

WESTFIELD SELECTBOARD GENERAL BUDGET MEETING

Minutes

December 12th, 2025 – 12:30 p.m.

Westfield Town Office, 38 School Street

Meeting Recordings Available to View at <https://www.youtube.com/@TownofWestfieldVT>

Town Officials Present: Jacques Couture, Selectboard Chair; Richard Degre, Selectboard; Dennis Vincent, Selectboard; LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk; Lisa Deslandes, Treasurer; Niki Dunn, Selectboard Clerk; Will Young, Zoning Administrator; Danny Young, Lister

Others Present: Jan Degre, Jennifer Grace

1. **Call Meeting to Order – Jacques Couture, Chair:** Jacques called the meeting to order at 12:30PM.
2. **Public Comment – 5 Minutes:** None
3. **Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda:** None
4. **Correspondence:** Jacques Couture clarified one question that Jennifer Grace previously had on the ANR PILOT (Agency of Natural Resources, Payment in Lieu of Taxes) and noted that it is an income the State sends the Town for their state-owned properties in Westfield.

- a. **Jennifer Grace – Submission of Budget Questions for December 12 Budget Hearing Received 12/2/25:** Jennifer Grace relayed some questions to the Selectboard. She questioned the approximately \$72,000 increase in the highway budget for FY2026. Jacques clarified that \$40,000 in paving expenses were added back in that were removed last year to help alleviate the budget last year. The paving expense goes to wherever it's needed in town each year. The \$40,000 will do less than half a mile of roadway. Richard Degre explained that the town will get another paving grant but it skips 4-7 years before you are eligible to get another one. You need to show that you are contributing to your own paving expenses each year to be eligible for paving grants. Jacques then explained that part of the increase for next year is increases in expenses for things like chloride, sand, health insurance, parts for equipment, etc. Richard noted that there should be around 5-6 culverts being replaced next year as well. Jacques noted that this year the town was able to do a quarter of a million-dollar culvert replacement because of grant funds and next year there will be another large culvert replacement that will be mostly covered by grants. Jennifer questioned if the board looks at cost saving devices like combining with other towns on things like road work. Jacques explained that giving things up is really the only way to cut costs. Richard noted that all the town's road crews are busy all year long. Jacques noted that the board tries to be as tight on the budget as possible as they are all also taxpayers and don't like to see increases. The town also gets lots of grants that help keep the budget down.

Danny Young felt that the general effects on the state of society are being put onto the Selectboard by Jennifer Grace. The costs for things are going up all throughout the country, not just Westfield.

Jennifer feels that the board does not try to reduce costs in any way and that people are not getting any answers on things. Jennifer does not feel that the town should spend money on the Village Wastewater Study and Jacques clarified that the town is not spending any money on the Village Wastewater Study. The only money that could ever be spent would be if the town votes to move forward with a wastewater project once the study is completed.

This item was revisited at the end of the meeting as not all questions were addressed during the meeting. LaDonna suggested drafting a letter to answer the questions that we are able to answer at this time. The Selectboard and the office staff will draft a letter and get it ready to be sent to Jennifer.

- b. **Jennifer Grace - Public Comment for December 2nd DRB Hearing Received 12/2/25 (requested to be forwarded to Selectboard as well as the DRB):** Jennifer noted during the meeting that her concerns regarding the DRB hearing were addressed at the hearing and she requested no further discussion on this.
 - c. **Jennifer Grace – Cure Letter Submission Received 12/2/2025:** There is a drafted letter to address the Cure Letter that is ready to be sent to Jennifer. Dennis Vincent motioned to approve the letter for Jennifer Grace and Richard Degre seconded. Motion passed. The letter was signed and given to Jennifer in person. The letter addresses the letter Jennifer Grace sent to the Selectboard alleging Open Meeting Law violations. The board addresses each issue in the response letter and notes that they did not violate any Open Meeting Laws.
5. **Discuss 2026 General Budget:** Jacques explained that everything being worked on now is in draft form, then in January the Selectboard will finalize the draft and that will be voted on at Town Meeting in March. Jacques explained that the actual column for 2025 is only what has been spent so far this year, and those numbers may go up by the end of the year. Lisa Deslandes noted that her and LaDonna Dunn put in some amounts as placeholders for now but they can be changed as the board works through the budget.

