

Town & Village of Woodstock
Town Selectboard & Village Trustees Special Joint Meeting
September 29th, 2025
5:30PM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes

Draft minutes are subject to approval.

Present Selectboard: Chair Ray Bourgeois, Vice Chair Susan Ford, Greg Fullerton, Keri Cole, Laura Powell

Present Trustees: Chair Seton Mcilroy, Vice Chair Jeffrey Kahn, Brenda Blakeman, Lisa Lawlor

Public: Tyler Kimberley, Jill Davies, Jon Spector, Todd Erceg, Karim Houry, Norm Frates, Tesha Buss, Beth Finlayson, Lauren Fisher, Roger Logan, Butch Sutherland, Carol Cunningham, Alison Clarkson, Norm Frates Jr., Michelle Sutherland, Loren Fisher, Ellen LeFever, David McKay, Kimball Bailey

Staff: Eric Duffy, Abbie Sherman

Call to order

1. Selectboard

- a. Chair Ray Bourgeois called the Selectboard meeting of September 29th to order at 5:30PM

2. Trustees

- a. Chair Seton Mcilroy called the Trustee meeting of September 29th to order at 5:30PM

B. Additions or Deletions from the Agenda

Introduction of Economic Development Director Abbie Sherman

Potential Executive Session 1 V.S.A 313

C. Discussion

Abbie Sherman Introduction

Municipal Manager Eric Duffy introduced Abbie Sherman, who has been with the Town of Woodstock for just over three weeks as the Economic Development Director. Abbie has been meeting with people in the community and will be an integral part of the goals and objectives conversations moving forward. Abbie shared that she previously worked for the Town of Killington Vermont overseeing their tax influence financing district and water and road projects. Prior to that, she worked for the Vermont Department of Commerce and Community Development, which reviews and approves tax and financing districts. She noted that her first three weeks have been busy as she gets up to speed.

FY24 Audit Presentation – Mudgett Jennett and Korgh-Wisner PC

Tyler Kimberley from Mudgett Jennett and Korgh-Wisner P.C. presented the FY24 audit findings for both the Town and Village. For the Town audit, he noted that it began in September 2024 and initially was anticipated to need a single audit. By March 2025, it was determined that a single audit was not required, which caused some delays in the process.

The audit identified several adjustments, most of which related to government-wide reporting and year-end accruals. There was a finding regarding duplication of revenues, including an ARPA grant of approximately \$600,000 that was recorded both in FY23 and FY24, as well as duplicated local options tax revenue. The audit also identified sewer fund loan proceeds that were incorrectly recorded as revenue when they should have been recorded as a liability.

For the Village audit, there were similar adjustments related to government-wide reporting. The audit identified a finding related to "miscellaneous exchange accounts" that should have been zeroed out but contained various amounts that needed to be properly classified, including state grant money of \$47,008 and a transfer of \$7,000.

Tyler Kimberley emphasized that both the Town and Village received unmodified (clean) opinions on their financial statements. He expressed hope that the FY25 audit process would go more smoothly with fewer adjustments.

Finance Committee Presentation- Water Rates

Jill Davies, representing the Finance Committee, presented the results of their work on water rate scenarios. The committee's previous presentation in August had outlined initial findings, and they returned with additional scenarios as requested by the board.

The key conclusions presented were:

1. The current water rates need to be increased substantially to fund needed capital expenditures over the next 5 years.
2. Rates would need to increase by approximately 129% across the board to meet operations and capital expenditure needs.
3. With this increase, the average residential user would see their annual water bill increase from approximately \$354 to \$811 by FY30, which is close to the national average.

John Spector explained that there was some confusion about how to allocate costs for subsequent capital expenditures beyond the bonded capital expenditures that had already been approved by voters. The committee had assumed that the percentages voted on (approximately 50% from users, 27% from options taxes, and 23% from property taxes) would continue for future capital expenditures. However, they learned recently that communications had been made suggesting that property tax contributions might be limited to only the currently bonded capital expenditures.

The committee presented several "what if" scenarios as requested:

1. Charging higher fees for users who exceed certain water usage thresholds
2. Reducing the access fee and increasing usage fees
3. Charging second homeowners 10% more than residents

The Finance Committee recommended:

1. Implementing water rate increases as soon as possible
2. Ensuring decisions are supported by readily available data
3. Creating an ordinance requiring properties within a certain distance of water mains to connect to the municipal water system

During discussion, board members raised concerns about clarity on future funding allocations and requested that the committee run scenarios with 0% and 23% contributions from options tax and property taxes for future capital expenses. Karim Houry, a village resident, cautioned against extreme changes in allocations that might lead to divided votes between users and non-users.

