

**Waterford Selectboard Meeting
Monday, September 13, 2021
Davies Memorial Library**

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

Members in Attendance: Warner Hodgdon, Bill Piper, Fred Saar

Others in Attendance: See attached sign-in sheet

Modifications to the Agenda

There were no modifications to the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the August 9th Selectboard meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Budget Report

The Budget Report was distributed via e-mail prior to the meeting. Marcia asked about receiving a copy of the budget report, and after discussion the Selectboard decided to post the report on the website each month.

Citizens' Concerns

Kate Piper made a presentation on the status of the Lower Waterford Congregational Church and the non-profit Waterford Preservation Trust that is coordinating planned repairs and long-range planning. Kate explained that the goal is to preserve the church, deed the church to the Town along with an endowment of approximately \$150,000. The goal is to avoid transferring cost for the maintenance of the Church to the Town residents. The Selectboard will place the issue on the Warning for the 2022 Town Meeting. (Copy of Kate's handout is attached)

Louis Brach read a statement he had prepared.

Roberta Gillott discussed the brevity of the meeting minutes and asked if more detail could be provided.

There were numerous comments about the Town expenses, the performance of the Road Crew, and other items.

Town Boards

The Listers presented an Errors & Omissions correction to the Grand List. They requested the Brach Trust parcel 276 be changed from 64.14 acres to 59.76 acres and the value be changed from \$42,800 to \$40,700.

Bill Piper provided an update on activities at NEK Broadband and discussed the selection of NRTC to provide design, engineering and construction management services, Waitsfield Champlain Valley Telecom to provide ISP services delivering content to subscribers, and Mission Broadband to act as consultants to NEK Broadband in the activities associated with the rollout of fiber, regulatory issues, and preparing to issue bonds to finance construction and operations.

Highway Department

The Selectboard reviewed and approved the following applications for driveway permits: Kaylee Devenger and Austin Fenoff, Stephane Robbins, and Jason Goodwin.

Lisle provided an update on the Lower Waterford Road project. The project is ready for paving, and this will substantially complete the project.

The Selectboard discussed the Grant-In-Aid recently awarded to the Town by VTrans. The grant is for \$14,800 with a \$3,700 match and is designed to address hydrologically connected segments of road. NVDA is completing their inventory of the roads in Waterford.

There was a suggestion that the Highway Crew put a cable across the gate entrance at the end of the day. Lisle will do that.

Dave Morrison discussed the signage present around the intersection of Old County Road and Lawrence Road noting that both the right and left turns are dead end roads. He noted that there signage on the road to the right, but not to the left. The Selectboard ask the Road Crew to place a "no outlet" sign at the intersection and an "dead end" sign at the top of the road to the left.

Old Business

Repairs to the Porch of the Town Office/Davies Memorial Library Building

The Selectboard reviewed the progress to date in obtaining quotes and selecting a vendor to perform the needed work. Nine contractors were contacted about the repairs, with little interest in doing the work. David Chase presented an estimate of \$9,800. A motion was made to award the work to David Chase with a contingency amount of \$1,200 and a total cost not to exceed \$11,000.

VLCT Risk Management Update

The repairs identified by VLCT at the Town Office, Town Garage and Fire Department have been completed, and this item will be removed from future agendas.

Cemetery Update

The Selectboard discussed updates to the Cemetery Sexton Policy, the Cemetery Operations Policies, and the Cemetery Lot Pricing Policy. Individual motions were made to approve each policy, and all motions passed unanimously.

There was a discussion related to private cemeteries in Waterford; Howard Remick provided information on cemeteries that are identified on tax maps, and the conclusion of the discussion was that additional research is required.

ARPA Funding Utilization

There was an update on the funds to be awarded to the Town under The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funding. Roberta Gillott agreed to chair public meetings to propose options for spending the funds.

Town Website

Bill Piper will work with Mike Barrett on the redesign and updates to the Town website.

