



**Town of Whitingham
Office of the Selectboard**

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 6, 2019

These Minutes shall be accepted into the public record (with any corrections noted) at a future meeting of the Whitingham Selectboard.

The Whitingham Selectboard held a regular meeting on Wednesday, November 6, 2019 at 6:30pm in the Dining Hall of the Municipal Center, 2948 VT Route 100, Jacksonville, VT.

Selectboard members present: Wayne Wood, Vice Chair; Wayne Corse, Craig Hammer, and Scott Reed. Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator.

Wilmington Selectboard: Tom Fitzgerald, Chair; John Gannon, Vice Chair; Vincent Rice, Clerk; Sarah Fisher, and Ann Manwaring. Scott Tucker, Wilmington Town Manager.

Readsboro Selectboard: Raymond Eilers, Chair; David Marchegiani and Joe Berard. Karen Boisvert, Administrative Assistant.

Others present: Stanley Janovsky, Jr., Whitingham Road Commissioner; Almira Aekus, Whitingham Town Clerk; Jeanette White, State Senator; Laura Sibilia, State Representative. Rodney Bemis, Richard Lemaire, and Jenefer Burnell Whitingham residents. Omar Smith, Readsboro Broadband Connectivity Committee. Robert Marechal, Readsboro resident. Mike Eldred, Deerfield Valley News.

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda.

Wayne Wood called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. There were two additions to the agenda under item 12 (introductions and state representation). It was noted that it is a heavy agenda, we will try to get through in the proper order, but the neighboring towns were invited for 7pm and that will start promptly and may shift some agenda items.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

Richard Lemaire questioned if zoning permits are up to date in town. Gig responded that there are currently a few people building without permits but letters have been written to inform them they need a permit. Richard Lemaire mentioned that the town ought to look into a new town garage. It is too small and the ugliest building in town.

Highway Department, if any

Mr. Janovsky reported that blacktop if finished, the crew is getting ready for snow. He provided a printed report for the board.

Gig was informed by VTrans that the Environmental Mitigation Grant that was previously denied within 10 minutes of submission is actually still in the queue at VTrans. We were advised to modify the application to request up to \$50,000 funding for a scoping study of the three properties (2948, 2964 and 2984 VT Route 100). An exact cost estimate has not been determined yet. A 20% match is still required but it will be a maximum of \$10,000 rather than \$49,500 in the original grant application. VTrans has not accepted the River Corridor Plan as a

scoping study so this is a first step required for the flood mitigation project. **A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve the modification of the grant application to request funding for a scoping study at a cost of up to \$50,000 with a town match of up to \$10,000, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.**

Continue discussion of Broadband Committee vs. EDG

Tabled. The board would rather make a decision about this after talking with the neighboring towns.

Sewer Department, Honora pump station

Harry Farrington had complained that a sewer pump station on his property was not working properly and threatened legal action if it was not fixed. Dave DiCantio, Wayne Corse and Scott Reed did some research and talked to several people and found that the pump station was installed by Ed Metcalfe when he owned the property. It is a private pump station and not the responsibility of the Sewer Department. A letter to that effect was mailed to Mr. Farrington on October 29, 2019.

Final review/adopt Strategic Plan

A motion was made by Wayne Corse to adopt the Strategic Plan and to do our best to follow it, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.

Review and discuss medical insurance options

Marylee Putnam provided information about MVP insurance for the board to consider. At the last meeting she provided information about Blue Cross Blue Shield insurance. Wayne Wood suggested tabling this until the next meeting. A final decision will need to be made at the November 20th meeting. Board members should review all the information provided prior to that meeting and let Gig know if they have any questions.

Discuss plowing contract with school

The education funding attorneys have agreed that a contract with the school stating that the town will continue to plow the school property in exchange for holding town meeting at the facility is a good idea. They are not in favor of a school user fee and feel it might hurt our court case. The board agreed that Town Attorney Robert Fisher should draw up the contract. Mr. Janovsky would like to read the contract before it is signed, he feels no mention of sidewalks should be in the contract. Mr. Corse noted that the contract should be written to include more use of the school grounds than just town meeting. The school board has a meeting on November 19 at 6pm at the elementary school in Wilmington. Gig will email Sharon Berry, School Board Chair, to let her know that the Selectboard would like to attend.

