



**Town of Whitingham
Office of the Selectboard**

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 4, 2020

These Minutes are considered a DRAFT until accepted into the public record (with any corrections noted) at a future meeting of the Whitingham Selectboard.

The Whitingham Selectboard held a regular meeting at 6:30pm in the dining hall of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, November 4, 2020.

Selectboard members present: Wayne Wood, Scott Reed, and Craig Hammer. Chris Walling and Phil Edelstein attended remotely.

Others present: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator, Almira Aekus, Town Clerk; and Richard Lemaire, resident. Shane Mullen of Weston & Sampson Engineers; and Dave DiCantio, Chief Sewer Plant Operator; attended remotely.

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda

Wayne Wood called the meeting to order at 6:30pm reading the remote meeting script. There were a few changes to the agenda since it was posted.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

none

Sewer: project update

Shane Mullens of Weston & Sampson Engineers provided an update of the project: We are on track at 60% design. The process equipment has been chosen, the technical specifications and contract language have been drafted, etc. The next milestone is 90% around Thanksgiving. We should be able to go out to bid on construction by the end of the year. The environmental site condition (FONSI process) was approved by the state and is currently on public notice until November 18th. Gig and Dave have worked with the engineers every step of the way.

Phil Edelstein questioned if they were considering a coagulant. The answer is no, they determined the process at the very first step of the project.

Gig asked Mr. Mullen to explain how difficult it has been to get approval from the state to use the BioMax unit in our project. A formal letter of 30% approval (basis of design) has not been officially sent yet. The engineers had informed the state that they were “pencils down” until they approved. An informal approval was emailed by the state, but the formal letter of approval has not been sent yet.

Mr. Mullen offered his assistance for reaching out to the public to inform them of the entire project and the upcoming bond vote.

Highway:

Review and approve access permit:

An access permit for James and Patricia Culbertson on Sadawga Lake Road was reviewed. Mr. Janovsky met with their excavator operator to inform him that the access must be lower than the road. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve the access permit for James and Patricia Culbertson, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Ratify signing of Notice of Intent to participate in the MRGP

A Notice of Intent to participate in the Vermont Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) was required to be filed last week. Gig signed the Notice and submitted it to the state. **A motion was made by Scott Reed to ratify the signing of the Notice of Intent to participate in the MRGP, seconded by Chris Walling, all in favor.**

Review and sign MRGP grant application

VTrans apparently lost our prior MRGP application and we were advised to submit a new one for 2021. Gig had asked WRC to review the new application and add a letter of support. They responded that they can't do either until next week. If an error was made on the signature page Gig would like to permission to sign the corrected document. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to appoint Wayne W. Wood to sign the MRGP grant application tonight, if corrections are required then Gig Zboray may sign the corrected application, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Flood Resiliency: project update

Gig informed the board that progress is being made on several fronts of the hazard mitigation/flood resiliency project at the Municipal Center.

A meeting was held with MSK Engineers to go over contract documents and discuss their pricing for the scoping study. The Selectboard will likely have a contract to sign at next meeting.

The Archaeological Resource Assessment of the Kingsley property was finalized, and the report submitted to the Selectboard with a copy to VT State Hazard Mitigation Officer to process for the FEMA buyout. The next step is to get confirmation from the Two-Rivers Regional Planning Commission that the matching funds they promised us are still available for this. We are currently having a little difficulty getting a clear confirmation of that even though they promised us funding when this process first began. Gig was advised by the WRC to sign the required "local match commitment letter". The process is now in FEMA's hands.

Review propane delivery service for Fire Department, Municipal Center and Sewer:

We received a price quote for propane delivery from Nido's with a lock-in rate of \$1.65 per gallon until May 1, 2021. We currently use Suburban Propane with an adjustable rate (August 2020 was \$2.325 per gallon, June 2020 was \$2.349 per gallon and March 2020 was \$2.479 per gallon). **A motion was made by Chris Walling to accept the propane proposal (\$1.65**

per gallon and \$117 to bring the Municipal Center piping up to code) from Nido's for the Fire Department, Municipal Center and Sewer Department (they already fill the new tank at Town Hill), seconded by Phil Edelstein , all in favor.

