

Minutes of the Waterbury Select Board
Monday, September 15, 2025 | 6:30 p.m.
28 N. Main Street and via Zoom

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

Public attendance: ORCA Media, Sandy Sabin, Al Lewis, Harry Shepard, Valerie Rogers, Chris Viens, Scott Culver, Dana Culver, Steve Harrington, Jessica Dickinson, Bill Shepeluk, Tom Bryant, Evan Karl Hoffman, Susan Clark, Liz Schlegel, Mal Culbertson

Zoom attendance: ORCA Media, Anne Imhoff, Amy Marshall-Carney, Carrie MacMillan, Lindsay Sullivan

CALL TO ORDER by A. Johnson, 6:31 p.m.

Agendas

Meeting agenda

Motion by M. Bard to approve the meeting agenda as presented; seconded by R. Clapp.

A. Johnson pointed out two additional items for consideration to be added to the agenda.

Amended motion by M. Bard to approve the meeting agenda with the added items of annual approval of highway mileage and a discussion of care of the veterans monument in Rusty Parker Park; seconded by R. Clapp.

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

Consent agenda, incl. minutes of [Sept. 1, 2025](#)

Motion by K. Sweeney to approve the consent agenda as presented; seconded by M. Bard.

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

Public comment

S. Sabin requested the local options tax policy and a Town Meeting article for the housing trust fund be put on the next meeting agenda.

H. Shepard suggested a meeting procedures policy that included 1) not holding meetings open to the public on national holidays and 2) that when selectboard members would like to express their views as individuals during public comment, that they do so from the position of the public at the table.

A. Lewis reported that despite the selectboard and the state being provided documentation of the concerns and possible solutions regarding the safety of the intersection with Route 100 at the Stowe Street bridge, nothing has actually been done to address those concerns. He asked for the selectboard to authorize the town manager to contact the state and insist on a meeting that includes Bill Woodruff to discuss these concerns and alternate solutions.

V. Rogers echoed H. Shepard's disappointment and perception of the public being disrespected that the selectboard scheduled a meeting on Labor Day. She additionally suggested that some agenda items are better suited for roundtable discussion or other format when there are so many important topics still sitting in the agenda "parking lot," such as sidewalks, paving and the local option tax. The selectboard should hear from the public about what needs to be on the next meeting agenda.

C. Viens requested someone give him a reasonable explanation for why we can't do something about the overhanging brush on our roads, which he has brought up several times at past meetings. Same request regarding the town's bridge decks and their ongoing deterioration getting kicked down the road for discussion.

Downtown Vibrancy Fund - [letter of attestation](#)

L. Sullivan, president of Revitalizing Waterbury, summarized RW's history, mission, and work, as well as the state's Downtown Vibrancy grant program. She described the ways that RW intends to use the \$25,000 grant they most recently received to support Waterbury's downtown economic vitality, support the growth of business development in Waterbury Center, engage in promotion for these efforts, and develop a new three-year strategic plan. The letter of attestation asks for the selectboard support

Discussion

T. Leitz noted that this has been approved in a number of other groups.

R. Clapp recused himself from discussion and vote.

A. Marshall-Carney asked where members of the public can look to understand the decision-making in using the funds and how much is being spent on each initiative.

- L. Sullivan responded that funding has been used toward many different things, for example their marketing committee is developing a new campaign to encourage people to come spend time in town and at businesses. Other projects include signage, some public art, partnering with Vermont Tourism.
- A. Marshall-Carney followed up with an inquiry about how those strategies and conversations are intersecting with municipal bodies because bringing more people to town will have implications.

A. Johnson requested the conversation come back to the specific request in the letter of attestation, noting that this money is separate from and does not supplant any funds budgeted for the downtown organization by the municipality.

Motion by M. Bard to approve the Downtown Vibrancy Fund letter of attestation on behalf of the Waterbury Selectboard; seconded by K. Sweeney.

No further discussion; **motion passed 3-0 with 1 (R. Clapp) abstention.**

Event permit requests

S. Culver, speaking on behalf of event partners D. Culver, S. Harrington and J. Dickinson, summarized the first request for entertainment at a craft fair event and "trunk or treat" at Rusty Parker Park in October. The craft fair has already been approved and the latter event has previously been held on private property. They are joining forces for this seasonal event. No road closures are needed and parking has already been secured at Pilgrim Park.

