

Minutes of the Waterbury Selectboard
Monday, April 7, 2025 | 6:30 p.m.
28 N. Main St. and via Zoom

Attendance: Tom Leitz, Kane Sweeney, Cheryl Casey, Mike Bard, Alyssa Johnson

Public attendance: Chris Viens, P. Howard “Skip” Flanders, Elizabeth Brown, Bill Shepeluk, Lisa Walton, Kelly Lake, Tom Gloor, Lisa Scagliotti, Billy Vigdor, Mike Merchant, Brooks Fortune, Pamela Eaton, Dan Roscioli, Valerie Rogers, ORCA Media

Zoom attendance: Tori Taravella, Marni Martens, ORCA Media, Amy Marshall-Carney, DeAnna, Joe Camaratta, Owen Sette-Ducati, Anne Imhoff, Nate Dubrule, Alyssa Johnson, 231-590-4436

CALL TO ORDER by K. Sweeney at 6:31 p.m.

Agenda

Motion by M. Bard to approve the agenda as presented, 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

L. Walton reminded the selectboard that they agreed in February that members of the public would have 5 minutes to speak instead of 3 minutes. A. Johnson confirmed that was correct.

T. Gloor cautioned the town to be fiscally conservative in the coming months because of the “unknown unknowns” of grants, reappraisals, and union negotiations. He also suggested that the 3-year plan that has been parked on the agenda for a while should now be addressed, especially in terms of the budget.

School Board Candidate interviews

A. Johnson said that the preference would be for school board members to be elected by the public. Absent candidates on the ballot, the selectboard is now doing interviews and will appoint members.

Candidate #1: Brooks Fortune

B. Fortune introduced himself and explained he applied for the position as a civic duty since no one else stepped up on the ballot.

- He has one child at Brookside, and the other will enroll in Brookside in a year.
- Decisions made now will affect his children in the future, so he has a vested interest in school board work.
- He is valued for strategy and judgment in his profession
- He is a property owner in Waterbury and pays taxes.

Questions from the selectboard:

T. Taravella asked what he hopes to bring to and gain from serving on the school board.

- B. Fortune responded he hopes to bring a sense of collegiality and respect, and a better understanding of how the school board works to benefit children, as well as how it could do better to benefit children in the future.

K. Sweeney why he didn't run on the ballot in the first place.

- B. Fortune replied that he hadn't really taken an interest until he saw no one wanted to do it. He was struck by the importance of having someone step up.

M. Bard asked how he felt about Gov. Scott's proposal to realign the school districts and the future of education in Vermont.

- B. Fortune reviewed the Governor's proposal but can't tell how it will fulfill its promises. In general, he favors local control of most things. To the extent that the governor and Secretary Saunders can demonstrate this is the proposal that will improve education and is the proposal the state needs, he finds it promising. But it's currently hard to ascertain whether it's a good idea or a bad idea without concrete plans.

R. Clapp inquired as to his availability and commitment to attend all board meetings.

- B. Fortune replied that he discussed this decision with his family and they have all agreed to support him in this commitment.

Candidate #2: Pamela Eaton

P. Eaton introduced herself as a resident of Waterbury with a son in second grade Brookside.

- She has been interested for a while in serving on the school board, but she didn't run because she felt intimidated by the process of putting her name on the ballot. However, she similarly came to the conclusion that it was important to step up when no one ran. She will run on the ballot next year if appointed.
- She described how she and her husband moved to Waterbury because they felt good about the quality of education. When the pandemic hit, and their son reached school-age at the same time, they considered the challenges students were having and decided to enroll him in a private school. With students back in person full-time, they enrolled him at Brookside.
- Her greatest concern is the lack of community buy-in about what our schools need. She would like to engage with the community as a school board member to increase buy-in.
- Part of her profession is to talk to people and help them understand often complex and dense policies that come down from state and federal agencies.

Questions from the selectboard:

K. Sweeney asked P. Eaton her profession—she is an attorney.

M. Bard asked how she felt about the consolidation of districts and how Harwood Union can best work within that framework.

- P. Eaton said it is hard to know what the new district model would exactly look like because of the lack of concrete details. There are some promising comments coming out, but it's not yet clear how it all looks in reality. Seeing more details will give her more data to analyze and come to conclusions about how the consolidation will impact the district. Overall she is neutral if not generally optimistic.

