

**TOWN OF WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT**

**SELECT BOARD**

**Select Board  
Martin Memorial Hall  
5259 Route 5, Ascutney VT  
Monday, December 19, 2022  
6:30 PM  
REGULAR MEETING**

**MINUTES**

**Select Board Members Present:** David Fuller  
Kelly O'Brien  
Wendy Smith  
Paul Tillman  
Michael Todd

**Select Board Members Absent:**

**Brandon Gulnick, Town Manager**

**Others Present:**

Lisa Slade	Joseph Bublat	Steve Hier	Eva Loomis
Josh Dauphin (remote)	Vincent Jewell	Darrin Spaulding	
Nichole Gagnon (remote)	Ray Stapleton	Andrew Grimson	

**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Todd called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Mr. Tillman led the pledge of allegiance.

**3. Agenda Review**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**4. Comments from Select Board and Town Manager and Citizens on Topics not on the Agenda**

Mr. Todd thanked the highway crew for their hard work on clearing the roads this past weekend.

Mr. Stapleton said the power had gone out at the highway garage. He asked where things stood in the discussion on generators. Mr. Todd said they would get to that later.

Mr. Todd also thanked the GMP and Asplund crews who are helping to clear downed lines and trees. He said they had come from several states and Canada to help. At one

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point there were 30,000 people without power. By this morning, 226 people were still without power.

Mr. Todd, the emergency management director (EMD) and two others (Jeff and Gary Graham) went out this morning to check on people around town. He said he wants to work with the fire chiefs and the EMD to create a better response plan for the future.

Lisa Slade said thank you to Chris on the highway department. She said she wished people without power were helped sooner. She said 674 people in town were without power. Mrs. Slade is the point person for the Martin Hall Trustees. She said the Ascutney side of Town did not lose power. The Hall was rented on Saturday and people were able to attend. She thinks it is important to let people know this is a public building. People could have come to it and charged their devices, cooked a hot meal, used the bathroom. She reviewed the bylaws and there doesn't seem to be anything to prevent such a use. She offered to help work with the EMD and others to make the building available next time it's needed.

Mrs. Slade said there was discussion about a generator for this building at the November 14<sup>th</sup> Select Board meeting. She believed a contract had been awarded. She asked for an update on installation. Mr. Gulnick said it would happen in the spring.

Mr. Fuller said he was very disappointed that the Planning Board meeting was cancelled due to improper warning. He said this had happened too many times. He said the Board needed a new plan to ensure that "things are handled correctly".

Mr. Todd said that Mr. Gumbert had claimed responsibility for the oversight. He (Mr. Gumbert) has come up with a plan to keep it from happening again.

Mr. Todd said he didn't think it was any one person's fault. Mr. Fuller repeated that it has happened too many times. Mr. Todd said it is the responsibility of each board chair to confirm that the agenda has been posted. Mr. Fuller disagreed, saying that it is not the chair's job to post agendas. Chairs set the agenda. They don't work for the Town. He said he was going to continue on about this until it is resolved.

Mr. Todd said that due to the holidays, the Town Office will be closed on Monday, December 26<sup>th</sup> and Monday January 2<sup>nd</sup>. The first Select Board meeting in January will be on Tuesday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Vince Jewell, member of the school committee, said he came to address the Board about concerns the school board has regarding the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). Mr. Todd said this discussion would be taken up later in the agenda.

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### 5. Review minutes from previous meetings – 12/5/2022

#### Additions/corrections/deletions:

a. None

**Motion:** To approve

**Made by:** Mrs. O'Brien **Second:** Mr. Tillman

**Vote:** All in favor

### 6. Fire Truck Loan Schedule

Town Treasurer, Steve Hier, said the voters had authorized the purchase of a new fire truck. The vote authorized borrowing up to \$270,000 for a period of up to 7 years. The decision was made to borrow that amount for 7 years. The Board packet contained the loan paperwork to accomplish that. The loan is from M & T Bank (previously People's Bank) for \$270,000 for 7 years at 4.28% interest.

There is one additional step needed. Vermont law considers short-term borrowing as up to five years. Beyond five years, Vermont law considers it more of a bond. Bonding requires steps and proof of those steps. The bank needs a legal opinion that the loan is appropriate. (Mr. Gulnick is working on this.) When the bank gets the legal opinion, they will turn the money over to the Town on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Hier did not foresee any problems.

