owners who are doing nothing about the house. Michael said we have an ordinance in Town Policy, Section 3, but it isn’t clear if it was active policy or a draft. Michael said if it is an active policy, it poses solutions. Our town safety officer (Bob Kehoe) can do an inspection. Bob suggested hiring an engineer to determine if the building is unsafe. Michael suggested that we instead send a letter to the owner and ask them to address the problem. If we have no response, then we hire an engineer.

Kord wondered if there are any zoning violations. Bill said he wonders how large that lot is, as it looks smaller than the one-acre minimum our zoning regs allow. He also wondered how there could be a usable septic system. Keith said the lot is about 1.7 acres, extending back and doglegging south up the hill. It was built in the 1960s. He said the owner is adamant about keeping the land and rebuilding. Ron said we don’t need a safety officer to know there is a safety issue. It is up to the owner to take care of this, and the owner is at fault if there is a safety problem. The owner could remove the house now if he plans to rebuild. Bill asked if the owner has lived there full time, and he said he can’t see how there could be a septic system. Keith said it was lived in full-time, and there is plumbing and a well. Bill said it is in a flood zone, next to a stream, and the zoning regs, Chapter 7, say rebuilding in a flood zone is a real problem.

**Next Step:** Kord will send Bob Fisher’s response to Bill and the other selectmen. The selectboard will send the owners a letter stating our concerns and asking for a response. Mac can help prepare the letter.

**O)** Update on FEMA project, bids due 12/19, easement requirements –We’ve had a good contractor turnout for the pre-bid meeting about the Wheeler Road upgrade. Bids are due on the 19th for the total project. This will satisfy a FEMA requirement in terms of what they will allocate. We have contacted the adjacent landowners to set up a meeting to discuss the easement requirements.

**P)** Update on LHMP Planning Team – The first meeting is this week. There will be two meetings required.

**Q)** Discussion about Owl AV System mentioned by Tom Widger – Tom said he heard about this system from a relative who uses it in Springfield. The Owl is a camera that turns to whomever is speaking in a hybrid meeting that is televised. They cost is $1000 to $1500. Michael was impressed with the promotional video he saw about it. He thinks Landgrove is using one. George said we could use some ARPA funds for it. Our current system is cumbersome.

**Next Step:** Look at it on the website and continue to consider its purchase. Michael will talk to someone who is using it.

**10) Adjourn regular meeting and stop recording.**

**Moved:** To adjourn the meeting at 7:33 PM. George moved and all agreed.

**The next selectboard meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 19, 2022 at 5:30 PM**

Respectfully submitted,

Mary McCoy (Mac), selectboard clerk