

**Town of Woodstock  
Selectboard Meeting  
March 19<sup>th</sup> 2026  
6:00 PM  
Town Hall & Zoom  
Minutes**

**Draft minutes are subject to approval.**

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

**Staff:** Eric Duffy, Abby Sherman, Greg Fullerton

**Public:** Peggy Fraser, Sally Garmon, Peter Shoemaker, Barbara Otranto, Leslie Watts, Nancy Barr, Mary Anne Sweeney, Kevin Lynch, Bonnie Clement, Gay Travers, Lisa Sullivan, Roger Logan, Susan Neuberg, Katharine Niemczyk, William Boardman, Nicholas Seldon, Ed Esmond, Wendy Spector, Wendy Marrinan, Susan Chiefsky, Keri Bristow, Jennifer Falvey, Roger Logan, Jim Kelly, Lauren Fisher, Tom Debevoise III, Susanne Wooten, Jon Spector, Sarah Glasser Tucker, Nina Phalen, Matthew Paul

**A. Call to order**

Chair Susan Ford called the Selectboard meeting of March 19<sup>th</sup> to order at 6:00 PM.

**B. Additions to & deletions from posted agenda**

**Village Conservancy Trees Planting Plan – Change to Village Conservancy**

**C. Citizen's Comments**

Chair Susan Ford noted the unusually large attendance and explained that citizen comments are limited to three minutes and should address items not already on the agenda.

Peggy Fraser expressed concern that some Selectboard members believe there is community support for their actions simply because few people attend meetings.

Sally Garmon requested that budget presentations include line items showing which items are over or under budget with explanations for the variances.

Peter Shoemaker addressed Water Department issues, and issues regarding the Vondell Cobb Property.

Barbara Toronto expressed concern about reports that Town funds were being used to pay Village expenses.

Leslie Watts disagreed with the Board's continued pursuit of what she characterized as "a very simple HR process" and the fiscal risk of potentially spending \$5-12 million in legal costs.

Nancy Barr raised concerns about Ray Bourgeois remaining on the Board after selling his home. The feasibility of Town and Village merger regarding Sewer and Water costs, problems with the Police Department, and inadequate snow plowing of handicapped parking spaces.

Cliff Johnson responded that while the Town has problems, "it's not that bad of a mess" and that every Town goes through difficulties, emphasizing that Woodstock and Vermont remain great places to live.

Mary Anne Sweeney pointed out that many people don't realize items must appear on meeting agendas to be discussed, and there's no information on the Town website about how to get items on the agenda. She referred to a Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

Bonnie Clement expressed confusion about why important questions raised on the listserv and in meetings don't receive answers.

Gay Travers criticizing the Board for not engaging with citizens during comment periods and hiding behind procedural excuses.

Lisa Sullivan emphasized the importance of maintaining Woodstock as a loving, open community.

Roger Logan defended the Board members as volunteers who work hundreds of hours on complex issues like Sewer and Water systems, arguing that the listserv is not a reliable source of information and that better avenues exist for communication with Board members.

Susan Neuberg criticized Eric Duffy for imposing penalties regarding Homestead Declarations on the listserv.

#### **D. Manager's Update and Finance Report**

Eric Duffy provided updates on several projects. The Selectboard had approved a bid for the Elm Street Pipe Environmental Assessment, required due to the \$900,000 federal grant, which has pushed the project back about six months. Three vendors were approved for negotiations on the new Well and pipeline project from the road to the recreation center, with interviews scheduled in approximately two weeks.

Eric Duffy clarified that water bills have not yet been sent out, contrary to earlier statements. The goal was to send them by the end of March, but it will likely be the first week of April to ensure accurate readings rather than using minimum estimates.

The Village meeting held the previous Tuesday passed all articles overwhelmingly. Economic Development Director Abbie Sherman recently returned from a housing conference in Baltimore with new ideas.

