

## Westfield Selectboard Minutes

January 15, 2024 @ 5:00 p.m. In-Person Meeting at the Westfield Town Office, 38 School St., With Zoom Meeting Option

**Town Officials Present:** Jacques Couture, Selectboard (Via Zoom); Richard Degre, Selectboard; Dennis Vincent, Selectboard; LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk; Lisa Deslandes, Treasurer; Eric Kennison, Road Commissioner (Partial Attendance); Niki Dunn, Selectboard Clerk; Danny Young, Lister (Partial Attendance)

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1. **Call Meeting to Order – Jacques Couture, Chair:** Jacques Couture brought the meeting to order at 4:58pm.
2. **Public Comment – 5 Minutes:** There were no public comments.
3. **Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda:** Richard Degre added discussing the change in who handles delinquent taxes. LaDonna Dunn added the selectboard town report and a request from the Jay food shelf.
4. **Approve 12-18-23 Selectboard Meeting Minutes: (emailed in advance)** Richard motioned to approve the minutes from December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Dennis Vincent seconded. Motion passed.
5. **Approve 1-8-24 & 12-13-23 Joint Selectboard Meeting Minutes on Rasputitsa Bike Event 4/24: (emailed in advance)** Dennis motioned to approve the minutes from December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Richard seconded. Motion passed.
6. **Discuss Filling Library Position:**
  - A. **Accept Resignation of Current Library Director:** The board reviewed and accepted Maureen Zimmermans resignation letter. The board would like to thank her for all her work at the library. LaDonna has already received 6 or 7 requests for applications to fill the open position.
  - B. **Appoint New Trustee:** Carolyn Lyster would like to be appointed as an interim member of the Library Board of Trustees and she would go on the ballot at town meeting to fill one of the open positions. Richard motioned to appoint Carolyn Lyster as an interim member of the Library Board of Trustees, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.
  - C. **Update on Grant:** LaDonna worked with Beau at the Fairbanks Museum regarding the two dioramas. They are of significant historic value and the grant is \$6,600 to cover the cost of two consultants and to work on humidity control. Beau wrote the grants and submitted them to the grant portal with LaDonna. Jacques wondered if there was some deterioration already to the dioramas. LaDonna believed there was and noted that they have not been cared for properly and have been in the museum for

many, many years. She should have an update on the grant in the next month or so. Richard wondered if there was any update on the grant Jenn Stelma was working on for the building repairs. LaDonna has not heard any update on that grant.

- D. Other:** Dennis questioned whether the Wi-Fi at the library was free for people to use. LaDonna explained that it is, and there is also free Wi-Fi at the Community Center. Richard noted that Roger is working on the floor in the bathroom, and they will need to remove the toilet to get it finished. They will try to get it done on Monday. He also spoke with Jason at D&D Electric, and he is supposed to be doing the electrical work. LaDonna let the board know that the Lions Club will be doing another Texas Hold ‘Em game with donations going to the library in February.

**7. Equalization Study Results – CLA 72.93%, COD 23.04% -- Danny Young, Lister:**

*(emailed in advance)* Danny Young explained the CLA and COD rates from the 2023 Equalization Study. He informed the board that the town meets the criteria for a re-appraisal, along with many other towns in the county and throughout the state. There will be issues getting all the re-appraisals done at the same time. The order would usually be issued in July, but there is no certainty yet on how the state will go about getting all the towns re-appraised when they typically do about 16 a year. Danny thinks it may be two to three years before the re-appraisal can be done. Jacques wondered if there is anyone available to work with the town currently to do a re-appraisal. Danny let him know that the companies that do them are training new staff to expand how many re-appraisals they can do but everyone will be trying to get the same people hired to do this at the same time. In the past the town has done re-appraisals every ten years. Including the 2024 budget there will be around \$26,000 in the account to do a re-appraisal. When the last one was done in 2020 it cost around \$47,000. If the state orders in July to get a re-appraisal done, then the money needs to be ready to go by 2027. At the current rate of setting money aside it would bring the account to around \$33,000 by 2027. Danny explained that the goal of the re-appraisal is to bring the tax rates to a more “fair” level. Some people may be paying more or less than their fair share. Jacques wondered if it is possible that the CLA could improve with home sales coming more in line with normal. Danny explained that even if they improve, the town will still be ordered to re-appraise. Once you meet the requirements for a re-appraisal it does not matter if the CLA or COD changes afterwards. Last year there were over 100 towns that qualified for re-appraisal, and they changed the rules on what triggers one, so they may do something again this year. The board decided to wait another year before deciding on whether to add more money to the fund each year.

**8. Highway Update – Eric Kennison, Road Commissioner:**

- A. FEMA Update:** LaDonna has a meeting with FEMA tomorrow, she will have everything she needs to submit and then will wait to get word back on whether it was approved or rejected. She did not have photos of Kingdom Mountain Road to submit as there was too much snow so it may get sent back due to that.

