

Westfield Selectboard MINUTES
September 21, 2020 at 5 p.m. at the Westfield Community Center

Due to COVID-19 some people participated in person and some participated remotely via Zoom.

Town Officials Present: Selectboard members: Yves Daigle (Chair), Jacques Couture (Co-Chair) and Anne Lazor; Treasurer, Mary Lou Jacobs; Town Clerk, LaDonna Dunn; Assistant Town Clerks, Karen Blais (via Zoom) and Heather Johnson (via Zoom); Planning Commission Chair, Pat Sagui; Lister Chair, Danny Young; and Road Commissioner, Eric Kennison

Members of the Public Present: Ben and Bobbi-Jo Andrews; Will Young; Richard and Jan Degre; Sharon Rosenberger; and Gayle Veilleux

1. Call Meeting to Order: Yves called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. Public Comment – 5 Minutes: Yves welcomed the members of the public present and explained time is set aside under public comment to discuss concerns.

- Ben Andrews said he'd like to talk about his taxes because they went up quite a bit. He said he's asked town officials and people say it is the education tax. He said the municipal tax rate is up and no one seems to know why.
- Treasurer, Mary Lou Jacobs said she could explain why. She said a few reasons are: Abatement of taxes when the condos in Alpine Haven burned down; other expenses over the past few years that weren't accounted for in budgeting which brought about a contingency fund to retire the previous debt in the budget of \$60,000; adding a general miscellaneous expense for unexpected expenses of \$10,000; and replacing a box culvert on Balance Rock Road which the town received a grant for but the towns portion is still \$20,000. All of these combined are the reason the municipal budget increased this tax year.
- Jacques mentioned the Selectboard and other town officers are taxpayers too and all of our taxes increased. He said the Selectboard has perhaps been too conservative when budgeting. He said he's been on the Selectboard for years and they have never had to borrow money until a couple of years ago.
- Ben Andrews asked if everyone's taxes went up and if he could see everyone's tax bills. Mary Lou said yes, they are public information. LaDonna said the tax bills would have to be printed individually. She suggested the easiest way to view this information would be to compare last year's grand list and this year's grand list. This would show the assessed values and the total taxes on each property. LaDonna said this information is available for viewing Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.
- Bobbi-Jo Andrews said this is the first time they have been to a meeting and are trying to understand where all the money goes.
- Jacques suggested reviewing the budget presented in the town report because it is very detailed by category as to where the money is spent.
- Yves stated a couple of years ago it was a long, hard winter which exceeded the budget. He said it is important to keep the roads sanded even if it exceeds the budget. He said that's the Selectboards job, to keep people safe. He said it was the first time during his many years on the Selectboard they had to open a line of credit.
- Mary Lou explained last year the town used \$35,000 of the line of credit. It was paid back. She said so far this year we've used \$40,000. She stated she's hoping by increasing the budget this will enable us to not have to use a line of credit going forward. She said it's the unexpected things like the Halloween Storm of 2019 that cost the town \$30,000 of unbudgeted expenses that can add up over the course of a budget year and cause the budget to be exceeded. We've applied to FEMA for reimbursement but still, almost a year later, have not received any of the money.
- Jacques stated the Selectboard is always looking for grants for roadwork (80 to 90% funded). This saves taxpayers a lot of money on road work that eventually has to be completed.
- Yves said to get back to the point; it's the money we have to pay back that created the increase in the municipal rate for 2020. When the Selectboard prepares the budget, they compare each line item to what was actually spent the year before. They never know what type of winter it will be. This makes it hard to anticipate the winter road budget. It's easier to control the summer roads. For example, they decided to skip paving in 2019 because of the Halloween storm. The money that was in the budget for paving was needed to do road repairs from the Halloween storm.
- Jacques said the Selectboard spends a day or more preparing the annual budget for Town Meeting, evaluating each line item/project carefully.
- Yves invited people to come to the budget meetings to give input. Yves said the only time the Selectboard gets input from property owners is at Town Meeting and it would be good to get it when the budget is created.
- Bobbi-Jo Bathalon asked if money raised from property taxes is invested. Mary Lou explained about the investment accounts and where they are invested either at the credit union or at Edward Jones.

