

**Town of Woodstock
Selectboard Meeting
January 20th 2026
6:00 PM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes**

Draft minutes are subject to approval.

Present: Chair Ray Bourgeois, Laura Powell, Cliff Johnson, Vice Chair Susan Ford, Keri Cole

Staff: Eric Duffy, Kathy Avellino, Abbie Sherman

Public: Nicholas Seldon, Roger Logan, Jenevra Wetmore

Call to order

1. Chair Ray Bourgeois called the Selectboard meeting of January 20th to order at 6:03 PM.

A. Additions to & deletions from posted agenda

Proposed executive session1 V.S.A 313

B. Citizen's Comments

Nicholas Seldon expressed concerns about the Town's fiscal management, particularly regarding a potential merger with the Village. He suggested the merger was not in the Town's financial interest.

Eric Duffy clarified the numbers, noting that the Village had \$39,000 in fund balance at the end of the FY24 audit after running a deficit the previous year. He confirmed the Town's fund balance is actually around \$1,900,000. Regarding legal expenses, he explained that the combined Town and Village spent approximately \$200,000 in legal fees the previous fiscal year, with about \$75,000 spent on the water system purchase, \$30,000 on public records requests, and \$30,000-\$40,000 on Community Development and Planning legal issues.

C. Manager's Report

Eric Duffy reported:

- The Town is working through budgets with a tight deadline, needing approval within a week to prepare for Town Meeting Warnings.
- Progress has been made with a resident on a FEMA elevation grant with the first reimbursement filed this week.
- A 30% design review of the new Wastewater Plant was conducted with Hoyle Tanner at the Town Hall, with a presentation to the State scheduled for the next day.
- Public forums regarding the Wastewater Plant project have begun, with weekly meetings scheduled at 9 AM at local cafes through Town Meeting Day, with evening sessions to be added.

D. Vote

Homestead late filing penalty

The board discussed implementing a Homestead Late Filing Penalty, as required by state law. Kathy Avellino, a Town Assessor, answered questions. Board members expressed concern about starting with a high penalty rate since this is a new implementation, preferring to begin with a lower rate and increase it in future years if necessary. They also emphasized the importance of a robust communications plan to inform residents of this change, particularly since many residents file for tax extensions but may not realize they still need to file homestead declarations by April 15th.

Motion: by Vice Chair Susan Ford moved to establish a Homestead late filing penalty of 3 percent (6:13 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Municipal Policies and Codes- CDBG-DR Planning Grant

Eric Duffy explained that these policies and codes are required to receive the funds for the CDBG grant. Jenevra Wetmore from Sustainable Woodstock confirmed this is needed for Woodstock as the grantee (with Sustainable Woodstock as the subgrantee) and noted that the policies were updated in 2023.

Motion: by Laura Powell motion was made to approve the Municipal policies and codes (6:15 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Potential Amendment to NBRC Grant

The board discussed options for the NBRC grant that Abbie Sherman, Economic Development Director, had previously presented. Cliff Johnson recommended option 2, and Laura Powell agreed, suggesting option 5 as a backup. Abbie Sherman confirmed option 2 was viable but would take time to implement.

Option 2 would remove the design and permitting of a new Well but maintain construction of the Elm Street Bridge, which would likely happen in the fall. She explained that they need to complete a full environmental assessment of the two projects, which typically takes 6-12 months, and if they don't go out to bid for construction by June, they would likely need to abandon the NBRC grant. Option 2 allows them to retain both the grant and the \$800,000 in SCRP bond funds at 0% interest.

Motion: by Laura Powell to amend the NBRC grant to approve option 2 with option 5 as backup. (6:17 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Town Report Dedication

Eric Duffy recommended dedicating the Town Report to Chris Barr.

Motion: by Vice Chair Susan Ford moved to dedicate the Town Report to Chris Barr. (6:20 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Date for Selectboard meeting to Sign Town Meeting Warning

The board discussed the timing constraints for approving the budget and signing the Town Meeting warning, which needs to be posted between 30-40 days before Town Meeting. They determined they needed to approve the budget first, then sign the warning.