- B. Location/Status of Better Roads Grant Application:** Eric did not apply for this grant this year as he could not find a section of road that would benefit from this. He still has one to work on in 2024 that was approved in 2023.
- C. Reconsider Health Insurance Options:** Eric would like to have the option to get a family plan for his health insurance. Lisa explained that currently for a single plan the cost is \$1,094 and the family plan is \$3,076.56 per month. The town currently pays 80% of the single plan. Changing to the family plan with the town paying 80% would be an increase of \$18,961 for the year. Jacques suggested the option for Eric to add his family to the plan but have Eric pay the extra costs above and beyond the single plan cost. Dennis wondered if a 50/50 split may be better for this year. Jacques noted that if the town paid the full 80 percent of the family plan it would be an almost \$20,000 raise which would make it unequal for their other full-time employee. Dennis suggested the town pay 50% of the extra \$18,961 with Eric paying the other 50%. It was agreed upon that the town would still pay 80% of the single plan, plus 50% of the additional cost of the family plan, which works out to the town paying 60% of the health insurance premium for the family plan and Eric paying 40% of the premium. It was then agreed upon that raising the portion of LaDonna's health care premium that the town pays to 100% would make it more fair for now, as hers is a single plan, and that paying 100% of all full-time employee's health care would be discussed during next years budget talks. Lisa noted that many other towns offer 100% paid health insurance for their employees. Dennis motioned for the town to pay 60% of Eric Kennison's vision and health insurance family plan premium with Eric Kennison paying 40% of the premium and for the town to pay 100% of LaDonna Dunn's insurance plan premiums, to begin on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Richard seconded. Motion passed.
- D. Discuss/ Sign Certificate of Highway Mileage (Due 2/10/24): (emailed in advance)** LaDonna talked to Jason Sevigny, and he explained the process to change road classifications. You need to warn a meeting for this, and there is not enough time to get it done this year before the Certificate of Highway Mileage is due. He thought it would be better to get it done for next year. Eric feels that it is important to get Reservoir Road and Lane Road reclassified, or they will need to be rebuilt to get them up to code.
- E. New Letter of Understanding & Equipment Price List with Kennison & Son Excavating:** LaDonna explained that there were problems with FEMA and Workers Comp because the contract language is currently not clear enough. LaDonna talked with someone in Morgan town who has a similar road situation, and she would like to work with Lisa and Eric to come up with language that is more clear going forward. LaDonna noted that there is more legal language that needs to be included, which is something FEMA wants, and they need to change some specific language regarding bidding out work. Richard would like the bills broken down a bit better, so it is easier to see the labor. FEMA needs labor broken out separate from the truck costs also as they calculate benefits on the labor hours. LaDonna would like to meet with Eric

before the next selectboard meeting to get the language figured out. Richard noted that FEMA also needs grader hours recorded.

**9. Treasurers Report – Lisa Deslandes:**

- A. Approve Warrants 12/4/23 \$17,187.16 (bills), \$5,479.46 (payroll); 12/08/23 \$2,743.75 (bills); 12/19/23 \$66,308.52 (bills), \$13,152.90 (payroll); and 12/29/23 \$35,242.06 (bills), \$7,593.45 (payroll):** Richard motioned to approve the warrants, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.
- B. Discuss Health Insurance Benefits:** Previously discussed in 8c.
- C. Review Investments: (*emailed in advance*)** Board reviewed the investments.
- D. Discuss Changing Due Date for Property Taxes:** Lisa would like to change the due date for property taxes to October <sup>3<sup>rd</sup></sup> ~~4<sup>th</sup>~~, the first Thursday of the month of October. It would avoid the due date falling on the holiday. Richard questioned if they need to put this on the warning for town meeting. LaDonna explained that it will go on the warning and then the board will need to approve the warning. Lisa noted that a letter will be included with the tax bills that has the new due date and directions on how to pay.

**10. Review/ Approve General Fund Budget FY24: (*emailed in advance*)** Health insurance expenses were changed to \$13,200, bringing the total general expenses to \$151,019.77. Total expenditures then become \$439,685.77. Lisa noted that she moved the fire department expenses into the general budget, rather than having them as an appropriation. Richard motioned to approve the general fund budget with the above changes made, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

**11. Review/ Approve Highway Fund Budget FY24: (*emailed in advance*)** Health Insurance expenses were changed \$22,200, making the total expenses \$503,497.50. Dennis motioned to approve the highway budget with the above changes made, Richard seconded. Motion passed.