- Jacques clarified if Bobbi-Jo was asking if taxpayer money that comes in is going into investments. He explained that taxpayer money comes in and is deposited into the general fund. Jacques explained the investment accounts are for specific uses. He used the example of the grader fund. He explained for each hour the grader is used, a dollar amount goes into the investment account for the grader. That way, when the grader needs to be replaced, we're not starting from zero to raise the capital investment.
- Bobbi-Jo asked where the money came from to start the library fund and other investments.
- Mary Lou said the grader fund money comes from a line item on the budget. The other investment accounts were taken over by the town from associations years ago (Library, North Hill Cemetery, Westfield Cemetery). The reappraisal money comes from money received each year from the state based on a ratio calculated per parcel. That money is set aside each year and invested so when it is needed for a reappraisal it doesn't have to be raised from taxes.
- Bobbi-Jo said she wasn't sure if the investments were at risk because of where the money was invested.
- Jacques said the town money is not invested in anything at risk. Jacques said it is refreshing to have people ask these questions and express an interest.
- Richard said the Library and the Cemetery money is invested with Edward Jones.
- Jacques said the \$10,000 Good Neighbor fund had been invested in CD's over the years and that money was used to fund the expansion of the Town Garage.
- Jacques said when a reappraisal happens it reshuffles the deck a little bit. The same amount of money is still needed to operate the town. The money for the municipal tax rate is the money that taxpayers vote to raise when they approve the budget on Town Meeting Day. He said the purpose of a reappraisal is not to raise more money for the town.
- Anne commented a reappraisal is an equalization of property values based on the whole state.
- Bobbi-Jo pointed out it just seemed to be bad timing because of everything happening with Covid. The budget was set in January and approved in March, right at the beginning of the pandemic.
- Ben Andrews commented that the town needed an extra \$100,000 for expenses this year.
- Mary Lou and Jacques replied it is more like \$80,000.
- Bobbi-Jo asked about how someone could find out about the offices in town and when those positions are up for election.
- Yves suggested getting the minutes and agendas from the town website and reading those.
- Jacques suggested looking at the officer's page in the Town Report. It shows all the elected and appointed positions and the term of office.
- Anne said we're looking for an auditor right now.
- Mary Lou said they can still be involved by coming to the Selectboard meeting.
- Yves commented that Mary Lee Daigle would like to have an outdoor pumpkin carving event and trick or treating at the Library this year. She would like to have permission from the Selectboard. The Selectboard was in agreement.
- Jacques commented on the new Wedding Barn. He said he was coming home one night on the tractor and it was the most beautiful sight he'd even seen with the wedding barn all lit up for a wedding. He stopped by and told Will what they are doing is a real asset to the town.

3. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda: Added 9E Grants in Aid FY21.

A. Inspection of Town Garage: Yves said there was an inspection at the Town Garage. The inspector took pictures of the Town Garage and the Recycling Center. Yves plans to address the following concerns brought up during the inspection:

- Someone needs to sign off on the fire extinguisher inspection each month.
- There is a cable on the ground near the road. Eric Kennison said it is probably a phone wire.
- The inspector was happy with the bay abutting the recycling bay where the tar was removed and it was cemented.
- Smoke alarms need to be added that tie into the Fire and Sheriff departments similar to what is at the town office. There will need to be a phone line for this to happen. Eric says conduit is already in the ground for the phone.
- The walls should have two coats of semi-gloss paint. The inspector spotted a welder on the premises. He commented a spark is more apt to burn on raw wood than a painted surface.
- The hazardous waste cabinet needs a list of what is inside the cabinet.

4. Approve Minutes of the July 20, 2020 and August 17, 2020 Selectboard Meetings: There was a motion by Jacques and second by Yves to approve both sets of minutes with no changes. Motion passed unanimously.

