



**Town of Whitingham  
Office of the Selectboard**

**MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 22, 2023**

*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 (hybrid) meeting at 6:30pm in the dining hall of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, February 22, 2023.

Selectboard members present: James Weber, Vice Chair; Greg Brown, Craig Hammer, and Robin Kingsley.

Others attending: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator. Richard & Mary Lemaire, and Joyce Forbush, residents. Almira Aekus, Clerk/Treasurer. Stanley Janovsky, Jr., Road Commissioner.

Others attending remotely: Laura Sibilia and Tristan Roberts, State Representatives. Ron Pastore, Althea Dodge, Chuck Fowler.

**Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda**

James Weber called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. There were no changes to the agenda.

**Laura Sibilia to speak about “Affordable Heating Act”**

State Representative Laura Sibilia addressed the board remotely to discuss the proposed heating bill. She talked and answered questions for about 45 minutes. It didn't appear that anyone in the crowd understood how this bill will help Vermonters, especially those with lower/fixed incomes.

Greg Brown asked, what provision is there in the bill to regulate not raising the electric rate for our lower income residents. Unfortunately, we live in an area that is not conducive to sunshine, we need these fossil fuels. We don't have the electric infrastructure to support a total shift to electric cars and heat pumps.

Craig Hammer noted that this proposal will affect the equipment that construction companies, logging companies and farmers use, not just every diesel truck on the road, because in the winter diesel is mixed with kerosene to keep it from gelling.

Mr. Brown mentioned the 65% increase National Grid just put on their customers. It's hard to see where the grand savings is going to come from, we are going to pay the extra.

Mary Lemaire questioned what happens when her electricity goes out, how is she supposed to keep her house warm if it is all electric? This bill, as introduced in the Senate is 34 pages long.

Ron Pastore is concerned about the bill being introduced as a “cost savings bill”. Ms. Sibilina said, “that’s not what I said”.

Mr. Hammer questioned what is “modern wood heat”? Ms. Sibilina responded that it is a cleaner smokestack, like the one at Twin Valley Middle High School.

**Hearing of Visitors** none

**Town Report: hear questions regarding annual Town Report and Budget**

Joyce Forbush asked lots of questions:

- Transfer Station income, how will that be generated? Ms. Aekus responded that the recent increase to the permit and per bag fees will cover that; no new increases are anticipated.
- Cost of medical insurance for employees? It was explained that the town is in a group with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, we budget for the full amount the town might have to pay, but often the full amount is not used and results in a fund balance.
- What are the reimbursed fees to Town Clerk and reimburse tax penalty? Why is that not part of the job, why are we collecting and paying additional fees? Reimbursing fees and penalties goes back many decades to when there was no money in the budget to pay a wage.
- Why does the highway get reimbursed for Muni Employee. That position is a highway position but does maintenance and repairs on the municipal buildings so the municipal budget covers some of his wages.
- It costs \$13,000 to clean the Municipal Center? Yes
- What is the firefighter nominal fee? It is a small stipend set up to compensate the volunteers for time and expense to attend incidents and trainings.
- What is the Cemetery prior year fund balance? They didn’t use their entire budget the prior year.
- Why was highway fund balance so much larger this year? Grant(s) received.
- Current use exemptions, how do we get one of these? Special circumstances per statute.
- How many voters do we have? 997.
- How many residents? The 2020 census says 1,344.
- Why do we have to set up funds in Articles 32 and 34? Required by statute.

Richard Lemaire questioned why the equipment fund keeps going up, but we never buy anything new? Mr. Brown replied that they rely on the elected Road Commissioner to make recommendations to purchase needs. Mr. Janovsky responded that the money will be there when new equipment is needed.

**Highway:**

Mr. Janovsky is required to attend Jury Duty starting April 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Fire Department: brush truck**

Mr. Janovsky told the board the fire volunteers formed a truck committee to research purchasing a 4 door/1 ton pickup to replace the 1971 Suburban used as a brush truck. They need an OK from the Selectboard when they find what they need. They also need to know what to do with the Suburban. Mr. Hammer suggested purchasing two 1-ton trucks at the same time to possibly get a discount (one for the highway department). **A motion was made by Greg Brown to allow the Fire Department to purchase a brush truck, following the purchasing policy and keeping in budget, seconded by Robin Kingsley, all in favor.**

At their recent annual meeting the Fire Department added a position of lieutenant and voted James Weber to fill it. During Town Meeting Mr. Janovsky will ask to adjust the Fire Dept budget to add that salary of \$847.

**Municipal Energy Resiliency Program: discuss if we want energy audits conducted**

The state has a new Municipal Energy Resiliency Program (MERP), they haven't quite figured out the entire program yet, it will start with a free energy audit of a municipally owned building (sounds like a singular building, not multiple). The board needs to discuss if they want to participate in the program, but **a motion was made by Greg Brown to table the discussion for tonight, seconded by Craig Hammer all in favor.** Gig will put the topic on a future agenda.

**Sewer: consider adding a new connection**

A few people have asked Mr. Weber if the town is willing to allow new sewer connections. Mr. Brown suggested yes, if the property owners are willing to foot the bill, including engineering. The board agreed; yes of course, they would like to add customers.

**Hazard Mitigation: Appoint an "authorized representative" for state grant to update our Local Hazard Mitigation Plan**

Gig applied for, and won, a grant to update our Hazard Mitigation Plan, which must be updated every 5 years. The total grant is \$11,150 with a local match required of \$2,787.50 (staff time counts toward the match). The grant requires an "authorized representative" of the town. **A motion was made by Greg Brown to appoint Gig Zboray as the authorized representative for State of Vermont Grant Agreement #02140-31237-004AI" (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities 2021), seconded by James Weber, all in favor.**

**Approval of Payables Warrant – February 23, 2023**

**A motion was made by Robin Kingsley to approve Payables Warrant #2334, dated February 23, 2023, seconded by Greg Brown, all in favor.**

**Approval of Payroll Warrant – February 23, 2023**

**A motion was made by Greg Brown to approve Payroll Warrant #2333, dated February 23, 2023, seconded by Robin Kingsley, all in favor.**

**Review and approve Minutes of February 8, 2023**

**A motion was made by Greg Brown to accept the Minutes of February 8, 2023, as written, seconded by James Weber, three in favor, Mr. Hammer abstained.**

**Other business**

Review and sign thank you letter Phil Edelstein resigned from the Deerfield Valley CUD, the board accepted his resignation, with regret, and signed a thank you letter for his service.

Discuss donation offer from the Zephirs The Zephirs recently offered to pay for an additional \$14,000 worth of police coverage, the town budget already covers \$14,000 per year. When Gig spoke to Mrs. Zephir it was noted that Wilmington PD might not have the capacity to double patrol coverage in town. She suggested perhaps purchasing speed signs. The board discussed the generous offer.

Mr. Brown suggested a little more police coverage in the villages, the board agreed. Gig will contact Chief Murano about extra coverage and also ask if they would move a speed sign if we get one.

**Adjourn**

**A motion to adjourn was made by Craig Hammer, seconded by Robin Kingsley, all in favor.**

James Weber adjourned the meeting at 7:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

~Gig Zboray