

WESTFIELD SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
September 16th, 2024 @ 5:00 p.m.
Westfield Town Office, 38 School Street with Zoom Option

Town Officials Present: Jacques Couture, Selectboard Chair; Dennis Vincent, Selectboard; Richard Degre, Selectboard; LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk; Lisa Deslandes, Treasurer; Niki Dunn, Selectboard Clerk; Danny Young, Lister (Partial Attendance); Shelley Martin, Lister (Partial Attendance); Pat Sagui, Development Review Board Chair (Partial Attendance); Eric Kennison, Road Commissioner (Partial Attendance); Mike Piper, Constable (Partial Attendance)

Others Present: Carter Finegan, NVDA MERP Coordinator (Partial Attendance); Louis Bushey, Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation (Partial Attendance); Luke O'Brien, Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation (Partial Attendance)

1. Call Meeting to Order – Jacques Couture, Chair: Jacques called the meeting to order at 4:57pm.

2. Public Comment – 5 Minutes:

A. Speed Cart on Kennison Road: Mike Jacobs requested the speed cart to be placed on Kennison Road. LaDonna will call the sheriff's office to see about getting the cart brought there.

B. Speed Limit Sign Repaired Kennison Road: Mike Jacobs also noted that there is a speed limit sign down on Kennison Road. Jacques noted that the town will need to take an inventory on all signs and get them ordered. Dennis and Richard will do the inventory.

C. Richard got a few complaints about the camper on Route 100. LaDonna explained that they did get a permit and they meet the setbacks so it is legal as far as the zoning bylaws.

3. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda: Added 2A & B, 7A, 9D and 16A.

4. Approve Minutes of the 8-5-24 Selectboard Meeting: (*emailed in advance*) Dennis motioned to approve the minutes from the August 5th Selectboard meeting, Richard seconded. Motion passed.

A. Business from the Minutes: There was no business from the minutes.

5. MERP Energy Assessment Grant Planning – Carter Finnegan, MERP

Coordinator: (*emailed in advance*) Carter Finegan joined to discuss the MERP Energy Assessment Grant application. Carter went through each town building and the selectboard finalized needs to be included on the grant application. Carter will work with LaDonna and Niki to get the application finalized and submitted. Jacques questioned how EV Chargers would work. Carter noted that it is up to the municipality to maintain them. You can hire someone to maintain them, and they can set up a credit card system to have people pay to use them. There was some discussion on putting solar panels on the roof of the Town Garage and Recycling Center. Pat Sagui noted that she would like costs compared to the Vermont Electric Community Solar program. Richard will get all the quotes still needed to submit with the grant application. The deadline for the grant to be submitted is 9/27/24 and the award notifications should be sent out on 10/8/24.

6. 5:35 – 5:55 PM: Jay State Forest Planning Efforts – Louis Bushey, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation: Louis Bushey and Luke O'Brien joined from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to discuss the Jay State Forest. They wanted to introduce themselves and discuss the long-range planning management effort they are starting on. Westfield has 1917 acres in the Jay State Forest. Jay Peak leases 775 acres of the Jay State Forest. There are 3.5 miles of VAST trails, 9 miles of Long Trail and easements to the Catamount Trail in the state forest. The first acquisition was in 1954. There were large acquisitions of land in the late 90's and the early 2000's.

They have been doing resource inventories this year and there is a public scoping meeting planned for October 15th, 2024. They plan to write their draft management plan this winter and hope to have it finalized by the summer/fall of 2025. Jacques questioned how often these management plans get updated and Louis explained that they should be updated periodically, however this plan has not been updated since the land was first purchased in 1954. Pat Sagui wanted to know if they could recommend another state forest plan that may be similar to how this one will look to familiarize herself with them. Louis noted the Worcester State Forest plan and the current draft for the Castleton State Forest would be similar plans to look at. Pat noted that she recently discovered there is a backcountry skiing area that is in the Westfield part of the forest. Louis explained where that is on the map he brought. Pat wondered if there are any other places in Vermont that have the backcountry skiing like this. Luke noted that Willoughby state forest has a sanctioned back country ski area and Brandon Gap National Forest also worked with a back country ski group to sanction an area for this. Pat asked if the back country skiing would become regulated through this plan. Luke explained that he would not be surprised if they were approached to sanction a back country section. LaDonna questioned who is tasked with writing the plan. Louis explained that they and other committee members from various other organizations write the plan. Pat wondered if climate unpredictability is factored into the writing of these plans. Louis noted that they have a new climate forester who was hired specifically to help with climate recommendations. Pat questioned if there is something in the plan that someone wants to challenge, what type of data would you want them to provide and what would it look like to bring that challenge forward. Louis explained that the people writing the plan address the science behind it and try to juggle the public wants/ expectations. There are opportunities to revise the plan and make comments on it. Showing up to public meetings is the best way to be updated and prepared for what is happening.

