

Wolcott Selectboard Informational Meeting Minutes February 24, 2021

Zoom meeting: 6:00 p.m.

All Minutes are draft until approved by the Selectboard
Please see future Minutes for approval of these Minutes

Present: Linda Martin, Kurt Klein, Richard Lee
Absent: Kim Gravel, Kurt Billings
Legislators: Dan Noyes, Kate Donnally
Participants: Randall Szott, Allen Carpenter, Harold Schwartz, Monica Cross, Rick Harkins, Bill Cotten, Gina Brown

Martin called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

On behalf of the board, Martin expressed thanks to Kim Gravel, and to Mike Davidson, for their services to the Selectboard. Each will receive a certificate of appreciation.

Legislator Introductions

Dan Noyes: Noyes reminded constituents that he serves on the Committee on Human Services. His contact information is available online, or by calling the Town Office.

Kate Donnally: Donnally reminded constituents that she and Dan Noyes are hosting open meetings the fourth Saturday of each month. Information will be posted on Front Porch Forum. Those who wish to participate may RSVP for a Zoom link. The meetings will also be made available on YouTube.

Meeting Rules, Voting Procedures and Overview of Meeting: Martin expressed the board's disappointment over being unable to meet in person for this year's Town Meeting. This year all Articles will be voted on by Australian ballot. Given the change, State law requires an Informational Meeting be held within 10 days before the vote. The Informational Meeting does not replace Town Meeting, but is a Selectboard meeting to allow citizens an opportunity to ask questions. Martin laid the groundwork for how the meeting would proceed.

Articles 1-4: Lee addressed Articles 1-4 of the Warning:

Article 1 lists the Town officer positions up for election.

Article 2 addresses publication of a list of delinquent taxpayers.

Article 3 addresses the appropriation being sought by the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department. The proposed budget for the Sheriff's Department is not contained in the Town Report. The proposed budget may be viewed on the Town's website.

Article 4 addresses the appropriation being sought by the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department for dispatch services. The \$42,753 amount that appears on the Warning and on the ballot is incorrect. The actual appropriation being sought is \$37,005 which is a 2.93% reduction from last year's appropriation. Although the figure listed in the Warning and on the ballot cannot be changed, the board is looking into the best way to address the matter. If

Article 4 passes, the amount the Town will pay for dispatch services would be the requested amount of \$37,005.

Articles 5-12 with explanation as to why they are split: Martin addressed Articles 5-12 of the Warning:

Article 5 addresses the appropriations requested by social service agencies that have been given appropriations in the past. There were no increases in the amounts requested this year. Two agencies: Hardwick Emergency Rescue Squad, and Lamoille County Planning Commission, that had been included in this group in the past, were moved to the Selectboard budget since they are considered essential services.

Articles 6-12 are individual requests for appropriations to various organizations. Typically, an organization seeking an appropriation from the Town for the first time would be required to submit to the board a Petition with a required number of signatures. Due to COVID, that requirement was waived. Since Petitions were not required, citizens may vote on the requested appropriations individually rather than as a group.

Article 13 Junk Ordinance explanation: Klein reminded citizens that Wolcott has had a junk ordinance for many years. Periodically the ordinance needs to be updated in order to comply with the most recent State laws, and to be considered a viable ordinance by the Judicial Bureau. Last year the board made some revisions to the existing ordinance following the Vermont Cities and Towns template. Also added was a clause addressing the length of time a “free pile” may be left on the roadside. The board voted to adopt the amended ordinance. A Petition was filed challenging final adoption of the ordinance. The issue of whether Wolcott will have a junk ordinance is now up for vote by the Town.

Klein noted that the wording on the ballot is in the negative, which seems counterintuitive. If one supports adoption of the ordinance, then vote “No.” If one does not support adoption of the ordinance, then vote “Yes.”

Articles 14-15 Budget: Martin addressed Articles 14-15:

Article 14 is standard language authorizing the Treasurer to collect taxes, and when the taxes are due.

Article 15 addresses the Selectboard budget. Martin touched on highlights.

-The Athletic Association did not request funds this year due to COVID.

-No funds were requested for the flood loan. Reimbursement funds should be forthcoming from FEMA. There will be sufficient money to pay the next annual payment on the loan, so that payment was not included in this budget.

-Election costs were reduced since there is no primary or general election this year.

-Library funding was reduced because the librarian will retire the first of July and will then work on a part-time basis which will not qualify for benefits. Since the library has moved to the Depot building, money was added for utilities.

-For the Highway Department, temporary labor was reduced from \$10,000 to \$2,000. The equipment replacement fund was increased \$500. Klein added that last year the Town entered into five-year lease agreements with CAT for a new grader and excavator, with 7 year warranties. It was determined that the old equipment needed to be replaced. The old grader was traded in for \$30,000. The excavator was sold for \$10,000. A lease payment is made once

per year. In five or six years a determination can be made to replace the equipment based on depreciation, care, and maintenance. Or, at the end of the lease period, the Town would own the equipment which could be traded in or sold.

-The Fire Department budget increased due to the cost of protective equipment. The Department was unable to do a coin-drop or other fundraiser this year due to COVID.

It is anticipated there may be a 6 cent reduction in property taxes this year.

Questions and Answers:

Allen Carpenter introduced himself as a candidate for the two-year position on the Selectboard.

Bill Cotten complimented those responsible for this year's Town Report. Cotten opined that the Sheriff's Department budget should be part of the Selectboard's budget rather than a separate Article, since he considers that an essential service.

Harold Schwartz requested clarification on what happens on Town Meeting Day. Due to COVID, there will be no in-person Town Meeting this year. All voting will take place via Australian ballot. Ballots may be obtained ahead of time from Town Office and mail in or drop off early; or voters may cast their ballots at Town Office on Tuesday, March 2 between 8:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Schwartz requested clarification on the wording of Article 13 regarding the Junk Ordinance and what a yes, or no, vote would mean. It was pointed out that the wording in Article 13 is required by statute, so that is why it reads, "Shall the voters disapprove (reject)...." A "No" vote is in support of the Ordinance. A "Yes" vote is a vote to reject the Ordinance.

Bill Cotten suggested the board develop a capital facilities fund to address expenses coming up in the next few years to avoid a yo-yo effect with tax rates going up and down. The board acknowledged the positives of having such a fund. There is a capital fund that the board has put money into in the past. The board considered this year to be unusually tough on taxpayers, and the Town has a lot of debt. The board would consider it a priority to put more money into the capital fund if there is money left over from the end of the year budgets.

Monica Cross commended Martin and Lucien Gravel for the work they have done complying with FEMA paperwork. She added that it has been a tough COVID year, economically, and thanked the board for tightening the belt on this year's budget.

Belinda Harris Clegg reminded voters to get their ballots in to Town Office, or to vote on Tuesday. She also encouraged everyone to tune in to the OSSU meeting tomorrow night. The link for the school meeting will be posted on the Town's website.

Gina Brown requested clarification on the hours the polls will be open at Town Office on Tuesday. Voters may cast their ballots between 8:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Rick Hawkins expressed interest in the volunteer position on the Law Enforcement Study Group. Hawkins may contact Randall Szott, the Town Administrator.

Martin thanked everyone for attending. If anyone has questions, they may contact anyone on the Selectboard. Board members' phone numbers appear on page 2 of the Town Report.

The meeting ended at 6:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deborah Klein

Next regularly scheduled meeting - March 3, 2021