

Waterford Selectboard Working Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 22, 2024 @ 6:00 PM

Davies Library

In Attendance: Sue Hayes, Warner Hodgdon, Ron Gray, Kevin Gillander. Attendance list attached.

Sue Hayes called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. She served as acting chair for the night.

Modifications to Agenda

- The approval of the Special and Regular meeting minutes on July 8, 2024 will be postponed until the August 12, 2024 meeting.

Citizens' Concerns

- Sue Hayes made a spreadsheet compiling all unanswered citizen concerns since Town Meeting on March 5, 2024. The Board addressed each item.
- On March 11 Howard Remick asked to be included in an Executive Session regarding personnel. The Board has not held that particular executive question yet.
- On April 15 Howard Remick suggested putting the upcoming ATV ordinance on the ballot for the Presidential Election.
- On May 13 Dave Morrison shared he doesn't think the ATV ordinance should be added to the Presidential Election ballot. He went on to explain that the Presidential election is done by Australian ballot, so the town would need to first vote to approve adding the ATV ordinance to the Australian ballot before it can be included. Sue Hayes will look into verifying this information. Until it can be voted on to be included in the Australian ballot, it is a question for Town Meeting. Town Clerk Deb Benoit confirmed it was voted during Town Meeting on March 5, 2024 to revisit the issue at the 2025 Town Meeting.
- On April 15 Dwayne Keach asked for an update of plans for the Town Garage roof. The Selectboard is still coming up with fixes and do not have an answer yet.
- On June 24 Dave Morrison expressed his concern that the current Road Foreman Jim Hayes is making fewer wages with less benefits than the previous Road Foreman despite inflation rising since Jim took the position. Dave also mentioned that he thinks it is best to elect a Road Commissioner without requiring citizenship. The Board has not discussed these issues yet.
- On May 13 Jen D'Agostino as Cemetery Committee Chair requested that all relevant papers/files pertaining to cemeteries be turned over by the previous Sexton to be stored in the Town Clerk's office to allow for easier access by the committee. Former Sexton Warner Hodgdon confirms he has turned over everything he had. He does not have a

record of the conversations he had with Dave Helstein when setting up the contract for Totally Trees to work on clearing out the cemeteries.

- Road Foreman Jim Hayes asked the Selectboard to let him know if they're going to provide the materials to smooth gravel. They added it to the agenda for the next Selectboard meeting on August 12 to provide an answer.
- Jen D'Agostino, Cemetery Committee Chair, asked why the Selectboard managed scheduling Totally Trees to cut trees at cemeteries without notifying the Cemetery Committee or the land owners involved. Ron Gray read a passage from the minutes of the Facilitated Working Meeting on April 29, where it was agreed that Warner could stay involved in this particular matter because he had started working out this agreement with Totally Trees a few years ago. Jen pointed out that being involved and offering assistance does not mean taking control.
- Lynne Flemming responded to the concern raised by Jen and agreed the Board should be transparent and open to communication, and should be focused on working as a team. William Jones read a passage about the roles and responsibilities of the Selectboard written by VLCT saying that the Selectboard should not interfere with duties granted to other entities. Kevin Gillander clarified that the committee reports to the Selectboard.
- On July 8 Clem Gray asked Warner Hodgdon to resign from the Selectboard over a budget issue. Clem still asks for his resignation. He presented a petition with signatures from 87 residents calling for Warner's resignation, which is more than the amount of votes Warner was elected with. Clem requested the resignation on the grounds of dishonesty. He shared a few of his concerns over Warner's behavior, one being the issue with flags not being put out on time for Memorial Day.
- Sue Hayes responded saying the Memorial Day flag situation could have been avoided if the Cemetery Committee had built a relationship with the Legion. Deb Benoit is a member of the Cemetery Committee and clarified that she contacted the Legion two weeks before Memorial Day with the help of Marcel Lapierre, and they assured her they would be able to put out the flags. They told her after the Holiday that they couldn't put out the flags because their list of veterans was not in their records, it was missing.
- Clem Gray admitted that some signatures on the petition were attained while he was working at the Transfer Station. There was some conversation about if it was appropriate to be getting signatures on a petition started as a town citizen while working as a town employee.
- On July 8 Ben Lyons raised concern over Warner Hodgdon overstepping his role as Selectboard member during the water issue by his house. Warner said the previous Selectboard Chair Gary Allard asked him to look into the problem with Mad Brook. Sue Hayes said Warner needed to respond to it because it was considered an emergency situation and the Road Forman was out of office. Warner sent an email to the other Selectboard members to inform them he was looking into it. Sue Hayes said that email did not count as a quorum because it was not a conversation, it was just Warner sharing

information. Jim Hayes came back into work to deal with the problem. Ben reported that two men, a town employee and a state employee, went to his house when he wasn't home and accosted his wife saying the brook had been diverted. Ben recalled the men telling him that Warner sent them, but Warner denied speaking to them. Ben claimed Warner admitted to calling the two other men during a conversation with him, but Warner maintains that the conversation he had with Ben was only confirming that he is a member of the Selectboard.

