

Town & Village of Woodstock
Town Selectboard & Village Trustees Special Joint Meeting
March 25th, 2026
4:00 PM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes

Draft minutes are subject to approval.

Present Selectboard: Vice Chair Laura Powell, Chair Susan Ford, Norm Frates Jr., Cliff Johnson

Present Trustees: Brenda Blakeman, Chair Lisa Lawlor, Stephen Stuntz, Jamie Fox

Staff: Eric Duffy, Kitty Mears Koar, Emily Collins, Molly Maxham

Public: Nicholas Seldon, Sally Garmon, Carl Andeer Esq, Gay Travers, Wendy Marrinan,

A. Call to order

1. Selectboard

- a. Chair Susan Ford called the Selectboard Meeting of April 1st to order at 3:30 PM

Before beginning the meeting, Chair Susan Ford acknowledged the passing of Bruce Gold this week, noting his tremendous dedication to the Town of Woodstock where he was raised and raised his three children. She detailed his extensive service including 13 years on the Selectboard, 24 years as Justice of the Peace, and 36 years as Moderator, in addition to serving on the school board and countless nonprofit boards. Chair Susan Ford stated that Woodstock is truly better for Bruce having lived there, calling him a phenomenal public servant, and extended sympathies to Pat, Christine, Tim, Leanne, and their families.

2. Trustees

- a. Chair Lisa Lawlor called the Trustee Meeting of April 1st to order at 3:30 PM

B. Additions or Deletions from the posted Agenda –

Move Vote section to before discussion

C. Citizen Comments – Three Minutes per participant

Due to very limited time, citizen comments were restricted to 10 minutes total. If there were more comments than could fit in that timeframe, individual comments would be limited to one minute per person.

Nicholas Seldon raised several concerns about open meeting law violations. He stated he had tried to contact both boards privately. Mr. Seldon alleged that Ms. Ford had committed viewpoint-centric terminations of citizen comments at the last meeting. Mr. Seldon raised additional concerns including regarding the board's code of ethics or rules about giving truthful information to the public, He stated there should be penalties for this and that the Town needs recall efforts for elected officials committing legal or ethical violations.

Sally Garmon complained about notice for the meeting, stating many people would have liked to attend but didn't know ahead of time. She noted the 3:30 PM time conflicted with work schedules and suggested the meeting should be adjourned and rescheduled for a time when citizens could listen and participate.

D. Vote

State Required Annual Financial Plan- Highway

Eric Duffy explained these were two pieces of paper for VTrans to show proof that enough money was raised in the Town and the Village, requiring individual votes by both the Selectboard and Trustees with signatures.

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to approve the state required annual financial highway plan. (3:36PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote:4-0-0, passed

Motion: by Stephen Stuntz to approve the state required annual financial highway plan. (3:36PM)

Seconded: by Brenda Blakeman

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Selectboard Quarterly Police Meeting Member Designation

Chair Susan Ford explained they have been having quarterly police meetings for at least two to three years, routinely with the Chair and Vice Chair attending. This year they have a new Vice Chair, but Cliff Johnson has been more involved with police issues and the police contract with the Village.

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to nominate Susan Ford, the chair, and Cliff Johnson to represent the selectboard in the quarterly police meetings. (3:38PM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr

Vote:3-0-1, passed

E. Discussion

Vermont League of Cities and Towns Training

Eric Duffy explained that about a month ago, Chair Susan Ford reached out asking to organize this training under the belief that there would be new board members and as a refresher for current board members. They also invited Chairs of all committees and commissions that operate under the Selectboard and Village Trustees in Woodstock.

The purpose was to have staff attorney Carl Andeer from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to present to the boards on Open Meeting Law and Executive Session. Eric Duffy noted they would not take questions from the audience, only from the boards, would not take stances that would create liability issues for the Town, and would not answer questions directly about specific examples.

1. Open Meeting Law

Carl Andeer, a staff attorney with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns for about 10 years, introduced himself and the Municipal Assistance Center (MAC), which provides help to Towns through publications, trainings, webinars, and on-site visits. She encouraged Town officials to create free accounts on their website at vlct.org to access resources and send questions.

Carl Andeer explained that Vermont's open meeting law at its most basic level requires meetings to be open and noticed for the public to attend and have limited participation rights. The law exists because of constitutional requirements that all government officials be accountable to the people, providing transparency through the Open Meeting Law and public Records Act.

The law applies to every board, committee, and commission in the Village and Town, including both statutorily listed bodies like Planning Commissions and Selectboards, as well as committees or subcommittees created by those boards. Mr. Andeer explained the recent amendment distinguishing between nonadvisory (decision-making) and advisory public bodies, with different requirements applying to each.

A meeting occurs when there is a gathering of a quorum discussing the business of the body or taking action. For electronic participation, the law requires designated staff physically located at a physical location for decision-making public bodies, with members attending electronically needing to identify themselves and be heard throughout the meeting.

Mr. Andeer addressed email communications, warning against "reply all" situations that could create inadvertent violations. He outlined specific exemptions for scheduling meetings, organizing agendas, or distributing information for later discussion, but cautioned against substantive discussions via email among a quorum.

The training covered notice and agenda requirements, including 48-hour posting for regular meetings and 24-hour posting for special meetings. Agendas must contain sufficient details about matters to be discussed and can only be amended as first order of business, though this shouldn't be used to circumvent proper notice requirements.

Meetings must be open to the public with different requirements for decision-making versus advisory bodies. A recent amendment allows individuals to request electronic participation with at least two business days notice, which must be accommodated unless there would be undue hardship.

The law requires providing reasonable opportunity for public comment on matters considered by the public body, subject to reasonable rules. Mr. Andeer recommended reviewing their model rules of procedure available on their website.

Meeting minutes must provide a true indication of the meeting's business, including all members present, topics discussed, participants, motions and results, and vote outcomes. Minutes must be posted within five calendar days and remain on the website for at least a year.

A new requirement mandates that non-advisory public bodies record and post all meetings for at least 30 days, unless doing so would impose undue hardship. This requirement doesn't apply to site inspections or field visits.

2. Executive Session

Mr. Andeer distinguished between deliberations and executive sessions. Deliberations are strictly tied to quasi-judicial proceedings like vicious dog hearings or development review board hearings, where after closing a public hearing, the board can deliberate privately about the case without violating open meeting law.

Executive sessions are closed portions of otherwise open noticed meetings that cannot happen spontaneously. Boards must look to specific statutory reasons and ensure their situation matches one of those listed reasons rather than assuming something is private or embarrassing enough to warrant executive session.

The law has different methods for entering executive session- first finding that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or individual at substantial disadvantage, second motion then moving to enter executive session for the specific purpose.

No binding action can be taken in executive session except for one exception regarding real estate negotiations. Minutes are not required but can be taken, and if taken, are not subject to public disclosure. All public body members can enter, and they can invite necessary staff or others related to the issue.

The training concluded with information about responding to open meeting law complaints, which must be addressed within 10 calendar days at a public meeting, either acknowledging inadvertent violation and stating how it will be cured within 14 days, or stating no violation occurred. Failure to respond is treated as a denial, and complainants can appeal to superior court.

Questions from Board members and the public included clarification on citizen working groups, hybrid meeting requirements, Board answering questions during citizen's comments, and executive session procedures.

F. Adjournment

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to adjourn the Meeting (5:17PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Motion: by Stephen Stuntz to adjourn the Meeting (5:17PM)

Seconded: by Brenda Blakeman

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

*Respectfully submitted,
Kitty Mears Koar*