

Minutes of the Waterbury Selectboard
Monday, March 31, 2025 | 7:00 p.m.
28 N. Main St. and via Zoom

Attendance: Alyssa Johnson, Tori Taravella, Tom Leitz, Roger Clapp, Kane Sweeney, Mike Bard, Cheryl Casey

Public attendance: ORCA Media, Scott Culver, Amanda McKay, Lisa Walton, Lisa Scagliotti, Sandy Sabin, Amy Marshall-Carney, Bill Shepeluk, John Ritter, Kelly Lake, Troy Lake, Al Lewis, Sandy Lewis, Sue Johansen, Marty Johansen, Evan Karl Hoffman,

Zoom attendance: Bob Hammerl, ORCA Media, Valerie Rogers, Marcy Blauvelt, Josh Lincoln, Pegeen Mulhern, Billy Vigdor, Martha Staskus, Mallory _____, Dani Kehlmann, Evan Karl Hoffman, Alyssa Johnson, John Zimmerman, Curtis _____, Tiffany Bellows

CALL TO ORDER by A. Johnson at 7:03 p.m.

Agenda

Motion by K. Sweeney to approve agenda as written, seconded by T. Taravella.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Consent agenda

Motion by M. Bard to approve the consent agenda as presented; seconded by T. Taravella.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Public comment

C. Viens attended the education reform discussion on March 24. He conveyed what he learned and too away from the discussion:

- After asking how many people in that meeting were or had been in the education industry, at least over half of the approximately 100 people in attendance raised their hand; he then asked how many of them had realistic expectations for retiring and staying in VT and about 10 people raised their hand.
- Secy of Education was there and tried to explain the broad concept of the administration's new education proposal.
- His takeaway was that the admin doesn't have any real solutions. He is concerned about potential cuts to state spending but also how property taxes will be recalculated.

K. Lake inquired why T. Leitz's name and contact information wasn't included on the selectboard page on the town website. A. Johnson clarified that he is a paid staff member and where his information can be found on the site.

M. Bard gave congratulations to Jack Donovan who just retired from WDEV, lauding everything he has done for the community, especially letting people know what's happening during a flood. Mr. Donovan will be missed.

A. Johnson gave two additional announcements:

- A Planning Commission visioning session is scheduled for Wed. Apr. 2 at Grange Hall at 6pm
- Selectboard meetings will now begin at 6:30 p.m., effective April 7. Meetings will take place on the first, third, and fifth (when occurring) Mondays of the month.

Blush Hill Road and Route 100 intersection

T. Leitz summarized takeaways from a 2017 feasibility study (included in meeting docs) about building sidewalks from the intersection of Route 100 and Stowe St. north to the stoplight at Shaw's on Route 100.

- Cost at the time was prohibitive; it could now easily be a million-dollar project.
- There are complex engineering challenges to putting sidewalks in this area due to the topography, making for a higher price tag.
- An additional challenge comes from the fact that the Town does not own Route 100.
- The town does have about \$214k in grant funds available for an engineering study that can refresh the numbers from the last time the study was conducted, but any project undertaken here is likely well into seven figures, with both engineering and maintenance challenges. For example, sidewalks heading up Blush Hill could not be plowed by sidewalk plows because it's too steep.
- Stowe Street bridge will be out the entire summer to do work - more information will be given at a May 5 meeting by the state - but there will be sidewalks on the bridge.

Discussion:

Sue J. said she finds the intersection terrifying just to drive, never mind to walk, with the following specific concerns:

- The timing of the light is awkward and dangerous as people are trying to turn.
- The intersection is also misaligned so people waiting to turn left are always in the way.
- Coming across the intersection, drivers also don't give the right-of-way as they are supposed to. It's only a matter of time until a tragic accident happens there. Anything that can be done to make it better would be very helpful.

A. Lewis, a Perry Hill resident, provided some history about addressing the intersection and offered a recommendation for how to re-stripe the intersection for increased vehicular safety.

- Previously, the state opted to refresh the pre-existing striping instead of re-striping to give better guidance to drivers coming through the intersection. At least the bridge repair will include adding a turning lane.
- He brought a sketch of the intersection and images from Google Earth to show the challenges with traffic flow and how clearly marked lanes might alleviate some of the problems. He called for the Agency of Transportation to do the re-striping.

A. McKay asked A. Lewis if his proposal takes into account pedestrian and bicycle use. He replied yes and showed on his sketch where the space would be made.

B. Shepeluk said the 2017 study was probably the third one done since the 1980s and the cost for sidewalks has always been prohibitive. He suggested that adjustments to the light times and cycles might alleviate some of the traffic dangers.