Discussion

- M. Bard clarified that Pilgrim Park will only be used for parking - overflow and vendor parking; no events will be held there.
- K. Sweeney asked about anticipated foot traffic.
 - S.H. said a couple hundred kids came to the trunk or treat event last year.
 - S. Culver noted 20-25 vendors will be at the craft fair.
- R. Clapp asked if there is a rain date. D. Culver said both events are always rain or shine.

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

Additional discussion:

S. Culver added that he spoke with Bill Woodruff about using the town's portolets, and they would pay for them to be delivered and taken away.

No further discussion; **motion passed 4-0 with 1 (T. Taravella) abstention.**

T. Bryant presented his event permit request and supplemental material.

- In November, Maxi's will have been in business for 20 years and they've never celebrated any sort of anniversary. He would like to celebrate the 20th in a pretty big way.
- On Friday, Oct. 10, he would like to have a party in the Maxi's parking lot with one band (The Grift) that would play for 3 hours. The band will set up in the same parking spaces that they had an outdoor patio during COVID. The music would end at 9:00 p.m., with a start time of around 6:00 p.m.
- Another band might play for an hour as an opener. If that comes through, the start time for the event would be about 4:00 or 5:00 p.m.
- The inside would still be open and there is a full bar; outside, he would serve beer. He is working to establish a plan for clearly delineating the spaces in which alcohol can be consumed.
- There will be some free food offered outside.

Discussion

K. Sweeney expressed concern about the potential for 300-400 people in that parking lot.

- T. Bryant acknowledged that parking will be an issue and we need to respect that the lot is designated for both Maxi's and the post office, which is open until 5:00 p.m. He requested access to either of the nearby parks to send people for parking; both are close and have appropriate walkways and crosswalks.
- R. Clapp said the Rec Department should be consulted about the parking, but otherwise he supports the event.

A. Johnson suggested having the board give final approval at the special meeting on September 22 while

T. Bryant gains confirmation about some of the details, including parking.

M. Bard recommended completing the liquor permit sooner rather than later.

T. Bryant expressed concern that returning in a week for approval poses a serious challenge to adequately promoting the event and confirming other details.

Motion by R. Clapp to approve the event permit, pending resolution of the parking issue and confirmation of the outdoor liquor permit; seconded by K. Sweeney.

T. Taravella requested T. Bryant come to the September 22 meeting to update them on the planning.

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

Town meeting attendance - Historical data and trends

[Full presentation to be posted on town website.]

E. Hoffman presented his research on Town Meeting attendance over 65 years.

- Methodology: reviewed minutes for votes taken by hand count or paper ballot to give a snapshot of how many people were at the meeting at that particular moment. Such votes don't happen every year, as represented by "n/a." All numbers are likely underestimated.
- Key takeaways:
 - In-person attendance saw an immediate drop-off in 1972 after the Australian ballot was introduced for electing town officers. Participation via Australian ballot has been fairly steady.
 - While actual attendance has gone down, population has increased; on a per capita basis, the drop in attendance is even more dramatic.
 - The meetings have gotten notably shorter since an outlier 12+ hour meeting in 1972; meetings were typically 6 hours or longer until about 1990 and 4 hours or shorter since.
 - Recorded votes (when voice votes were too close to call), have likewise declined since 1972.
- Conclusions:
 - The 1960s saw high engagement, probably because people turned out to elect officers.
 - 1973-1990 still saw high engagement, likely driven by concerns over inflation and energy.
 - From 1990 to present, data is spotty (suggested primarily voice vote), the school district meeting is separated out, and special articles start to appear.

Discussion

K. Sweeney gave admiration to E. Hoffman for having read all of those years of minutes.

A. Imhoff noted that people attending Town Meeting in person are also casting Australian ballots, so comparing them paints a misleading picture.

- E. Hoffman said the comparison is significant whether the in-person numbers are separated out or not.
- A. Imhoff supported the case for subtracting the in-person number from the Australian ballot number.

A. Marshall-Carney asked what assumptions went with gathering the data set, such as population size not appearing to reflect how many people are actually of voting age.

- E. Hoffman acknowledged there is a lot that the data doesn't capture, and he has implicit assumptions in his interpretations of the data.

T. Taravella asked for clarification about the methodology.

C. Viens asked if this was general information or if there was a driving argument behind presenting this data. In particular, the unchanging factor in every Town Meeting is the budget vote being in person.

- E. Hoffman said his goal was to provide some numbers for the foundation of a discussion moving forward.

