

TOWN OF WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT

SELECT BOARD

**Select Board
Martin Memorial Hall
5259 Route 5, Ascutney VT
Monday, December 21, 2020
6:30 PM
REGULAR MEETING**

MINUTES

Select Board Members Present: N. John Arrison
David Fuller
Joseph Jarvis
Paul Tillman
Michael Todd

Select Board Members Absent:

Brandon Gulnick, Town Manager

Others Present (online):

Rosalie McNamara	Darrin Spaulding		
Stephanie Smith	Suzanne Terrill		
Ray Stapleton			

The Public was permitted to attend this meeting in person. Remote public participation was facilitated via the GoTo Meeting video-conferencing platform and conference calling. The number for people to join or call in to the meeting was published on the meeting agenda and on the Town's website. Mr. Gulnick monitored the calls and the video-platform while Mr. Fuller ran the meeting. The meeting was recorded.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Fuller called the meeting to order 6:33 PM.

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

Mr. Fuller thanked the highway crew for their hard work during the recent storm. He urged everyone to be patient while they continue working to clear the roads.

Mr. Arrison said petitions are not required for anyone wishing to run for open elected positions. A letter of consent is required however from the Town Clerk (due January 25th). The list of positions is posted on the Town's website. Elected officials will continue to serve until replacements are elected at Town Meeting, whenever that will be held.

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Mr. Gulnick said he is in the process of scheduling meetings with both fire departments to review the contract. He said he felt he will be prepared on January 4th to review with the Board any feedback from the departments.

Mr. Gulnick said he let the Town Clerk know that the Board will be discussing Town Meeting on January 4th. Mr. Fuller said his questions regarding elections had been answered at this meeting. He said he wasn't concerned about the money articles because the Town may actually know more by May and the fiscal year doesn't end until June 30th. He believed the Board could put together budgets that will pass. He said the wild card will be the State. The funding bill just passed by Congress does not include money for States to provide aid to local governments. This could affect State aid to highway and the education fund, which in turn could affect the Town's operations as these funds help to offset the tax rate.

There were no comments from citizens.

3. Review minutes from previous meetings – December 7, 2020

Additions/corrections/deletions:

a. None

Motion: To accept the minutes of our Board meeting on December 7, 2020

Made by: Mr. Todd **Second:** Mr. Arrison

Vote: All in favor

4. Hazard Mitigation Grant Program: Project #4356-4R

Mr. Gulnick said a meeting to discuss this grant had been held several months ago. Stephanie Smith was on the call to answer any questions the Board may have relative to the terms and conditions. The Board needs to sign off on the terms and conditions so FEMA can finalize the award for this project.

Mr. Fuller asked if the current landowner was still on board with this proposal. Ms. Smith said she had not personally spoken with the owner, but the owner could withdraw from the program at any time if they chose to. This is purely voluntary. The Town could withdraw at any time as well.

Mr. Fuller reminded everyone that this project refers to the demolition of the Amsden Store with creation of a greenspace/park in its place. The building sits right on the bank of the river and there is no place for a septic system. (Mr. Fuller thought that the original system may have been located on an adjacent lot (there's a house there now). The people who bought the property were planning to renovate the building until a sudden death in the family occurred. Plans changed after that.

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Mr. Fuller said he didn't know if a bank was involved in this.

Motion: That we approve the hazard mitigation grant for 6648 Route 131

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Todd

Mr. Arrison asked if the grant amount was fixed. He said he asked because the terms state that any hazardous materials discovered during the demolition must be properly dealt with and he wanted to know who would be responsible for that added expense. Ms. Smith said we can request an extension and that the first step was to hire an appraiser to get an accurate value of the property. Asbestos usually is found during the appraisal. A more detailed survey could be requested if that were a concern. She said we can ask FEMA for more money, but they will only cover 75% of the project cost. She said she has been talking with Two Rivers Regional Planning Commission who is managing a pot of money for the match – it's possible they can cover the 25% match for this project, but because it hasn't been awarded yet she has not been able to confirm it.

Mr. Tillman asked if there is anything in this contract that falls outside the standard language. Ms. Smith said she didn't think so. She said key points in the document include:

- The Town is required to manage the grant.
- The property will end up in Town ownership.
- The Town will be required to maintain the property as green open space.

Mr. Fuller wanted to know how big the lot is, but no one had the answer on hand. Everyone agreed that it is quite small and right on the bank of the river. There is no place for a septic system and this program is a way out for the owner.