- Make the red lights just a little bit longer
- Stagger the green lights on the Stowe and Blush Hill sides.

- For the left-hand turns, the red arrow turns yellow and blinks; it rarely goes green or stays green for more than a few seconds. He recommended doing away with the yellow light option and just using either green or red.
- There is also merit to re-striping, but adjusting the lights could go a long way.

A. Johnson said the selectboard hopes to have more clarity on the issue for the next meeting on April 7.

Conservation Commission update

A. Marshall-Carney presented slides (included in meeting docs) that covered the commission's 2023-2024 priorities; the commission's mission statement, which was deemed too broad in scope to be realistic; 2024 key accomplishments, which are also included in the town report; 2025 objectives and goals; and challenges and opportunities. She also summarized the specific tactical efforts the commission would undertake in April and May.

Discussion:

M. Bard asked if the commission had identified a replacement for the LEAP Energy Fair as an event for outreach.

- A. Marshall-Carney said the commission is brainstorming some community event ideas, but nothing that can come together in a short period of time for this year.

T. Leitz asked what a "natural resources inventory" entailed.

- A. Marshall-Carney explained that it identifies site-level specifics, including species and habitat.
- Wetlands, for example, are not mapped at all, but they have a direct correlation to what happens downstream.

T. Leitz asked if there had been any conversations with land trusts.

- A. Marshall-Carney has had conversations with Waterbury Land Initiative, which now owns the Russell property on Blush Hill. Unlike in Stowe, WLI does not have a direct relationship with the town conservation commission, which might be something to explore further.
- B. Shepeluk commented that it would be worthwhile for the commission to have a conversation with the town about properties that are good candidates for being put into a trust. Regarding the Russell property, it could have been used for housing but the owner wanted it in trust. A lot of our land area is state forest, so he's not sure how much more we have to preserve.

R. Clapp mentioned that Revitalizing Waterbury is hosting a community volunteer fair on May 17, Brookside Primary School, 1pm - 3pm, if the commission would like to participate in order to do volunteer outreach.

A. Johnson asked what coordination with the selectboard now looks like for the commission.

- A. Marshall-Carney asked to come report once per quarter.
- The commission will be connecting with the planning commission on the new town plan and the results of their natural resources inventory, and this is where decision-making using the data will need to happen.

K. Sweeney asked if any of the proposed mapping would relate to disaster preparedness.

- A. Marshall-Carney answered that details about the landscape could inform how to interact with the landscape. In terms of Thatcher Brook, the commission has water sample results from the Friends of the Winooski and now they need to understand what those samples are indicating and the next steps. With a multitude of inputs, the commission is feeling very well informed.

M. Staskus pointed everyone to the planning commission's process as described on the town website.

State Police update

A representative could not attend, so this item has been tabled.

Event permit approvals

WATA Gravel Grinder event permit - D. Potter, president of WATA, presented the proposal and safety plan (included in meeting docs) to request event approval for the 17th annual Gravel Grinder in Pilgrim Park. He reported that the event usually draws between 300-400 riders for the day.

Discussion:

K. Sweeney expressed concerns about cars following the riders. D. Potter said instructions to the riders emphasize riding in single file. WATA will also be posting large signs to caution drivers.

R. Clapp asked how local residents will be notified to expect riders. D. Potter said some signage will be posted at several points along the route and then specific route markers go out the day before the event. Social media posts also keep people updated.

M. Bard thanked WATA for their presence in the community.

Motion by R. Clapp to approve the event; seconded by T. Taravella.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Clyde Whittemore Little League Opening Day Parade event permit - S. Culver submitted the parade route and safety plan using a series of Google Maps screenshots.

- The parade will take place on Saturday May 10 at noon.
- The route is identical to prior years, starting at Dac Rowe and traveling south on Main St to Park Row and then right into the state complex parking lot.
- Monitors in vests, backer trucks, and a state police escort will oversee safety during the half-mile walk; each side street is blocked off by a volunteer until the parade crosses. There will also be more volunteers walking in front to help watch for cars coming out of driveways. Rain or shine.

Motion by K. Sweeney to approve the permit; seconded by T. Taravella

Discussion:

C. Viens asked how many teams are fielded with 120 kids signed up.

- S. Culver answered about 20 teams, both softball and baseball. The league has been growing the last few years.

M. Bard asked if the Waterbury team has ever been in the state championship game.

- S. Culver recalled one time quite a while ago. But he just wants these kinds to learn some skills, teamwork, and sportsmanship while having some fun.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Flood resilience updates, including Randall Meadow

T. Leitz showed the Randall Meadow 48-acre parcel on the AxisGIS map and summarized the status of the property transfer process.

