

**Windham VT Selectboard Minutes
September 3, 2024 Regular Meeting
Held at the Meeting House and on Zoom**

Present at the Meeting House

Kord Scott, selectboard chair
Michael Pelton, selectboard
George Dutton, selectboard
Mary McCoy (Mac), selectboard clerk
Carolyn Partridge
Maureen Fitch

Present on Zoom

Heather Chase, state rep	David Osborne
Mark Anderson, sheriff	Pat Cherry
Ashley Pinger, animal control	Phil McDuffie
Bob Fisher, town attorney	Bill Dunkle
Ginny Crittenden	Abby Pelton
Antje Ruppert	Bea Eliastam
Cathy Fales	Crystal Corriveau

1. Start Recording and Call to Order

Kord called the meeting to order and started the recording at 5:30 PM.

2. Additions/deletions and/or changes to agenda – There were no changes.

3. Announcements – Heather Chase will be at the Town Office tomorrow from 10:00 to 1:00 to help people who think they have received an inaccurate tax bill.

4. Act on the minutes from the August 19, 2024 selectboard meeting

Motion: To approve the August 19, 2024 selectboard minutes; George moved, and all agreed.

5. Public Comments – Carolyn said Maureen Fitch received a large tax bill that was clearly wrong, as her income is small, and her tax bill should not have been more than \$669, or 4.5% of her income. Carolyn has contacted the state’s tax advocate, and she learned that others have reported a similar issue. She asked that the selectboard change the deadline for payments for folks like Maureen until this problem can be corrected.

6. Correspondence – Skip Lisle sent a document regarding the beavers on Burbee Pond and the benefits of beaver deceivers.

Next Step: Discuss this at a future selectboard meeting.

7. Payroll/Bills

Motion: To approve the check warrant reports from the town treasurer. George moved, and all agreed. Kord will sign these.

8. Guest and Staff Reports with Discussions and Possible Decisions

A) Treasurer – Kathy/Heather Chase (tax help meetings /resident tax questions) – Heather agreed with Carolyn’s concerns and the process for addressing those concerns. The first step is to contact the state’s tax advocate, and she hopes people will meet with her to contact that advocate. The Tax Department needs to look especially at issues related to income sensitivity. There are many people questioning their taxes, so the work might not get done before taxes are due. Perhaps the selectboard could delay the penalty for people in this situation. Carolyn said there also seems to be errors in the tax rate for land in “current use.” Antje said she had been contacted about that as well. Heather asked that she, Kord, Kathy, and Antje be kept informed about these issues. Michael wondered if NEMRC might doublecheck our records.

Next Step: Consider postponing property tax penalties for taxpayers with questionable bills.

B) Road Commissioner -- Kord (hiring Reg Paré for GIA and culvert/ditching work) – Richard asked the selectboard do discuss this since Reg is his nephew. There was no opposition to hiring Reg at the same rate as is paid for grants and aid work. The contract to purchase the truck from Allison Transport (ATG Patriot LLC) was discussed.

Motion: To have the agreement with ATG written to include their buying back our current truck when the new truck is ready, buying back the new truck when it is eventually replaced, and to adding the agreed upon updated slack adjusters for the new truck. George moved and all agreed.

C) Grant Strategist (Concert 9/14, grant updates) – Cathy talked about the concert on September 14 at 2:00 with a pianist and teacher from UVM who is performing in every town in Vermont. He will play music from Windham’s past and perform with Windham musicians Pete and Diane Newton, Dan Roth, and two new residents who are music educators.

VRDC has approved a grant for Windham of \$7500 to \$9500 to pay an architect and engineer for a needs assessment and full plan for all of the town buildings, including the schoolhouse. Cathy is meeting on Friday with Kord, Abby, and a rep from VRDC regarding the needs of the schoolhouse.

Cathy will also meet with folks from the Windham Foundation to consider funds they might have for one or more of Windham’s 501(c)(3)s.

She is waiting to hear from Willy regarding the exhaust hood.

D) Listers (lister issues, sales equalization study, ongoing training needs) –Antje said the lister records are still not as they should be, and it isn’t clear why the errors exist or how to fix them. The Grand List still needs work. She will meet soon with Jacob Stoddard, an assessor from NEMRC, to get his help. Michael suggested making a list of the problems to be addressed in that meeting and to seek help from others, like a lister from Londonderry. George said he knows a lister from Newfane.

Michael said no one has expressed interest in the lister job that is open since Ron Cohen resigned. Kord said we may need to change the structure of the lister job which is now an elected position. If it was an appointed position, the selectboard would have oversight, and a professional could be hired.

Next Steps: The selectboard will make sure Antje gets the support she needs from NEMRC or other towns’ listers. George will contact the lister he knows. The selectboard will consider changing the structure of the Board of Listers.

E) Town Clerk (tax abatement meetings, updates) – Ellen was unable to attend the meeting.

F) Planning Commission/Energy Committee (9/4 hearing, Windham Dressers) – Bill said the Zoning Board of Adjustment will hold a hearing on September 4 regarding a request by George Wichelns who owns a historic building in the historic district in South Windham. He wants to remove and rebuild his barn in the historic style. Law requires an open meeting on this. Wichelns has other changes he wants to make, but these were not warned for 9/4 and cannot be added. Bill found mistakes in the historic district designations.