M. Bard followed up inquiring about her position on possible school closures.

- P. Eaton said there are pros and cons to the many options currently on the table. These need to be narrowed to better assess their respective implications

T. Taravella asked what strengths she would bring to the position and what she hopes to accomplish as a member of the school board.

- P. Eaton responded that her strength is being able to process a lot of information and listen to people to then share the information clearly to the community and to the rest of the school board. She hopes to accomplish stronger community buy-in.

R. Clapp asked about her availability to serve and her commitment to attend meetings.

- P. Eaton replied that she just rotated off another board, so her capacity has opened up; additionally, her family is supportive of her attending the meetings.

K. Sweeney asked her to elaborate on the struggles she saw in Waterbury students that led to her to enroll her son in private school for remote learning during the pandemic.

- P. Eaton said the constant transition between in-person and remote days seemed to be one of the significant challenges for kids. The other challenge that concerned her was the level of rigor during remote days. She perceived an educational gap during that time frame, but feels it has since improved.

Candidate #3: Elizabeth Brown

E. Brown introduced herself and explained that she is hoping to rejoin the board after stepping down this past year. She had expected a very full schedule with little extra time for that commitment; however, it became clear that continuing to see projects through for her current clients while also serving part-time as chief-of-staff for the Lt. Governor, was not tenable.

- Since she wound up not taking the chief-of-staff position, she has the capacity to commit to meetings; additionally, she brings experience and wouldn't need time to get up to speed. given the learning curve.
- The school board has improved communication and made progress on identifying near-, mid-, and long-term cost savings.
- She wants to "get under the hood" on specific metrics and objectives to assess how well the district is meeting its mission
- In her view, we still need clarity on cost drivers. Our district is quite high and we're going to have to get specific about which line items we can work on. The board will also need to get creative about ways to get our expenses down to mid-range.
- She advocated for using SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) so that we can identify concrete action items and measures of success.
- She would like to go into the fall spending less time focusing on cuts and more time strategizing for the future.
- Vermont provides a good education because of great teachers, not top spending. There are creative solutions out there to improve our outcomes, strive for equity, and lower our costs.

Questions from the selectboard:

M. Bard asked about school consolidation and closing some smaller schools.

- E. Brown responded that she is in favor of district consolidation, specifically doing it around the tech centers. Those centers are an important asset for the state.
- She doesn't think there is any other option, arguing that money has been used as a proxy for equity, but equity has clearly not been achieved with that money.

T. Taravella asked how she would address building and maintenance costs as significant budget items.

- E. Brown said that facilities can be looked at more creatively to rethink how the spaces are used for multiple functions.

R. Clapp asked about how she would ensure the retention of high quality teachers

- E. Brown noted that teachers are leaving because they are scared and they have families they have to provide for. But the school board is in a really difficult position until we have a plan from the state. One aspect of that plan is to equalize some of the pay so that teachers don't leave for richer districts.

K. Sweeney asked about how her involvement in state-level politics might interfere with her objectives for the school board. E. Brown stated not at all.

Candidate #4: Dan Roscioli

D. Roscioli introduced himself as a resident of Waterbury with four kids, aged 9 to 19. He just finished serving a one-year term on the school board.

- He was a member of the board's finance committee, and attended all meetings except at the very end of the year when his son was sick. His son's brief hospital stay at the time led to him missing out on collecting signatures to run on the ballot. However, all medical issues are cleared up and he is back to full capacity, ready to serve again.
- The last year has been a whirlwind getting up to speed on the school board process and the budget. He thought the board did a pretty remarkable job in going from budget crisis last year to passing a budget with flying colors this year.
- Over the last two budgets, the FTE count has dropped by about 50 people, which is significant in a small community; further cuts will really cause us to start feeling the pain.
- Other expenses have been reduced without the students feeling much, but the next year will be more difficult. We need to get out of the reactionary mode the board has been stuck in for the last few years.
- He is not a proponent of the governor's plan, finding it too extreme, but admits consolidation is most likely in our future. There aren't any other plans on offer to cut costs.
- For the next couple of years, the major challenge will be to digest all of the information coming down from the state into our own system and be prepared to have control over what we want to do. The goal is not to be as much at the mercy of the state's plans.