7. Library Update: (emailed in advance) Lisa explained that when donations come in for books, the funds are then used immediately to purchase new books. This is throwing off the line items in this year's budget as there was a specific amount set for books but due to the large amount of donations the book purchase line will look way over budget. LaDonna suggested changing the line items next year to be able to see the flow of the funds better. LaDonna also noted that people like to go to the library, they like the new librarian and she is hearing from people that they are using the library a lot more now. Dennis questioned what happened with the book return box. Lisa noted that it was returned. LaDonna explained that they are going to order a large mailbox and have it mounted. Once the new box comes in the selectboard will decide how to mount it.

A. Pay Rate for Librarian: Lisa explained that a new assistant was hired for when the librarian is unable to work, and she was unsure what the pay rate was supposed to be. Richard motioned to pay her \$17.82 per hour, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

8. Highway Update – Eric Kennison, Road Commissioner:

A. Current Grants:

- i. BR1104 Better Roads Grant (TH2/ Route 58) \$15,000 – Needs to be completed by 9/30/24**
- ii. GA0461 Grants In Aid \$12,500 – Needs to be completed by 9/30/24**
- iii. GA0695 Grants In Aid \$10,000 – Needs to be completed by 9/30/24**
- iv. Wild & Scenic Grant – Needs to be completed by 9/30/24**

Eric noted that the Better Roads Grant is not due until December, and he will be starting work this week on the rest of the grants. Paving will be getting done next week and it will be from Kingdom Mountain Road to the town line and part of Kennison Road.

B. Discuss Bathalon Farm Road #23 – Culvert: Jacques questioned how this was brought to the town's attention. Dennis explained that there was a complaint from the camp further down the road and they contacted Eric. The road is being used to cross cattle and the manure is now too deep and needs to be moved so the road can be accessed by the other residents who own property there. Dennis also noted that there are a lot of gates now blocking access down the road. The road is a class 4, so the town is not responsible for maintaining it,

however it cannot be made unfit for travel. Jacques will get in touch with Sebastian to see when the Selectboard and Eric can go speak with him to get this resolved.

9. Treasurers Report – Lisa Deslandes:

- A. Approve Warrants for 8/14/24 \$10,156.53 (bills) & \$5,131.13 (payroll); 8/20/24 \$1,890.98 (bills); 8/27/24 \$12,960.68 (bills) & \$7,218.94 (payroll):** Richard motioned to approve the August warrants; Dennis seconded. Motion passed.
- B. Review General & Highway Fund Budget Status Reports: (emailed in advance)** Board reviewed in advance and had no questions.
- C. Review Investments: (emailed in advance)** Board reviewed in advance and had no questions.
- D. Thoms, Property Tax Request:** Peter Thoms requested the town not charge him the 8% delinquent tax rate and to allow him to pay after property taxes are due on October 3rd. He is selling some of his property, but the sale will not go through before October 3rd. and he has funds tied up until November. The selectboard agreed not to allow this and Lisa will follow up with him.

