

Select Board
Martin Memorial Hall
5259 Route 5, Ascutney VT
Monday, February 5, 2024
6:30 PM
REGULAR MEETING

Select Board Members Present: Michael Todd, Kelly O'Brien, August Murray, Wendy Smith, David Fuller

Select Board Members Absent:

Brandon Gulnick, Town Manager

Others Present:

Olivia Savage	Rika Henderson (remote)	Joseph Bublat (remote)
Beth Hunton	Ryan Palmer (remote)	William Daniels
Paul Giammatteo (remote)	Maureen (remote)	
Lisa Slade (remote)	Ray Stapleton (remote)	

- 1 Call to Order**
Mr. Todd called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.
- 2 Pledge of Allegiance**
Mr. Fuller led the pledge of allegiance.
- 3 Agenda Review**
The Town Manager stated that the Highway Mileage needed to be approved. Highway Milage would be taken up under Item 14: Any Other Business.
- 4 Comments from SB, TM, and Citizens on Topics not on the Agenda**
Mr. Fuller inquired about an exit survey and Town Meeting prep at the next meeting. Mr. Fuller inquired about the [Town Wide Yard Sale](#). Mr. Fuller pointed out some negative online content regarding TDS and the Select Board took a few moments to discuss the upgrades and work that is being done to provide faster internet service.
- 5 Review Minutes from the Previous Meeting: 1/16/24**
Additions/corrections/deletions: Item 7: check content for more information.
Motion: To approve the 1/16/24 minutes.
Made by: Ms. O'Brien **Second:** Ms. Smith
Vote: All in favor
- 6 RE: Project Sponsorship – 7219 RT 106**

The streambank was damaged at 7219 RT 106 during the July 2023 storm. Public and private landowners were eligible for Emergency Watershead Project (EWP) assistance, but must be represented by a project sponsor. Sponsors include legal subdivisions of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization. The Town Manager attended several site visits at this residence and reviewed the damage to the streambank.

The funding request for this project was approved. EWP program policy requires that emergency projects be completed within 220 days of being funded. A policy waiver to extend the performance time can be requested if a project cannot be completed within 220 days. An executed EWP agreement is how EWP funds are obligated for repairs. EWP cannot reimburse for work done prior to having an executed agreement. The project includes repairing the 60-foot damaged section of revetment with 12-foot-high x 4ft thick rip rap.

The project will not be eligible for EWP assistance if:

1. A repair has been completed.
2. Bids exceed the value of the property being protected. With the engineering workload brought on by the July 2023 Storms plus the programs regular farm bill commitments, NRCS cannot provide the engineering services to design the EWP projects in Weathersfield. Therefore, they ask the Town to hire a private third-party professional engineer to complete the necessary design work, construction oversight and certification necessary to implement this project.

The Town of Weathersfield may submit a request for additional TA funds if the price proposal for the engineering services exceeds the TA funds in the agreement. There is no guarantee that a request for additional funds will be approved by the National Watershed office. Total project cost is \$44,906. The NRCS share is \$33,679.50. Sponsor cost share is \$11,226.50. An agreement may be written between the Town and the Landowner that holds the landowner responsible for the \$11,226.50 share. No work can commence until there is a signed agreement between NRCS and the Town. If the Town wishes to proceed, it needs to submit an application to NRCS.

Motion: To sponsor the Emergency Watershead Project at 7219 Route 106 and to authorize the Town Manager to move forward with the project.

Made by: Mr. Fuller

Second: Dr. Murray

Vote: All in Favor

At the previous meeting, the Select Board had discussed taking the appointment names off the agenda while the 60% process is underway and that those individuals would still be considered for the appointment. The Select Board received a letter from those looking to be appointed to the Village Wastewater Committee (below) and had been asked to read the letter for the record ([Select Board Packet](#), pg 15). Mr. Todd read:

To: Board of Selectmen

Date: January, 31, 2024

Five months ago, in September 2023, we submitted our requests to be appointed to the Ascutney/Perkinsville wastewater study review panel. The engineers have completed the 30 percent benchmark a month ago. Still to date, no action has been taken on our appointments.

I believe from the demeanor we have seen, and the deliberate kick-the can-down-the road, the board has exhibited its wish to be the sole reviewer and authority for the study.

The latest from the board is 'let's wait until the 60 percent benchmark'. The only conclusion we can make is that the Select Board by postponing appointments, for no particular reason, would prefer the committee not exist and seeks no input from residents of the designated village centers where the improvements are needed and likely funded by federal grants.

Please remove our names from consideration for appointment to the WW study committee.

John Arrison

Annmarie Christensen

Mark Richardson

The Select Board discussed how they did postpone, but that this was done because of language in the committee policy. Mr. Todd stated that he was unsure of the need for a committee until the study is done and the Select Board agreed that interested parties should look into what the presentation and the study are saying so far. The Select Board agreed that they can't force people to stay and that they are welcomed to reapply in the future if a committee is needed.

8 Sale of 2016 Cruiser

The Town is ready to sell the 2016 Police Cruiser and has two (2) proposed options:

- 1) Sell the car through Ford of Claremont at auction. The car will be sold to the highest bidder. The total cost is \$250 for the title.
- 2) Private party sale. The Town will put a for sale sign on the car and advertise it for sale online.