Vote: All in favor

Ms. Smith said she would be in touch with the Regional Planning Commission and the landowner. Once she receives the signed document from the Town, she will send it to FEMA so the Town can receive the award. Mr. Gulnick had the document signature-ready for the Board members to sign after the meeting.

5. Town Manager Report

Website: Mr. Gulnick said the website is in its final stages of development. The website "team" has training on January 12th. The site will go live on January 20th, 2021.

Martin Memorial Hall Hours of Operation: The Board received a copy of the 2021 Holiday Schedule. The Town Office will be open on 12/24 until 12 Noon. The same will be done on 12/31. It will be closed on Christmas and New Year's Day.

FY22 Budget Schedule:

- Highway Budget – December 21st

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- General Fund Budget – January 4th
- Solid Waste Budget – January 18th

\$900B Covid Relief Bill: There is no funding in the bill for local governments with unbudgeted COVID 19 expenses for the 2nd half of FY20.

Mr. Fuller asked if a vote from the Board was needed for the Town Office to be closed for half a day on Thursday. He said Highway is closed for the day; the Town Office is not. Mr. Gulnick said this schedule was already approved at the beginning of the year. He said the Office was originally going to be closed completely on Christmas Eve, but since the Office moved to a full five-day schedule, they decided to remain open a half day on Thursday and close all day on Friday.

Mr. Fuller said weather forecasters are calling for 47° and an inch of rain for the 24th. He predicted that the highway department would be out sanding the roads that day.

6. Small Business Relief Fund Grant Awards

Mr. Todd recused himself as he had applied for grant funds. He stepped away from the table and sat in the audience during the discussion.

Mr. Gulnick said ten applications had been received. They were as follows:

1. Ascutney Mountain Horse Farm (\$1,000)
2. Evolution Salon (\$1,000)
3. Hawks Mountain Motorcycles (\$1,000)
4. Tiny Stars Childcare/PreK (\$1,000)
5. Perkinsville Preschool and Childcare (\$1,000)
6. Sweet Sprouts Daycare (\$1,000)
7. World of Discovery Center (\$1,000)
8. Richard Strobel Tax Services (\$500)
9. JC Site Works (\$500)
10. Everett Bingham (\$500)

Mr. Gulnick recommended awarding all of the ten requests. There was no discussion.

Motion: To approve as written

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

Mr. Fuller thanked Mr. Gulnick for securing the grant and the committee who helped vet the applications.

It was noted that \$1,500 would be left over from the original \$10,000 grant. Mr. Gulnick said the balance will go into the fund for covering unbudgeted COVID-19 expenses.

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Vote: All in favor

Mr. Gulnick said the checks should go out tomorrow.

7. Finance Report

Ms. McNamara reported the budget-to-actuals for each of the departments for the month. She noted that COVID-19 expenses contribute significantly to the total expenses to date. They will be moved to the Emergency Management line item in the Fire Services Budget. In late January, these expenses will be reimbursed through the LGER grant.

Mr. Fuller felt the well-related expense should be separated out from the highway budget. It was a project undertaken by the Town to avoid litigation. The well does not serve the highway garage. Mr. Gulnick said it was an expense that was incurred a month before our contract with the well-owner expired. The contract is now over and this represents our final expense for that project. We are no longer responsible for repairs or maintenance.

Mr. Arrison said the well contamination occurred because of highway activities.

(Ms. McNamara lost contact with the meeting, so Mr. Gulnick resumed the report.)

Mr. Gulnick said he was uncomfortable reporting Fire Department expenses because he doesn't have all of the information. With the new contract, he will have the numbers. At present, AVFA handles their finances. We reimburse WWVFD for their expenses.

Mr. Fuller asked why the two sets of books couldn't be made into a single set (for the fire departments). Mr. Gulnick said there are a couple of different ways this could be done. They are two separate departments. Right now, we have a budget that consolidates the departments. One of his recommendations would be to separate each department, and each would have their own budget documents – like highway and police are separate departments. Then the Town would pay all of the bills. The numbers would go through NEMRC and the budget-to-actual reports could be generated.

Mr. Fuller said that for the last few years, WWVFD had the Town Office paying their bills. He asked if there is any transfer of money to the department if the Town was paying the bills as they occurred. Mr. Gulnick said there is a separate budget document that leads to this budget document. Because it's complicated, it was agreed to wait until the general fund budget discussion to clarify. Mr. Gulnick said he would present an option with a consolidated budget and an option with them separated.

