

**MINUTES REGULAR SELECT BOARD MEETING
6:00 P.M. THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024
MEMORIAL BUILDING
20 CHURCH ST. 3RD FLOOR AND VIA ZOOM**

Select Board

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

Others Present

David Upson, Town Manager
Casey Rowell, Business Manager
Lynne Gedanken, HED
Erik Josephson – *Zoom*

Others Present

Regular Meeting

6:01 P.M. – Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the meeting to order.

6:01 P.M. – Set/Adjust Agenda – Add an Item#6 for the Select Board to consider appointing Jason Schlesinger as a Hardwick Police Officer.

Upon motion by Elizabeth Dow, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to adjust the agenda as stated.

No communication from the audience.

6:03 P.M. – Select Board to approve the minutes of the Regular Select Board meeting February 1, 2024

Upon motion by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of the Regular Select Board meeting of February 1, 2024, as written.

6:03 P.M. – 6:15 P.M. Town Manager Report – Given by David Upson

David shared that the first closing of a flood buyout property at 209 School St. in East Hardwick will be closing soon. The others should follow soon. The appraisals came in higher than expected, so the grant amount was amended to cover the costs. The grant covers all costs associated with the acquisition, demolition, and cleanup of these properties to create a green space.

David reported that we are close to having all of the necessary permits for the pedestrian bridge. The Coast Guard permits are all set too. He anticipates that the bid documents will come out in mid to late March.

David shared that the MTAP grant for \$75,000 for architecture and engineering plans for the Creamery Rd. property was approved with a couple of minor tweaks to be made to our application. The idea is that the Fire Department (FD) would move up to that location for future flood mitigation. While the focus of this grant is the moving of the FD, it will help us to develop a campus concept where all of public works could also be housed.

David shared that the Jeudevine Youth Librarian, Marlyn McDowell, is helping to organize an event at Hazen Union High School to be held on February 21 at 8:00 a.m. She is looking for Town officials to talk with kids about government processes, Town meetings, etc. There will be local representatives there as well. Opie asked some of the Select Board members to attend.

David reported that he continues to have weekly calls with FEMA. This week's call was somewhat frustrating after learning of all the additional information they need, primarily for the road repairs, but we will continue to work through it and provide what they are asking for.

The next Neighbor-to-Neighbor community meeting will be held on Sunday, February 18 at the Legion at 4:30 p.m. David is unable to attend, so Kristen Leahy will be attending on behalf of the Town.

David let the Board know that Davies Law has notified us that they will no longer be doing tax sales for any towns. We have been fortunate to find another firm that can take this on for us. David will be signing an engagement letter with that firm soon. We will not be having a March tax sale due to the timing of this announcement, but we will use the new firm for our larger sale in the Fall.

No Police Department or Road Foreman Report.

6:16 P.M. – 6:27 P.M. Hardwick Electric Department (HED) Report – Given by Lynne Gedanken

Lynne shared that a notice of rate increase went out to rate payers recently. The proposed increase is 1.97% and would take effect in March if approved by the PUC. Inflation and increased costs are the drivers for the increase.

Lynne gave an update on the Wolcott Hydro that was damaged in the July flood. She indicated that materials and equipment are in the process of being repaired and replaced to get it back online. They are anticipating it will be back online around the end of May/beginning of June.

Lynne mentioned that statewide fiber building continues to roll out. HED has contractors working on setting new poles for this effort.

Lynne reported that HED is working on their year-end numbers. Their purchased power costs came in @\$4.14M, which was \$27,000 over budget with a 92% coverage rate.

Lynne indicated that the HED Commissioners will be looking at the 2024 budget at their next meeting. They are expecting an 8% increase due to transmission costs and inflation. In addition, their current employee union contract expires in June and negotiations are starting. They anticipate an increase in that as well.

Lynne shared that there are standards for reliability when it comes to outage frequency. The standard says they would have no more than 3.5 events per year per customer and 2.4 hours off per year per customer. HED's stats were 3.2 events per customer, so slightly more favorable than the standard.

Ceilidh asked if the Wolcott Hydro was going to be raised to avoid future flooding. Lynne explained that it is likely that the windows will be removed making it all concrete. The building cannot be elevated due to its current structure.

Eric asked Lynne where the meeting notices for the commissioner meetings get posted. Lynne is not sure at the moment, but she can ask.

Elizabeth mentioned that the Jackson Bridge dam was built to regulate the flow of water and wondered if HED had ever used that way. Lynne is not sure. This was over one hundred years ago. Lynne said that she knows that the Core of Engineers use it for flood mitigation, but the electric department does not have control over it.