D. Votes

Annual Ottawaquechee River Trail Agreement

Eric Duffy stated that the agreement is with both municipalities and was the same agreement as last year. Tesha Buss, representing the Ottawaquechee River Trail, noted that the trail sees approximately 500 visitors per week and involves three different landowners. She explained that the Town's most important role is providing liability coverage, though Vermont laws provide substantial protection for outdoor recreation. The ultimate goal is to have a long-term lease, but they are working toward that gradually.

Motion: by Chair Seton Mcilroy approve the license to use the real estate from the Ottawaquechee River Trail. (6:27PM)

Seconded: by Jeffrey Kahn

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Funding for Wassail from Local Option Tax Revenue

Norm Frates presented on behalf of the Wassail Weekend committee, explaining that he joined the committee two years ago after a poor parade in 2023. He noted that previously participants had to pay to be in the parade, but the committee reversed that policy, resulting in over 30 participants last year. This change created expenses that needed funding. The committee's total budget is \$21,750, with the Chamber contributing \$5,000, leaving a request for \$16,750 from local option tax revenue.

Board members raised several questions about the budget, including specific line items for marketing expenses, swag, and revenue-generating opportunities. Susan Ford asked about the amount of money the EDC contributed last year, Beth Finlayson responded that they gave \$10,000. Lauren Fisher expressed concern about organization and governance, wanting clarity on who specifically owns and is responsible for the event.

Beth Finlayson from the Chamber of Commerce clarified that the Chamber owns the Woodstock Wassail Weekend entity and has been working to build a committee to help organize the event, particularly the parade, which is considered the heart of the weekend.

Several community members spoke in support of the funding, including Kimball Bealy, who expressed surprise at the scrutiny, emphasizing the event's importance for the town's tourism and recognition. Lauren Fisher, village resident and Chamber board president, noted that the event draws over 5,000 people, including many town residents, and is crucial to Woodstock's identity.

Roger Logan suggested supporting the funding this year but encouraged the organization to become self-sustaining in the future.

FY26-FY27 Strategic Planning Conversion and Directives

Municipal Manager FY25 Goals and Objectives Update

Municipal Manager Eric Duffy presented an update on the goals and objectives set last year, highlighting achievements and ongoing projects. Accomplishments included:

1. Housing Development:

- Purchase of the water system (closed April 2025)
- Hiring of a new Development Director (Abbie Sherman)
- Work on updating Village zoning bylaws

2. Effective and Efficient Government:

- Implementation of new software (Paychex, iWork, Deckard, Ecopixel)
- Streamlined internal processes (reduced journal entries from 1,722 to under 500)
- HR software cutting payroll processing time in half
- Internal reorganization and staff stepping up to fill multiple roles

3. Affordability:

- Securing grants for the water system
- New ways to increase revenue
- Implementation of local option tax

4. Climate Resiliency:

- Staff member Molly Maxham volunteering to become certified floodplain manager

Eric Duffy emphasized that the staff is dedicated and often takes on additional responsibilities voluntarily. He also noted several items still in progress, including town hall renovations, updating Village Zoning Bylaws, and developing a capital plan.

Eric Duffy then made a significant recommendation for the boards to consider directing staff to investigate and prepare for a merger vote next year. He cited improved efficiency, less financial work, decreased overtime, reduced employee burnout, and streamlined ordinances as potential benefits. He acknowledged that there are many unknowns, including state requirements, charter issues, and potential costs, but expressed confidence that his staff could provide answers if directed to pursue this path.

The board discussed scheduling joint meetings to continue goals and objectives discussions, setting dates for October 14th at 5:30 PM and October 23rd at 8 AM, with additional budget meetings in early November.

Personnel Updates

Eric Duffy requested approval for retention bonuses for employees, recommending \$1,000 for full-time employees and \$500 for those working 20 hours or more per week on average over the course of the year.

Motion: by Laura Powell To give the town manager power to disperse retention bonuses to all full-time, part-time town employees and staff, and town elected officials who work within Town Hall. (7:48PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Motion: by Chair Seton McIlroy To give the town manager power to disperse retention bonuses to all full-time, part-time town employees and staff, and town elected officials who work within Town Hall. (7:48PM)

Seconded: by Jeffrey Kahn

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

E. Citizen Comments – Three Minutes per participant

Lauren Fisher, Village resident and Chamber Board President, expressed concern about the Marketing Committee and the MOA discussion between the board and Chamber of Commerce. He noted worry about the new website launching without clarity on advertising arrangements, pricing, and other details. He emphasized the urgency of addressing these issues as they affect both the website launch and the chamber's budget. Eric Duffy apologize for not presenting the information sooner and committed to scheduling a meeting when the relevant staff member returns from vacation.

F. Adjournment

Motion: by Chair Ray Bourgeois to adjourn the meeting at 7:53PM

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Motion: by Chair Seton Mcilroy to adjourn the meeting at 7:53PM

Seconded: by Brenda Blakeman

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Respectfully submitted,

Kitty Mears Koar