Hold Harmless was much higher this year than budgeted for. Danny Young explained that money is revenue received from the State for land that is in Current Use.

The legislature decides how much money to put into the PILOT program, to reimburse towns for property taxes lost for state owned properties.

The reappraisal will begin being paid for in July of 2026.

Clerks Office incomes was kept the same as last year as most of these income categories will likely remain about the same next year. LaDonna explained the restoration fund and what it is used for. To restore an old land record book costs about \$2400-3000. LaDonna also noted that the income for the clerk's office is \$9000 higher than the budgeted amount because money from the cemetery CD was moved into the income category to pay for the road to be fixed at the Westfield Cemetery.

The reappraisal payments will begin in July and for FY26 the payments made will total \$12,500.

Lisa noted that the library sent over a budget and she used those numbers to add to this draft budget. They are using some money from their investments to cover the increased salary for the current year for the librarians' pay. They would like the increase in salary to be covered by taxpayers for FY26. The Library Board of Trustees came up with these numbers at their budget meeting.

Jacques explained the Recycling Center always has a goal of breaking even.

The increase in salaries is calculated with the Cost-of-Living Adjustment of 2.8% for each position.

Danny noted that the listers' involvement for FY26 in the reappraisal will be relatively minor. The listers will be looking at inspecting around 20-25 parcels in FY26 as part of the data verification

process. The results will be compared to the current grand list and if the results are close to each other then the town can continue with a statistical re-appraisal. If they are not close, then the town needs to go to a full re-appraisal. This is looking at the data on the property and the description of the property only and does not take into account how much properties in town are selling for. Jacques questioned when the re-appraisal will be finished. Danny explained that the statistical update will be mostly done in time for grievance hearings in FY27. The 2027 grand list should show the updates after the re-appraisal. Danny explained that the training they were looking to do this year was lower because Shelley broke her ankle earlier in the year and wasn't able to do as much training as projected. He feels \$11,000 would be a good figure for FY26 as they will need some extra time to do the re-appraisal work.

The election official category is higher as there are three elections next year.

Will discussed the zoning administrator budget line. Currently he gets paid from the permit fee, not hourly. He has been keeping track of his time the last two years to see if the permit fees is covering his hourly time. When calculating it he is getting just over \$16 an hour, which is less than the hourly rate of other town employees. He feels the permit fees would need to go up about 15% to bring his pay up to a good point. The DRB hearings are more work for him and everyone in the office as well as the mailing costs, the ad in the newspaper, the cost for the DRB clerk, etc. He noted the town is losing money on those hearings at this point. Jacques feels the fees should cover the expenses of all involved with the hearings. To cover the expenses the fee would need to be around \$400. Jacques questioned if the permit fee should be different for small projects versus entire homes. Will noted that the work involved with each on his end is the same no matter the project. Richard questioned what other towns do, and Will noted that some other towns charge per square foot for their permits. LaDonna suggested changing the zoning permit to \$65 and increase the DRB hearing fee more. Will suggested increasing the DRB hearing fee to \$400. LaDonna suggested paying Will an hourly rate instead and have the permit fees going into to the general fund. Jacques suggested keeping the way Will is paid the same for next year with the new permit fees and see if he feels that's more in line with a good hourly rate. The increase in both fees will be warned on the January agenda so a motion can be made at that time.

The Planning Commission will be working on the Town Plan again next year, so their salary line was increased by \$600 for FY26.

The Health Officer would like to get compensated for her time next year so \$200 was budgeted for this.

For the town supply line LaDonna noted that the current year's budget was not fully spent and she would like to purchase some things the office has been holding off on like the flag for the pole outside, the new 911 signs, and a filing cabinet. She also asked if the 911 signs should be in a category of its own next year so the income and expenses can be tracked.

Equipment Maintenance budget line includes monitors for the computers in the office as the current ones are out of date. Dennis Beloin quoted around \$100 per monitor. We should have an extra monitor for the cameras so they can be seen from the main part of the office.