- Ron Gray was recommended for Project Manager. Ben Lyons said he does not believe Ron would be a good fit for the job considering how he mishandled the gravel bids. Ron admitted he made a mistake and apologized again. He added that the only people who never make mistakes are those who do nothing. Town Treasurer Heather Gonyaw clarified that the purchasing policy was broken when they accepted late bids and had nothing recorded in the minutes to explain why they suspended the purchasing policy.
- On July 8 Debbie Allard stated she believes the Road Foreman should be in charge of road issues instead of the Selectboard acting as Road Commissioner. She believes that Road Foreman Jim Hayes has the experience to do the job, and thanked him, his crew, and outside contractors for their work repairing the town after the recent July flooding. A discussion ensued regarding the legality of having all five Selectboard members being elected as the Road Commissioner. The Selectboard will look into it further and add appointing a Road Commissioner to the agenda for the August 12 Selectboard meeting.
- Road Foreman Jim Hayes shared a statement. He explained how much the town means to him and why he took the job. He expressed his concern over behavior from Warner Hodgdon that has led him to believe that Warner has a personal vendetta against him. He described that Warner has slandered him to town vendors, has been outspoken with intent to get rid of him, and had negative conversation behind his back with employees. He referenced the last Selectboard meeting on July 8 saying Warner publicly attacked his character and was shown being dishonest. He commended the previous Selectboard Chair Gary Allard for being the only Board member to repeatedly reach out to offer help repairing the damage caused by flooding. He noted that Sue Hayes has been busy with personal matters, so he didn't consider her to be negligent. He feels that he has been putting the town back together from flood damage by himself. He believes these issues need to be rectified with honesty and transparency to bring back a unified Board.
- Jen D'Agostino read an email she received from David Greenwood, who owns and operates an auto repair shop in St. J. The town of Waterford has been a long time customer of David. He had followed the newspaper coverage of Warner Hodgdon and wanted to share his experience as a third party. He recalled numerous occasions that Warner made disparaging comments about Jim at his business. He believes it is unprofessional and unethical to openly express derogatory remarks toward a town employee. He noted that Warner had a friendly relationship with the previous Road

Foreman, and noted the possibility of a personal vendetta against Jim. He believes Warner should put aside his personal beliefs for the good of the town.

- Sue Hayes asked why the email was sent to a town citizen instead of the Selectboard. Debrah Caldwell suggested David sent the email to Jen to ensure the citizens were informed.
- Edie Aremburg noted that the Selectboard are all overwhelmed with their responsibilities, and suggested voting on a Road Commissioner who is not a Board member.
- On July 8 Elke Billig stated that she would like to see the cost of employee health insurance on the townspeople reduced. She doesn't believe the taxpayers should be responsible for paying 100% of the health insurance of the Road Foreman and Workers. Other citizens voiced their disagreement.
- Sue Hayes added that retaining good employees is very important, and recalled how difficult it was to hire a Road Worker even with the inclusive health insurance package. She believes reducing benefits in such a competitive work environment may not be right for the town considering the package they currently offer isn't good enough to keep a consistent pool of workers.
- Road Foreman's wife, Kristina Hayes, noted that Jim does not get a pay differential for being on call 24/7, so the benefits are a very important part of his compensation package. Sue Hayes reiterated that her hiring experience has shown the importance of offering a great benefits package to attain great and reliable employees.
- Clem Gray asked if the Selectboard were willing to give up their stipend to pay for the added expense caused by the mistake with the gravel crushing bids. Sue Hayes said they will open the new bids during the August 12 meeting, so the cost of the mistake is still unknown. Whatever the case, she will not agree to donate her stipend citing the extensive amount of work and difficulty of this position. The Board and Town Treasurer Heather Gonyaw again discussed an overview of what happened with the bidding issues.
- Clem Gray asked if Warner Hodgdon had a response to David Greenwood's email. Warner said he doesn't believe the email sounds like David Greenwood.
- Sue Hayes read guidelines of public participation in Selectboard meetings from VLCT. It will be added to the agenda for the August 12 meeting to vote to approve them.

Selectboard Roles and Responsibilities (Discussion)

- Heather Gonyaw pointed out that the agenda includes an item labeled Selectboard Roles and Responsibilities. She wants to hear from members of the Board what they are going to do about regaining the trust and transparency with the community.
- Ron Gray said he intends to communicate better with the community. He wants to listen and address citizen concerns. He believes the town can get beyond this by being more transparent.
- Sue Hayes said the August 12 meeting will include appointing a new chair. She stated she is not interested in the position, and will not be rerunning when her current term is up.