- The House Committee on Corrections and Institutions took testimony from T. Leitz and other stakeholders, eventually signalling they are comfortable transferring the property to the town and have agreed to put the proposal in the Capital Budget bill.
- The committee was amenable to the transfer instead of selling the parcel for fair market value because it has no development potential, plus any flood resilience work also benefits the state complex.

- Unfortunately, there isn't a viable FEMA project because the farmer has tilled the field, making it impossible to determine "before" and "after" for flood damage repair.
- A hydrologist said if we can regrade the field and move the mound in the center to fill in some of the swales on Randall, we will get anything from several inches to a foot of flood relief for the entire area along S. Main St.
- Public Works will have some basic environmental soil sampling done, as well as some core samples to understand what is underneath in case there is useful material.
- The project to move about 15 acres is still a good idea but let's not forget that the project will create a *lot* of fill that needs to go somewhere.
- If a future flood leaves new deposits, we can then work with FEMA.
- Central VT Regional Planning Commission is in charge of phosphorus reduction goals for the region, and a fair amount comes from regional agriculture; they say they can reach their goals just with the Randall Meadow project because that is definitely a place where phosphorus-laden silt has been deposited. This opens more extensive funding opportunities.
- Timeline - we'll know by the end of the legislative session on June 30. And then the Dept. of Buildings and General Services needs to do their studies.
- He has also been working with an upper-level natural resources planning class at UVM. They have been doing their research and developing proposals for what to do with that parcel. They would like to come present to the selectboard at the end of April/early May on their project.
- We have been searching for a Natural Disaster Preparedness Coordinator, or "fire chief for floods," to ensure we have the appropriate equipment and trained volunteers to respond as needed. He is finalizing an agreement with Dani Kehlmann to take that position.
- We now have a couple thousand people enrolled in the TextMyGov system, which is good for pushing critical messages out to the community.

Discussion:

R. Clapp asked if the lease was renewed with the farmer.

- T. Leitz said the current lease runs until the end of 2026, and the farmer would be given appropriate notice, as with any lease. The farmer might not lose this acreage in the short term; additionally, there is EFUD land a little farther south, 17 acres, that he might be interested in leasing instead.

M. Bard asked about the potential for heavy metals and other hazardous materials.

- T. Leitz said they don't know yet, but studies will be done to determine that information before the town takes ownership.

A. Lewis commended the speakers at the committee hearing for representing Waterbury. He also noted that the smokestack on the state complex loop stands out like a sore thumb and he hoped something would be done about that.

L. Scagliotti asked if an archaeological study will also be done.

- T. Leitz confirmed it would.

Finalize and readopt municipal ethics and conflict of interest policies

[These two policies have been combined in one document and are included in meeting docs.]

T. Taravella reviewed both documents and walked the selectboard through the line edits.

- A lot of content in the state policy makes ours more solid and disclosure more necessary. Whenever the state updates policy, it is important to update our own.

- A future consideration is that we require municipal officers to disclose their affiliations on an annual basis and available to the public. T. Leitz recommended that selectboard members remind each other of potential conflicts when they arise during meetings.

R. Clapp asked how extensive the town policy is with regards to connections to relatives.

- T. Taravella reviewed the list in the town policy, which is more extensive than what the state gives. Her recommendation is, when in doubt, disclose.

T. Leitz asked for a more precise definition of “recusal,” whether it refers to the vote, or to the entire discussion. The policy says recusal “from the matter.”

- T. Taravella replied that the language in that section as a whole points to recusal from both.

Motion from T. Taravella to adopt municipal ethics and conflict of interest policies; seconded by M. Bard.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Confirm locations to post public notices

A. Johnson listed the physical locations of where notices have been posted: Waterbury Post Office, Waterbury Center Post Office, Town Offices.

T. Leitz would like to find alternatives for the post offices at some point in the future, such as the kiosk in Rusty Parker, because sometimes even the lobbies aren’t open over the weekend.

Motion from K. Sweeney to reaffirm existing locations for public posting; seconded by R. Clapp

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Review openings for municipal Boards & Commissions, process for appointments, and Selectboard liaison roles

A. Johnson summarized:

- There are 5 school board applicants to review at the April 7 meeting.
- There are pending vacancies on town boards and commissions, but some of those might be a matter of folks reupping for another term as opposed to needing to find someone new.
- The process of filling those vacancies includes asking people if they want to serve again and posting public notices to solicit interested parties.

