

Westfield Selectboard Minutes
December 18, 2023 @ 5:00 p.m.
In-Person Meeting at the Westfield Town Office, 38 School St.

Town Officials Present: Jacques Couture, Selectboard; Richard Degre, Selectboard; Dennis Vincent, Selectboard; LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk; Lisa Deslandes, Treasurer; Jenn Stelma, Library Board of Trustees Chair (Partial Attendance); Niki Dunn, Selectboard Clerk

Others Present: Kitty Ufford-Chase, Community Relations Manager NEK Broadband (Partial Attendance); Laura Emery, Westfield Board Representative NEK Broadband (Partial Attendance); (Partial Attendance); Carrie Glessner, Westfield Board Representative NEK Broadband (Partial Attendance)

1. **Call Meeting to Order – Jacques Couture, Chair:** Jacques Couture called the meeting to order at 5pm. Introductions were made.
2. **Public Comment – 5 Minutes:** No public comments.
3. **Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda:** Recycling calendar was added to other business (C).
4. **Approve 12-4-23 Selectboard Budget Minutes: (emailed in advance)** Richard Degre motioned to approve the minutes from December 4th, 2023, Dennis Vincent seconded. Motion passed.
5. **Discuss NEK Broadband (CUD) Progress – Carrie Glessner, Westfield Representative:** Kitty Ufford-Chase gave the board a map of the coverage area and a list of addresses that will get service throughout the two phases of construction. The build they are currently doing is spread over a group of towns and is building the backbone of the project for this area. Homes on this backbone build will get service right away. There are two different builds going on, one to be completed in 2024 and one to be completed in 2025. Construction on the first build is planned to be finished in the next month and then splicing will begin. After that is completed, they will test the network. They are using Advantage Utilities to do the work. The 2025 build is waiting on grant money from the federal government. The process to apply for that money doesn't open until the spring of 2024 and they will find out if they receive the money in the fall of 2024. This grant money specifically targets homes that are off the grid or farther off the main roads. LaDonna asked Kitty to explain how this works with people who don't have electricity or are off grid. Kitty explained that they are trying to get this done and they will have to take it on a case-by-case basis. They will need to see how far from the power lines the homes are. The overall mission is to get internet access to people who are off the main roads. In another 5-6 years they plan to have completed the full NEK Broadband build. Kitty let everyone know that people interested in getting their service should pre-register online with their address and then they will receive updates on the project, and it will show what areas they should concentrate on more. Lisa questioned what the monthly cost is going to be. Kitty explained that there are four different packages that will be offered, and all come with a free router. The packages are based on speed with the lowest speed being 50mbs up/down, then 250mbs up/down, then 500mbs up/down and the largest package is 1GBS up/down. The basic package is \$79.95 per month with no data caps. The system is run though fiber optic cables attached to the telephone poles. Laura has flyers explaining a program called ACP that offers a discount to qualifying customers. It would be a \$30 discount each month. There is a link to that program on the NEK Broadband website. Jenn Stelma questioned whether the library should look into this for their internet and it was noted that internet at the library is currently free through Xfinity. Jacques wondered if there are any discounts for municipal buildings. Kitty explained that there is not at this time, but they are trying to build to those places if they need internet. Laura wondered if other towns have inquired about this, and Kitty noted that they have. She explained that the plan is to talk about reducing prices in the future if possible. They will not have any

introductory prices. Jacques wondered if you would have a choice of providers if you were in an area that already has Xfinity. Kitty noted that they are trying not to go to places that already are served by Xfinity or Consolidated, but you would have the choice of which provider to go with if they do serve your area. Jacques felt that this is very exciting, that it has been about three years since the idea of this was brought to the board and now it's happening. LaDonna questioned how long the technology will last. Carrie said that since it is fiber cable the technology is infinite. Jenn wondered if it would work when the power goes out. Kitty explained that it won't right now, but they are looking at getting green hydrogen generators at the cabinets to allow it to run even when the power goes out. She also noted that the system will not go down in a storm. Jacques would like to have something about this in the town report. Kitty will be providing a one-page report that can be used for that purpose. Carrie will also have materials available at town meeting for people to pick up.