B. Shepeluk said the hard numbers are helpful.

- He wondered if electing town officers from the floor, like before 1972, is what we need to consider. If we get 200 or 250 people to come sit and talk town business for a few hours on a Tuesday in March, that seems pretty good.

- Certain trends in the numbers, like the decreasing number of amendments from the floor, don't automatically mean people are less engaged. His conclusion is that once a vote is moved to Australian ballot, people are more likely to disengage; the system that we have works well and provides a much more informed vote than just counting ballots.

A. Lewis said the information provided by E. Hoffman gives a good foundation for articulating more substantive questions to the general public. Some residents have moved here from places that didn't have the practice of Town Meeting Day, and it would be interesting to learn if such residents become involved in town business and meetings.

Strategies for increasing democratic engagement

S. Clark introduced herself, her research, and her book about Vermont town meetings. She followed the debate about Town Meeting last March and does a lot of workshops on such topics.

- Two good things are in tension: democratic quantity and democratic quality. We value quantity a lot, but we can also be passionate about high quality - deep, informed, empowered participation. The question is how to navigate these two things.
- There isn't one right answer that will work for every community because the tension involves competing values, different identities, and our brains' preference for an either-or narrative wants to find the "one" answer.
- Like with parenting, where both firmness and flexibility are good and desirable, we have to relax and be comfortable with the inevitability of that tension. Vermont's motto, Freedom and Unity, calls for the same kind of acceptance.
- Under-reliance or over-reliance on either side of the inherent tension leads to further problems. The goal is to embrace and manage the benefits of both, in this case, quality *and* quantity. The solution is both/and instead of either/or.
- One way forward is to establish a "democracy matters" committee charged with strengthening both quality and quantity in democratic practices and principles.
- Another option is to use a representative model at Town Meeting to address concerns that certain interests are currently over-represented.
- A third model is to conduct discussion and amendments from the floor at meetings held prior to Town Meeting Day itself, and then citizens vote by ballot on the final items on Town Meeting, which is otherwise run like a regular selectboard meeting.
- Rather than trying to improve Town Meeting, try to improve democratic participation throughout the year.

Discussion

T. Taravella asked about how representatives from neighborhoods are elected for Town Meeting.

- S. Clark said it would require the Town to identify 3 or 4 neighborhoods and people would "run for office" in each neighborhood. It's not generally hard to run and be elected for town meeting representative; these are usually the people who will attend anyway.

R. Clapp said someone had asked about the representative model and the selectboard acknowledged they hadn't, being focused on exploring Duxbury's approach with "Have Your Say Day."

K. Sweeney asked if the Middlesex "citizen's guide" had an impact with new residents of the community.

- S. Clark said people were skeptical at first, assuming the information was easy stuff that everyone knew. But it soon took off and new residents felt really welcomed by it.

A. Imhoff asked if Town Meeting time was changed from 10a.m. to 9a.m. when Keith Wallace stepped down as moderator; B. Shepeluk said historically 10 a.m. was a common starting time for meetings across the state because many residents were farmers and needed the morning to milk their cows.

L. Schlegel supported the idea of a democracy committee and strategies for making the town more welcoming.

M. Culbertson expressed her appreciation for S. Clark's particular framing of the issue, as someone who has advocated for expanding voting access via Australian ballot.

- Finding ways to get the most out of both of these good things (democratic quality and democratic quantity) is important, especially to engage young people.
- Creative solutions to systemic barriers need to be developed so that people who do really care but can't, for a variety of reasons, attend Town Meeting are empowered to attend.

R. Clapp asked if changing Town Meeting Day to the weekend makes any discernable difference.

- S. Clark said sometimes changing the date or time helps, sometimes it doesn't; on average, it didn't make any difference. That doesn't mean it wouldn't work for Waterbury, but there's no way to know until it's tried.
- It's important to think about democracy as Town Meeting Day and 364 other days. A lot of important stuff happens in town governance all of those other days.

M. Bard suggested having someone at the door of Town Meeting with a clicker to capture how many people are actually attending the meetings.

B. Shepeluk said that some things can be handled differently at Town Meeting, such as separating out different parts of the budget as their own voting items. We should also think about how we should address Town Meeting through a charter, and make it work for Waterbury.

R. Clapp asked for a show of hands from those present who would be interested in serving on a "democracy matters" committee. About 7 people said they would be interested.

Stanley Wasson development

T. Leitz gave updates:

- Phase I environmental assessment has been completed and is on the website. The key finding from the engineer is that further investigation is not necessary.
- He received questions from one developer in response to the request for qualifications.

