

**MINUTES REGULAR SELECT BOARD MEETING  
6:00 P.M. THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023  
MEMORIAL BUILDING  
20 CHURCH ST. 3RD FLOOR AND VIA ZOOM**

**Select Board**

Eric Remick, Chair  
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane - *absent*  
Elizabeth Dow  
Shari Cornish  
Danny Hale

**Others Present**

David Upson, Town Manager  
Casey Rowell, Business Manager  
Tom Fadden, Road Foreman  
Tonia Chase, Town Clerk - *Zoom*  
Kristen Leahy, Zoning Admin  
Tracy Martin, CDC - *Zoom*  
Rob Alcusky, HRS  
Mike Sullivan, HED  
Brenden Beer – *Zoom*  
Tim Riccedello

**Others Present**

Jodi Lew-Smith  
Daphne Kalmar  
Diane Grenkow  
Rachel Kane  
Jason Bahner - *Zoom*  
Lindsey O’Steen, HRS  
Mary Hall, HRS  
Eric Jonathan  
Harry Besett, HRS  
Timothy Edgar

**Regular Meeting**

**6:00 P.M.** – Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the meeting to order.

**6:01 P.M.** – Set/Adjust Agenda – Add an Item #7 Select Board to consider approving three cannabis license renewals

*Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the adjusted agenda as stated.*

**6:02 P.M.** – Communication from the audience –

Eric Jonathan served a civil order to the Hardwick Select Board denouncing the current corporate government structure. He asked to be put on the agenda for a future meeting for further discussion.

**6:04 P.M.** – Select Board to approve the minutes of the Regular Select Board meeting of December 7, 2023

*Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of the Regular Select Board meeting of December 7, 2023, as written.*

**6:07 P.M. – 6:12 P.M.** Town Manager Report – Given by David Upson

David updated us on several items including an update on the pedestrian bridge, police staffing, the recent flooding, and the wastewater plant generator. He also announced that our Town Wastewater Operator, Ken LaCasse, has been awarded the EPA Region 1 Wastewater Treatment Facility Operator of the Year. Congratulations Ken!

See attachments for the detailed report.

**6:12 P.M. – 6:14 P.M. Road Foreman Report – Given by Tom Fadden**

Tom reported that they had some minor damage on a few roads in the recent flooding, which has been fixed already. They will be working on fixing ruts this week and next. He mentioned that the crew hauled a bunch of material back from Danville to restock the mud season material supply that was somewhat depleted. He also shared that the abutment on the Mackville side of the Carey Rd. bridge started washing out in this recent storm, but they were able to fix that before it actually washed out.

No police report this evening.

**6:14 P.M. – 6:21 P.M. Hardwick Electric Department (HED) Report – Given by Mike Sullivan**

Mike shared that the HED Commissioners are currently evaluating another rate increase due to increased transmission costs. He also mentioned that they are still reviewing their options for an upcoming borrowing for system upgrades and repair of the Wolcott hydro. They are looking at local banks and the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank. If they bond, the municipal corporation (Town) has to back that debt, so they will need to work with the Town through that process.

Mike explained that several of the Wolcott Hydro component parts are out of state being restored/repaired. They have been steam cleaning, baking, and testing the stator, the results came back good. The stator holds the electromagnets that create the flux in the generator. Good news is that it does not need to be rewound. This will allow them to avoid a \$200,000 expense in the overall project.

Mike thanked the HED crew for restoring power as quickly as possible these last three Mondays as we had three storms with heavy wet snow, causing many outages. They worked diligently to get everyone back on within 24 hours.

Mike reported that the H11 solar is not doing too great; it is 12% under budget for production. Fortunately, market power is inexpensive right now. They are \$45,000 or 1.5% over budget on purchased power costs. A year ago, it was a much different story and luckily prices have come down.

Mike shared that their coverage ratio is currently 94%. He also gave an update on HED's year-to-date financials, reporting that revenues are \$175,000 or 2.8% under budget and expenses are \$110,000 or 1.8% over budget.

Eric asked if they had an idea of when the Wolcott Hydro would be back online. Mike said that they are hoping for March 1, but it will more likely be April 1. Eric also asked about the forecast for purchased power that is given by VPPSA. Mike indicated that the 60-day forecast, even without Wolcott Hydro, shows there is likely to be minimal financial burden on HED.

Shari asked about the EV charger over at HED's office building. Mike explained that they had to file for a tariff before they could start operating it. They have started that process. Once that is complete, they can actually put it into service. It is ready to go as soon as the administrative work is completed.

