

**Town of Woodstock
Selectboard Meeting
August 19th, 2025
6:00 PM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes**

Draft minutes are subject to approval.

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

Staff: Eric Duffy

Public: Susie Stulz, Nicholas Seldon, Hugh Wetherald, Gail Dougherty, Karim Houry, Todd Erceg, Ellen LeFever, Jill Davies, Suzanne Wooten, Carol Wood, Roger Logan, Lynda Fulkerson, Joe DiNatale, Jennifer Belton, Byron Kelly, Barbara Kennedy, Ellen Copenhaver, Mike Doten, Wendy Wright Marrinan, Jon Spector, Ben Brickner, Beth Hunt, Ryan Silvestri

Call to order

1. Chair Ray Bourgeois called the Selectboard meeting of August 19th to order at 6:00 PM

A. Additions to & deletions from posted agenda

Chamber of Commerce

B. Citizen's Comments

Susie Stultz announced that Monday, August 25th, would mark the 200th consecutive day of protesting at Tribou Park.

Nicholas Seldon made a public comment regarding an incident in Town involving Interim Police Chief Chris O'Keefe.

C. Manager's Report

Eric Duffy reported on several items:

1. Paving work was underway on roads that had been prepared over the last few months, with some road closures and traffic disruptions expected.
2. Next Friday would mark the last day of summer hours, with normal business hours at 4:30 PM on Fridays resuming thereafter.
3. Eric Duffy reported the recent passing of Christopher Barr, the Public Works Director, who was an eighth-generation resident and had worked for the town for 7-8 years. He was promoted to Public Works Director about a year and a half ago. A celebration of life was planned for Saturday, August 23rd, from 11 AM to 2 PM at the South Woodstock Fire Station.

D. Votes

Liquor Licenses:

Bern LLC – 1st, 3rd, OCP

Motion: by Susan Ford to approve the liquor licenses 1st, 3rd, and OCP for Bern LLC with the assumption that the State is reviewing the applications as we are not given the appropriate materials. (6:07 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

E. Discussion

Presentation from Ryan Silvestri concerning Woodstock's Upcoming Reappraisal

Ryan Silvestri, co-owner of NEMC, introduced himself as the project manager for Woodstock's 2027 Reappraisal. He explained that the legal conversion process from the old valuation software to new valuation software had begun and would continue through September. Data collection would begin as early as December, allowing for systematic data collection throughout Woodstock.

Ryan Silvestri emphasized that all properties would be assessed with "fresh eyes," with every property receiving a visit. The new software would be more capable of valuing diverse properties, improving equity among taxpayers through fair market valuation.

He explained the data collection process: residents would receive an "impact letter" 4-6 weeks before data collectors visit, allowing property owners to schedule appointments or request that assessors not visit their property. However, he cautioned that refusing access would require assessors to use Google Earth and other resources to assess properties from the road, potentially leading to less accurate valuations that would then need correction through the grievance process.

For identification purposes, data collectors would wear vests and lanyards, have magnetized IDs on vehicles, and their information would be shared with the local police department. Property inspections would typically take 15-20 minutes.

In response to questions, Ryan Silvestri confirmed they were converting to Catalyst AP 5 software, which is cloud-based with better data security and more detailed capabilities than the previous software. He noted that the reappraisal would be reflected in summer 2027 tax bills, and clarified that there is no differentiation between second homeowners and permanent residents for assessment purposes.

Presentation- Finance Committee: Water Department Model (6:29PM)

Jill Davies, representing the Finance Committee, provided a status update on their work developing a water rate structure. She was joined by committee Karim Houry, Todd Erceg, and Ellen LeFever.

Over the past six months, the committee built a financial model for the Water Department that allows testing of different rate structures to cover costs. Working with the Woodstock Aqueduct Company, Vermont Bond Bank, and Woodstock's Finance Director, they reached two key conclusions:

1. The needed capital expenditures can be funded by raising rates to roughly the Vermont average initially, and then to the national average.
2. The model can show how to achieve other objectives like conservation or encouraging business startups.

Jill Davies outlined the current situation: Woodstock's water system is unreliable due to the poor condition of pipes (mostly cast iron installed between 1890-1900), inadequate water pressure for fire hydrants, and lack of financial reserves. Water rates have been

underpriced for many years, with the last increase 13 years ago. The average residential charge in Woodstock is \$364/year, compared to Vermont's average of \$552 and the national average of \$816.

The Finance Committee found no standard approach to rate structures among Vermont towns. They recommend adopting common language (access fee, usage fee, and hydrant fee) and measuring usage in gallons rather than cubic feet for clarity.

Their model indicates that rates need to increase by 129% over the next five years to fund operations and capital expenditures. For an average residential user currently paying \$362, this would mean paying \$589 next year (63% increase) and \$811 in five years (FY30), which aligns with the current national average. Beyond that, rates would need to increase another 101% over the following 15 years to pay for all capital expenditures.

During discussion, board members requested several additional scenarios to be modeled, including:

- Maintaining the representations made to non-users about their percentage of bond repayment
- Creating rate structures that incentivize conservation through threshold pricing
- Treating residential properties owned by the Woodstock Foundation the same as other residential properties

The committee was praised for their comprehensive work, which could potentially be adapted for the upcoming wastewater project.