Approval of Payables Warrant – November 7, 2019

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payables Warrant W2020 dated November 7, 2019, seconded by Scott Reed, all in favor.

Approval of Payroll Warrant – November 7, 2019

A motion was made by Craig Hammer to approve Payroll Warrant W2019 dated November 7, 2019, seconded by Wayne Corse, all in favor.

Approval of Minutes of October 23, 2019

A correction was made to add Phil Edelstein as an attendee of the October 23rd meeting. **A motion was made by Scott Reed to approve the Minutes of October 23, 2019 as corrected, seconded by Craig Hammer, all in favor.**

Other business / Office Administrator – as needed

Resident complaints received: Ms. Aekus informed Gig of a complaint she received about an excavator constantly working on Streeter Hill Road, Gig went to the property on October 29th at approximately 3:30pm and found no one there and the equipment not running. There is a camper on the property with an expired license plate that would now require a zoning permit. Gig sent a letter about the camper, they responded that they will update the registration. There is no noise ordinance in town. State ordinance calls for quiet from dusk to dawn.

Ms. Aekus also informed Gig of a complaint received about dogs constantly barking on Fuller Hill Road. Gig went to the vicinity on October 29th at approximately 3:15pm and heard many dogs barking. Again, there is no noise ordinance in town but the Animal Control Ordinance speaks to dogs barking continuously for 15 minutes or more. Dan Hollister, ACO should investigate, speak to the owners, and report back to the Selectboard.

Other The Eames Village Park parking spaces have been lined and the new 2 hour parking signs have been installed.

Budget worksheets were distributed to Selectboard members. Town departments have received their worksheets and were asked to submit their budget requests by December 1st.

Wilmington, Halifax and Readsboro Selectboards

Introductions were made around the room. Halifax did not attend.

Fiber Optics, formation of CUD Whitingham has met with Matrix Design Group about their proposal to provide fiber optics. Recently about 10 towns met in Wilmington to learn about formation of Communications Union Districts (CUDs). Ms. Sibia is a strong supporter of CUDs. There will be a webinar about formation of CUDs on November 19th from noon-1pm. Omar Smith of Readsboro is not yet sold on the benefits of a CUD, he hasn't seen the advantages yet, unless maybe it is a municipal CUD. Readsboro is moving forward with a pole survey and already received grant funds for it. Laura Sibia noted that Windham Regional Commission (WRC) is working with Carole Monroe of EC Fiber and that they have been awarded federal funds to assist towns in expanding broadband. Sue Westa is the Community Development person at WRC. Scott Reed is afraid that getting the state involved might delay any projects that the towns might start. Wilmington has been working on the issue for some time. They are pursuing two tracks – moving forward alone and the possibility of joining a CUD. They have some fiber now but still need to connect everyone in their community. John Gannon mentioned that a key piece of legislation was recently passed to help towns.

Laura Sibia had sent Jenepher Burnell (Jacksonville Electric Company Trustee) information regarding utility companies being able to borrow and lend funds at 0% interest (the REDLG program). Laura Sibia made a commitment that if for some reason Jacksonville Utility could not provide fiber to the entire town rather than just their customers then she will push legislation to change that.

Rodney Bemis mentioned Chesterfield New Hampshire and an article in the Brattleboro Reformer today. He questioned if that is a route we should look at? Raymond Eilers mentioned he doesn't think that most residents could afford the Matrix offer. Mr. Smith mentioned that each town should have a real plan and understand how any fiber offers might benefit the town, the build-out is very expensive. Mr. Marchegiani mentioned that Mr. Smith has already ready spent hours and years on the task.

Laura Sibilia suggested we might want to hear from Department of Public Service and from Carole Monroe of EC Fiber. They will be in Manchester on Friday night at 6pm or they could be invited here.

