

**Windham VT Selectboard Minutes
December 30, 2024 Special Meeting
Held at the Meeting House and on Zoom**

Present at the Meeting House

Kord Scott, selectboard chair
Mary McCoy (Mac), selectboard clerk

Present on Zoom

Michael Pelton, selectboard	Cathy Fales
George Dutton, selectboard	Phil McDuffie
Tan Bronson	Ron Phillips
Tye Guertin	Abby Pelton

1. Start Recording and Call to Order

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

2. Additions/deletions and/or changes to agenda – Acting on the payroll/bills was added.

3. Announcements – There were no announcements.

4. Act on the minutes from the previous selectboard meeting

Motion: To approve the December 23, 2024 selectboard minutes; George moved, and all agreed.

5. Public Comments – Phil McDuffie announced that he is running for town treasurer. He said he was qualified, would begin learning the treasurer’s job before the election, and would appoint an assistant who could take over for him.

6. Updates on upcoming deadlines

- A) Final report for ARPA (due 12/31) – The due date for this is actually in April.
- B) Letter of intent for REI for MRGP (due 12/31) – This has been completed.
- C) Obligation of funds for Hazardous Mitigation Grant (due 1/6) – Imme has applied for this and is waiting for a response.
- D) Bids for Rt. 121 repairs (due 1/6) – The bids for the project management are in. Bids for the construction are due in February.

7. Budget and Warning planning for 2025 – Michael led an updated review of the budget, focusing on changes made at the 12/23 selectboard meeting and new figures he has learned since that meeting. He reiterated that the budget expense figures he is presenting include amounts that will need to be removed from the Highway and General budgets and approved separately in articles at Town Meeting. Also, he is using the top amounts that could be needed in all categories. Once the 2025 revenue figures are determined and 2024 surplus amounts are confirmed, expense figures will need to be adjusted so that revenue and expenses are balanced.

- A) General Transfers Out – These are appropriations that are voted on in separate articles at Town Meeting.
 - *NEMRC Fund:* \$30,000 is needed for NEMRC services. They will be moved from Transfers Out into the General Fund as line items under the heading “NEMRC”.
 - *Emergency Reserve Fund:* This amount will be determined in the latter part of the budget process when we see our cash situation. The amount could change significantly.

- *Question:* Cathy asked about the ebb and flow of grant funds. She will provide Cynthia with an explanation of how she expects the funds to be received and to be spent for the Bruhn and MERP grants. Kord said all grants need their own ledger for grant management.

B) General Fund Budget – A few numbers changed.

- *Total Revenue:* The expected amount from Property Taxes is now anticipated to be \$425,779, bringing the total tax revenue to \$503,779. That brings Total Revenue to \$533,854.
- *Computers:* For Web Management, the amount due for Curly Sprouts Creative will be \$1,200.
- *NEMRC:* This category will now include \$11,875 for Lister services and \$10,560 for Treasurer services. The total is now \$28,815.
- *Town Office:* The amount for Heating Oil changed to \$3,800.
- *Total Expenses in General Fund & Appropriations:* This amount is now \$469,925.77

C) Highway Transfers Out – These are appropriations to be voted on in separate articles.

- *Town Garage:* Kord noted that we need \$125,000 in this fund to match the grant for the salt shed. Since we won't need the money until 2026, setting this at \$17,500 for 2025 and 2026 will provide the amount needed. If this is not enough and we have a surplus, some of that surplus can be used for this purpose.
- *Bridges and Culverts:* Kord said we have just what we need in this account to provide the \$125,000 match for the repairs on Route 121, so we should ask for no less than \$10,000 this year. There are other culverts that need repair, and there may be grants available to help with the costs. Kord will ask Cynthia about how to manage these monies.

D) Highway Fund Budget

- *Highway Payroll:* This was changed to \$143,708, a more accurate figure.
- *Highway FICA/MEDI:* This number is now \$10,993.
- *Payroll Benefits:* Michael noted that insurance costs are up 23%. The health insurance expense for a new employee was increased to \$22,508 for single coverage. The cost of a family plan was deleted.
- *Total Highway Payroll:* That is now \$222,979.
- *Total Highway General Expenses:* These are now \$584,820.76.

E) Articles for the Town Meeting Warning – This began with a discussion about the financial impact of offering health insurance for the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer. This was seen as a good way to attract qualified and committed employees. George suggested offering a higher salary to cover some of the insurance cost. The employee can choose how to use those funds. Cathy said she has spoken to folks in other towns about this. Most offer 1/2 or 2/3 of the cost of insurance, and let the employee handle buying what they want. Kord said we can see where we are financially after Revenue and Expenses are confirmed and then decide how to handle insurance. There was also discussion about the base wages for the treasurer, and that number needs to be confirmed. Then Michael presented his draft of the Warning, going through the various likely Articles.