T. Leitz will be the contact and will post the application form on the website and FPF. M. Bard added that the notice should be given to the Waterbury Roundabout as well.

A. Johnson recommended that, per the Town Clerk’s recommendation, the selectboard review school board candidates on April 7 and all other board/commission candidates at the following meeting, April 21.

Discussion:

A. Marshall-Carney said a majority of the conservation commission members plan to stay and would like clarification on the process.

- A. Johnson said they will receive an email to confirm their decision and if they are staying, they will be asked to fill out an application as a formality.

R. Clapp suggested we set the deadline for applications as April 18, so we can decide them at the April 21 meeting. Selectboard members all agreed.

A. Johnson confirmed the remaining selectboard liaison roles will have a full list of assignments available for the April 7 meeting.

- R. Clapp drafted the description: “The role of the selectboard liaison is to advise and inform committees and commissions on municipal policy and intent as well as update the selectboard on committee progress and arrange for presentations.”

R. Clapp said his preference is that the school board members should be elected by the voters directly, so this situation isn’t ideal. He inquired why, for the second year in a row, we didn’t have enough candidates running and now we have 5 for two seats.

- T. Taravella said two of the candidates are former members that have been roped back in. Certainly, having the voters elect these members is preferable.

C. Viens asked if it would be useful to change the format of school board meetings in order to get more public engagement in person; he suggested two in-person locations (Harwood and somewhere in Waterbury) plus online.

- T. Taravella said that from her experience, having the board members together in one room is instrumental. For the budget, members make every effort they can to get out into the community to engage people. Any community member can always attend remotely if they can’t get to Harwood in-person.

Duxbury and Moretown Fire Protection contracts

T. Leitz reported that the Moretown contract is a fairly simple matter since it has been based on an inflationary model each year. However, the Duxbury contract has a change that is substantial over the long term.

- The old agreement calculated the cost using the two towns’ grand lists; Waterbury covered a certain percentage of their grand list. What has been happening is our grand list is growing faster than Duxbury’s, so the percentage they pay us goes down incrementally each year. Over a decade, that becomes a significant amount of money.
- He spoke with Duxbury selectboard chair (at the time) Dick Charland about keeping the exact same dollar amount for this year, and in the future, tying the contract amount to our tax rate. Charland agreed it made sense and was fair.

Discussion:

C. Viens asked for elaboration on how debt payment on the firetruck has affected the contract.

- T. Leitz said figuring out the contract amount with the debt unexpectedly paid off by the local option tax money would raise complications. They will remain responsible for part of the maintenance costs, about 12.5%. The numbers don’t change greatly, but the methodology has changed to avoid the long-term drawbacks.

M. Bard asked about pushback from either town, and T. Leitz said he hasn’t received any.

Motion to approve the Moretown and Duxbury Fire Protection contracts by T. Taravella; seconded by K. Sweene .

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Municipal communications position

A. Johnson set context by explaining this topic as one calling for general conversation about municipal communications and outreach.

T. Leitz explained his idea for improving how the town communicates with the community.

- He explained that he has been having a number of internal conversations about improving town communication with the public.

- His proposal at this time is to have a monthly municipal newsletter that aggregates the disparate threads of information and gets that information out to the public. Having some dedicated help on this task would be extraordinarily useful. This person would talk with committee chairs and department heads each month to provide clear information about all of the things going on.
- This board has heard a number of times lately that communication has been our challenge.

A. Johnson asked about the stipend amount. T. Leitz responded with \$500 per issue, published on a monthly basis.

Motion from R. Clapp to authorize the new position as described; seconded by T. Taravella.

Discussion:

M. Bard asked how that stipend relates or compares to other positions we've been hiring. He's noticing some creep of positions.

- T. Leitz said this role is an addition to what had been budgeted for other stipend positions. He increasingly feels like there is a call for someone to address various buckets of work that are hard for him to get to, and communication is part of that.

K. Sweeney asked how \$500f per month was determined. T. Leitz said that amount was proposed in negotiation with the individual he has in mind to do the work.

V. Rogers said every board and committee can send out their own meeting minutes, so she's not sure why we need to pay anyone to do this.

- A. Johnson responded that it takes an enormous amount of time and energy for the volunteers to pull together all of the information.
- T. Leitz agreed V. Rogers raised an important point. What he has heard from people we see regularly at selectboard meetings is that it is really hard to keep up. It's not about meeting minutes but synthesizing information and highlighting the most meaningful.