Ann Manwaring suggested putting together a small working group to pursue fiber. There are many pieces, meet to discuss how to put those pieces together. Readsboro committee has 3 members total.

The following people were suggested for such a committee:

Whitingham: Phil Edelstein and Wayne Corse

Readsboro: Omar Smith and Raymond Eilers

Wilmington: Ann Manwaring, Gretchen Havreluk and Sarah Fisher

A member of the Jacksonville Electric Company (either Jeneper Burnell or Pam Moore).

Omar Smith suggested adding folks from Halifax and Stamford.

Ann Manwaring organized the first meeting for Wednesday, November 20th at 5pm in the Whitingham Municipal Center dining hall.

The working group should report back to all the boards in mid-January or so. State grants for technical assistance come out in February or March.

State highways John Gannon noted that Halifax reached out to Agency of Transportation in June about Route 112 and they were told that it is not a top 50 road so it won't be repaved for years, it hasn't been paved in 20 years already. Mr. Gannon, as state representative, has received complaints about plowing. He feels that discussing plowing and paving with as many town selectboards that are willing to attend would be beneficial. A letter campaign to the governor's office and to the Windham Regional Commission might help.

Mr. Bemis complained that VTrans is in the habit of picking up the signs on the roadway (i.e local event notices) but they won't pick up a tree limb that is laying on the white line for three weeks.

Ms. Manwaring noted that when the AOT comes down that only the local towns should be at the meeting and not invite the paving companies.

John Gannon will organize a multi town meeting to discuss the roads with state officials.

State representation The 2020 census might result in the loss of the little representation that our southern small towns currently have in the House of Representatives. Redistricting will happen in 2022. Ms. White suggested that each community create groups of people to make sure that every resident is counted. It is very important that every person is counted. Mr. Fitzgerald is very concerned about the loss of representation.

Grant writing the towns offered some experience and advice. Karen Boisvert had attended a 2-day grant writing workshop in Keene and highly recommended it. There was some discussion of the towns banding together to hire a professional grant writer.

Policing Wayne Wood shared Whitingham's recent experience in trying to get police services in town. He noted his gratitude that when there are emergencies in Whitingham the Wilmington Police show up. Readsboro is not very happy with Bennington Sheriffs, they are contracted for 10 hours every other week. Ms. White is a member of Government Operations and heard the issues of the towns around the state, there is difficulties with access and difficulties with money. She is working towards meeting with Windham Country towns that have police forces. This is another instance of the rural towns not being represented or served. The biggest challenge is the lack of qualified candidates. David Marchegiani talked about the area towns forming a group to pool funds together to hire one officer to cover all the towns.

The Wilmington Police Force has 2 police academy graduates coming on soon, bringing their police force up to 5 officers by the holidays, they are looking to hire a 6th officer. The Town Manager suggested we work out something with the Chief, the cost might be higher than Whitingham is anticipating. It would have to be a flexible schedule.

Wayne Wood will meet with the Wilmington Police Chief after the holidays.

The Schools Wilmington will stand behind Whitingham and cheer us on with our education funding lawsuit. Wilmington recently met with the School Board and asked them what their 5 year plan is. Currently Wilmington's school tax is the highest in the state.

Young families interesting in moving to the area will look at our schools, how do we make it better? One place to start is for the Selectboards and School Boards to meet together. Laura Sibilia and John Gannon met with the school about their grading system. Laura Sibilia feels it is critical to maintain our schools in this area. We need a high school in this valley, we need our elementary schools. She would encourage Wilmington and Whitingham to look to our neighbors that have school choice to encourage them to send their children to Twin Valley. The turnover in the supervisory union in the last 2 decades is really harming the situation. What can be done to add more stability? Perhaps by working with a few other towns or looking at the big picture with fresh eyes. If we continue to lose population with the current funding mechanism, we cannot sustain the schools. She is fighting for increasing the weight of rural students in the funding mechanism.

Scott Reed is concerned about the kids that want to go to school in other towns. We have some that can't wait to get out.

Almira Aekus noted that the supervisory union has a lot more work required of them now because of Act 46.