D. Roscioli asked the selectboard what they see as priorities for the next year.

- For M. Bard, it was school consolidation. He said that good quality education is an issue everyone can rally around, but can we continue to have the number of schools we have? School board members will need to be fiscally responsible and treat schools like a business, running—and perhaps closing—them responsibly.
- K. Sweeney agreed about consolidation but doesn't support the governor's plan for doing so.
 - D. Roscioli said it's worth noting that Waterbury and Duxbury did consolidate voluntarily at one point, so we're capable of sorting out the problem in a responsible way.
- R. Clapp said he's looking to feel complete trust in the board members—trust that they will give their all to solving the considerable problems. He asked D. Roscioli to confirm he is in a position to commit the time. The answer was yes.
- T. Taravella acknowledged that D. Roscioli had done some instrumental work on the finance committee and she hopes the committee will stay focused on that work. It would also be nice to have our reps come to the selectboard from time to time to talk about their process and big discussions at the moment.

K. Sweeney asked what he thought was the school board's greatest success last year.

- D. Roscioli replied that in the end, a summation of small victories that led to the budget that passed by a wide margin was the big success.

Discussion:

K. Lake asked the members of the select board about their respective levels of education and where they went to college, if applicable.

- M. Bard: Degree in agricultural and environmental education from University of Vermont; also had a career in finance.
- K. Sweeney: Attended a vocational school and left with two certifications; grew up in a family of teachers and younger sister is a teacher.
- R. Clapp: M.A. in teaching from UVM and B.A. in psychology.
- T. Taravella: JD from the University of Mississippi; passed the bar in several states.
- A. Johnson: Degree in environmental science from UVM; attended K-12 public schools in MA.

V. Rogers asked why the selectboard doesn't have standard questions for the applicants.

- A. Johnson acknowledged a standard interview protocol has never been used, even for board appointments.
- M. Bard pointed out that each person tried to ask the same question to each candidate, but specific details in an application sometimes call for varied questions to fully gain enough relevant information about a candidate.
- T. Taravella said she tried to keep her questions pretty standardized but also acknowledged that she served on the school board, which meant she already knew some of the information.
- R. Clapp also stuck to the same question except when something came up that prompted him to ask a follow-up question.

C. Viens said the notion that more money leads to better outcomes is a fallacy. There are so many indications that the education problem is bigger than people are willing to accept. If we keep going on the path we're on now, no one will be able to live here and raise their kids here. Whoever is appointed, we need them ready to go because we're bleeding out.

Motion by R. Clapp to appoint D. Roscioli to the school board; seconded by K. Sweeney.

Discussion:

T. Taravella said D. Roscioli is the one candidate who was recommended by the superintendent and the school board chair. That should carry a lot of weight. She appreciates the dedication he has shown and strongly supports his appointment.

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

Motion by M. Bard to appoint E. Brown to the school board; seconded by R. Clapp.

Discussion:

M. Bard said EB offers some on-the-job experience; like D. Roscioli, she can do the job on day one, and she offers a different perspective from the other candidates.

T. Taravella expressed concern that her experience level isn't the same since she wasn't at as many meetings.

No further discussion; **motion approved 3-2, with K. Sweeney and T. Taravella opposed.**

A. Johnson announced that the Central Vermont Career Center has an opening on their board for a representative from Waterbury; they have a separate application process for appointment.

- L. Scagliotti elaborated that they are their own school district with an at-large opening from the Harwood district. They are hoping to do appointments this month as well. There is a lot happening with that board right now, including a possible bond vote to build a new career center.

Housing Task Force - Housing Trust Fund Program recommendations

J. Camaratta shared slides (included with meeting docs) stating that the task force, after considering the key takeaways from the successful VHIP program, is proposing a program specific to Waterbury modeled after the state-level VHIP program.