6. Update from Hitchcock Museum & Library Trustees – Jenn Stelma, Chair:

- A. **Discuss Gift Acceptance Policy: (emailed in advance)** Jenn Stelma discussed a letter that Nancy Domina sent regarding a set of chairs that were donated to the library and she was sad to hear that they were taken to the recycling center and disposed of. She would like \$733 dollars in payment for the chairs and the cost of trying to recover the chairs. At the time of her donation there was no policy on donations, the board does have a policy in place now. The policy is specifically regarding the library, not the museum. They are working on a separate policy for museum donations. Jacques feels the donation policy is very well written. Jacques is okay with the library board writing a letter in response to Nancy and would like the board to look at the letter before it is sent just to stay in the loop. Jenn did note that the chairs were in very poor condition and there was no more room to store them in the basement. Richard explained that somebody must have picked them up from the recycling center, they didn't go in the trash. Jenn will draft a letter and make it clear that the town does not accept responsibility for any costs incurred in them trying to retrieve the chairs.
- B. **Vacancy on Board:** Jen Grace has stepped down from the Library Board of Trustees and they have an interested person in taking the position, Carrie Glessner. Carrie's job takes her out of town for half the year, so the board will discuss this at the next meeting and whether that will be okay with the other members. She would need to be elected at the next town meeting, although the selectboard could appoint her prior to town meeting. Beau cannot be re-elected to his position on the board at town meeting because he doesn't live in town although he could be an advisor to the board. LaDonna explained that all board members need to be on the voter checklist as they are an elected board. She also explained that the Planning Commission is an appointed board, not an elected board, so up to 50% of their members can be from out of town.
- C. **Back-Up (Assistant) Librarian:** Carrie Glessner is willing to fill this position, however she will not be available in the summer months due to her job. The Library Board of Trustees needs to meet to discuss this and then it could be approved at the next selectboard meeting.
- D. **Trustees being Employees:** Jenn questioned if a trustee member wanted the assistant librarian position would that procedurally be okay as you would essentially be your own boss. Lisa noted that the selectboard works at the recycling center, so in that way they are also their own boss. Jenn explained that Karen Blais expressed interest in filling in as the assistant librarian and she is on the board, so they wanted to make sure that would be okay first.
- E. **Camera at Library:** There still needs to be an outlet installed and the extension cords moved. Lisa also noted that the librarian doesn't get good Wi-Fi currently. Richard felt that D&D Electric could get the work done.

7. Discuss Joint Selectboard Meeting/Vote on Rasputitsa Bike Event 4/20/24: (emailed in advance)

Jacques asked if the Westfield Selectboard would like to work with the other towns involved to become a joint committee regarding discussions on this bike event. There previously was a meeting held where safety for the event was discussed. Emergency personnel services were discussed and who would pay for them. The reason the race left Burke was also discussed, and it involved an accident where someone passed away. Jacques is concerned with all the mud and dirtying up the waterways as the event takes place mostly on back roads. There will be another meeting on January 8th. Gaston Bathalon was elected as the chair of this joint committee. Legal counsel and risk management personnel from VLCT were present through zoom at the first meeting. Litigation in case of another accident is a main concern. The event has already begun advertising and they have 1100 bikers signed up, with a cap of 1500 bikers. They plan to let groups of 300 bikers go every half hour. The event organizers still need to get some permits and to get those permits they need letters of support from all the towns they will be biking through. LaDonna noted that a lot must happen in a short time. All of the towns want a contract put in place first that relieves them of any liability. Jacques did note that the organizers informed the towns that if they feel that some roads are too muddy, they can let them know and they will find another way around it. Dennis questioned if the event organizers are responsible for getting these contracts done. LaDonna explained that the towns are, and there is no plan on who is paying for this to get done yet. Richard noted that if they use the Sheriff's Department for traffic control, he doesn't want them to use the hours the town pays for to do that. Jenn Stelma wondered if any local businesses are excited to have this event go through town. Jacques didn't feel that anyone was excited other than the event organizers. Dennis motioned to have the Westfield Selectboard join with the other towns on the committee, Richard seconded. Motion passed.

8. Review General Fund Budget FY24: (emailed in advance) The board reviewed the draft budget with the updated numbers from the budget meeting. Lisa noted that the budgeted amount for FY23 for interest on bank accounts was \$16,000, she does not know why it was budgeted that high. It is only going to be around \$6,000 by the end of this year. LaDonna questioned whether the money market funds are included in that number. Jacques noted that the money fluctuates so much throughout the year, it's hard to tell how much you're going to make. He felt that using the amount made this year would be a better number to budget from for next year. Lisa will know at the end of the year exactly how much was made over the year from the Edward Jones accounts. Currently the budget is around \$14,000 in the negative, there may not be a carryover from this year into next year's budget. LaDonna did note that she received \$5,000 for the Wild and Scenic grant that still needs to go into the current year's revenue. Richard noted that the FEMA money should also be coming in. Lisa has some numbers that she still needs to calculate to get the final budget numbers. She explained that starting in the middle of next year all elected officials will need to have unemployment tax paid on their behalf at a rate of 2.9% on the first \$18,000 of their pay.

9. Review Highway Fund Budget FY24: (emailed in advance) Lisa needs to put in the calculations for VMERS and heat for the town garage and then the highway budget should be completed. Eric is working on the flooding damage on the roads which could put the current roads budget over, however it may qualify as a FEMA event and in that case would be reimbursed.