The heat budget line may change before the end of the year as the numbers in there now are pre-buy numbers not actual.

The new phones made the budget for the telephones at the Town Office go down by \$2100 for FY26.

The NEMRC annual support budget line item is increased based on adding the dog module, which is a one-time expense. The office is also working on allowing people to pay for their dog licenses online. There is also a cash receipt module one-time charge added into this line as well. This allows payments to be processed into the accounting system as people come into the office.

The town office maintenance line for the current year is higher than budgeted because the hot water heater broke and for the repairs to the furnace system.

The auditing went up to \$13,000 which is a \$600 increase.

The ambulance service went down about \$5,000 for FY26 with the new contract that was recently negotiated. The cost split is based on the current grand list of each of the four towns.

LaDonna noted that the number for the Troy Fire Department for the current year's budget was incorrectly written down and is three cents different than their appropriation request was.

The Workman's Compensation was lowered \$1000 from last years budgeted amount.

The county taxes are not known until we receive the bill each year.

Medical insurance expense is increasing due to the change in plan to a gold family plan when Niki becomes Town Clerk from the platinum single plan that LaDonna currently has. The board agreed that the insurance payment rates will change on January 1st, 2026. The plans will be paid at 90% by the Town and 10% paid by the employee. Dental and vision are going down as Niki will not be taking those insurance plans.

Re-Appraisal expense will be added as a budget line. That budget line will be a wash with the income from the CD coming in and then spent on the re-appraisal payments.

The line item that reads wastewater expense is in the wrong spot, that \$21.98 will be moved to the cemetery. It was for the purchase of the flags but very few of them were used and they will be used to mark cemetery plots for burials in the future.

Richard felt the playground could use one truckload of mulch to top off the mulch that is currently at the playground. The cost for the port-a-potty needs to be included in that line also. That costs \$930 for six months. The amount entered was \$1000 for playground maintenance.

Heat at the Community Center is zeroed out as the building switched to propane this year when the furnace was replaced through the MERP grant. The gas line item is now budgeted at \$3000.

The maintenance line for the Community Center went over this year due to plumbing issues, the rocks out front and more plowing needed than normal.

The miscellaneous expense line at the Community Center for the current year was for the bathroom floor being replaced and for FY26 they need to have the toilet replaced and the wall in the bathroom re-varnished.

The librarian payroll line went up as they are open another partial day now and the librarian received a raise in pay part way through the year. Richard questioned if the increase in pay and the extra hours will be paid by the town next year or if they are covering the extra with their donations and investments. Lisa noted it is in the town budget; however they are using around \$2000 from their investments to help offset some of their costs for next year. Jacques felt that they should have a talk with the library board about the increases in pay and hours coming from their funds, not from the town budget. Jacques questioned if the trustees set the pay rate for the librarian and it was noted that they do. The librarians' pay will be \$23.64 per hour with the COLA increase for next year. Jacques felt the activities that are held there should generate a small amount of income, to cover building upkeep over the years. The Selectboard would like to meet with the library board to have a discussion on the long-term plan for the library. Lisa calculated the increase after considering their income they expect to receive and the increase from last year

becomes only \$3,747. LaDonna noted that the more the library is open and holding activities the more likely you are to get donations and inheritance money.

The library supplies line is increased by \$1000 because they will be in charge of buying their own supplies now instead of the Town Office.

The library is now being charged for water as they were not in the past. That charge is \$480 per year.

Library grant expense budget line is an in and out and they have two grants coming up next year.

Library training was up over the budget this year however she only expects to spend \$200 on training next year and \$500 on mileage to get to the trainings.

The tires are being disposed of in a different way now, that expense line went down from \$2000 to \$1300. Jacques noted this could go up a bit more if the cost of disposal goes up.

6. Executive Session (If needed): None

7. Other Business: None

8. Adjourn: Richard Degre motioned to adjourn the meeting at 3:00PM, Dennis Vincent seconded. Motion passed.

Westfield Selectboard Approval Date: 1/12/20 with 0 change(s).

X

Jacques Couture
Selectboard Chair

X

Richard Degre
Selectboard

X

Dennis Vincent
Selectboard