New Business

Annual Generator Maintenance Contract

The Selectboard discussed the annual renewal of the maintenance contract for the emergency generator at the Waterford School. The Town pays the annual maintenance agreement and has designated the School as a shelter for use in emergencies. A motion was made and seconded to approve the maintenance contract; the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20pm

Selectboard Meeting

September 13, 2021 @ 7:00 PM

7:00 PM Davis Memorial Library

Sign In Sheet

Please Print

Nate Piper	Nate Piper
Marcia Martel	Marcia R Martel
L. BRACH	L. Brach
BRYANT FLEMING	Bryant Fleming
Warren Whitcher	Warren Whitcher
Clayton Bullock	Keva Ellander
Howard Remick	Gary & Debra Allard
Maria Dantos	
David Morrison	David E. Morrison
Clement Gray	
FRANK BULLOCK	
STEW EDDY	
Deborah Williams	
ROBERTA GILLOTT	
Katherine Fiegenbaum - Caledonian-Record	
Justin Stoller	
Duane Keech	

Proposal to Waterford Town Select Board

Sept. 13, 2021

Proposal: Based on the unanimous approval of the Lower Waterford Congregational Church (LWCC) congregation at a special meeting on July 22, 2021, the congregation voted to ask the Waterford Select Board to put the following item on the agenda for the 2022 Town Meeting: Will the voters of the Town of Waterford approve the purchase of the church building in Lower Waterford for \$1.00 from the LWCC congregation with the understanding that 1) the congregation will donate its endowment (currently valued at more than \$145,000) to the Town of Waterford to be used for the upkeep and maintenance of the building; and 2) the non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, the Waterford Preservation Trust, LLC, will continue raising funds for and oversee the maintenance, restoration, rental and use of the church building.

Why is this vote being proposed?

Membership in the congregation is dwindling as members age or move away. The Congregation does not have the resources to maintain this lovely historic building and has made a commitment to do all it can to find an adaptive reuse of the church building that will benefit the entire community for generations to come.

What impact will ownership of the church building have upon the tax payers in Waterford?

Ownership of the church building will not result in an additional tax burden. As noted below, once the 4 projects funded by the Freeman Foundation and PTVt are completed and foundation work funded through contributions to a capital campaign is complete, the church building will be stabilized for years to come. Routine maintenance will be covered by the donated church endowment. A cyclical maintenance plan has been developed with funding from the PTVt which can be followed by the building committee of the WPT. Other projects allowing for public use of the building for various purposes will be done as funding from sources other than the town becomes available.

What efforts have been made thus far to preserve the building and find an adaptive reuse?

Work with the Preservation Trust of Vermont that began in 2017 when a committee of concerned citizens- consisting of a town selectman, town librarian, members of the Waterford Historical Society and church leaders- was formed. The goal of the committee was to find sustainable ways to preserve the church building and to expand its use.

In 2019 the town of Waterford received a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Business Development Grant to cover the costs of a feasibility study. A link to the report from that study by Black River Design, Architects, can be found on the town's website. The purpose of the study was to determine what it would take and how much it would cost to bring the church up to code for various public uses.

Why is the building important to the town of Waterford?

A town-wide survey was conducted during the summer and fall of 2017 that garnered responses from 130 households (a 22% response rate). The survey results indicate a strong community interest in the rental of a commercial kitchen and space for concerts, dances, exercise classes, a café, after-school programs, watercraft rental and art classes. Another possible use of the building is the creation of a collaborative work space providing high speed internet in the lower level of the church. Ninety-six percent (96%) of survey respondents agreed that the church building is an important part of our community identity and 97% agreed that it is an historical building worth preserving.

Also, in 2019, the church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in time for the celebration of the church's 160th birthday. As Waterford Selectman Fred Saar stated in his letter of support of placement of the church on the National Register:

The Waterford Select Board is actively engaged with the Church in exploring avenues for adaptive reuse that will insure the long-term use and maintenance of the church building. The Church is a central component of Lower Waterford, and coupled with the historic Rabbit Hill Inn, forms the center of the Lower Village.

The church building has a long history of serving the needs of the community. Up until at least the 1930s much of the activity in the community was centered in the church which was used regularly for social functions and town meetings as well as religious services. Because Waterford has never had a town hall, the church served that purpose until the new elementary school was built in 1957. Town meetings were held in the vestry until 1957 and voting in the November general elections took place there until 1984. Prior to the pandemic, the church joined forces with the Waterford Historical Society to host numerous community events: a bluegrass concert, poetry readings, an historic house and garden tour, an historic barn tour and sale of barn-to-table food items, and the annual Rhubarb Café in June. The Community Room in the lower level of the church was available for use by the town selectmen for meetings involving large crowds and for events sponsored by the Davies Memorial Library.

In short, this building has played a vital role in the religious and social life of the community and has made an important contribution to town government and the democratic process in Waterford. As Waterford's former local historian, David J. Carpenter, has written: "The Church stands with quiet strength and grace as a reminder of the hardships, faith, perseverance and dedication to God, community and country of those who came before us in the town of Waterford."