10. Treasurers Report – Lisa Deslandes:

A. Update on Health-Dental Insurance: The board reviewed the two different plans offered. As with the health care the town would pay 80% of the premium and the employee would pay 20% of the premium. Richard motioned to select the higher cost plan, \$66.71 per month with the town paying for 80% of the premium and the employee paying for 20% of the premium, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

B. Approve Warrants 11/8/23 \$5170.26 (bills), \$7527.21 (payroll); 11/14/23 \$11744.13 (bills); 11/20/23 \$26704.16 (bills), \$5320.13 (payroll); and 11/28/23 \$14296.00 (bills): Richard motioned to approve the warrants, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

- C. Review Investments: (emailed in advance)** Edward Jones investments were reviewed from the start of the year. Lisa does not have totals for December yet.
- D. Discuss Audit Quote:** Lisa received the quote for the audit for next year and the cost went up to \$12,000 for FY24. Lisa will be speaking to them to see why it went up that much. LaDonna noted that it is still cheaper than the previous quotes the town received.
- E. New Letter of Understanding & Equipment Price List with Kennison & Son Excavating:** LaDonna explained that the letter of understanding needs to be reworked to make it easier to understand for FEMA repayments. FEMA has a specific way that hours and benefits and overtime need to be calculated. They also need the invoices to show what roads specifically the work was done on. Also, if the grader is used the hours and location need to be noted for FEMA work. Jacques felt that grader time needs to be specified on all the invoices. Richard thought putting a logbook at the town garage in the grader may help with this, then whoever is using it can fill in their time and where they worked as they use it. LaDonna noted that they need the grader time noted for grants for the in-kind money. It needs to be on the bills for the final reports for reimbursement. It was also questioned when paying a second person/ hired man became something the town did. Jacques noted that Eric should bill for this person, but the town should not be paying them as an employee. When Eric is at a meeting the billing changes that need to be made can be discussed. Richard wondered why the sand bill was so much higher this year than last year.

11. Highway Update – Eric Kennison, Road Commissioner:

- A. FEMA Data Needed: Length of damage on Kingdom Mountain Road in Two Locations:** Eric spoke with LaDonna earlier by phone and said he will get her this information tomorrow.
- B. Location/Status of Better Roads Grant Application:** Eric spoke with Jason Sevigny regarding this grant, and they felt that there is not much work that needs to be done right now. He might not apply for this grant this year.

12. Request from Connie LaPlume for TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) Group to use Community Center: Connie LaPlume requested to use the Community Center on Fridays, for about 16 people to meet, and to use the tables and chairs. LaDonna let her know the homeschool group uses it on Fridays sometimes and Connie spoke with a woman from the group, and they felt that they could work something out. If Connie is no longer involved in the group, the selectboard would like to revisit this. Dennis motioned to allow TOPS to use the Community Center for two hours on Fridays, Richard seconded. Motion passed.

13. Request from Town Clerks Office to use Restoration Funds to Purchase New Plat Map Filing System: This cabinet storage system would be used to store the plat maps that are currently in the vault as well as other types of maps. The map storage system in use now is causing the maps to become tattered as they are out in the open, not stored away. The quote received from Easifile is \$4263.06 for the cabinet, freight shipping and accessories. This includes a \$500 recycling credit to recycle the current map storage unit. These maps are required to be kept as part of the permanent records. Niki did reach out to multiple companies to get quotes for this type of storage cabinet; however, most do not have cabinets large enough for the largest maps that need to be stored. There is around \$11,000 in the restoration fund currently. Richard motioned to approve the purchase of the cabinet from Easifile using restoration funds, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

14. Sheriff's Report for October 2023: (emailed in advance) 15.5 hours were billed for October. All tickets given out were on Route 100.

15. **Cover for Town Report:** LaDonna was not able to get to this in time for the meeting.

16. **Executive Session (if needed):** Richard motioned to enter executive session at 7:43pm for personnel reasons, Dennis seconded. Motion passed. There was a motion by Richard, second by Dennis to come out of executive session at 8:05 p.m. Motion passed. No action was taken.

17. **Other Business:**

A. **Next Meeting Date:** The next meeting will be held January 15th at 5pm.

B. **Kickoff Meeting for Village Wastewater Project 1/19/24 2-3pm (Virtual Meeting):**
Informational.

C. **Recycling Schedule for January:**

January 6th – Richard Degre

January 13th – Maurice Doyon, Roger Tetreault

January 20th – Dennis Vincent

January 27th – Richard Degre

Richard attended the waste district meeting, and their budget passed. They are looking to purchase a new or new to them skid steer. Jacques noted that the big tv that was on a pallet at the recycling center was picked up.

18. **Adjourn:** Dennis motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 p.m., seconded by Richard. Motion passed.

Westfield Selectboard Approval

Date: 1/15/24 with 0 change(s)

WESTFIELD SELECTBOARD:

X

Jacques Couture
Selectboard Chair

X Richard Degre

Richard Degre
Selectboard

X Dennis Vincent

Dennis Vincent
Selectboard