S. Sabin asked if the person has been hired or if the position will be advertised.

B. Shepeluk recounted how he was asked at one time by the selectboard to write a town manager's report.

- He ultimately came back to them saying he's spending 10 hours per week trying to write this report but it's not a great use of his time.
- Minutes are one thing, but getting information to the community about things going on is another issue altogether.
- There are plenty of reasons why the selectboard should consider supporting something like this. There aren't any staff members at present that have enough time to fill this gap.

B. Vigdor said that both in the community survey and the visioning sessions conducted by the Planning Commission, lack of communication comes up routinely.

- Minutes aren't very user-friendly, and the more communication options we have, the better.
- We should explore different models for this position, which sounds like it will become entrenched.

R. Clapp agrees it is a challenge to keep everyone informed about everything going on.

- He thinks this is a worthy investment. It will help resolve some of the issues about community engagement and communication.

M. Bard said a lot of people on a lot of committees are giving a lot of their time, and he sees this as a bit of a creep on expenses.

- Maybe there is a volunteer in the community who would donate their time to do this.
- It's very important to get the word out, but he would prefer it be done in a different way.

A. Johnson said communication is really needed and having paid staff capacity is important for consistency and accountability.

K. Sweeney admitted he's nervous that they are seeing this agenda item for the first time and yet someone is already in mind. He would feel better approving the creation of the position if we were to interview multiple candidates.

Lisa Walton said \$6,000 per year is a lot and maybe once/quarter would be adequate.

- Newsletters do take a lot of time but we also have WDEV, so what if once per quarter we utilize that communication resource instead.

Motion to amend the motion to include advertising the position by K. Sweeney; addition from M. Bard to avoid mentioning the stipend amount.

R. Clapp was amenable to adjusting the motion.

Motion by T. Taravella to authorize the municipal manager to create the communications position for up to \$500 per month and advertise the position; seconded by R. Clapp.

Additional discussion:

C. Viens said \$500 is a good place to start, but we should be aware of creeping bureaucracy.

T. Leitz said we have gaps that can be improved.

- One of the other big challenges he faces is that Steve Lotspiech was a very prolific grant writer, and it has been a struggle to keep up with some of the grants.
- Having the help he has on the flood side gets him some progress but there are opportunities out there that we're losing out on.

M. Bard said it is far more important to have the municipal manager chasing after grants, and you never know who is going to come out of the woodwork to volunteer for such things. T. Leitz's time isn't well spent doing the communication tasks.

S. Sabin asked about the format for the newsletter. T. Leitz said it would primarily be distributed electronically.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Selectboard and manager informational updates

A. Johnson repeated the announcement for the Planning Commission visioning session on Wednesday, April 2, at 6:00 p.m. at the Grange.

K. Sweeney reported that the Natural Disaster Preparedness Committee is very excited to work with the new coordinator.

R. Clapp said a group of business owners in the Bidwell Lane area will be coming together for a conversation about adding sidewalks to the block.

T. Leitz:

- recapped a meeting about flood grant funding, learning there is a large chunk of cash from the state designated for Washington County: a community development block grant for flood relief and it is specifically for housing-related projects. More information to come.
- reported that two mature trees in downtown were identified with emerald ash borer.
 - The power company took down one; we will have to take down the other some time this year.
 - The assumption is that it will spread; inoculations are effective but also expensive and have to be done every other year. The other option is to take down the trees as they get infected.

- M. Bard asked how many ash trees we have in the community. T. Leitz said he can pull up the information for a future meeting.
- T. Taravella said the Tree Board will be meeting on Friday April 18 to discuss the matter.

T. Lietz has been appointed to the board of the VLCT. The position comes with a stipend of \$150 per meeting; in his contract for both the town and EFUD, he needs selectboard permission to pursue outside employment. He will donate that \$150 back to the town to go toward the newsletter position.

- B. Shepeluk encouraged the selectboard to allow T. Leitz to keep that stipend. Having Tom on that board is a benefit to the community.
- T. Leitz responded that he noticed a real separation in terms of pay because of covid and by virtue of that timing, he has benefited in his salary. Giving the stipend back is appropriate.

Next meeting agenda, April 7 at 6:30 p.m.

School board candidate interviews

Housing Task Force proposal for use of the housing trust fund

Municipal government goals for new town plan.

Event approvals

VSP if possible

Motion by K. Sweeney to that find that premature public knowledge of contracts would place the town at a disadvantage; seconded by R. Clapp.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Motion by K. Sweeney to find that premature public knowledge of attorney-client communications would place the town at a disadvantage; seconded by T. Taravella.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

Motion by K. Sweeney to move to executive session; seconded by T. Taravella.

No further discussion; **motion approved unanimously.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Selectboard entered executive session at 9:55 p.m.