



**Town of Whitingham
Office of the Selectboard**

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 21, 2024

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 in the dining hall of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, February 21, 2024.

Selectboard members present: Scott M. Reed, Chair; James Weber, Vice Chair; Greg Brown, and Craig Hammer.

Others present: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Administrator; Almira Aekus, Clerk/Treasurer; Stanley Janovsky, Jr., Road Commissioner/Fire Chief. Travis Wheeler, Skip Tefft, Glen Merrill, Liz Weber, Sherry Adams, Bill Holveck, Cindy Holveck, Shandell Soumar, Blake Janovsky, Seth Boyd, Donnie Boyd, John Robohm, Johanna Robohm, Marshall Dix, Terrie Morse, residents. Kristine Sweeter, librarian. Mike Eldred, Deerfield Valley News.

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda

Scott M. Reed called the meeting to order at 6:20pm. One addition to the agenda to review the contract for Town Hill pavilion drawing.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

None

Informational session to discuss proposed budget and Town Report

Mike Eldred of the Deerfield Valley News questioned the amount of General Fund revenues on page 12, he thought it looked high. Interest rates went up substantially, current use tax reimbursement is up a little because of a rate change.

Ms. Adams is concerned with putting a limit on questions at Town Meeting because the cover of Town Report says, "detailed financial questions will not be answered at Town Meeting but can be answered before or after". Lots of discussion ensued, of course folks can ask questions during Town Meeting, and general questions will be answered, but not detailed nitty gritty questions.

Ms. Adams questioned what happens with the cemetery funds on page 30? The intent of prior Cemetery Commission members was to just let the balance grow, so those funds can take care of the cemeteries without using money from the General Fund in the future. It should be a conversation between the Commission and the Selectboard in the near future.

Ms. Adams questioned Economic Development (ED) and putting money into the fund, and that there are 3 different agencies that do ED in the area requesting funding on the warrant. Mr. Weber answered that he recommended a few years ago that we keep putting funds into our ED fund in order to build a new website in the future.

Mr. Merrill questioned what happens to fees generated from police tickets. That money goes into the general fund.

Ms. Adams questioned if ED funding could just go to SeVEDS? Discussion ensued.

Ms. Adams questioned the status of the Town Garage. We recently learned that it can be built on the same property, and VTrans will allow us to keep the very large curb cut.

Mrs. Robohm questioned the amount of "equipment" in the municipal budget? It was explained that a new copier is planned for upstairs/town clerk's office.

Mr. Robohm questioned what roll Ms. Aekus has during town meeting? She is the Election Official/Town Clerk running the elections and taking Minutes of Town Meeting. It was said a number of times tonight that if the Selectboard doesn't know the answers to questions at Town Meeting, the answer will be provided after the meeting, Ms. Aekus will not be looking them up during the meeting.

Mr. Robohm continued:

Page 12: why is bank interest projected to go from \$2,800 to \$20,000? The treasurer found better rates for the town funds.

Page 13: If all employees received a 3% COL increase why did the Selectboard Administrator's salary go up 13%? She was awarded a salary increase based on merit.

Page 14: Assistant town clerk got a 3% raise, but the Town Clerk's went up 12%? \$23,636 is the correct amount, it looks like a typo. It will be corrected for town meeting.

Page 15: Tax Collector what is the salary? That section of the budget should be called "Delinquent Tax Collector". That position is paid by the tax penalties. Ms. Aekus explained there were changes in the Vermont Statutes a few years back that the current taxes would be collected by the treasurer instead of the Tax Collector. There was a small salary in the budget for the collection of current taxes and the penalties are compensation for the delinquent tax collection. Mr. Brown noted that he would like to see the Delinquent Tax Collector and the Town Clerk paid by salary only versus salary and penalties or fees. These changes will likely be addressed when Ms. Aekus's terms are over.

Page 16: sewer usage fees went up substantially on the Municipal Center Budget. Mr. Weber answered how the allocation of usage was updated.

Page 17: ZBA Clerk fees why did they increase? The ZBA Clerk is paid \$75 per ZBA hearing; the budget simply projected more hearings.

Page 22: questioned librarian wages, were they on the wrong line? Yes, typo.

Page 25: questioned what is "sludge revenue"? Mr. Brown answered that it is revenues received from sludge haulers who may dump into our plants; the projected revenue went down significantly because we are in the midst of a large construction project and will not be receiving sludge.