Why is "White Village" an important part of the Town of Waterford?

The church is located in the heart of historic "White Village" which also contains the Rabbit Hill Inn, post office, library and town clerk's office. As historian Allan Hodgdon noted in 1980, both the historic quality of the church and the village of Lower Waterford have been well preserved, "so that today, as in 1867, the village retains the form it achieved during the period it was associated with the Burlington to Portland stage route, a route that opened the interior of Vermont to the seaboard."

The Waterford Town Plan recognizes the importance of preserving our historic village, stating on page 52, that White Village is “an historic and classic Vermont scene which is much photographed and frequented by many vacationers and tourists. It is a fine example of functional historic and scenic preservation as an appropriate land use.” One goal in the Town plan is to “encourage the retention of older buildings [in the Lower Waterford village] for village-scale commercial use.”

Waterford has no village center or town hall. Without “White Village” the town of Waterford would simply be a bedroom community for the towns of St. J. and Littleton. The beauty of this quaint village center and consequent generation of tourist dollars has been recognized as an essential economic resource in the region. Should the church building become abandoned and fall into disrepair, it would have a severe detrimental impact on the economic vibrancy of the village.

In a letter supporting the application for the assessment grant, the Waterford Historical Society board and the Davies Memorial Library trustees stated:

Lower Waterford also called White Village has been a tourist attraction for the town for years. The Lower Waterford Congregational Church, Davies Memorial Library and Rabbit Hill Inn represent a three-legged stool that can create economic activity in a small town that is in danger of becoming a bedroom community for St. Johnsbury and Littleton, New Hampshire. We are excited to have the village known as the center of activity for the town and support the assessment of the church building.

Is there precedent for the Town to own a building with programming managed by a volunteer board? Yes, the town owns both the fire station and the Davies Memorial Library building. Both the fire department and library are run by boards composed of citizen volunteers.

In 2019 the church building became listed on the Register of Historic Places. What does that mean if the town owns the building?

According to Devon Colman of the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation:

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places is an honorific designation that documents the history and significance of a property. Listing does not, in and of itself, impose any restrictions on the property owner’s use, maintenance, or disposition of the property. The town would not be under any obligation to maintain or repair the building in a certain manner simply because it’s listed in the National Register.

Regulatory oversight, and accompanying requirements for how work on the building is done, is triggered by the use of State or Federal funding, licenses, or permits for the project. Private donations and grants may also require repairs to be made in a certain way, depending on the granting organization. If the town wants to apply for more historic preservation grants, then it’s definitely an advantage to be able to say the building is formally listed in the National Register. This removes any doubt on the part of the funding organization as to whether or not the building is worth their investment.

What grant funding is available for further restoration work on the church building?

If the town owns the church building, grants for the restoration of the church will become available for which the church as a religious organization is not eligible.

What has been done to restore the building so far?

Since 1998, the congregation, with the strong support of the Waterford community and the receipt of grants from the Preservation Trust of Vermont and the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, has raised and invested \$92,344 in structural repairs and upgrades to the church. The \$50,000 grant from the Freeman Foundation and Preservation Trust of Vermont will cover the cost of four projects, three of which are currently under contract: restoration and painting of the steeple, rewiring and installation of a new electrical system, repair of the rusted tin ceiling in the sanctuary and replacement of asphalt shingles on the west side of the roof. The electrical work has been completed to the satisfaction of the electrical inspector and fire marshal. The only other immediate need in order to stabilize the building for years to come is the replacement of the north foundation wall and stone support piers. This will cost about \$100,000. The WPT has launched a capital campaign drive to cover this cost as well as the installation of ADA compliant ramps on both levels. The church and WPT will continue to apply for grants, including from the state Division of Historic Preservation and the Preservation Trust of Vermont.

Other projects allowing for public use of the building for various purposes will be done as funding from sources other than the town becomes available.

What is the Waterford Preservation Trust?

In 2020, a nonprofit organization, the Waterford Preservation Trust, lld., was formed for the purpose of facilitating the restoration, preservation and adaptive reuse of the Lower Waterford Congregational Church building. Directors of the WPT include: a church trustee, former building contractors, former and current town librarians, a real estate agent, a trustee of the Davies Memorial Library and a director with accounting skills. The Board of directors of the WPT consists of community leaders dedicated to the revitalization of the village of Lower Waterford by restoring the church building as a community gathering place regardless of religious affiliation.

To learn more about the WPT, go to its website: www.waterfordpreservationtrust.org