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Again, in the fire department report, communications show as 158%. Mr. Gulnick said this includes the Emergency Management line. This line is at 3,113% and that's not even all of our COVID expenses. All the COVID expenses must be extracted from other budgets and pulled into the Emergency Management line.

Mr. Fuller suggested handling COVID expenses in the same manner as Irene expenses were – as a separate line. He said the Emergency Management line is normally only \$300-\$600 in any given year and to put these expenses there looked “foolish” in his opinion. He said to handle it similar to a grant. He said the \$50,000 grant we had already received should not be mixed in with the operating budget.

Mr. Gulnick said that he felt all COVID expenses should be booked to the Emergency Management line. The grant would zero out the expenses. The report will show all of the individual expenses booked to that line. It is preferable to having the expenses scattered across all of the other budgets.

Mr. Fuller was concerned that such reporting would skew the budget and be confusing in future years. Mr. Tillman said there is ample space for notes in the budget document that could be used to explain the expenses. Mr. Gulnick convinced the Board that this was the simplest method of tracking the COVID expenses and grant income.

The report indicated that AVFA expenses were at 0%. After discussing it with Chief Spaulding, it appeared that AVFA had not been paid their first quarterly stipend. Mr. Gulnick said he would look into that immediately.

8. Appropriations

Ms. Terrill was available online to discuss the list of requests. She noted that Windsor County Mentors is asking for \$480 (same as last year) but it didn't show on the report.

There was much discussion about how appropriations are made from year to year. Because there was too much confusion, it was agreed to continue the discussion when the general fund budget is being discussed. The Board asked to have the Board's policy on hand at that time.

9. Proposed FY22 Highway department Budget

The highway budget has been level funded. It has absorbed the grader and dump truck lease and interest payments. State aid to highway was based on the average of FY18-FY20 figures (these numbers are usually received after Town Meeting).

Highway service to the water district was removed from this budget. Olivia Savage replaced Alex Longton as the water operator apprentice.

The budget includes a 2% increase in pay for the personnel.

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\$54,145 was saved in insurance benefits because two employees took the opt-out and the employee/employer contribution was increased to 14%.

Covered bridge and other insurances increased.

The IT services line is not certain at this time. Mr. Gulnick is meeting with CCI tomorrow to review the contract. The contract has been extended to give the Town and CCI time to work out details. Ten laptops are being added to the contract (one of which will go to highway) which may result in an additional increase.

The equipment-maintenance-repairs-and-supplies line was reduced because we purchased the grader maintenance plan. The warranty will cover unanticipated repairs. The cost of the maintenance plan and warranty was broken out separately. They are each 1/7th of their total respective amounts. These two lines plus the maintenance line together equal the amount budgeted last year for the single equipment-maintenance-repairs-and-supplies line.

The equipment line was lowered from \$7500 to \$2500 on the grounds that we don't have any large equipment purchases this year.

Paving was reduced by half (one day of crack-sealing instead of two).

Summer mowing was increased by \$2,000.

Mr. Fuller questioned having the guard rail budget at \$0. He said he has seen sections of rail that have been damaged by accidents but not removed or repaired. He thought guard rails should perhaps be something we take a section at a time. He did not think a zero budget was appropriate.

Mr. Gulnick agreed. He said he wasn't aware of the broken guard rails. He said he would discuss it with Mr. Stapleton.

Mr. Todd spoke to the "Reclamation and Other Exp" line where there is a note stating, "This money should be moved to reserve if not used." Mr. Stapleton said this money is for reclamation of the Bow pit. He said this money needs to be saved up in an account. He said there should be a sum of money somewhere as this money has been budgeted every year for 8-10 years, but not used. He surmised that it must be sitting in the fund balance.

Mr. Fuller said we should be doing reclamation every year to avoid issues with 250. Mr. Stapleton said he has been conversing with the 250 office – reclamation of the pit is to be done in phases. Once section six is completed, sections 4-6 have to be reclaimed. The terms are defined in the Act 250 permit. Mr. Stapleton says he meets with the 250 office every year and lets them know when he opens a new section.

It was agreed that a reserve account needs to be set up to hold the annual allotment.

Mr. Fuller said that while \$2500 may have been budgeted every year, it has not

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accumulated anywhere. The money has been absorbed into the operating budget each year as there was no means in place with which to reserve it.

The gravel and chloride budgets are the same as last year.