H. Shepard asked if more than one developer is entertaining submitting. T. Leitz said only one has so far reached out with questions.

M. Culbertson asked what the deadline is for submitting qualifications; T. Leitz confirmed September 26, end of business.

K. Sweeney asked a general development question: what Kingsbury is doing at the old shed; T. Leitz said they will be

Route 100 speed limit [change request](#) - preliminary discussion

A. Johnson summarized that the request is to post a speed limit of 40 mph or less from the light at Guptil Road to the Cabot Annex; at present, a portion of that stretch is 50 mph.

T. Leitz said the selectboard does not set the speed limits for state highways, but if the request is approved or supported by the selectboard, the town would then send the request to the state.

K. Sweeney agrees with the Public Works director's assessment of the area and people do fly down that strip of highway. M. Bard and R. Clapp echoed the position, citing their personal experience and observations.

Motion by T. Taravella to allow the municipal manager to email the state and request they consider lowering the speed limit to 40 mph from 50 mph; seconded by K. Sweeney.

Additional discussion:

A Marshall-Carney asked if data pertaining to the timing between lights and general traffic flow will be informing this decision/request.

- K. Sweeney said such factors should be included in the correspondence between the appropriate state officials and the town.
- H. Shepard and A. Marshall-Carney both encouraged the request to the state be explicit about the concerns to be taken under consideration and to know that such a request is subject to a lot of bureaucratic processes.

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

Annual certificate of town mileage

T. Leitz explained this form is an annual requirement showing how much we spend by mileage on highways. We are well over the \$300 per mile budgeted limit.

Motion by K. Sweeney to sign the annual financial plan for town highways, concurrent with 19 V.S.A. § 306J; seconded by M. Bard.

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

Rusty Parker military monument care

T. Leitz gave background that the question came up recently at a Cemetery Commissioners' meeting. The American Legion asked who has the authority to add names to a veterans' monument. The Cemetery Commission does not want that authority and T. Leitz recommended the Legion is the appropriate entity.

Discussion:

K. Sweeney said that if the Town has been putting money into caring for the monuments, that should continue; however, the Legion should have the authority to manage the names.

Motion by M. Bard to designate to the American Legion the authority to add names to the veterans' monument at Rusty Parker Memorial Park as they deem appropriate, with the understanding that the Town will continue to provide the funding for the additions and their general care; seconded by R. Clapp.

Additional discussion:

- A. Lewis gave some history about the care of the monuments as negotiated between the Rotary and the Legion.
- T. Taravella clarified that the request is about the Legion telling the town what names need to be added.
- A. Johnson said this discussion does point out the need for clarification around maintenance of the monuments.
- R. Clapp said Revitalizing Waterbury has a design committee and he can discuss with the committee whether the maintenance is something they would find appropriate to take on.

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

Selectboard and municipal manager informational updates

T. Taravella: two members of town staff, Mike Walder and Carl James, recently helped the police locate missing Waterbury residents and thanked them.

R. Clapp: Revitalizing Waterbury will be hosting the downtown program retreat this week.

A Johnson: attended the last input session for the town plan and the Planning Commission continues to further this work.

T. Leitz:

- The Town now owns 40 Union St.; the FEMA buyout process has been completed.
 - The state is putting the demolition out for bid. It will likely take a while because they are hoping to make demolition a package bid with a number of properties. The hope is that demolition will happen within six months.
 - 36 Union is fully approved, but no closing date yet.
- The 2024 FEMA plan is now done; the remaining step is to submit for his own and staff time. The 2023 plan remains open.
- There is a walkthrough on October 4 for the Better Connections grant project in Waterbury Center. October 5 is the rain date.

Agenda items for upcoming meetings

September 22 special meeting:

- Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery grant applications.

September 29 regular meeting:

- The Conservation Commission has requested to present a quarterly update
- Capital plans
- Selectboard meeting policies
- Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission - stormwater master planning process
- Charge of a potential new democracy matters committee

October 6

- Revised events permit
- Discussion of revised traffic ordinance and possible light ordinance
- A. Lewis requested an invitation be sent to the state to have a discussion about the Route 100/Stowe Street safety concerns.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion by K. Sweeney to find that premature public knowledge of labor negotiations would place the town at a significant disadvantage; seconded by T. Taravella.

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

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

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

Executive session entered at ____.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Cheryl Casey.