A. Business from the Minutes: None

5. Update on Housing Study Municipal Planning Grant – Pat Sagui/LaDonna Dunn: Pat reported the project is going very well. We received 50 community surveys. The consultant, Camoin Associates, is very good to work with. The Project Team meets every two weeks to review portions of the housing assessment. Anne asked if there would be a report at the ends presented to the town and then what happens with the report. Pat replied there will be a very thorough housing needs assessment report with an executive report. That will be then presented to Rural Edge. Anne commented that the assessment gives the town a voice. Pat was in agreement with Anne's comment. Richard Degre asked what kind of housing we were looking for. Pat commented that the survey specified different types of possible housing. It was explained that the town really has no say as to what Rural Edge does with the property as they are the owner. Richard commented about it costing the town \$2,000 for the town's match of the grant cost. Jacques commented the town only has so much say as to what happens with the building. Jacques stated there is only so much storage capacity at that site. LaDonna commented the housing study will help Rural Edge get further grants down the road. Richard commented people need to be careful what the use of the building is because it could end up costing the townspeople a lot of money on their taxes. Yves commented that since the beginning the Selectboard has been interested in senior housing as the use for the building. Pat said there may be a small amount of money from a grant that can help offset the towns match of the grant. She also said that if there is a change of use of the building they would have to go through local zoning approval from the Board of Adjustment as well Act 250 may become involved. If Act 250 were involved then state regulations would be in place and people would have input during those hearings. Yves commented the Selectboards position should be firm as to what the town wants to see in the building and what the community will support.

6. Planning Commission Report – Pat Sagui, Chair:

A. Recommendation for Zoning Administrator and Assistant Zoning Administrator: Pat reported the Planning Commission formally voted to recommend Will Young as the Zoning Administrator and Andrew Emery as the Assistant Zoning Administrator. Jacques asked if there will be a job description. Pat stated Andrew is volunteering his time to do trainings and keep up with the changes happening but he does not want to have day to day administrative duties unless Will is unable to fulfill the duties at any given point. There was a motion by Jacques and second by Anne to accept the recommendation of the Planning Commission to appoint Will Young as the Zoning Administrator and Andrew Emery as the Assistant Zoning Administrator with their thanks for people being interested in the job. As was discussed at earlier meetings, Pat said Ellen Fox is willing to do some training with the new Zoning Administrator and the Assistant Zoning Administrator. Ellen's job as the Zoning Administrator in Montgomery and working on their Zoning Bylaw revisions provides her with the unique experience necessary to train Will and Andrew. The Planning Commission recommended an amount up to \$500 to be paid for training/coaching. There was a motion by Jacques and second by Yves to authorize Ellen Fox to coach the two new Zoning Administrators with an amount up to \$500 (payable at the current hourly employee rate). Motion passed unanimously.

B. Authorize Municipal Planning Grant for Zoning Bylaw Work: Pat said this grant is being applied for to reorganize the Zoning Bylaw document and make it consistent. Part of the grant money would go to NVDA and/or Ellen Fox. It is a 90/10% match. Some of the sections have updates available to bring them into compliance with FEMA guidelines. The Planning Commission is requesting the Selectboard to sign the resolution so NVDA can help the town apply/write the grant. The details and budget are being worked out with the grant request \$10,000 to \$25,000. There was a motion by Anne and second by Jacques to authorize submission of the grant proposal and sign the FY21 Municipal Resolution for the Municipal Planning Grant. Passed unanimously. The grant deadline is October 1, 2020 with notifications being made mid-December. If awarded, the towns match would be budgeted in the 2021 budget.