- The Waterbury program would use money from the newly-established Housing Trust Fund to provide grants to homeowners who are looking to bring a new or renovated ADU online.
- Key specs of the Waterbury program:
 - Grant only (no loan option), limited to \$30,000 per project.
 - The grant would reimburse expenses incurred within 6 months of signing the grant agreement.
 - Grant is for 5 years, and does not require working with a coordinated entry organization
 - Credit score requirement is at landlord discretion
 - Landlord cannot require more than one month deposit
 - Unit must be rented at 110% of fair market rent *or below* for the duration of grant (5 years)
 - Program to be administered by Downstreet Housing on behalf of the town. They would handle the application process and disbursement of the funds. Their capacity for them to administer Waterbury applications/funds exists as long as the state continues to fund the VHIP program.
 - Per project costs for the town would be \$2,000 admin fee, \$1,000 for inspection, and \$300 recording fee—and additional \$3,300 per grant.
 - The town would be responsible for enforcing compliance with the grant conditions.
- The Task Force has three specific recommendations:
 - 1. That the Waterbury Home Improvement Program be adopted as permissible use of funds available in the Housing Trust Fund.
 - 2. That Downstreet Housing be engaged to administer the applications and distribution of funds.
 - 3. That the 2024 amount allocated to the housing trust fund be used for a combination of grant funding and administrative costs, effective immediately.

Discussion:

M. Bard asked why a loan program component wasn't included.

- J. Camaratta said Downstreet cannot offer loans except through the state program because they are not licensed to do so; the state gave them a special exemption specific to VHIP.

K. Sweeney asked why the rent cap was set at 110% fair market value.

- J. Camaratta explained that the task force wanted to be careful about having a program that would appear to be better than VHIP, because it is preferable that people use the state program. However, the intent of this program is to provide an extra push for getting multiple units on the market quickly. The 110% cap is a financial incentive for landlords because the grant money is less than VHIP.

- A. Johnson clarified that the fair market value measure was for Washington County, but with Waterbury on the line between Chittenden and Lamoille Counties, Waterbury rent averages are more aligned with rents in these counties; 110% of Washington County rent seems an appropriate compromise.

R. Clapp asked if those receiving state funding through VHIP are eligible for Waterbury funding—J.

Camaratta replied no, they are not.

R. Clapp asked how using this trust fund money in this way moves the town toward housing growth goals.

- J. Camaratta said the first round would be considered successful in this regard if three grants leading to three new units are disbursed. The task force will then ask for 2025 funds to continue the program.

B. Vigdor asked about the penalties for noncompliance, and how it will be enforced.

- JC answered that compliance is simply having the landlord showing proof of a lease that is within the financial terms set for the grant. We can claw the money back if they don't comply; legal action may be needed to enforce.
- A. Johnson reminded everyone of the broader context: This proposal is a considered use for the Housing Trust Fund and gives a model based on the state program rather than something new created from whole cloth.
- O. Setti-Ducati mentioned there is specific language in the state-level VHIP about noncompliance that the Waterbury program can use.
- T. Gloor is also concerned about the specifics of governance over qualifying criteria. He wanted to confirm that the funding priorities are for new landlords at the microlevel (accessory dwelling units) over an existing landlord who wants to rehab units already online

Issue of **potential conflict of interest** was brought up by R. Clapp, since he supervises O. Setti-Ducati at Revitalizing Waterbury, and Setti-Ducati is a member of the housing task force making the proposal.

- T. Leitz said that since Revitalizing Waterbury doesn't invest directly in affordable housing and the program would be a partnership between Downstreet Housing and the town, he doesn't see a conflict.
- A. Johnson reminded the group that she is the selectboard liaison to the housing task force and has been participating in the discussions that led to this proposal..

Concerns were brought by a number of people about the seeming lack of criteria or guidelines for renter eligibility under the Waterbury plan.

- For example, Valerie Rogers pointed out that the state does require landlords to rent to persons meeting certain requirements; why are there no participant or tenant-selection guidelines in the Waterbury plan? If those guidelines aren't in the Waterbury plan, then it's not really meeting our goals of bringing in fair and safe housing for those who want to live in Waterbury. She said that affordable housing should not only apply to rent being paid, but to people who need affordability.
- AJ added that the program does meet the goal of adding more units in Waterbury, but feedback from homeowners said using a coordinated entry organization (which the state required under their 5-year grant program) took away their agency to select who would be sharing their premises/home, and that was a barrier to entry to a number of potential new landlords. The housing task force made accommodations for that concern to incentivize bringing on new units.
- M. Bard added in defense of the program recommendation that this program does not relieve the landlord from the legal responsibility of providing fair housing. Landlords cannot discriminate

against protected classes. Loosening certain restrictions in the Waterbury program was the tradeoff to encourage getting new units online as quickly as possible.