She will instead offer her time to help the Town Clerk. They also need to appoint a new Selectboard member. The announcement has been posted. For anyone who's interested, please contact the Town Clerk by email. Sue added that she hasn't witnessed the atrocities the town has brought up concerning Warner Hodgdon. She clarifies that she is not his biggest supporter nor a close friend, but she trusts him as a fellow Selectboard Member.

- Warner Hodgdon said he is in shock from all of the attacks, many of which he does not understand. When he first ran for his position, his biggest goal was to get things done. He went on to say that his approach to getting things done instead of talking about them has gotten him in a pile of trouble. There is no truth to any underhanded conspiracy or bad mouthing. He believes it will be difficult to overcome the atmosphere he has witnessed during this meeting. He has always acted in a way that he believes is best for the town. He drew attention to some things he is proud of accomplishing for the town- worked on water well, worked on cemetery projects, many things that he picked up and got done. He expressed concern about folks not trusting anything he does or says because he takes pride in telling the truth. He will not apologize for his actions but he apologized for not acting the way he's expected to. He has not decided if he will remain on the Selectboard or not.
- Road Foreman Jim Hayes asked if he could comment on Warner Hodgdon's statement. Sue Hayes denied his request.
- Kevin Gillander noted that he is trying to make a difference despite being the newest member. He is still learning, and urged the town to bear with them during this difficult time.
- William Jones asked for clarification about the Selectboard member appointment. The Board responded saying it is their responsibility to vote to select an appointment to fulfill the remainder of Gary Allard's term until a proper election can take place during the next Town Meeting. Town Treasurer Heather Gonyaw added that a petition can be made with proper signatures to have a warned meeting to vote on a new member before the next Town Meeting. Heather read the article in Title 17 that describes the process.
- Suki Watson thanked Warner Hodgdon for sitting in the hot seat. She expressed her discomfort with the town taking sides and creating petitions behind someone's back.
- Sue Hayes asked the Town Clerk Deb Benoit what the cost is for a Special Town Meeting. Deb estimated \$700-\$1000.
- Town Treasurer Heather Gonyaw brought up the cost of flood damage repairs. She said FEMA is only available when a disaster has been officially declared, which has not happened yet. Even if that happens, it takes about 24 months to receive FEMA money. She and Delinquent Tax Collector Marcel Lapierre have been reaching out to banks about a municipal line of credit, but the interest rates are pretty steep.
- Edie Aremburg noted that folks need to report their damages to Vermont 211 by going online or calling. Contact insurance and get a denial letter to submit, and take lots of

pictures of the damage. Heather put a notice on Facebook and will add the information to the town website as soon as possible. They do not currently have access to the town website because the business who hosts the town website let the security certificate lapse. They are trying to recover it.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- New Chair (Discussion/Action)
- New Selectboard Member (Discussion/Action)
- Open Crushing Bids (Discussion/Action)
- McCloughlan Material (Discussion/Action)
- Driveway Permit (Discussion/Action)
- Tax Rate (Discussion/Action)
- Mold Quotes (Discussion/Action)
- Approve VLCT Public Participation Guidelines (Discussion/Action)
- Flood Damage (Discussion)
- Paving Grant (Discussion/Action)
- Road Commissioner Appointment (Discussion/Action)

Adjourn

- Ron Gray motioned to adjourn the meeting. Kevin Gillander seconded the motion. Motion passed 4-0. The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 pm.

Waterford Selectboard Meeting July 22, 2024

Sign In Sheet

Name

Signature

Scott Beck - St J	Scott Beck
Ben Lynn	Ben Lynn
Deborah Caldwell	Deborah Caldwell
Jen D'Amico	Jen D'Amico
Egin Slaton	Egin Slaton
Ami Gordon	Ami Gordon
Clem Remy	Clem Remy
Lu Fleming	Lu Fleming
BRYANT FLEMING	Bryant Fleming
Maria Dantos	Maria Dantos
William Jones	William Jones
Jodi Hayes	Jodi Hayes
David Morrison	David Morrison
KARIN HALE	Karin Hale
Ricky Hale	Ricky Hale
Eydie Aremburg	Eydie Aremburg
Sukey Watson	Sukey Watson
Tom Thomas	Tom Thomas
Debra Allard	Debra Allard
Debra Benoit	Debra Benoit
ROBERTA GILBERT	Roberta Gilbert
E. Patten	E. Patten
Dwaine Keach	Dwaine Keach
James Hemard	James Hemard
Cheryl Mathews	Cheryl Mathews
Darrell Mathews	Darrell Mathews
Dattan Mathews	Dattan Mathews