Mr. Marchegiani suggested that a co-op could be created for seasonal workers who do one job in the summer and work at Mt. Snow in the winter, providing year-round medical insurance as a way to encourage families to move to the area.

In closing Sarah Fisher said it's time for the small rural towns to rise up and fight for what we need. Mr. Fitzgerald suggested that this group of Selectboard members should meet every 90 days.

Ms. Sibilia mentioned that there will be a hearing on December 11th about small rural towns, she will send out more information to gather our written testimony for the hearing.

Adjourn Everyone in attendance agreed with Mr. Eilers' suggestion to adjourn.

Mr. Wood adjourned the meeting at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,
~Gig Zboray



Whitingham Selectboard

STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted November 6, 2019

At several meetings in October of 2019 the Whitingham Selectboard discussed and determined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Town of Whitingham. The following summarizes the actions that the Selectboard would like to complete to address each item.

STRENGTHS

Highway Crew / Operation of Transfer Station / Town Employees / Fire & EMS
(tied with 5 votes)

To keep the employees happy the Selectboard would like to provide opportunities for employees to meet informally with the board so they can express any concerns they might have to the board. Usually if there is an issue it comes from lack of communication. Perhaps provide a questionnaire, keep it general. Create a process to have department heads do performance reviews on a regular basis. Create a conduit for communication. Show gratitude to employees. We want to be the preferred employer.

To Do:

- Start on Friday November 1st at noon. Employee luncheon, serve hamburgers, steak, salads from store, soda and water.
- Gig google employee surveys. Discuss survey questions and delivery at the November 20th meeting.
- Discuss how to implement regularly scheduled employee reviews.

Community spirit / Great place to live / Community that cares / Recreational opportunities (tied with 5 votes)

The Selectboard feels community spirit is growing as evidenced by attendance at a recent ice cream social and the number of volunteers attending fire calls. Whitingham is a great place to live because of its convenient location, scenery, freedom and air quality. Whitingham is a community that cares as evidenced by the number of people who offer support in tragic situations and the number of volunteers willing to serve. Whitingham has great recreational opportunities including the Harriman Reservoir, hunting, snowmobiling/access to VAST trails, hiking, & fishing.

The Selectboard would like to create a town get-together similar to Rutland's monthly "Project Vision". This would not be a political event, but an opportunity to hear from our

residents and business owners. It could be a monthly ice cream social type of event with a topic for each event such as broadband, where is Whitingham going, how can we improve the Municipal Center, etc.

To Do:

- Schedule the first event, decide on a topic. (Put on November 20th agenda)
- Review pros and cons after first event to make future events better.

Municipal Center building / Town Hill (tied with 5 votes)

The Whitingham Municipal Center and Town Hill Common are great assets. We need to continue to maintain these assets. Does the Municipal Center need fans, lighting, sound system, projector, tables, chairs? Create a Municipal Center Committee to make this asset more valuable. Update rules for Town Hill and get a new sign.

To Do:

- Seek volunteers for a Municipal Center Committee. Publish info in January 2020 newsletter, in 2019 Town Report.
- Continue to support and communicate with Town Hill Committee.

WEAKNESSES

Sewer plant needs/condition (tied with 4 votes)

Although sewer services are technically an asset, the condition of the sewer plants is a current weakness. We need to continue working with engineers and the state to move this important project forward. Seek out grants to help reduce cost of upgrades to the sewer users.

To Do:

- Discuss with engineers if they will seek grants or if it is a town responsibility. Perhaps hire a grant writer. This would coincide with the next step of the sewer project.
- Meet with sewer plant operator on a bi-monthly basis to hear of any concerns, repairs, etc. (meet with him again in December).

School system – staff turnover, school board, administration (tied with 4 votes)

There are weaknesses in the school system including staff turnover, the school board and the administration. We should meet with the school board to determine if the Selectboard can help in any way. We need to create a contract to say the Town will

continue to plow the school property in exchange for holding Town Meeting at the school.