Motion: To sell the 2016 Cruiser by private sale after the Police to get their equipment out and for the Town to coordinate as needed.

Made by: Mr. Fuller

Second: Ms. Smith

Vote: All in Favor

The Select Board discussed the value of the cruiser and concluded that they should try to sell it first and if that doesn't work, they can consider options.

9 Police Officer Recruitment

The Town advertised the Police Officer vacancy in December and have not filled the vacancy to date. The Town Manager met with the Police Chief, and discussed several reasons why the position may not be appealing.

- 1) Sign on Bonus: Many surrounding towns offer sign-on bonuses. We recommend offering a \$10,000 sign-on bonus paid out either weekly or quarterly.
- 2) Vacation/Personal Time: Per the personnel policy, when any employee starts their employment with the Town, they start off with 1 week of vacation. Generally, people have 3-4 weeks of vacation in their current positions, so losing 2-3 weeks of vacation to work here is not attractive to them. Further, many communities offer 3-4 personal days annually.
- 3) Annual Salary: The average annual Police Officer salary is \$71,889.19 according to the 2023 VLCT Wage & Benefits Report. In this year's budget we are budgeted for \$62,195 and in FY25 we are budgeted for \$64,185.

The Select Board discussed at length about how Weathersfield compares to other towns in regards to benefits, vacation time, salary, sign on bonuses, and how finding quality candidates has been a challenge for all the surrounding towns and how competitive it is right now. Retention bonuses were suggested and the Select Board discussed where in the budget funding would come from and the reserve fund was suggested. The Select Board concluded that they would like to see some packages that could be offered and would like to discuss the issue further at the next meeting.

10 CLA Discussion

The Town Manager gave a brief presentation on the CLA and utilities and how that would affect the tax rate going into FY25. For more information, go to the [Vermont Department of Taxes](#) website.

The Select Board discussed how reappraisal costs money and also how when broken down by the amount of properties in Weathersfield, seems too low. The Select Board discussed how much properties seem to be worth now via Zillow and compared CLAs in other Towns in Vermont.

At the last meeting, the Select Board discussed filing a request for an appeal with the goal of getting to freeze the appraisal at the 81% level. The Town Manager and Select Board discussed the information that would be needed to

file an appeal and concluded that after that information has been gathered, they would file.

11 Town Manager Update

a. Drinking Water State Revolving Fund

In January 2023, the Town had applied for the [Drinking Water State Revolving Fund](#) (DWSRF) program, for the Ascutney project. The DWSRF program provides low-cost financing to public water systems for planning and for capital improvements that improve public health protection and facilitate compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Town Manager stated that funds have been made available for the Ascutney project and congratulated the Water District.

b. Town Meeting Presentation

The Town Manager is in the process of creating a presentation for the Town Meeting and will be available for review at the next Select Board meeting. The Town Manager pointed out how some people want all of the information presented and some people want it short and to the points so it is finding a good balance. The Select Board stated that citizens can find all of the information in the Town Report. The Select Board took some time discussing ways to make the Town Meeting more engaging.

12 Appointments

- a. Budget Committee (5 Vacancies)
- b. Conservation Commission (1 Vacancy)
- c. Energy Coordinator (1 Vacancy)
- d. Green Up Coordinator (1 Vacancy)
- e. Lister (2 Vacancies)
- f. Parks and Recreation (1 Vacancy)
- g. Veterans Memorial Committee (2 Vacancies)
- h. Zoning Board of Adjustment (2 Vacancies)
- i. Beth Hunton

Motion: To appoint Beth Hunton to the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Made by: Ms. O'Brien **Second:** Ms. Smith

Vote: All in Favor

13 Approve Warrant

To approve the warrants for 2/5/2024 as followed:

General Funds
Operating Expenses: \$47,749.40
Payroll: \$20,295.69

Library
Payroll: \$4,844.01
Operating Expenses: \$0

Highway Fund
Operating Expenses: \$42,583.85
Payroll: \$13,040.90

FEMA Fund: \$570.00
ARPA Fund: \$20,000.00
Reserve Fund: \$5,372.00

Solid Waste Management Fund
Operating Expenses: \$1,517.33
Payroll: \$1,891.22

Grand Totals:
Operating Expenses: \$117,792.58
Payroll: \$40,071.82

Made by: Mr. Fuller
Vote: All in Favor

Second: Ms. O'Brien

14 Any Other Business

Motion: To approve the highway certificate for year ending February 10, 2024, with a total mileage, including State Highway (31 miles), of 100.746 miles.

Made by: Ms. O'Brien **Second:** Ms. Smith
Vote: All in Favor

The Select Board, Town Manager, and Chief of Police went into Executive Session at 8:26pm.

No action was taken.

15 Future Agenda Items

Not Discussed.

16 Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn the meeting.

Made by: Dr. Murray **Second:** Mr. Todd
Vote: All in favor

The meeting adjourned at 8:57pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Nichole Gagnon

WEATHERSFIELD SELECT BOARD

Michael Todd, Chairperson

August Murray, Selector

David Fuller, Vice-Chairperson

Wendy Smith, Selector

Kelly O'Brien, Clerk