7. Voting Delegate Request from Pat Sagui for VLCT Annual Meeting: Pat has been the voting delegate for the past two years. She is interested in being the representative for the September 23, 2020 VLCT Annual Meeting. Pat explained she has served on a VLCT policy committee that has worked on Act 250 wording rework, clarifying language around telecommunication, energy and environment, giving priority to renewable energy projects. Yves asked about connectivity on Kennison Road. Pat explained the wording she is working on around telecommunications is about VLCT's policies. Jacques mentioned one of the Covid grants available is for \$3,000 for homeowners to extend connectivity. Jacques asked if Nate Deslandes knew about this grant. LaDonna stated she had forwarded the information to Nate and that the property owner needed to initiate the grant. Pat asked for a point of order to finish Article 7. Anne made a motion, which was seconded by Jacques, to appoint Pat as the voting delegate for VLCT's annual meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Discussion continued about Comcast connectivity on Kennison Road:** Sharon Rosenberger mentioned she worked with Comcast as part of getting Roselle's Cosmetics connected to Comcast on the Loop Road in Troy. She needed to get 4-6 other businesses signed up then if residential customers signed on to the service, Roselle's would see some money back. Sharon stated she felt if families have kids, the town should be looking into helping get service on Kennison Road. Eric Kennison has V-Tel for his internet. Sharon will provide the business contact she used for Roselle's and LaDonna will try to gather more information.

8. Lister Update – Danny Young, Chair:

A. Selectboard Approval for Errors & Omissions for Buttafuoco/Verge: Danny Young said this was a bookkeeping error on the part of the Listers. It doesn't change the total municipal assessment on the grand list. It was a temporary missed error in processing land use tax. It all happened after the taxes were set and had no effect on the tax bill. It does, however, require formal approval on the Errors and Omissions Certificate. The Nature Conservancy, as of today, is enrolled in current use. This is contiguous with a large block of land in Montgomery and Lowell. The Selectboard signed Form PVR-4261-E Errors and Omissions Certificate acknowledging these two corrections.

B. Final Expenditure for Reappraisal for MTS Manuals of Building Costs: Danny pointed out the final bill has been paid for the reappraisal.

C. Update on Tax Map Contract with Russell Graphics (Change of Ownership to CAI Technologies): Russell Graphics has updated the town tax maps for the past 11 years. Recently, a four-year contract was signed with Russell Graphics. Danny learned Dean Russell sold his business to CAI Technologies. CAI is a larger company than Russell Graphics. Danny met with CAI Technologies who committed to carry out the terms of the contract. Danny feels comfortable with continuing with CAI and recommended that the Selectboard sign an Assignment. The Selectboard was in agreement and signed the Assignment with CAI Technologies.

9. Road Updates – Road Commissioner, Eric Kennison: Eric asked Mary Lou for a detailed breakdown on Capital Improvements-Town Garage and the Town Garage-Maintenance accounts. Mary Lou asked him to stop by on Wednesday to discuss this.

A. Update on FEMA (Halloween Storm 2019) Progress – LaDonna Dunn: LaDonna reported she is still trying to get the grant agreement from the State for the town to get paid. She will contact Jason Sevigny to see if he can help. We are waiting for \$22,000 from FEMA/State. Jacques asked if we have received the NVDA grant money yet from 2019. LaDonna said no. Doug Morton said it will be sent to the town soon but did not provide a date.

B. Completed since Last Meeting: Landscaping at Town Garage; Two Wild and Scenic River Grants: Yves commented that the landscaping looks good. The balance of the money will be here soon for the Wild and Scenic River Grants. There is a little bit of extra money that will be sent to us for the Wild and Scenic grants as long as it is used for storm water related work and we detail how the money was spent. We will be receiving \$8,000 for the balance due on the grants plus \$3,000 for the extra work. Eric said the extra money will be used for the box culvert on Balance Rock Road.

C. Timeline Update on Unfinished Projects: Installation of Stone Barriers at Roger Tetreaults; Dykeman Culvert; Installation of Missing Road /Speed Limit Signs; Installation of Radar Signs; Installation of Guardrails at Taft Brook Road/Buck Hill; Structures Grant on Balance Rock Road: Eric asked LaDonna to make the notifications for a road closure October 5th for assembling the box culvert on Balance Rock Road at Taft Brook Road. Eric assured the Selectboard everything on this list will be completed by fall and before snow and the radar signs will be installed before the next Selectboard meeting. LaDonna asked if the barricades that are at Taft Brook are the ones that are moving to Reservoir Road. Eric said two of them are.