To Do:

- Schedule a meeting with the school board
- Prepare contract. The lawsuit attorneys have responded that they are OK with a contract for plowing, they suggested that Bob Fisher should prepare the contract. (On November 6th agenda to discuss)

Junk – ability to get it cleaned up (tied with 4 votes)

There are several private properties in town with large accumulations of junk visible from the roadway. In the past it has been found that cleaning up these properties is difficult and can be very costly to the town. Can junk fines be tied into property taxes somehow?

To Do:

- Research successful junk ordinances in other towns.
- Seminar “Ordinance Enforcement” is being offered by VLCT on December 4, 2019

Parking – Village (3 votes)

The yellow lines that the state painted seem to make parking even more difficult in Jacksonville Village. If a vehicle is parked in front of the store the car passing must cross the yellow line. New signs have been ordered to indicate the new parking rules of 2-hour parking between 7am and 8pm, and parking lot lines will be painted before winter.

To Do:

- Find out about parking at corner of Route 100 and Gates Pond Road, what is the state right of way? (asked Stan on 10.23.19)
- Make sure parking area is empty when the line painting is scheduled (11/2/19)
- Install new signs when the lines are painted.
- Write letter to VTrans to complain about new yellow lines (Stan said he will talk to the state)

OPPORTUNITIES

Networking with other towns (law enforcement, services, EDG) (tied with 5 votes)

The Selectboard would like to form some sort of coalition with surrounding towns to work together to address common issues.

To Do:

- Meet with surrounding towns to discuss commonalities. (Wilmington and Readsboro will attend November 6th Selectboard meeting. Halifax has been invited.)
- Follow up as needed based on meeting results.

Enhance Connectivity – population, jobs, schools (tied with 5 votes)

Connectivity, cellular and internet, is vital to allow our citizens to work from home, to use e-medical services, to complete school work, etc.

To Do:

- The second VTel cell tower is currently being built and should be online by years end. Continue to inform the public of this opportunity.
- EDG hosted Matrix Fiber Optics to learn about their proposal to the town. Discuss fiber optics with neighboring towns on November 6 and follow up as the results of that meeting require.
- Continue to pursue opportunities that enhance connectivity services for our residents.

Grants/funding (4 votes)

Grant funding is vital to enable the town to complete expensive projects.

To Do:

- Pursue grant opportunities as they become available.
- Look into hiring a grant writer. Who is Readsboro using?

Public Engagement (meetings, Town Report, Committees, Reports) (4 votes)

Engaging the public in important decisions is vital to running the town smoothly. How do we get people to read the annual Town Report and newsletters, to attend meetings, to work on committees, etc.?

To Do:

- As discussed above, host town get-togethers on a regular basis.

THREATS

State of Vermont – Highways, education, state support to Town of Whitingham/funding (5 votes)

In discussions one of the greatest threats to the wellbeing of the Town of Whitingham was mentioned to be the State of Vermont. They push unfunded mandates, do not maintain the state roads (reactive instead of proactive), force school consolidation, force high education tax, make Act 250 difficult for small business owners to navigate, etc.

To Do:

- Continue to support the towns education funding lawsuit
- Discuss state highways with other towns (scheduled for November 6)
- Follow through after November 6 meeting

Lack of industry/jobs Losing existing businesses (4 votes)

A lack of available jobs in the area is a threat to the population of Whitingham. The broadband initiative might help. Recent store committee was a good example of how to support a business.

To Do:

- Encourage the EDG to continue to support our local businesses.
- Continue to review broadband opportunities as they become available.
- Open dialog with businesses that may be considering moving out of town

Losing the school (3 votes)

Losing the school, the largest employer in town, would be detrimental. Not only for the employees but also for the students who would then be forced to travel far. It is possible that many families with school age children would move out of town. Property values would decrease.

To Do:

- Continue to support the education funding lawsuit.
- Meet with the School Board to work together (to be scheduled)
- Meet with Wilmington Selectboard to discuss this (scheduled for November 6)
- Follow through with what is learned at meetings.

OVERALL TO DO:

- Follow through
- Update this plan on a regular basis
- Annually update of this plan