- K. Sweeney said the presentation does not reflect any salary cap for renters, and that means the rules can be bent in a way we don't necessarily want from this program. If the program is just a local version of VHIP, then the program should follow all the VHIP rules.
- O. Setti-Ducati said VHIP's 10-year loan program, although significantly more popular than the grant option because it doesn't require a coordinated entry organization; there would be significant barriers to implementation if the town had to take on that .
- T. Taravella said the goal is to provide affordable housing, and if renters have a high salary, they have more money to spend at our local establishments. The requirement should really be about the renters being full-time residents of Waterbury.
- C. Viens said that since living anywhere in Vermont is extremely costly, maybe this program can be tightened up a little bit with criteria geared toward growing our workforce.
- R. Clapp asked about how means-testing would be monitored.
 - TL said it is more appropriate for someone like Downstreet to ask questions beyond looking at a lease because such inquiries by the town will likely be felt as intrusive.
- B. Shepeluk said he thinks this is a great idea but expected to see an income threshold for tenants—the income of the tenant should be part of the equation. Since the final funds aren't disbursed until the lease is signed, there is opportunity to withhold funds if certain requirements aren't met.

Motion by R. Clapp to adopt recommendations 1 and 2 and recommend to the task force that they revisit the issue of tenant eligibility; seconded by T. Taravella.

Discussion:

K. Sweeney recommended that the criteria for tenant eligibility be that the person be employed in Waterbury, rent full time, and make under a certain amount.

T. Taravella suggested looking at the schedule of teacher's salaries as a benchmark for income cap.

R. Clapp agreed that priorities can be established for what kinds of tenants will benefit from this program.

No further discussion; motion approved unanimously.

Event Approvals

Circus Smirkus (supporting documents included with meeting docs.)

N. Dubrule summarized that all of the specs are the exact same as last year.

Discussion:

R. Clapp asked about how they will deal with a high wind situation to avoid a collapsed tent.

- N. Dubrule said an engineer looked at their tent and it is in compliance with required standards.

Motion by K. Sweeney to approve the entertainment permit for Circus Smirkus for July 2-3; seconded by R. Clapp.

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

Leaf Peepers Half Marathon and 5K

Motion by R. Clapp to approve the event permit; seconded by K. Sweeney.

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

Selectboard and Manager Informational Updates

A. Johnson gave two updates:

- The third session of Building Better Waterbury will take place on April 15 at 6:00 p.m. in the Library SAL Room; presentations will be about financing.
- The planning commission is working on rescheduling the visioning session that had been cancelled because of a snowstorm.

M. Bard confirmed he will be attending the upcoming conservation commission meeting and will have a report at the next selectboard meeting.

R. Clapp said the Recreation Department and Revitalizing Waterbury are co-sponsoring a community volunteer fair on May 17, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. at Brookside Primary School gym.

T. Leitz had several updates:

- Rental registry is live and postcards are going out. People have begun registering. Vermont Renters Association is offering Waterbury landlords 50% off membership if they register with the town. There is no charge to register a rental with the town.
- The BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure Communities) grant application (\$166,500) to update the hydrology study is void because the program has been cut. He continues to have active meetings about FEMA reimbursement claims; those seem to be processing and he hopes to have cash in the bank soon.
- In a previous executive session, the selectboard authorized an agreement with the armory and that is now public record.

Next meeting agenda

- Municipal board/commission interviews and appointments.
 - M. Bard urged the selectboard members to ask each candidate the same question, with freedom to expand with follow-ups.
- T. Leitz will continue to extend the invitation to VSP and hope the scheduling works out.
- R. Clapp recommended that the housing task force return to follow up on their revised item 3 (above)

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion by K. Sweeney to find that premature public knowledge of the labor relations agreement would place the town of Waterbury at a substantial disadvantage; seconded by M. Bard.

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

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

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

Motion by K. Sweeney to move to executive session and invite the municipal manager; seconded by M. Bard.

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

Selectboard entered executive session at 8:41p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Cheryl Casey.