Investment Advisory Committee

Jill Davies reported on the Rockefeller Endowment Fund, noting that as of June 30th, the fund was worth over \$2 million, having increased by 7.5% since the previous June. The fund is invested 75% in equities and 25% in bonds through low-cost Vanguard index funds, with \$125,000 invested with the Vermont Community Loan Fund. The 7.5% growth includes an \$87,500 payment to the town and village in January 2025. The investments are performing as planned, tracking within 1% of their respective benchmarks.

Guidelines for Water Abatement (7:28PM)

Eric Duffy noted that now that the Town owns the water company, they need to establish guidelines for water abatements. He suggested using the same model used for sewer abatements.

Board members agreed that using the existing sewer abatement guidelines would provide consistency across sewer, water, and taxes. There was discussion about eventually requiring meters for all users, with newer electronic meters providing more accurate readings.

F. Votes

Ambulance Billing Contract – Medical Business Service LLC (7:30PM)

Eric Duffy presented a contract with Medical Business Services LLC, a third-party company that would handle ambulance billing. They would receive approximately 8% of revenue, estimated at \$30,000-\$40,000 per year. This would free up staff time (currently 10-20 hours per week) and allow for reallocation of resources. The company works with about 40 municipalities and nonprofits in Vermont and does not perform collections.

Susan Ford noted a significant typo in paragraph J where "case" should be "cause" and asked about procedures if either party terminates the agreement. Eric Duffy indicated the company would work through the transition process but could add specific language if required.

Motion: by Keri Cole to approve the ambulance billing contract with Medical Business Services LLC with the condition that in paragraph J "case" is changed to "cause". (7:34 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Revision of the Grant List (7:34PM)

Eric Duffy explained that after the Assessors submitted the grand list, the state came back with an update. This was the state's mistake, not the Town's, and required approval to update the grand list.

Motion: by Laura Powell to approve the revision to the Grant List (7:35 PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Foliage Road Closure- Cloudland Road

Ben Brickner, Pomfret Selectboard Chair, explained that this would be the third year Pomfret has closed its portion of Cloudland Road during fall foliage season due to traffic concerns. Mike Doten from Pomfret also spoke about the closure.

The plan is largely the same as in previous years, with Pomfret closing its part of Cloudland Road and making Barber Hill Road one-way for westbound traffic only. The significant change this year is a shorter closure period, from Saturday, October 4th through Sunday, October 19th, about a week shorter than last year.

The primary reasons for the closure are public safety (ensuring emergency vehicle access) and quality of life issues for residents, including traffic noise, litter, and disruptive tourist behaviors. Pomfret requested that Woodstock close their portion of Cloudland Road as well, as the town line is not a logical turnaround point.

Motion: by Keri Cole to approve the closure of Cloudland Road from October 4th through October 19th. (7:38 PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Setting of FY26 Tax Rate

Eric Duffy reported that when the budget was approved in January and at town meeting, they were estimating about a 10.75% tax increase, not including special articles. With special articles totaling \$231,000, they had expected about a 13.75% increase. However, the final tax rate represents only a 9.2% increase, which is lower than originally predicted. This equates to about a \$64 increase per \$100,000 of property appraisal for municipal taxes.

Motion: by Laura Powell to set the FY26 Tax rate (7:40 PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Pomfret Ambulance Contract

Eric Duffy explained that a few months ago, the Board had approved contracts for services to different municipalities around Woodstock. Pomfret requested changes based on response times, creating a new contract that carves out an area where Hartford would be the first responder instead of Woodstock. If Woodstock had to respond to that area and could not bill for it, they would be reimbursed.

Ben Brickner, Pomfret Selectboard Chair, explained that Pomfret has been considering Hartford as the first responder for the northeast section of town for a few years due to faster response times from Hartford's upgraded Quechee station. This change would optimize emergency response times for Pomfret residents.

Motion: by Laura Powell to approve the new Pomfret Ambulance contract (7:42 PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Catalis Assessing Software Contract

Eric Duffy presented a contract for new assessment software that would be more robust and responsive. The software is used by Ryan Silvestri's company and would allow for more efficient use and better data management.

Motion: by Laura Powell to approve the Catalis Assessing Software Contract (7:43 PM)

Seconded: by Keri Cole

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

G. Potential Executive Session 1 V.S.A 313

Motion: by Greg Fullerton to go into an Executive Session 1 V.S.A After making a specific finding that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage:

Chamber of Commerce MOU (7:44 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed (Returned 7:54PM)

Motion: by Laura Powell to exit executive Session (7:54PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Chamber of Commerce MOU

Motion: by Laura Powell to approve the Chamber of Commerce MOU (7:55 PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

H. Other Business

Eric Duffy announced that he will be in Canada Monday and Tuesday of the following week.

I. Approval of Minutes

Motion: by Susan Ford to approve the minutes 07.22.25 (7:56PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

J. Adjournment

Motion: by Greg Fullerton to adjourn the meeting at (7:56 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Respectfully submitted,

Kitty Mears Koar

Susan B. Ford

Raymond Bourgeois

Keri Cole

Greg Fullerton

Signature: Susan B. Ford
Susan B. Ford (Oct 23, 2025 17:18:15 EDT)

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Signature: [Signature]
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Signature: [Signature]
Greg Fullerton (Oct 25, 2025 20:51:10 EDT)

Email: gfullerton@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: Raymond Bourgeois
Raymond Bourgeois (Oct 23, 2025 12:28:32 EDT)

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