The Energy Committee will host the Windham Dressers on November 3-6 at the schoolhouse. The school board would like the town to rent the schoolhouse or make a donation for its use. Abby said window inserts are wanted for the schoolhouse windows, and she will see that measurements are taken. Michael estimates that inserts are needed for eight large windows, costing \$100 per window. Measurements have been made for the inserts at the

Meeting House, ordered by the Meeting House Committee. The deadline to order windows is October 4. Previously made inserts that become damaged can be repaired for \$15 each. Bill will be out of town September 9 – October 1.

Antje said there is a wrong expiration date on the zoning permit application, and links need to be added to the application for information about wetlands and steep slopes.

Next Step: Discuss payment for use of the schoolhouse. Ask Ellen to update the zoning permit application. Bill will send her the needed updates.

G) Website Manager – Bea Eliastam (website development/outreach to town chairs) – Bea was asked to postpone her report until the next selectboard meeting, as all participants for the Executive Session were now present. The order of the agenda items was changed.

11) Executive Session

Motion: To enter into executive session to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution to which the public body is or may be a party. Michael moved, and all agreed.

Kord stopped the recording at 6:25 PM and placed most meeting participants in Zoom's Waiting Room. The Executive Session include Kord, George, Michael, Mac, Ashley Pinger, Mark Anderson, and Bob Fisher.

At 6:41 PM, the Executive Session ended. Kord brought back the remaining regular meeting participants from Zoom's Waiting Room, and he restarted the recording. Michael announced that no action had been taken in Executive Session.

9) New Business

A) Discuss Green Mountain Gardeners Invasive Species Workshop 9/6 – Kord asked if anyone would like to attend this workshop. No selectboard member could attend, and Michael wondered if someone from the Conservation Commission could.

Next Step: Kord will forward the information to Ginny who will share it with the Conservation Commission members.

B) Discuss Pete's roadside mowers for sale – This may be the same mower they advertised last year which was not right for our use.

Next Step: George will call to get more information.

C) Discuss grant for road erosion inventory update – Kord said we have a Better Roads grant for this that needs to have an updated inventory in order to prioritize the work required and receive more funding.

Next Step: Imme will administer the grant, and Richard will work with the WRC to update the inventory.

D) Discuss having window inserts made for the Meeting House and School – This was discussed earlier in this meeting. (See 8F above, Bill Dunkel's report.)

10) Old Business

A) Prepare for meeting with school board on September 16 – Michael asked anyone with questions or suggestions to send them to him. The meeting on Friday 9/6 with Kord, Abby, Cathy, and Jessica from VRDC will focus on ways to include the community in decisions about the schoolhouse.

Next Steps: Kord will send out information from Friday's meeting on the process discussed.

The agenda for 9/16 will be made short, so most discussion can focus on the future of the schoolhouse.

Crystal said people need to know the tax implications for the various options for the schoolhouse. Michael said that if the town owns the schoolhouse, the \$40,000 needed to maintain the building would have a negligible impact on future tax rates as it would not be part of Education Taxes.

Next Step: On 9/16 gather ideas and discuss possible options, then pursue tax implications.

B) Discuss possible actions to mitigate extraordinary tax bills – This was previously discussed. (See 8A above.) Michael has contacted various folks to get information. Kord said he wants to know how much money we send to the state and how much we get back. Crystal said the Agency of Education has created a committee to consider the future of public education. Michael said we need to tell them to make decisions now, not years from now. Cathy said property taxes issues are relevant to our town's future.

Next Steps: Lobby the legislature to lower our taxes. Michael will ask Bea to post info on the town website. Make taxes a part of our community needs assessment.

C) Update on new AV equipment setup/storage – George said the equipment had been set up upstairs at the Meeting House. We need a new power strip and some new cables.

Motion: To spend up to \$150 for cables and a power strip. Kord said we need to know if there are still funds for AV from ARPA. No vote was taken.

Next Step: George will determine the cost of the needed items. Kord will determine how to pay that cost, and he'll order the equipment if possible.

D) Update on search for new lister/new town treasurer/possible other positions – Michael said no one has contacted him with interest in a town job. Crystal suggested doing a mailing to tell people about the openings. Cathy asked if Windham could hire a professional lister, as other towns have. Kord said that any changes like this would require a vote to do so at Town Meeting.

It has been suggested that the town clerk and town treasurer could be one person. That combined position might attract a professional person, as it would pay more and come with benefits. Our current setup of two jobs attracts retired people who often don't stay in the job for long. Having a professional lister and a professional clerk/treasurer would mean these are no longer elected positions.

We might do like Londonderry has and hire a professional town manager, but that would require a change in our town charter. Londonderry's town manager makes \$70,000 plus benefits. George asked what the situation would be if a professional person quit.

Next Step: Michael will ask Bob Fisher about the process for changing the lister structure. This and other changes should be discussed at the next meeting.

12) Adjourn regular meeting and stop recording.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 7:16 PM. Michael moved, and Kord agreed.

**Next Regular Selectboard Meeting is scheduled for
Monday, September 16, 2024 at 5:30 PM**

Respectfully submitted,
Mary McCoy (Mac), selectboard clerk
Approved September 16, 2024