Page 25: why are there assistant operator wages under “Labor” and on page 26 under “Sewer Plant Expenses” Simon Operations Contract Services? Simon Operations act as Chief Operator of the two sewer plants under their employee’s license. But the plants need to be checked and testing conducted on weekends; our contract says we will cover weekends/holidays.

Page 25: who is the sewer treasurer, and why did that position get a 6% increase? Marylee Putnam. She was caught up on a wages increase that she did not get prior.

Page 26: what is the difference between outside testing and contracted services? One is strictly for testing the other is for other services provided.

Page 26: why did outside testing go up so much? Testing done by the prior Chief Operator may have been behind the 8-ball, and the state recently updated our discharge permits which require more frequent testing and more expensive tests.

Page 31: The various funds seem to be earning at different rates – why? Ms. Aekus explained that the funds are all in different types of accounts, she recently renegotiated the rates to be much higher. She noted that the town could consider an investment committee to help with investments.

Mrs. Robohm questioned the VT Childcare Payroll Tax throughout the budget, are the employees sharing the cost or are the taxpayers paying the whole thing. Ms. Aekus answered that the new tax came in so late she didn’t have time to update the entire budget so for this year the taxpayers are paying it.

Donnie Boyd questioned how the garage fund balance on page 31 jumped so much? It was answered that the cell tower lease buyout of \$252,000 was deposited into that fund through Article 35 and also \$50,000 from Article 29 of the 2023 Warrant (fiscal year 2023 Town Meeting).

Mr. Weber departed.

Fire Department: discuss/approve purchase of brush truck body

Mr. Janovsky got 3 quotes for the body of the new brush truck:

- Northeast Municipal, LLC of North Adams, MA quoted \$14,787, their quote has everything the Fire Department wanted except the hookup of radio and emergency lights.
- Boyers Truck Equipment of Hudson, NH quoted \$12,225, their bid has the same body as Northeast, price does not include rub rails, 4” aluminum side boards, and no extra lights.
- Martin Truck Bodies of Martinsburg, Pennsylvania quoted \$11,823.30 with a different brand body, comes with everything they wanted minus the lights.

The truck chassis probably won’t come in until May. If we used a local contractor, they could make changes easier, and delivery is easier. Mr. Janovsky recommends Northeast Municipal.

Greg Brown made a motion to accept the quote from Northeast Municipal, LLC in the amount of \$14,787, seconded by Scott M. Reed, all in favor.

Town Hill: Design Contract We received a contract for design services from JG Design Services, Inc. to draw the plans for the Town Hill pavilion that needs to go out to bid as soon as possible. A retainer will be needed for \$1,200.00, if approved. He estimated it will be 10-12 hours to do the drawings. The board would like a pinned down cost. Seth Boyd noted that these hourly rates are way cheaper than an architect.

The board would like “an amount up to \$1,200”. Anything over that needs to be revisited by the board. **A motion was made by Greg Brown to approve the contract from JG Design Services for an amount not to exceed \$1,200.00, anything over that needs to be renegotiated and to appoint Scott M. Reed to sign the contract, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.**

Approval of Payables Warrant – February 22, 2024

A motion was made by Scott M. Reed to approve Payables Warrant #W2434 dated February 22, 2024, as written, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.

Approval of Payroll Warrant – February 22, 2024

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payroll Warrant #W2433 dated February 22, 2024, as written, seconded by Greg Brown, all in favor.

Review and approve Minutes of February 7, 2024

A motion was made by Greg Brown to accept the Minutes of February 7, 2024, as written, seconded by Scott M. Reed, all in favor.

Other business

Hazard Mitigation we were notified today that we won grant funding of \$43,740.00, with no local match, for a scoping study of the downstream properties from the Municipal Center to potentially create access to a floodplain. The grant is from the State of Vermont, Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Initiative Program (CWIP) through the Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC) Design/Implementation Block Grant (DIBG) program. The grant agreement is not ready to sign tonight.

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve the grant agreement and to appoint Scott M. Reed to sign it when available, seconded by Greg Brown, all in favor.

Sewer: process tank ventilation At the last meeting the board asked for more information, it was discussed thoroughly at a weekly construction meeting yesterday, February 20th. The engineers are considering a passive way to vent the tanks. Venting is not a permit requirement at this time, but it is a safety issue. No answer is currently available.

Jury Duty Gig has been called for Jury Duty starting March 14th, has no idea how long it will last or what it entails. Gig plans on taking Monday, April 8th off to go north for the total solar eclipse.

Adjourn

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to adjourn, seconded by Greg Brown all in favor.

Scott M. Reed adjourned the meeting at 7:47pm. Respectfully submitted, ~Gig Zboray