- Articles 1– 4 are as always to elect a town moderator, approve the Town Report, authorize the town treasurer to collect taxes, and set the due date for taxes.
- Articles 5 – 8 are the usual categories with dollar amounts that need to be confirmed for the General Fund, Roads Budget, New Road Machinery, and Repaving and Bridges.
- Articles 9 – 11 will have the amounts set in Transfers Out for the M&I for the Town Garage, Town Office, and Meeting House.
- Article 12 will ask for the whatever amount is determined for a Town-wide Reappraisal of Properties.
- Article 13 will ask for \$2,000 for the Emergency Radio connection.
- Article 14 will ask that the NEMRC Fund be closed and the expense to be included in the General Fund.
- Article 15 will ask for \$10,000 for the Professional Audit of the town’s financial accounts.
- Article 16 will ask to transfer an amount to be determined to the Emergency Fund.
- Article 17 will ask for \$32,000 to be used to maintain the Schoolhouse if the School Board decides to sell the building to the town and the town decides to buy it. There was discussion about this. The school board has not voted to sell the schoolhouse, but it seems likely that they will ask the voters to approve this. If the decision is made to sell the schoolhouse, we need to know if the voters will pay the basic annual costs of the building. Bob Fisher, town attorney, told Michael the selectboard has the authority to buy the building, but the selectboard should do so based on the decision of the voters. This issue will be discussed and determined by voters at Town Meeting.
- Article 18 – We have no input yet from the Social Services Committee about whether to list all the recipient organizations in this Article or only the new ones and list the rest of them in the General Fund.
- Article 19 will ask for funds to offer health insurance for the Town Clerk and the Town Treasurer. It was agreed that if we ask voters this, we should break it into two articles, one for each official. **Next Step:** George volunteered to rewrite Article 19.
- Article 20 will ask if the Town Clerk should be changed from an elected to an appointed position.
- Article 21 will ask if the Town Treasurer should be changed from an elected to an appointed position.

This Article and Article 20 prompted a challenge from Phil who said he doesn’t want to run for treasurer if the selectboard can appoint someone else. He does not think it would be right to run any election that the selectboard can overturn. It was pointed out that someone who was totally unqualified could be elected, and if no one ran for an office, someone unqualified whose name was a write-in could be chosen. Phil was reminded that he himself had stated this point of view in the past. Kord said that if the selectboard can appoint someone, that person does not have to live in Windham, while elected officials must live in their town. Kord said the selectboard is not looking for more work and would rather not have to recruit, hire, and supervise others, but it is vitally important that we find the best people for the positions. **Next Step:** Kord will talk to Cynthia about how other towns do this. He will also get input from Bob Fisher as to how to handle this matter. `

- A possible additional Article will ask to change the three-person Lister structure to have

one Lister who has the authority to hire an appraiser when needed. George advocated to have this position be elected, so the voters retain this power. Phil said we will be electing two new listers (there is one vacancy and one is up for reelection), and he wonders what will happen if the voters then decide to have only one lister. Will two be unelected? Which of the three will remain? This is another question for Bob. Kord said he knew there are provisions for how to do this. Abby pointed out that considerable training is required for the main lister. Do we want that person to be unelected from office? Michael said he had talked to Cynthia about this. She said that making this change could be challenging in the short term, but in the long term, we are much more likely to have a qualified person in the job. If we appoint them and pay them well, they will stay, providing greater efficiency. **Next Step:** George will talk to Bob Fisher and Cynthia for their recommendations about this. Michael will look at the cost difference for making this change.

Phil again protested that the selectboard should not have the power to hire someone who was not the one elected. Kord admitted there was that risk. Michael said if someone is elected who is qualified, it is unlikely that the selectboard would not hire them. George said this is about placing qualified people in our town jobs. Being appointed allows the selectboard to appoint someone who does not live in Windham. Cathy suggested changing the language to say the selectboard will “hire” the officials, rather than “appoint” them. This would make matters clearer. Phil said the selectboard could misuse this power. Kord said this is about having qualified people in important positions. If we found good people for the jobs, but they didn’t live in Windham, we would have to change our town charter in order to elect them.

8) Adjourn special meeting and stop recording.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 7:05 PM. George moved, and all agreed.

**The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for
Monday, January 6, 2025 at 5:30 PM**

Respectfully submitted,
Mary McCoy (Mac), selectboard clerk
Approved January 6, 2025