**Motion:** That we approve and sign the loan with M&T Bank for the amount of \$270,000 at an interest rate of 4.28% for a period of 7 years.

**Made by:** Mr. Tillman **Second:** Mrs. Smith

Mr. Tillman asked to add the words, "for capital equipment for a fire truck" to his motion. Mrs. Smith agreed to that.

**Vote on the motion:** All in favor

Mr. Spaulding asked if he could start advertising the old fire truck for sale now with the stipulation that the truck won't be available until late spring/early summer. There were no objections from the Board.

The Board took a moment to sign the loan paperwork.

### 7. Dry Hydrant New Construction – Lyons Drive

From the board packet, "The West Weathersfield Fire Department is requesting to install a new dry hydrant on Lyons Drive. Two estimates were received, which includes an estimate from Mountain Meadows for \$5,500 see Attachment A, and an estimate from Black & Tan Construction LLC for \$6,000 see Attachment B. The department is requesting to move forward with the Mountain Meadows estimate for \$5,500. The

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reserve account currently has a balance of \$12,966. If the request is funded from reserves, the balance will reduce to \$7,466. Alternatively, we can fund this from ARPA.”

Mr. Todd asked the Board where they would like the money for this to come from. Mr. Fuller said he would like to have it come from the reserve account and then possibly refund it (and other expenses) from ARPA. Mrs. Smith agreed.

Mr. Tillman asked if there is a list of what the town wants for dry hydrants and if there are priorities. He also asked if the necessary easements are in place for the hydrant.

Chief Dauphin said there is a list of hydrants. He said he was looking to fund this hydrant through the reserve accounts. He said they have met with the property owner who has no objections to the hydrant. The easement will be obtained after the funding for the hydrant is obtained.

Mr. Todd called for a motion.

**Motion:** for the installation of a dry hydrant on Lyons Drive for \$5,500 to come out of the reserve account with the proper easements to be obtained. The project is to be awarded to Mt. Meadows Property Maintenance.

**Made by:** Mrs. Smith      **Second:** Mr. Tillman

There was discussion about when the hydrant would be installed. It was agreed that it should wait until spring.

The motion was amended to increase the total amount to \$5,700 to provide \$200 for attorney fees for the creating the easement.

**Vote on the motion:** All in favor

#### 8. Fire Department Reserve Requests – Turnout Gear

From the Board packet:

“The fire departments are requesting to purchase turnout gear from the Fire Fighting Equipment & Gear Reserve Account. The account currently has an available balance of \$27,355.92 following the latest purchase of a Thermal Imaging Camera presented by WWVFD & approved by the SB on 10/3/22.

##### Ascutney Volunteer Fire Department

This department is requesting 2 coats and 2 pants for a total of \$5,530.

##### West Weathersfield Volunteer Fire Department

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This department is requesting to purchase 1 coat and 1 pair of pants for \$3,085. In addition, the department is requesting an additional transfer of \$1,470 to be applied to the purchase of a set of turnout gear that was purchased in the department's budget, which exceeded the available amount in their account for PPE due to inflation. The \$1,470 will eliminate the overage. The total request for this department is \$4,555.

The total amount requested from reserves from both departments is \$10,085, which will reduce the reserve account from \$27,355.92 to \$17,270.92."

Chief Spaulding said he had asked for two coats and two pants, but since that time a set had been ruined at a fire in Claremont. So, he is looking for three sets of gear for a total of \$8295. Chief Spaulding also requested three helmets for \$1,380. His total request came to \$9,675.

The total for both departments came to \$14,230.

**Motion:** To approve the purchase of turnout gear in an amount not to exceed \$14,230 to be taken out of the Fire Fighting Equipment & Gear Reserve Account.

**Made by:** Mr. Fuller      **Second:** Mr. Tillman

**Vote:** All in favor

#### 9. Habitat for Humanity Presentation

Eva Loomis and Andrew Grimson from the Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity presented a proposal to construct 6-8 dwelling units on the former Top Hat property in Ascutney. They may possibly add community solar as well. They are asking for \$20,000 from the ARPA funds to help fund the project.

There was much discussion about whether this is possible under current zoning and if there is capacity in the water system to support that many units. Board members didn't want to say no, but wanted to wait and see about the zoning and water issues.

It was agreed to move the discussion on the town reappraisal (#11) here.