**12. Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP):**

- A. Mini Grant Update – Niki Dunn: (*emailed in advance*)** Niki explained that the mini grant is for \$4,000 and is to be used to inform the townspeople about energy efficiency resources and programs. To do this a digital display magazine rack was being explored as an option to hold paper resources and information as well as to have the display screen where information can be more easily visible and catch people's attention better. It was discussed about possibly getting two of the displays and putting one at the library or store with the other one going at the Recycling Center. The board will review this again once the funds have been received.
- B. Discuss Energy Audit Results: (*emailed 1-4-24*)** The board reviewed the audit results. While the funds available go up to \$500,000 the town does not know yet how much of that they will receive. LaDonna can check on when the money will be

**19. Other Business:**

- A. Reminder, Kickoff Meeting with AES for Proposed Village Wastewater Project 1/19/24 at 2pm:** Informational
- B. Delinquent Tax Collector:** LaDonna will have to check with VLCT on how to change the delinquent tax collector to the treasurer, she is not sure if it will need to be a floor vote or done by Australian ballot. If the town has a choice the board would prefer an Australian ballot vote. The board would like to make sure its known that doing it this way means the money will go back to the town. Richard motioned to add to the warning changing the delinquent tax collector position to the town treasurer, to be voted on by Australian Ballot unless VLCT advises otherwise, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.
- C. Selectboard Report for Town Report:** Jacques noted that in past years there were two reports that were very similar, one written by the selectboard and one written by LaDonna, and he would like to change it to one report signed by all the board members and LaDonna. The Board and LaDonna will come up with topics they would like to talk about in the report and Jacques and LaDonna will work on getting the report written.
- D. Jay Food Shelf Request:** The Jay Food Shelf is requesting that the kitchen fee for using the Community Center during the Texas Hold 'Em game this week is waived. The fee is \$50 and they would only be using the stovetop. Richard motioned to waive the fee for the Lions Club to use the kitchen at the Community Center for the Texas Hold 'Em game that is benefiting the Jay Food Shelf, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

**20. Adjourn:** Richard motioned to adjourn at 7:44pm, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

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Westfield Selectboard Approval Date: 2/12/24 with ∅ change(s)

**WESTFIELD SELECTBOARD:**

X Jacques Couture  
Jacques Couture  
Selectboard Chair

available, she thinks it's in the fall. Richard noted that the heating system at the community center was worked on today. They fixed the toilet that was leaking also.

### **13. Recycling Update:**

#### **A. Recycling Schedule for February:**

**February 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Jacques Couture

**February 10<sup>th</sup>:** Roger Tetreault, Maurice Doyon

**February 17<sup>th</sup>:** Richard Degre

**February 24<sup>th</sup>:** Dennis Vincent

**14. Sheriff's Report for November 2023: (emailed in advance)** The report for November included 0 Tickets, 2 Warnings, \$0 Fines, 0 Arrests and 27 billed hours. Richard feels that it is not worth the money that the town spends on them. Dennis noted that if they don't fine anybody then the town doesn't get any money. They are currently asking for around \$16,000 in the new budget. LaDonna explained that the town could vote at town meeting to change the budgeted amount to zero funds. Jacques noted that the Vermont State Police cover the town anyway.

**15. Discussion about Rasputitsa Bike Rally 4/20/24:** There has been no update from Gaston Bathalon yet. Jacques emailed Gaston yesterday and he was going to message Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. LaDonna noted that he sent stuff to VLCT and they were going to look at it and get back to him.

**16. Adopt Personnel Policy: (emailed in advance)** The personnel policy was not previously adopted in the minutes. With the changes made earlier in the meeting to health care benefits, the wording in that section will now need to be updated. Jacques wondered if the specifics of the benefits need to be in the policy. LaDonna explained that it can be somewhat generic wording and each employee can have a separate form to fill out and be filed in their personnel file based on the benefits they receive. Lisa noted that the policy should specify if the town is offering family benefits or just single. Jacques felt that the wording should explain that the town provides insurance negotiated with each employee. The corrections will be made, and the policy can be approved at the next meeting. LaDonna also went over the social media clause. She explained that when you setup a Facebook business page it has to be attached to a personal page. So currently the libraries page is attached to Maureen's husband and the towns page is attached to LaDonna. She would like to create a fake persons page and attach both pages to the fake person.

**17. Status of Zoning Bylaws:** The planning commission would like to meet on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January at 6pm to go over the public comments on the zoning bylaws with the selectboard. They will send out an advance copy of the changes made to the bylaws, so the board has time to review them before the meeting. Richard feels that they should remove the section around building above 1600' and leave it up to act 250 to make changes. Dennis questioned why the 1600' section was included in the bylaws to begin with. LaDonna explained that it was partly to help create animal travel corridors.

**18. Executive Session (if needed):** Not needed.

X 

Richard Degre  
Selectboard

X 

Dennis Vincent  
Selectboard