10. Update on ARPA Funds:

- A. Community Center Windows, Discuss Continuation of Historic Preservation: (emailed in advance)** Will find out on MERP grant funds by October 8th, the windows may be covered through this grant.
- B. Fred's Plumbing & Heating – Air Exchanger for Town Garage:** This may also be included in the MERP grant.
- C. Current List of Anticipated ARPA Projects:** Lisa went through the updated list of ARPA projects and projected amounts. This could change depending on any funding we receive from the MERP Energy Assessment Grant.
- D. Digital Display for Town Common: (emailed in advance)** Lisa explained the cost of the signs and how they would need Wi-Fi to be updated. We may need an antenna to get the Wi-Fi to reach the common. Niki reached out to someone who may be able to help with this. The estimated cost for the sign, electrical upgrade and concrete work is \$20,000. To place this in the right of way we may need to get a permit from the state. LaDonna will find out if she can get a permit first and see where they allow the sign to be. The sign could be relocated to the town garage if it is not able to be placed on the common. Dennis motioned to approve the purchase of a 6X4 two-sided display sign, contingent on the state and town permits, Richard seconded. Motion passed.
- E. Outside Painting at Community Center:** Annette will be coming tomorrow morning to begin painting again. LaDonna will discuss with the exercise group about the painting going on. Richard let Annette know that if anyone questions the painting to come to the town office or a selectboard member. The lead paint analyzer came out today and noted there is a small amount of lead paint, but there is no concern about it as it's not a daycare, apartment etc. It is only in the corners and some soffits. Annette was already taking the correct precautions in her cleanup, so she can continue in the same manner. LaDonna questioned if there would be an added charge now for the extra days Annette had to rent the lift and there will be.

11. Resignation of E911 Coordinator & NVDA Board Member: (emailed in advance) LaDonna explained that for the E911 Coordinator there is some once-a-year reporting and otherwise they are only needed when someone creates a new driveway for a new house. She also noted that for NVDA the town

should have two representatives. Jacques used to be a rep on this board so he will try to make it to meetings again. Some possible candidates for these positions were discussed.

12. Sheriff's Report – July 2024: (emailed in advance) Report was reviewed in advance. Lisa noted that if the speed limit signs aren't up then tickets can't be enforced.

13. Re-Appoint VLCT Town Voting Representative, Currently Pat Sagui: Richard motioned to re-appoint Pat Sagui, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

14. Recycling Update: Jacques noted that at the Board of Supervisors meeting it was brought up that they are backed up with Styrofoam and so we need to stop taking it for a while. Dennis would like bigger signs for the paper and cardboard bins as people are putting these items in the wrong areas still.

A. Schedule for October:

October 5th: Jacques Couture
October 12th: Maurice Doyon, Roger Tetreault
October 19th: Dennis Vincent
October 26th: Richard Degre

B. Items Being Removed from Steel Dumpster: LaDonna explained that Karen Blais was at recycling to post a flyer and noticed people taking items from the steel dumpster. The woman explained that her and her husband take things all the time. LaDonna feels there needs to be a sign on the back of the dumpster as that's how they are getting in. The items in that dumpster are the town's property and provide revenue to the town. Other people have been caught taking items from this dumpster also. Lisa feels that updating to better cameras will help with this as well.

15. Executive Session (Anticipated): Dennis motioned to enter executive session for a personnel issue at 8:02pm, Richard seconded. Motion passed.

Richard motioned to exit executive session at 8:17pm, Dennis seconded. Motion passed.

16. Other Business:

A. Sign Re-Appraisal Agreement – Listers: Danny and Shelley presented the agreement to the selectboard. NEMRC and Deanna Robitaille both recommended doing a statistical update at this time instead of a full reappraisal. If the inspections done in the statistical update agree with the grand list, then the appraisal can be finalized. If not, then the town will need a full reappraisal. The statistical update would begin in July 2026 and be completed in June 2027. The contract is for \$30,000 and Danny would like to budget another \$5-10,000 for the extra hours the listers will need to work as well as unforeseen expenses. He also explained that the inspections are looking to make sure the properties are accurately described, they are not looking to see if the current assessed values are in line with current property sales. Payments will be \$2,500 per month for the period the update is being done. There will already be around \$21,000 in the account for this after this current fiscal year. To stay in line with our purchasing policy the listers sent emails to 8-10 companies who do this work and only got a bid from NEMRC. Accepting the one bid they received complies with the town's purchasing policy. The selectboard signed the agreement.

17. Adjourn: Dennis motioned to adjourn at 8:18pm, Richard seconded. Motion passed.

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

X

Jacques Couture
Selectboard Chair

X

Richard Degre
Selectboard

X

Dennis Vincent
Selectboard