**6:21 P.M. – 6:22 P.M. Item #1 Town Clerk Tonia Chase to present liquor and tobacco licenses for approval consideration – *Action needed***

*Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to approve the liquor and tobacco license renewals for Tops Market LLC.*

**6:22 P.M. – 6:24 P.M.** Item #2 Select Board to review the notification letter for a proposed farmland conservation project on a portion of North Hardwick Farm’s land on Terra Planus Place and provide feedback if they have any

The Select Board received notification from Vermont Land Trust that North Hardwick Farm, LLC (formerly known as North Hardwick Dairy, LLC) is working with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) to place a permanent conservation easement on 52.43 acres of land located on Terra Planus Place in Hardwick. If the Select Board and/or Planning Commission believes that the proposed project does not comply with town planning and zoning efforts, then they can respond. A response letter is not necessary if there are no issues and there were not.

**6:24 P.M. – 6:33 P.M.** Item #3 Conservation Commission to present details of their plan to work with the Downtown Partnership on tree planting in the village

Tracy explained that the Downtown Partnership is applying for an urban community and forest grant through VT Forest, Parks, and Recreation. It requires no match, which is great and rare with grants. The grant is to plant thirty trees downtown over the course of 2 years. The hope is that it will include some trees along streets and along sidewalks. Some will be on private property. People can “adopt” a tree.

They plan to hire a contractor who will purchase and do the planting. The Conservation Commission and the Tree warden would take care of the trees. There is also an educational component about how to take care of them. There would need to be easements made between the Town and the landowners for trees situated on private property.

Jason Bahner mentioned that trees can be destroyed if they are not put in a location where they are protected from runoff, salt, etc. Tracy said that Geoff Fehrs will be actively involved, and he is an arborist.

**6:33 P.M. – 7:03 P.M.** Item #4 Discussion about placement of Hardwick Rescue building on Creamery Rd.

Harry Besett explained that Hardwick Rescue Squad (HRS) needs a new building for several reasons, but one major one is that they need a better space for employees that stay overnight when working. Currently, workers who stay over to be on call have no access to showers or a kitchen sink. They have to sleep on cots in a common area. This is not attractive to potential new employees. They are growing and are looking to hire another full-time employee, but their facility presents challenges to attract and retain people.

A map is provided in the attachments showing where HRS would like to place a new building to the left side of the cold storage building on Creamery Rd.

Danny asked about consolidating services, such as public works, fire, and rescue into one building. Harry said that the operation of HRS would change if they combined with the Town. They are really only looking for space for a building. They do not want to become a Town entity. They want to stay independent and continue serving the seven towns they currently service. Danny said that he was not suggesting that HRS combine with the Town, but that sharing a building vs. building a new one on their own could present cost savings for them. Danny mentioned concerns about rising costs of providing service and that towns may eventually not be able to continue the service. It would be beneficial for them to look at cost-saving measures.

Kristen said we need to make sure we look at zoning rules for that area. David mentioned that the Town is actively working on mitigation grants for the fire station, specifically for scoping and design to move the fire station out of the flood plain. Moving it to Creamery Rd. is a possibility.

In regard to the space that HRS wants from the Town, there is concern about contaminated soil in that whole area. Mary explained that if they just expanded the current building, they would not be able to get a third bay for another ambulance. That is why they want the space at the other end of Creamery Rd.

Eric said that the Town definitely supports HRS, and we want them to be able to find a location. We cannot say right now if they would be able to have that space, especially since we need to figure out the Town's plan for a facility to support fire and public works on Creamery Rd. We need to look at the drawings that were done several years ago for a concept of a facility located on Creamery Rd. David is working on this now.

Rob said that they want to move quickly on this and are not sure they can wait until the Town is able to build a facility that they could lease space from if they are not willing to give them the space they are asking for.

One question was if HRS had measured that space to see if it supports the 54 x 64' building that they are proposing. It has not been formally measured. Danny is planning to measure the space in the next week to see if that size building would even fit. The Town also needs to review the architecture plans done back in 2017 and look at the zoning rules.

The plan is to follow up at the January 4, 2024, meeting.

**7:03 P.M. – 7:05 P.M.** Item #5 Select Board to review and consider approving the *revised* Hazard Mitigation Plan – *Action needed*

At the last meeting, a draft for adoption was presented. It was brought up that it had a lot of grammatical errors and some incorrect information pertaining to other Towns. The Zoning Administrator went through the entire document and made the necessary edits using “track changes” Thank you, Kristen! Both versions were shared with the Select Board so they could see the changes.

*Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the revised Hazard Mitigation Plan, as presented.*

**7:05 P.M. – 7:49 P.M.** Item #6 Library and Recreation to go over their proposed FY25 budgets and then Business Manager to recap entire budget draft

Jason Bahner was present via Zoom to present the Recreation budget. The proposal is for a slight decrease of \$2,680 or 11%. The Business Manager proposed this version to the Recreation Committee and the committee agreed, with the exception that they requested to move \$1,500 from maintenance to the Community Programming line. The Business Manager can make this adjustment.

Jodi Lew-Smith, Daphne Kalmar, and Diane Grenkow were present for the library discussion. The library budget is increasing by about 16% primarily because they are requesting to bring the library staff salaries up to average market levels and benefit costs have increased. There are some increased costs for the operation of the additional square footage of the library. Daphne went over the recent salary survey done for the VT Department of Libraries. Some of the staff have hourly rates that are significantly below average. They are valuable

employees, and the library trustees want to bring their wages up to closer to the average. In addition, the library does not have a fund balance to carry over to this budget, so the salaries and the lack of fund balance are the driving factors for the increase. All other categories had little or no increase.

Jodi reported that substantial completion of the library is slated for early August. She gave an update on the Vermont Department of Libraries grant opportunity that will be coming in January. They plan to apply for \$600-\$700K, so they can finish the library. The current construction model has the library closed in and weather tight, but parts of the addition will not be fully finished unless more funding becomes available. If they get this grant, they would be able to finish everything 100%.

The Business Manager mentioned that money to support the expansion continues to trickle in as people are still supportive of the project and want to see the project completed.

Since the last meeting, the Business Manager went through and updated new information that came in such as the insurance premiums, reduced capital set aside as much as possible, and subtracted small amounts from categories throughout the budget trying to reduce the overall increase. The goal is to maintain the level of service the Town provides now. As of now, it shows a 9.96% increase.

Tonight, should be the time to talk about any additions or cuts that the Board wants to make. The plan is to approve a final budget for presentation to the voters at the January 4 meeting. The board did not propose any changes this evening. It would be great if community members wanted to come and weigh in at our regular meetings prior to presenting to the voters, so they can understand the logic and discussion behind the numbers.

See attachments for the complete draft of all departments.

Lindsay O'Steen talked about the HRS budget increase. Their call volume has increased to over eight hundred for this year. Hardwick pays proportionately for the number of calls in the Town. There were 380+ calls in Hardwick this year. They need to hire another full-time person to keep up with the call volume, which is why Hardwick's portion of the budget increase is almost 24%.

**7:49 P.M. – 7:51 P.M.** Item #7 Select Board to consider approving three cannabis license renewals

*Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the following cannabis licenses:*

Indoor Cultivator Tier 1:

DCB LLC DBA High Altitude Cannabis Alternatives  
The Clean Cannabis Company

Manufacturers Tier 3:

Tilia Processing LLC

**Select Board Reports:**

Shari mentioned that the Town House renovation project went out to bid. It ended on Dec 19, but was extended to January 8 in hopes of getting additional bids. They only received one.

Elizabeth shared that as of January 1, 2024, the Gazette will transition to a non-profit called Northeast Kingdom Public Journalism. Ray Small will step back from the paper and the Board will take over. They are not sure exactly how it will go at first, but they want to create a community newspaper that will grow and thrive into what it was once and has been for over 130 years. She asked that the community be patient with them during the transition as it is a learning process. She also encouraged the community to be writers and submit articles, write about community events, or news about their companies, etc.

Elizabeth also announced that she is not running for Select Board again in March.

**New Business:** David mentioned that a person is requesting to get their local cannabis control board approval prior to their State approval. The reason is due to timing because the State board only meets once a month and not again until the end of January. The Select Board declined to entertain this, as all other applicants have gotten their State approval prior and then presented to the local board.

**Old Business:** Eric mentioned the sound system again. He heard feedback in the community that it is difficult to hear online. Danny said that at his prior employer, they spent a large amount of money on what was going to be an advanced sound system for virtual meetings, and it did not work any better than what we have. We do offer in person and so he did not feel that it is something that we need to spend a bunch of money on because it likely will not change the outcome. It was suggested that we could add a few more microphones to see if that would help.

**8:04 P.M.** Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, adjourned the meeting.

Minutes taken by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Casey Rowell, Business Manager

Minutes approved by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Eric Remick, Select Board Chair