

WESTFIELD SELECTBOARD & BUDGET MEETING MINUTES

December 21, 2020 – 5 p.m. ♦ Westfield Town Offices & via Zoom

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

In response to the concerns posed by Covid-19, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 162, which allows a legislative body to vote to use Australian ballot voting for any Town Meeting in 2021. The Westfield Selectboard voted on December 7, 2020 to switch to Australian ballot voting for all items that normally would have been voted from the floor at the 2021 Town Meeting, including the General Fund and Highway Budgets. Please plan to attend this important budget meeting, as well as the second budget meeting on Tuesday, January 5, 2021 at 8 a.m. This is your opportunity to be part of the conversation and provide input while the Selectboard drafts the General Fund and Highway Budgets.

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 Clerk, Heather Johnson (via Zoom); and Road Commissioner, Eric Kennison

- 1. Call Meeting to Order – Yves Daigle, Chair:** Yves called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.
- 2. Public Comment – 5 Minutes:** None
- 3. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda:** Added 11 B: Sign Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) Amendment Form; and 11 C: Review NVDA Annual Report.
- 4. Approve Minutes of the 12/7/20 Selectboard Meeting:** There was a motion by Jacques and second by Anne to approve the minutes with no changes. Motion passed unanimously.

A. Business from the Minutes:

- **CUD Update & Internet Connectivity on Kennison Road:** LaDonna said she spoke with Carrie Glessner, Westfield's CUD Representative. Carrie stated she would like to attend an upcoming Selectboard meeting to give an update on the progress the CUD has been making. There are no immediate changes that will affect Westfield. LaDonna stated Carrie has been helpful interpreting emails and reached out to Christine Hallquist for additional assistance. LaDonna said she brought her personal Verizon hotspot to Nate Deslandes house on Kennison Road to see if it would work. Unfortunately, there was not a strong enough signal for connectivity. Yves reported he has been working with Bobby Starr and Mark Higley and he's referred him to four different agencies:

- Hughes Net Line Extension: 1-855-543-5405
- New England Wireless: 1-877-543-8429
- Consolidated: 1-844-968-7224
- Public Service Board: 1-800-6222-4496

Yves stated these options are worth exploring. He reported the State received over one billion dollars from the CARES Act which was spent during 2020. The next stimulus bill will again have money earmarked for broadband. Yves said Mark Higley and Bobby Starr are both willing to help Westfield. The Selectboard wondered if Comcast would be applying for any of the 2021 stimulus money.

- **Comments on Housing Assessment & Upcoming Public Hearing 1/5/21 via Zoom 6-7 pm:** Pat Sagui reported edits are still being accepted for the Housing Needs Assessment document. She reminded the Selectboard of the Public Meeting

on January 5th being presented by the consultant, Camoin Associates. There will be a brief 15-minute presentation via Zoom followed by input. The meeting will be recorded and posted on the municipal website. January 5th through January 12th is the window to submit public comments. Pat commented that Camoin Associates has been excellent to work with.

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

A. Approve Warrants for Expenditures Dated 12/10/20 \$6,657.50 (bills) & \$3,151.19 (payroll); and 12/12/20 \$39,492 (bills): There was a motion by Anne and second by Jacques to approve the warrants as listed. Passed unanimously.

B. Discuss CD Rates: Mary Lou said CD rates are currently less than 1%. Community National Bank has the best rates at this time. There is money from the Good Neighbor Fund (wind towers), Reappraisal, and Grader Fund to invest. Mary Lou commented that Edward Jones would like to meet with the Selectboard at some point. There was a motion by Anne and second by Yves to transfer the money out of the General Fund for the Good Neighbor Fund, Reappraisal and Grader Fund and put it into CD's at Community National Bank. Motion passed with Jacques abstaining.