#### Town Reappraisal Discussion

Mr. Jewell, representing the School Board, urged the Board to get the reappraisal done now. The School Board claims that the lower the CLA falls, the harder it is for their Board to set a budget. They are urging the Board to act now because the effect of the new CLA will take 3-4 years to show. The School Board would also like to combine their budget review committee with the select board's.

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It was agreed that the boards are best off when they work together, but the select board was not concerned with having a reappraisal done at this time.

### 10. FY24 Budget Discussions – Continued

#### a. Compensation/Benefits Study

From the Board packet:

“During the December 5th Selectboard meeting, the board requested that we add an additional layer to the compensation study for the Highway Department, which includes the % each of our comparable Towns contribute to employee healthcare. This information was collected using a similar approach to the compensation study.

#### Findings

1. Eighty-one (81) towns were analyzed with an average population of 3256.
2. 35% contribute 100% of Healthcare costs for employees. Of the municipalities that contribute 100% of Healthcare costs for employees, the average payrate is \$23.76 in the Highway Department, which is \$0.91 above the average pay rate in the Highway Department according to the compensation study.
3. 4% contribute 95% of Healthcare costs for employees. Of the municipalities that contribute 95% of Healthcare costs for employees, the average payrate in the Highway Department is \$21.31, which is \$1.54 below the average pay rate according to the compensation study.
4. 25% contribute 90% of Healthcare costs for employees. Of the municipalities that contribute 90% of Healthcare costs for Employees, the average payrate is \$22.56 in the Highway Department, which is \$0.29 below the average pay rate according to the compensation study.
5. 23% contribute 85% of Healthcare costs for employees. Of the municipalities that contribute 85% of Healthcare costs for employees, the average payrate is \$22.86 in the Highway Department, which is \$0.01 above the average pay rate according to the compensation study.
6. 14% contribute 80% of Healthcare costs for employees. Of the municipalities that contribute 80% of Healthcare costs for Employees, the average payrate is \$22.30 in the Highway Department, which is \$0.55 below the average payrate according to the compensation study.

A data summary was provided in the meeting packet.

Mr. Todd asked what Weathersfield's average highway pay rate is. It was not possible to quickly calculate that number. Mr. Hier said the rate is roughly \$1.00 below the average. He said there are two people being paid \$2.00 less than the average, one person being paid \$1.50 more than the average, and one person almost at average.

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Mr. Gulnick said, "Following this review, I recommend that the highway department employee wages be amended to average. The adjustment will cost \$7,622.78 this year." He said we are not hiring another highway employee this year. There is a projected surplus this year in the highway department, so this would not create a budget deficit.

Mr. Tillman said he doesn't want to say we can't afford to pay our people more and bring them up to what an average would be because we have one less employee. He said he wants to compensate someone on the worth of what they do and separate that from the fact that we cannot find someone to fill a vacant position. What happens if we need that position filled again?

Mr. Gulnick clarified that there is a surplus, so using those funds would not affect the budget.

The vacant position has been eliminated. The \$7,622.78 includes wages, FICA, Unemployment, Workers Compensation, and Retirement. The goal is to bring the highway employees' pay up to where it should be with as little impact on the tax rate as possible.

It was clarified that this \$7,622.78 would be distributed to the highway employees now – in the current fiscal year. Twice that amount will be needed to retain this rate of pay for the FY 24 budget. This is consistent with Mr. Gulnick's request at the last meeting.

Mr. Gulnick directed attention to the budget sheet with the COLA data on it. The section in green shows the effects on the budget of highway department pay increases at various COLA levels. For example, at 10% increase (in COLA), the total goes from \$122,572 (no pay raise) to \$138,123 (with pay raise).

Mr. Fuller said raising taxes should be a last resort and asked if there were any other possible source of revenue. Mr. Gulnick said he had nothing definitive at this time.

Mr. Tillman asked to clarify the facts – the highway employees are underpaid according to State averages; the department is short of people and the current employees are working more and doing more because of it.

The Board decided last year that the Manager could make pay raises as he saw fit without the Board's oversight or intervention. Mr. Gulnick asked for this discussion because by giving a pay raise in this fiscal year, it will cause an increase in the next fiscal year budget. Mrs. O'Brien and Mrs. Smith both stated that they felt it was solely the purview of the Manager and Department head to decide on pay raises and not the Board's .

The Board moved on to the COLA discussion.

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### b. Cost of Living Adjustments

Mr. Gulnick said he recommended a 5% COLA across the board.

