



**Town of Whitingham
Office of the Selectboard**

MINUTES OF JULY 14, 2021

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 Selectboard Office of the Whitingham Municipal Center on Wednesday, July 14, 2021.

Selectboard members present: Scott Reed, Chair; Craig Hammer, Vice Chair; Chris Walling, and James Weber. Phil Edelstein attended remotely.

Others present: Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator; Almira Aekus, Clerk/Treasurer

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda

Scott Reed called the meeting to order at 6:32pm. There were minor changes to the agenda since it was posted.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

We received an email from Johanna Robohm late this afternoon questioning if the Selectboard is aware of a head-on collision on Gates Pond Road on June 4th. She was not happy with the way the Wilmington Police seemed to handle the scene and the fact that they left when the state police arrived. The board discussed her email and feel she may be missing some facts. The relationship with Wilmington Police Department has been working well so far. Wilmington is dispatched through the State Police so Whitingham residents should be contacting the State Police if there is a problem. Our primary policing agency is the State Police. Wilmington is contracted to patrol for us (although technically we don't have the signed contract just yet). Mrs. Robohm also questioned if perhaps a constable is a better option for Whitingham. The board does not think so at this time.

Sewer:

discuss/set the sewer rate The bond bank requires that we have on-hand our initial bond payment, that would require a 30% increase in the sewer rate. Because the construction bid was recently rejected, and the project will likely be extended another year Ms. Aekus suggested a 15% increase this year. She also suggested to not set the rate at this time because there may be Corona grant funds to lock in before the rate set is required. The 20/21 fund balance for the sewer is nearly \$119,000 of which she would like \$90,000 designated to the bond payment. She suggested sending a letter to sewer users soon noting that there will be an increase, they are free to start making payments now or at any time before the due date. Mr. Weber is a sewer user; he would rather get a letter with a worst case scenario spelled out than cushion the blow. Unfortunately, there are several unknowns because the project must go out to bid and we have no idea if we will get extra funding or if the new bids will come in lower.

Review letter to delinquent account a property in Whitingham village connected to the sewer without paying the connection fee and has not been billed since the connection in 2013. Attorney Fisher drafted a letter, and we created an invoice. The board reviewed and approved of the correspondence.

Discuss engineers most recent email We received an email earlier this evening estimating a cost of about \$2,500 for the engineers to prove to the state that we can meet our permit requirements if some of the very deteriorated media is removed from the Jacksonville RBC. The board doesn't feel they have a choice, the state must approve this temporary fix.

Set the tax rate

Almira Aekus came to the table and suggested the Municipal Tax Rate to be set at \$.738 per \$100 and the local agreement rate at \$.0034. **A motion was made by Chris Walling to set the 2021/2022 municipal tax rate at \$.738 per \$100 and the local agreement tax rate at \$.0034, for a combined tax rate of \$.7414 per \$100 as recommended by the Town Treasurer, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

The Vermont Department of Taxes provided the Education Tax Rates for Fiscal Year 2022 – the Non-Homestead Tax Rate is \$1.6017 and the Homestead Tax Rate is \$1.6852.

Last year the residential/school combined rate was 2.5457. The projected 2021 rate would be 2.4266, a decrease of .1191.

Last year the non-residential/school combined rate was 2.3163. The projected 2021 rate would be \$2.3431 an increase of .0268.

Discuss pre-buy of heating oil and diesel

We received pre-buy pricing of heating oil and diesel; it is higher than last year. The board discussed if it would be beneficial this year to not lock-in/pre-buy because of pandemic pricing, it's a difficult choice. **A motion was made by James Weber to lock in on heating oil at \$2.49 per gallon; summer diesel at \$2.55 and winter diesel at \$2.79, seconded by Phil Edelstein, all in favor.**