Mr. Arrison suggested putting the reclamation funds into the nonmotorized reserve account rather than creating a new reserve account.

Mr. Fuller asked how much was currently in each of the highway reserve accounts in light of the fact that we just bought a truck and grader. \$33,000 was put in reserve in last year's highway budget. \$40,000 was added when the old truck was sold. Funds were then taken out for the new truck and the grader. There is \$33,000 in this budget for (as a separate article) for equipment reserves.

Mr. Fuller said there was an audited surplus of \$100,000 in highway. He said we used \$50,000 of it to help pay for the grader. He asked where the remaining \$50,000 was. Mr. Gulnick said we used \$39,000 of it to pay for the truck. He said it is not in this budget – that he and Mr. Hier will be discussing this tomorrow. He said the auditors had a different opinion on the surplus.

(On a side note – we have a draft audit and Mr. Gulnick and Ms. McNamara are working on the executive summary of it.)

Mr. Gulnick said he would feel more comfortable answering Mr. Fuller's question after his meeting with Mr. Hier. He said the auditors currently show we are \$97,246 in the red. Mr. Stapleton said that matches the amount of the fund balance from last year. Both he and Mr. Gulnick think this is just a line-item mistake.

It was agreed to wait until Mr. Gulnick has a solid report before going any further.

Mr. Arrison expressed dissatisfaction with the current auditors' timeliness and asked when their contract is up.

Mr. Fuller expressed frustration that now the highway budget is being pushed into January 4th and once again the Board does not have the information it needs from the auditors. He had been ready to adopt the budget that was presented at this meeting with the recommendation that the \$60,000 from the surplus be put into the reserves and now they can't.

Mr. Gulnick said the auditors' contract has expired and will be put out to bid on the new website on January 21st.

Mr. Stapleton thanked his crew for all their hard work during the storm. They did an awesome job. The Town received between 40 and 48 inches of snow.

10. Errors and Omissions Certificate

Motion: To approve the Errors and Omissions Certificate from the Listers for 2020

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Made by: Mr. Jarvis **Second:** Mr. Arrison

Discussion: Mr. Arrison called into question how some of the numbers were presented – some that seemed as though should be negative were not bracketed to indicate that. Mr. Tillman asked why there were only two lister signatures on the Certificate. Mr. Gulnick said two represents a majority of the total, so it is acceptable.

Mr. Fuller asked that the minutes reflect that the Board has found that some of the figures are in the positive and others are in the negative and they may affect the Grand List appropriately but they are not that well documented (on the Certificate).

Amendment to the motion: Mr. Arrison amended his motion to add, “with clarifications of additions and subtractions”.

Vote: All in favor

11. Chain of Command Discussion

This item was requested by Mr. Fuller. His presentation was unclear given the nature of events to which he referred, but in essence he stated that everything goes through the Town Manager.

12. 2014 Purchase and Sale Agreement

Mr. Gulnick mailed a letter to Mrs. Abbott on December 14th in which he requests a meeting to discuss the situation. He has not yet heard back, but that could be due to mail delays. He said he will wait until the end of the year.

13. Appointments

No appointments were requested or made.

14. Approve Warrants

Motion: To approve the warrants for 12/21/20 as follow:

General Funds	Operating Expenses	\$10,941.69
	Payroll	\$14,012.40
Highway Fund	Operating Expenses	\$16,972.07
	Payroll	\$8,357.51
Solid Waste Management Fund		
	Operating Expenses	\$12,791.83
	Payroll	\$1,539.33
Library	Operating Expenses	\$0.00
	Payroll	\$1,895.85
Grants	Operating Expenses	\$17,185.50

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Special Revenue Operating Expenses \$0.00

Fire Gear \$930.00

Long Term Debt

Grand Totals Operating Expenses \$58,821.09

Payroll \$25,805.09

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Jarvis

Vote: All in favor

15. Any Other Business

At 8:35 PM, Mr. Fuller called for an executive session for personnel.

Motion: To enter executive session for personnel

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Jarvis

Vote: All in favor

The Board came out of executive session at 8:45 PM. No action was taken.

16. Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn the meeting

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:** Mr. Todd

Vote: All in favor

The meeting adjourned at 8:46 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

deForest Bearse

WEATHERSFIELD SELECTBOARD

N. John Arrison, Selector

David Fuller, Chairperson

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Joseph Jarvis, Clerk

Paul Tillman

Michael Todd, Vice- Chairperson

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