**Motion:** To set the COLA at 5% for FY2024 for everyone.

**Made by:** Mr. Tillman      **Second:** Mrs. Smith

Mr. Fuller was concerned that several employees had asked for a higher COLA at an earlier meeting when the Board wasn't ready to vote on it. Now that the Board was ready to vote on a lesser amount, the employees weren't present to debate the decision.

Mr. Tillman said he had no objections to the COLA being higher. Mrs. Smith agreed. Mr. Tillman withdrew his motion.

**Motion:** To set the COLA at 8% for FY2024 across the board

**Made by:** Mrs. Smith      **Second:** Mr. Tillman

**Vote:** 3 in favor, 2 abstentions. Motion carries.

### c. Long-term Debt Schedule – Not discussed

### d. Reserve Accounts – Not discussed

### e. Upcoming Capital Purchases – From the Board's packet:

The board had requested department input on upcoming capital purchases. The following is a list of planned capital purchase requests.

<b><i>Capital Purchase</i></b>	<b><i>FY Acquired</i></b>	<b><i>Replacement FY</i></b>	<b><i>Estimated Cost</i></b>
<i>Police Cruiser</i>	2016	2023 <sup>1</sup>	\$35,000
<i>Backhoe</i>	2004	2024/2025	\$220,000
<i>Dump Truck</i>	2009	2026	\$200,000
<i>WWVFD Brush Truck</i>	2006	2028	\$75,000
<i>AVFA Forestry</i>	2004	2028	\$135,000
<i>WWVFD Engine 1</i>	2000	2028	\$230,000

<sup>1</sup>This amount is currently in reserves through a grant we are receiving from the SIU. No additional tax need is anticipated for this purchase.

### f. Year-end fund balances

### g. ARPA Balance

**h. Reserve Requests** – During the December 5, 2022, Selectboard meeting the board requested department input on special articles to transfer to reserve accounts.



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<b><i>Reserve Account</i></b>	<b><i>Current Balance</i></b>	<b><i>Special Article Request</i></b>
<i>Fire Apparatus Acquisition</i>	\$81,954 <sup>1</sup>	\$40,000
<i>Firefighting Equip. &amp; Gear</i>	\$27,355 <sup>2</sup>	\$20,000
<i>Fire Protection Water Sup.</i>	\$12,966 <sup>3</sup>	\$10,000
<i>Total</i>	\$122,275	\$70,000

<sup>1</sup>After removal of down payment for new fire truck.

<sup>2</sup>This was reduced at this meeting to approximately \$14,000. Chief Dauphin asked if the special article doesn't pass, he would like to have \$13,000 put back in their budget for ppe.

**Motion:** To transfer \$20,000 from ARPA funds to the ppe reserve account

**Made by:** Mr. Fuller    **Second:** Mr. Tillman

**Vote:** All in favor

The special article will be removed.

<sup>3</sup> Amount before tonight's meeting.

### 11. Town Reappraisal Discussion (see above)

### 12. Whipple's Cabin Discussion – Mr. Todd moved this discussion to a later date.

### 13. Large Gathering Permit –

**Motion:** To approve the large gathering permit for Kate Murphy for June 23rd at 4:30 PM and Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup> at the Center Grove and to waive the fees.

**Made by:** Mrs. Smith    **Second:** Mr. Fuller

**Vote:** All in favor

### 14. Approve Warrants

**Motion:** To approve the warrants for 12/19/2022 as follow:

General Funds	Operating Expenses	\$9,415.17
	Payroll	\$16,571.11

Highway Fund	Operating Expenses	\$5,665.83
	Payroll	\$6,880.09

Solid Waste Management Fund		
	Operating Expenses	\$4,517.79
	Payroll	\$23,012.76

Library	Operating Expenses	\$0.00
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	Payroll	\$2,107.95
Fire Reserve		\$2,765.00
Grand Totals	Operating Expenses	\$22,363.79
	Payroll	\$48,571.91

**Made by:** Mr. Tillman      **Second:** Mrs. O'Brien  
**Vote:** All in favor

**15. Adjourn**

**Motion:** To adjourn the meeting

**Made by:** Mr. Tillman      **Second:** Mrs. Smith

**Vote:** All in favor

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*deForest Bearse*

**WEATHERSFIELD SELECTBOARD**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Todd, Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_  
Wendy Smith, Selector

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kelly O'Brien, Clerk

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Paul Tillman, Selector

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David Fuller, Vice- Chairperson