Life Insurance and Short-Term Disability

The highway employees receive life insurance and short-term disability benefits that are offered through the VLCT. There has recently been a change in the company providing coverage and documents must be signed. It was noted that it is likely that only the highway employees received this benefit because historically they were the only full-time employees of the town, however now 4 more employees meet the minimum of 30 hours per week requirement. The cost for both benefits was \$9.30 per month per employee but should be lower with the new company. **A motion was made by James Weber to appoint Almira Aekus and Marylee Putnam to sign the required paperwork and to allow all employees that work a minimum of 30 hours per week on a regular basis to be enrolled for the life insurance and short-term disability benefits, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Transfer Station: discuss requiring sticker for recycling

Traditionally the annual sticker/permit was not required to use the Transfer Station for recycling. Other towns are now requiring it. Gig noted that long ago the town received payment of the commodities recycled, but we are currently paying \$154 per ton for containers with \$170 per haul (a total of \$3,380.56 for the 2nd quarter of 2021); currently paper is no-cost but we pay \$250 to haul it (\$500 for the quarter). The state requires that we allow anyone to use electronics recycling. Our annual permit is \$20 and comes with 10 free punches (only one free punch card per household if they are purchasing more than one permit). Requiring a permit will deter non-residents from recycling at our facility. James Weber suggested the permit price be \$20 with no free punch card. **A motion was made by James Weber to require recyclers to purchase the annual permit/sticker for Transfer Station use and that the permit fee will continue to be \$20 but will no longer include the punch card beginning September 1st, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.**

Ms Aekus noted that there are contractors that use our Transfer Station saying that they have trash from a resident, but we have no way of knowing that. Taxpayers are subsidizing the Transfer Station for its residents and property owners and a contractor from another town should not be allowed to use it. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to enforce the dump sticker rule, all people using the Transfer Station must have a sticker which are available only to residents or property owners, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.** We will order a sign that says "Whitingham Transfer Station for residents and property owners ONLY, Permit Required".

Approval of Payables Warrant – July 15, 2021

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payables Warrant #W2204 dated July 15, 2021, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.

Approval of Payroll Warrant – July 15, 2021

A motion was made by Chris Walling to approve Payroll Warrant #W2203 dated July 15, 2021, seconded by James Weber, all in favor.

Approve Minutes of June 30, 2021

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to accept the Minutes of June 16, 2021, as written, seconded by Phil Edelstein, all in favor.

Other Business

Wilmington Old Home Week The Wilmington Old Home Week Committee invited Whitingham officials to participate in the parade on August 7th either with an antique vehicle, a float or just walking with a banner. Registration deadline is July 20th. There are too many events happening on that date, the board is not available.

Approve renewal of Jacksonville Village designation

Village Center designation renewal is due by January 2022. The Selectboard must sign a Municipal Resolution showing their support of the renewal application. The board reviewed the resolution and the draft application, **a motion was made by Scott Reed to approve the renewal application for Village Center designation for Jacksonville; to sign the municipal resolution; and appoint Gig Zboray to be the contact person for the application, seconded by Phil Edelstein, all in favor.**

Review proposal for lighting fixtures for the Selectboard Office Two fluorescent fixtures are dead, a proposal of \$2,000 was received to replace all the existing fixtures and add one more above the round table. The board approved the proposal.

Education Funding Litigation update Gig provided the board with the “Decision on Motion for Summary Judgement” which was received this morning. We did not win the case, which was expected from the beginning. The attorneys will come to the July 28th Selectboard meeting to discuss filing a motion to appeal in the State Supreme Court.

Litigation Fund we spent a little over \$19,000 on legal fees in the 2020/21 fiscal year; \$4,651 was for the Great River Hydro tax appeal. Ms. Aekus questioned if the board would approve of overspending legal fees by \$3,000 for the fiscal year just ended and the remaining expense to come from the litigation fund. She noted that we need to start budgeting more for legal fees in the general fund. The board approved.

End of Year Budget Status Ms. Aekus provided the board with a current budget status, it is likely to change as some adjustments will need to be made.

Fiber Mr. Edelstein provided an update on the CUD.

Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by James Weber, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.

Scott Reed adjourned the meeting at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

~Gig Zboray