Motion: by Vice Chair Susan Ford to schedule a meeting on Monday, January 26th at 4:30 PM to potentially approve the budget and sign the warning. (6:24 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Liquor License

Motion: by Vice Chair Susan Ford to approve a first class liquor license for Acadia Enterprise LLC and a first and third class liquor license for Shade Maple LLC, on the assumption that the state has reviewed the applications. (6:24 PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

E. Discussion

Town Report Availability- February 21st

Eric Duffy announced that following the previous Town and Village Meeting votes, Town reports will no longer be mailed to every resident. Instead, the Town Report will be available at Town Hall and other locations around Woodstock beginning February 21st. Residents can request a copy via email or mail, and copies will also be available at the Senior Center and library.

Wassail Recap

Eric Duffy reported that this year's Wassail celebration was very successful—potentially the best in five years. The event had more horses than in previous years, good weather, and the Trustees' decision to allow alcohol on the Green was a success. The Wassail committee will begin meeting again in April.

Main Wastewater Plant Funding Allocation

The board discussed how to allocate funding for the Wastewater plant project, including whether to specify the allocation in the bond warning for Town Meeting. Several

factors were considered: sharing costs between users and non-users, using option tax funds, potential congressional directed spending of \$1 million, and a \$770,000 fund available for sewer construction.

Board members agreed it was important to include allocation details in the warning to avoid confusion like what occurred with the South Woodstock project. The board discussed a potential 10% allocation to non-users, with estimates that this would cost about \$84 per parcel for non-users and approximately \$1,500 per user if no other revenue sources were applied. Using \$100,000 from local option tax would reduce these costs to \$76 for non-users and \$1,400 for users.

The board decided to consider the issue further and potentially use the infrastructure local option tax to offset costs. Roger Logan expressed concern about making allocation decisions with limited public input and suggested clear communication about any decisions made.

Town Meeting- Special Articles Tax Impact

Eric Duffy reported that special article petitions totaled \$230,447, representing about a 3% increase in taxes (approximately 2.88%), similar to the previous year's 3.1%. Vice Chair Susan Ford emphasized that this amount, combined with the proposed Town budget increase of 8.2%, would bring the total tax increase to over 11% if all special articles pass. Susan Ford encouraged residents to carefully consider each nonprofit's contribution to the community before voting.

Vondell Cobb Easement

Vice Chair Susan Ford reported that the Vermont Housing Conservation Board has requested to postpone their grant decision until March, so no immediate discussion was needed. She noted that private fundraising for the project is ongoing and encouraged interested parties to contact Tom Debevoise.

FY27 Budget Discussion

Eric Duffy presented budget updates, including reducing the assistant Town Clerk's hours from 49 to 44 per week and adding \$2,000 for overtime. Major changes in the budget include adding two new Fire/EMT employees starting July 1st with a trainee starting January 1st and increasing capital reserves for Public Works vehicle maintenance that has been delayed for years. Susan Ford proposed using \$35,000 from the Town's undesignated fund balance to offset the tax rate by half a percent, noting that the fund balance is healthy (approximately \$1.9 million) and this would help reduce the burden on taxpayers.

F. Proposed Executive Session 1 V.S.A 313

Motion: by Vice Chair Susan Ford to go into a Proposed Executive Session 1 V.S.A 313 after making a specific finding that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage: contracts; (6:58PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Motion: by Vice Chair Susan Ford to exit Executive Session (7:09PM)

Seconded: by Laura Powell

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

G. Approval of Minutes

Motion: by Laura Powell to approve the minutes 11.18.25, 12.16.25,
01.05.26,01.13.26 (7:08PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

H. Other Business -None

I. Adjournment

Motion: by Laura Powell to adjourn the meeting (7:08 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Respectfully submitted,

Kitty Mears Koar