

Town Of Wheelock Selectboard Meeting
At Wheelock Town Hall and via Zoom
February 18, 2025

Present Selectboard members: Ann Lawless, Mike Richardson, and Scott Lange. Citizen auditor Enid Ellis. Residents Chuck Dill, part-time road crew, and Theresa Stimpson; Recorder Meaghan Rinehart. Via Zoom Matt Hand from Vermont Emergency Management, Corey Kelley, homeowner; Town Clerk Erin Swigart.

6PM call to order. Changes to Agenda; Ann proposes to remove plowing policy due to time limitations.

OLD BUSINESS

Buyout Agreement

Matt Hand introduces himself and opens the floor to questions regarding buyout. Mike states that we want to support our resident whose property was damaged by the July flooding, but need to know what that will look like for the town. Matt explains that after demolition occurs and utilities are capped ownership and responsibility will be passed to the town or another entity, for example, Fish and Wildlife, that follows similar green space laws. Ann asks whether the town was required to participate in the NFIP (national flood insurance program). According to Matt as of this time we are not. Ann asks for clarification on what paperwork the town needs to fill out and what the property owner is responsible for. These documents were reviewed and clarification was given. According to the documents VEM handles the grant funding and legal services and will coordinate with the town not the homeowner. Ann questions the timeline for this process. Matt responds that its "roughly a 2-year process" with an application deadline of April 30, 2025. The dollar limits of this program and information needed are discussed. FEMA will conduct a benefit/cost analysis to determine eligibility. Matt made clear that this is the first step in the process, eligibility was still in question and that this was voluntary for both the town and homeowner and that any party can pull out during any part of the process up to closing. Call concludes, Matt and Ms. Kelley depart Zoom. Scott motions, seconded by Mike to sign application for Buyout. All in favor, so voted.

Contract Agreement With Riverside Rescue

Riverside Rescue requested that towns other than those in their immediate service area, such as us, sign an agreement for \$1,000 to guarantee that they would take rescues from Wheelock if they have room. Animal Control Officer, Cindy Cady had sent an invoice for caring for 2 dogs surrendered in Wheelock for which no rescue service had a place. She had suggested we need to have a contract with a rescue service for her to place dogs surrendered in Wheelock by those who can no longer care for them. Wheelock has no ordinance regarding this issue, and Ann noted the ordinances she has seen do not cover abandoned dogs. It was deemed we needed more specifics on Riverside Rescue policy and to create an ordinance going forward. Meaghan volunteered to look into what other towns do in similar situations. Scott motions, seconded by Ann, to appoint Meaghan to research this topic. All in favor, so voted.

Town Report Insert for 2024 Financials

Enid presented the insert packet prepared by citizen auditors that included the 2024 budget/actuals and the 2025 budget adopted by the Selectboard for the general fund and highway fund. The packet also included information on fund balances and loans. The information was not available at the printer's deadline, and the insert is needed to meet the statutory requirement for town reports to be available to the public by 2/22. Scott motions, seconded by Mike, to accept the auditors 2024 report so the pages may be photocopied and inserted into the town report booklets. All in favor, so voted.

Treasurer's Report, Statement of Financial Conditions

Erin noted the town used \$110,000 in late 2024 from the 2024 line of credit of \$300,000. The non-arbitrage loan signed in January to cover 2025 expenses before taxes come in has a slightly lower interest rate. Treasurers have been using both, trying to incur as little interest as possible. Applications are not open yet for disaster loans from the VT Bond Bank. Those will have a lower interest rate. Ann will look into whether FEMA reimburses for interest charges for money borrowed to cover disaster relief, and the documentation requirements.

Carol Rossi, Treasurer up to 12/31/2024, had submitted a 2024 Statement of Financial Conditions for the town report insert. She was not available beforehand or at the meeting to answer questions about it, and there were some. She also provided projections of tax impact on levels of property values, using the existing grand list figures. Although it could be beneficial to provide voters this information, the grand list is subject to change. Enid noted the 2024 financial reports and 2025 budget in the insert provide a percentage calculation of how much the road and general fund budgets are going up. Scott motions, seconded by Mike, to respectfully decline including the treasurer's Statement of Financial Conditions due to needing clarification. All in favor, so voted.

Set 2025 Pay Rates

Carol had recommended the selectboard vote to adopt 2025 pay rates, that are included in the 2025 budget they approved, for voting at Town Meeting. Ann motions, seconded by Scott, to hold pay increases pending voter approval, and to pay any increases retroactively from the first of this calendar year. All in favor, so voted.

MERP Updates

Ann recommended adding volunteer Russel Ruff to the MERP Implementation Town Hall steering committee. Scott motions, seconded by Mike, to do so. All in favor, so voted.

For buildings like our town hall that do not comply with ADA law, 20% of the grant funds must be spent to that end. James Coe gave us a proposal for \$5,000 to create information panels for Town Meeting with 3 different options for ADA accessibility. The cost of this presentation would be \$5,000, that would be covered by the MERP grant. Options ranged from \$50,000, that would not make us fully compliant with disabilities law, and 2 others that could be, ranging from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000. It was decided to table this issue.

NEW BUSINESS

V-Trans Packet

Mike motions, seconded by Ann, to certify the town's road mileage. All in favor, so voted.

Mike motions, seconded by Ann, to accept Certification of Compliance for Town Roads, Bridge Standards, Network and Inventory. All in favor, so voted.

ROAD REPORT

Scott made the Selectboard aware that both trucks are in rough shape, needing both major and minor repairs for both function and safety. The grader lacks heat.

Chuck Dill informed the Selectboard that he found trucks available we could buy today and inquired on the status of the 6 wheeler on order since Nov 2023. Discussion was had whether we could seek another option and if voters had to approve a change and if the price we were quoted for the truck on order would even be the same on delivery, which is expected in May. It was made clear that vehicles are a struggle across all municipalities and that this situation is not unique to Wheelock.

Chuck asked about the sand issue. Scott said the town is working on that and waiting to hear but materials have been difficult to obtain for Wheelock and other municipalities as well.

Scott stated that Luke has been doing a fantastic job and recommends him for Road Foreman position. He thanked Chuck for his service.

Employee Health Insurance Opt Out Payout The current policy is vague on this subject. Examples were given of instances when it has been paid out, when it has been declined and in what situations it is applicable. Most places that offer this generally don't pay it out until after a year of service. Ann motions, seconded by Scott, to pay an opt out to employee. Nay, so voted, unanimously.

FEMA Work submitting the reimbursement requests is ongoing with weekly meetings and progress is being made.

Road Crew Applications It was determined an Executive Session was not needed to discuss the six road crew applications received. Reading them silently, selectboard members determined no interviews were merited. The ad will continue to run.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Stimpson inquired about the Cobleigh Library request for appropriation and why it was on the town meeting warning if their petition was short on signatures, as stated at a prior selectboard meeting. Erin stated it was determined that several people were submitting the petitions and that the submissions sent via email did make the cutoff date, however, hadn't been processed prior to the last selectboard meeting but were indeed submitted on time. Ms. Stimpson asked about Powers Park and it was confirmed their petition was submitted on time as well.

Mike motions, seconded by Scott, to **adopt minutes of 2/4, sign warrants and adjourn**. All in favor, so voted.

Meeting Adjourned 9:43pm.

Submitted by Meaghan Rinehart

Ann Lawless, chair

Mike Richardson

Scott Lange