Corona/COVID-19:

Municipal Center Rental Maria Cunningham has requested permission to rent the dining hall for Thanksgiving 2020. This request comes before the Selectboard because we have not technically opened the Municipal Center to the public yet. Some groups have requested and received permission to use the dining hall with the clear understanding of the cleaning protocols necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This is the first rental request for personal/private use of the hall. Vermont Health Department guidelines suggest that families not gather for holidays this year.

The board discussed. The Municipal Center is still technically closed to the public. They do not want to set a precedent to allow the hall open to large groups at this time.

Changes to Town Meeting 2021

The State of Vermont has begun issuing guidance for Town Meeting 2021. It is likely that Town Meeting will look entirely different than it has in the past. The school most likely won't allow the town to use their building. We would have to offer several remote access meetings before Town Meeting Day to go over the budget and Town Report. All articles will likely be voted by Australian ballot since there will not be anyone on the floor to vote from the floor.

Mr. Wood does not like the changes, Town Meeting is a traditional event, he feels it is a slippery slope, but beyond town control. Mr. Hammer suggested a special meeting on a different night in case people aren't available on Wednesday night.

Resident's request to make payments on taxes due

A letter was received from a resident asking for approval to pay \$300 per month towards his outstanding sewer and property tax balance. During these difficult times he cannot come up with the money due. He is requesting a waiver of the legal fees if it goes to collection. Gig provided the board with her understanding of this taxpayer's debt to the town; it is ongoing and significant.

The board agreed, they are uncomfortable with the precedence this might set and said no to this request.

Junk: next step(s)

Four of the five Selectboard members drove through town again to assess junk accumulations using the list made in the spring of 2020 and looking for other properties that might need to be added to the list. Board members agreed there were quite a few properties that could be removed from the list and that a thank you letter should be sent. Those properties that remain on the list should receive an updated letter telling them specifically what was seen on their property and include a photo asking them to clean it up by Green Up Day 2021 or fines will be levied.

A property on Poverty Row now has many camping trailers on it. They have a zoning permit for one trailer. Gig was asked to write letter as Zoning Administrator to inform the property owner about temporary structures and also ask about their sewage.

Approval of Payables Warrant – November 5, 2020

A motion was made by Scott Reed to approve Payables Warrant #W2120 dated November 5, 2020, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.

Approval of Payroll Warrant – November 5, 2020

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payroll Warrant #W2119 dated November 5, 2020, seconded by Chris Walling, all in favor.

Review and approve Minutes of October 21, 2020

A motion was made by Phil Edelstein to accept the Minutes of October 21, 2020 as written, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.

Other business / Office Administrator – as needed

WiFi signal at Town Hill Gig discussed the VTel Wireless “free” wifi signal at Town Hill. VTel is providing the service during the pandemic. We receive a bill showing that the service would cost \$141.35. The VT State of Emergency is currently set to expire on November 15th. Although it will likely be extended Gig would like permission to cancel the service as soon as the state of emergency is over and VTel begins charging the town for the service. Money has never been budgeted to cover this cost; it was only agreed to because it was being offered for free by VTel. Before cancelling the service Phil Edelstein will call VTel to lower the cost of the monthly bill when the state of emergency is over.

Great River Hydro Tax Appeal Mr. Wood spoke with Attorney Fisher. On December 9th or 15th depositions will be taken for the Great River Hydro tax appeal, our expert witness is very good, and the case looks favorable for the town’s position. One Selectboard member will need to be present when it goes to mediation in January.

School Closures Mr. Walling reached out to the school superintendent, Gig is now on the list to receive information about school closings as a result of COVID-19. The School Board Chair also offered to attend a Selectboard meeting to answer any questions.

Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Craig Hammer, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.

Wayne Wood adjourned the meeting at 7:31pm.

Respectfully submitted,
~Gig Zboray