D. Update on School Street Paving & McAvinney's Request to Pay for Driveway Paving at the Same Time: Dan McAvinney talked to Yves and Eric and would like the company who is paving School Street to pave his driveway. The Selectboard said it should be a separate arrangement made directly with Dan and the paving company. The Selectboard is not paving any driveways on the road. Eric will talk to the paving company and tell them we want all of School Street paved first for the town and then any other driveway arrangement can be paved after the towns pavement tonnage is calculated. Yves will talk to Dan.

E. Grants in Aid FY21: LaDonna asked Eric if there were any projects we could submit a grant for. Eric said he had a project in mind. The Letter of Intent is due by October 30th. There was a motion by Jacques and second by Anne to submit the Letter of Intent for FY21. The motion passed unanimously. Westfield is eligible for a \$7,875 grant (includes 20% local match, cash or in-kind \$1,575).

10. Treasurer's Report – Treasurer, Mary Lou Jacobs:

A. Approve Warrants for Expenditures Dated: 8/19/20 \$8,875.33 (bills) & \$3,309.71 (payroll); 8/26/20 \$2,897.75 (bills); 9/2/20 \$13,164.65 (bills) & \$4,421.42 (payroll); 9/9/20 \$1,263.16 (bills); 9/16/20 \$8,281.58 (bills) & \$3,420.19 (payroll): There was a motion by Anne and second by Jacques to approve the warrants as listed. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Budget Status Update (emailed in advance): Mary Lou reported there is \$122,032.89 in the general fund checking account. She paid off the line of credit in the amount of \$45,500.

C. Investment Accounts Update (emailed in advance): The Edward Jones Investment account is valued at \$257,159.74 representing an increase of \$1,743.69 over July. There is \$9,722.38 in certificates/savings at North Country Federal Credit Union.

11. North Hill & Westfield Cemetery Updates: The Selectboard reviewed a contract from Heritage Memorials to repair some headstones at the North Hill Cemetery. Yves said this was the incorrect amount and he will contact Heritage Memorials to discuss getting a corrected contract.

A. Sign Cemetery Quit Claim Deed for Jack & Anne Lazor-Westfield Cemetery: The Selectboard signed a Quit Claim Deed for Jack and Anne Lazor for the Westfield Cemetery.

12. Sheriff's Report for July: There were 33.5 patrol hours reported with four fines totaling \$580 for the month of July. The August report reflected 10.5 patrol hours with two tickets issued totaling \$152.

13. Recycling/Tire Disposal Update: Yves reported the Jay \$2 tire drop-off day has been cancelled this year. Westfield will have to make other arrangements to dispose of tires that have been collected in Westfield. The challenge/cost of disposing of tires was discussed in great detail. It is costly and time consuming to dispose of tires. Yves feels strongly the Recycling Center should continue to take tires so they don't end up being disposed of on the town roadsides. Mary Lou will call Casella to get a price for disposing of tires at their location.

14. Accept Letter of Resignation from Auditor, Joe Falworth, and Discuss Replacement: Joe Falworth's letter of resignation was read and accepted, with regret. He and his wife are moving out of the state. Possible replacements were discussed. It was decided to post a notice in town to see if there are any interested parties. The Clerk will post a notice at the general store, post office and town office.

15. Other Business:

A. Discuss/Approve Grant for Elections from Center for Tech and Civic Life (Covid-19 Response Grant): LaDonna explained there is a grant available for municipalities for up to \$5,000. She asked for Selectboard approval to investigate and apply for this grant to purchase equipment to make elections safer. There was a motion by Jacques and second by Yves to authorize LaDonna to apply for the grant on behalf of the Town of Westfield. Motion passed unanimously. This grant award must be spent by December 31, 2020 and must be election related. There is no town match for this grant.

16. Adjourn: Following a motion by Anne and second by Jacques, all were in agreement to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

Westfield Selectboard Approval: Date: _____ **with** _____ **changes**

Yves Daigle, Chair

Jacques Couture, Co-Chair

Anne Lazor

Minutes submitted by: _____
LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk