

TOWN OF WESTFIELD INFORMATIONAL MEETING MINUTES
February 22, 2022 @ 6 p.m.
Electronic Meeting Held Via Zoom

The meeting was brought to order by Jacques Couture at 6 pm.

Pat Sagui began by letting everyone know that the meeting was being recorded. Since all articles were being voted on through Australian ballot there would not be any changing of numbers at this meeting, it is only for questions and information.

Town officials present were Selectboard members Jacques Couture and Richard Degre, Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn and Treasurer Lisa Deslandes, as well as meeting moderator Pat Sagui.

Pat explained how the meeting would work and how the public could participate. She explained that this is also a Selectboard meeting and there would be other business conducted after going through all the articles.

Pat read articles 1-5 with no comments or questions asked.

Article 6 – To elect a Selectboard member for a term of three years. Jacques Couture explained that his term is up but that he would be running for the position again. He also noted that Shelley Martin was also running for the position and offered her a chance to speak. She was not present at the meeting. Jacques said he has been on the Selectboard for 44 years and he loves the town, and he is happy to continue serving on the board if re-elected.

Article 7 – To elect a Town Treasurer to fill the remaining two years of a three-year unexpired term. Lisa Deslandes is running for the position and is currently doing the duties of the Town Treasurer. She started out as the Assistant Town Treasurer and was happy to step into the role as Town Treasurer when appointed by the Selectboard.

Article 8 - Shall the town authorize the elimination of the office of Town Auditor, with future audits to be provided by a public accountant licensed in the State in accordance with 17 V.S.A. 2651b(a)? Jacques explained that there is currently no one running for the auditor positions. Kay Courson had been doing the job for about 20 years and had decided it was time to step down, as did Karen O'Donnell. To switch to an auditing firm, Vermont law states that it needs to be voted on by the town first. LaDonna explained that if the article was voted down then it would fall on the Selectboard to appoint auditors until the next town meeting where they could put the auditor positions back on the warning or try to vote again on using an outside auditor. If it passes, then it does not need to be voted on every year. As far as cost, Jacques said that there is \$1,200 budgeted for the auditor positions each year and LaDonna has asked around to see what other towns are paying and conservatively it could be around \$10,000 per year to use an outside auditor. Richard thought it would be closer to \$15,000 per year. Meghan Wayland from The Chronicle newspaper asked if the town's volunteer auditors receive any type of pay. Jacques explained that they get paid by the hour and that is what the \$1200 is budgeted for each year and that is for three people to do the work.

Pat explained that the rest of the articles are all appropriations and that there is an explanation for each appropriation in the town report. LaDonna noted that Lynn from the OEVNA and a representative from Missisquoi Valley Ambulance were available in the meeting for questions.

Pat read articles 9-17 with no comments or questions asked.

Article 18 - Shall the voters of the Town of Westfield appropriate \$34,294 to Missisquoi Valley Ambulance Service, Inc.? Kristina Young was in attendance as a representative of Missisquoi Valley Ambulance. Jacques thought it would be good to have Kristina explain why the appropriation was higher this year. She

explained one reason for the increase was due to payroll changes. Raises in pay and pay for on-call personnel for the full 24 hours not just during the daytime. This was done in hopes of retaining current personnel and hopefully attracting new personnel. Jacques thanked the ambulance service for opening their meetings over the past year to Selectboard members. He also noted that they have done a good job paying down an IRS debt left to them by the previous administration, which was around \$100,000 and is now down to around \$60,000. Once they get the bill paid off, they can get their 501C3 non-profit status back and will be able to qualify for grants.

Pat read articles 19-26 with no comments or questions asked.

Article 27 - Shall the voters of the Town of Westfield appropriate \$2,500 to Orleans Essex VNA & Hospice, Inc.? Lynn Limoges from OEVNA was present to answer questions. There were none and she was thanked for attending.

Pat read articles 28-34 with no comments or questions asked.

Article 35 - Shall the voters of the Town of Westfield appropriate \$100 to Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force (RFP) - Vt. Assoc. of Conservation Districts (VACD)? Richard and Jacques explained that they receive grants through the VACD, including three this past year.

Pat read article 36 with no comments or questions asked.

Article 37 - Shall the voters approve general government fund expenditures of \$302,721.75, of which \$149,605.39 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$153,116.36 shall be raised by municipal taxes? The proposed 2022 budget is up 9.89% from the proposed budget of 2021. Note: Appropriations are not included in the above general government fund expenditures. Voter approved appropriations will be added as presented in the Selectboards budget in the Town Report. Jacques spoke regarding a typo in the 2021 actual column of the budget, recycling expense, for \$14,200. This line-item amount was incorrectly doubled. This cost was for the building of a concrete pad and wall for the dumpster at the recycling center and was only \$7,100. This does not affect the current budget figures. Jacques then spoke regarding the current budget numbers and noted that they try to keep the budget as low as they can without cutting any corners. He also thanked LaDonna and Lisa for the time they put into working on the budget. Richard noted a couple building improvement projects that increased the budget including the library roof and a building at the cemetery.

Pat read article 38 with no comments or questions.

LaDonna wanted to thank Normand Piette for helping to install the Christmas lights on the Town Common. His name was accidentally left out of the town thank you section in the Town Report. She also informed everyone that there is an opening for the Selectboard Clerk. She will be stepping down from this position. The position entails taking minutes for the Selectboard meetings and doing other work with the Selectboard over time with training. She is also looking for someone to be an assistant clerk one day a week, possibly someone who is interested in becoming Town Clerk one day. This position needs to be filled by a Westfield resident. Pat inquired as to the requirements of the Selectboard Clerk. LaDonna explained that the board meets once a month, and it takes about an hour to type up each page of minutes. That is a paid position.

Pat opened the floor for any thoughts or questions regarding ARPA funds. Jacques spoke initially about what the ARPA funds are. It is Covid money that each town received, Westfield getting \$148,566.23 over two years. No decisions have been made on what to do with the money yet, and no process on how to spend the funds has been determined. The Selectboard is open to suggestions from the community. One of the ideas being discussed is digitizing the town records. LaDonna explained that all the records would need to be scanned in order to be accessed digitally. During the covid shutdown it was difficult for people to come into the Town Clerks office to go through the vault and find the records they need. This would also help with less people physically touching the records. Each book costs around \$300 and to restore a book is \$3200. The town would still receive \$1 per page for copies, even if the records were digitized. The initial

cost to start this process would be around \$50,000. The vault records go back to 1801. Richard would like to have Informational Meetings and get input from the townspeople before any of this money is spent.

Pat reminded everyone that the School Informational Meeting is February 28th at 6pm, through Google Meets. LaDonna let everyone know that the link is on the town website and on Facebook. Andrew Emery will be the write-in candidate for the Westfield School Board position. He was unable to be at the meeting tonight but will be at the School Informational Meeting. He will need five votes to win as he is a write-in.

Jacques thanked everyone for attending and thanked LaDonna and Lisa for all their work on the budgets and the town report. He also thanked Pat for being the moderator as well as all the Town Officers and everyone who has stepped up to help at the Recycling Center.

Richard motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:48, Jacques seconded.