6:27 P.M. – 6:33 P.M. Item #1 Select Board to review and sign the loan agreement for the feasibility study of relocation the wastewater plant (100% forgivable loan) – *Action needed*

Upon motion by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to approve and sign the Loan Agreement with the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank for the Vermont State Revolving Fund Loan RF1-360-1.0 for the feasibility study of relocating the wastewater plant.

David shared information about his weekly task force meetings regarding the damaged wastewater plants in the state (Hardwick, Ludlow & Johnson). He has made it clear that we cannot put this burden on the ratepayers of the system.

6:33 P.M. – 6:34 P.M. Item #2 Select Board to consider approving a banner application for AWARE for their fall craft fair – *Action needed*

Upon motion by Shari Cornish, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve a banner application for AWARE for their fall craft fair and authorize the Town Manager to sign the application.

6:34 P.M. – 6:44 P.M. Item #3 Business Manager to give the FY24 Quarter 2 budget update thru 12/31/23

The Business Manager gave an update on the Town's budget through December 31, 2023 (second quarter). Both revenues and expenses are on track to meet budget (excluding the flood expenses). See attachments for the full report.

Eric asked for an update on the gravel pit blasting. David has Gary Nolan working on this.

6:44 P.M. – 6:49 P.M. Item #4 Select Board to consider approving the recommendation for a consultant for the East Hardwick Village Comprehensive Plan funded through a Better Connections grant – *Action needed*

David shared that we received four proposals. Several town employees, the Better Connections group from the State, and NVDA reps scored the proposals. They came to a consensus that the Fairweather/Dufresne Group would be the best fit for the project.

Upon motion by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the recommendation of Fairweather Consulting and Dufresne Group partnering as the consultants for the East Hardwick Village Comprehensive Plan funded through the Better Connection grant and authorize the Town Manager to execute any related documents.

6:49 P.M. – 6:51 P.M. Item #5 Select Board to review and certify "Certificate of Project Completion" for the gravel pit bond and the 2021 fire truck bond – *Action needed*

Upon motion by Shari Cornish, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to certify and sign the "Certificate of Project Completion" documents for the gravel pit bond and the 2021 fire truck bond.

6:51 P.M. – 6:53 P.M. Item #6 Select Board to consider appointing Jason Schlesinger as a Hardwick Police Officer

David gave a summary of Jason's background. Mike Henry and David, both know him, and David worked with Jason when he worked for Vermont State Police. Jason was a state trooper for about 14 years. Jason has a little time available now and is willing to help us out on a part-time temporary basis.

Upon motion by Elizabeth Dow, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to appoint Jason Schlesinger as a Hardwick Police Officer.

Select Board Reports:

Ceilidh shared that the Hardwick Equity Committee started a book group in partnership with the Jeudevine Library. Email Ceilidh if you are interested in joining. equity@hardwickvt.gov

Shari mentioned that on Tuesday, February 20 from 5:30-6:30 the Downtown Partnership is hosting a small event at the Cork & Fork for downtown businesses and organizations to give them an update on what is happening downtown. Light refreshments will be served and a cash bar available.

Eric mentioned that the Yellow Barn construction continues to push forward. He has had a lot of people comment to him on the enormity of the Accelerator building. There will be fifty-one windows going into the building which should break it up some. There is also likely still room for an art mural too.

Elizabeth announced that the Hardwick Historical Society is having its annual meeting on May 13, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. at the Town House. The guest speaker will be Thomas Hubka, the author of *Big House Little House Back House Barn*. Elizabeth also shared that this will be her last regular Select Board meeting. She is not running for a Select Board seat again. She wanted to assure the public that the Town is well governed. The employees and Board are working for the people. Elizabeth shared a quote from the movie Runaway Bride "May the Good Lord grant you the good sense to live in a small town" Her point was that Hardwick is a good small town with good leadership.

The other Select Board members presented her with flowers and a card as a thank you for her 9 years serving on the Select Board.

New Business Danny brought up that Lorraine Hussey passed away this week and she should be remembered for the wonderful person she was. Elizabeth encouraged everyone to read Lorraine’s obituary because it is great.

Old Business: none

7:00 P.M. *Upon motion by Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to enter Executive Session per 1 V.S.A. § 313 for loan contract discussion to include Town Manager and Business Manager.*

7:05 P.M. Exited Executive Session. *No action taken.*

Danny asked when the Yellow Barn would be paying back the Economic Development loan fund. Eric said that after construction ends, all the remaining debt will get refinanced into one note with VEDA (with NEKDC as the Borrower, not the Town) and the Town will get paid back at that point.

Shari brought up the Economic Development Loan fund having a healthy balance to invest in economic development in the town. If there are people in town that have a business plan and want to put in an application, we do have money to lend out for businesses.

7:10 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