6. Discuss Grant Opportunity for Library: Yves commented that Mary Lee was working with Carrie Glessner to submit a \$1,500 grant that looks promising for the Town to receive to help with connectivity. There is no match for this grant. Mary Lee feels the public access computers at the Library need to be replaced as they are old and slow. Jacques commented he recalled some recent correspondence which discussed allowing people to use the Library or Community Center space to access the internet when the buildings were closed. LaDonna said she had mentioned this to Carrie as a point for discussion since we are experiencing areas in town without internet connectivity and the Town buildings are currently closed to the public eliminating internet access except in the parking lots. Jacques stated he is not in favor of letting people into the basement at the Library or use of the Community Center unattended. He feels it is too much liability for the Town. LaDonna requested when budgeting for the Library, money be allocated for IT assistance to help maintain the public access computers and/or possibly money budgeted to send Mary Lee to some computer classes through adult education. LaDonna stated she has been helping by updating the computers, clearing the browsing history, etc. but feels it is time to either hire that service out or help Mary Lee get more experience through computer training. Anne thought it would be helpful if Mary Lee had additional training so she could assist her patrons who may have limited computer experience.

Yves said Mary Lee asked why Westfield's Library was the only one closed in the area, according to a recent newspaper article. Mary Lou commented that Newport's Library has been closed since the beginning of the pandemic. Mary Lou said she thought an online checkout system was available at the Newport Library. Jacques said he did not want to rush into changing anything right now regarding reopening the Town buildings.

7. Authorize Payment of Insurance Claim for Denny Lyster: LaDonna said VLCT is recommending the Town pay the claim for the damages to Denny Lyster's car on December 1, 2020 when he hit the guardrail barricade on Reservoir Road. There was a motion by Jacques and second by Anne to authorize VLCT to pay the claim. Motion passed with Yves voting no. The Clerk will contact VLCT to get recommendations about placement of road closure signage and the type of breakaway barricades that should be used. Jacques will order Road Closed signage from the prison.

8. Discuss Town Meeting March 2, 2021:

A. Discuss Possible Postcard Mailing to Notify Voters that all Town Meeting Votes will be Cast by Australian Ballot in 2021: LaDonna explained she would like to use some of the CTCL Covid grant money to purchase postage for a mailing to all registered voters explaining

the changeover to Australian ballot voting for all votes that would have been cast from the floor at Town Meeting. LaDonna will draft wording for the postcard for Selectboard approval. Jacques asked about sending one postcard per household. LaDonna felt this was possible. Motion by Anne; second by Jacques to authorize sending a postcard mailing to alert registered voters about the change from Town Meeting floor voting to Australian ballot voting for 2021. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Selectboard Articles for Warning-Town and School: LaDonna asked if there were any articles the Selectboard wanted to place on the Australian ballot besides the normal floor vote articles. No new articles were brought forward. LaDonna said she will be in touch with Kevin Amyot, School Board Chair, to see if the School will also be voting by Australian ballot and to logistically schedule the Informational Meetings.

9. Sheriff's Report for November: The November report reflected 28 patrol hours and \$803 in citations.

10. Draft 2021 Highway Budget: Eric Kennison was present and worked through the budget, line item by line item, to draft a preliminary budget with expenses totaling \$445,053. A new Wild and Scenic Rivers grant will be applied for as well as a NVDA Grant and a Better Roads Grant. The Selectboard agreed to continue to budget a flat rate of \$7,500 to transfer to the Grader Fund investment rather than basing it on the hours of usage. This draft budget will be reviewed at the next meeting on January 5th.

11. Other Business:

A. Reminder of Next Meeting Date to Finish Budget and Warning for Town Meeting- 1/5/21 at 8 a.m.

B. Sign Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) Amendment Form: LaDonna stated the annual payment was submitted earlier in the year but the annual report was not submitted. Yves signed the MRGP Amendment Form-Road Erosion Inventory (REI) Submittal for the Clerk to submit to the State.

C. Review NVDA Annual Report: Yves read a letter from NVDA which outlined the services provided to the Town during 2020 along with their dues request. The dues amount will be included as a line item under Dues and Subscriptions in the General Fund Budget.

12. Adjourn: Following a motion by Anne and second by Jacques all agreed to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Westfield Selectboard Approval: Date: _____ with _____ change(s)

Yves Daigle, Chair

Jacques Couture, Co-Chair

Anne Lazor

Minutes submitted by: _____
LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk & Selectboard Clerk