The new ambulance has been delivered and service began, with crews completing training on its operation.

Eric Duffy announced plans to establish public office hours for himself and staff at various locations around Town for residents who want to discuss concerns.

Regarding finances, revenues are exceeding expectations. While dispatch salaries were previously trending high due to understaffing.

However, ambulance and fire budgets remain concerning due to being short one full-time employee and difficulty recruiting part-timers, trending toward \$100,000 over budget. Chief Green is working with the department to avoid spending in other account lines to achieve overall budget balance.

Laura Powell noted that the recent budget includes adding 2.5 new employees to the fire department specifically to reduce overtime costs and strain on part-time staff.

## **E. Discussion**

### **Village Conservancy**

Wendy Spector, representing the Woodstock Village Conservancy, presented an overview of the community-driven nonprofit that began about 18 months ago as a project of the Woodstock Community Trust. The Conservancy aims to enhance and maintain public spaces and connectors in the Village through intentional design, sustainability, and accessibility at minimal cost to the municipal budget.

The group has identified their first major capital project as restoring the Village Green. They also outlined six "mini projects" under \$50,000 each, including Branch Out Woodstock (tree planting and replacement downtown), a volunteer maintenance crew, bicentennial planning, design processes, public art including a potential mural on Mechanic Street, and a traffic safety study.

The Conservancy has established partnerships and signed a letter of agreement with the Town outlining collaboration procedures. For tonight's meeting, they specifically requested permission to work with the Department of Public Works on due diligence for the Branch Out Woodstock initiative and to begin fundraising for this and other mini projects.

Wendy Spector explained they had identified four locations downtown where trees previously existed but were now concrete-covered, with plans to replace them using best practices for urban tree installation. The group emphasized the importance of working with DPW to ensure proper placement and avoid issues with sewer lines.

Peggy Fraser raised concerns about the Green design concept potentially limiting space needed for events like Market on the Green and Bookstock. Wendy Spector clarified that the concept was merely a starting point for public feedback sessions, not a final plan.

### **July 4th Committee Update**

Susan Chiefsky and Keri Bristow provided updates on July 4th Celebration planning. Since beginning in October, they've received financial support from businesses, individuals, and organizations, currently having raised \$14,000 plus another \$14,000 from the Town. They have a logo designed by Deb Green and a list of planned events.

The committee meets every other week and welcomes volunteers and input. Their next phase involves launching community and business fundraising campaigns, with plans to establish an ongoing fund to avoid starting from scratch each year. They need 5-10 volunteers for each event to help with setup and cleanup, with some school teams already committed for the July 5th fireworks.

The committee is establishing a Venmo account for digital donations and confirmed their next meeting is April 2nd at 8:30 AM, open to all.

### **Marketing committee update**

Roger Logan, speaking informally for the Marketing Committee, reported they've been working with the Chamber of Commerce to establish advertising structure and

pricing for the website, with proposed procedures under Eric's review. They're developing visitor and business surveys to gather input on interests and concerns.

The committee is helping businesses improve their website listings for better Google searchability. The most exciting aspect Roger Logan noted, is updating content to organize by activities rather than just business listings—such as kayaking, biking, and family-friendly rainy-day activities—to better serve both residents and visitors and align with modern search patterns.

Laura Powell thanked the committee for their work and noted their support for the July 4th planning.

### **Wassail Committee Update**

Jim Kelly from the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce and Lauren Fisher, Chamber Board Chair, reported that Wassail costs approximately \$22,700 in direct cash expenses, not including volunteer time or staff hours. The Chamber of Commerce raises funds beyond the Town's \$15,000 contribution, with zero profit to the Chamber.

They plan better record-keeping going forward and are addressing capacity issues identified last year by doubling bus service and Wassail serving locations to reduce wait times. There were no significant restroom complaints.

The committee discussed challenges in measuring retail sales impact, as businesses are reluctant to share specific revenue figures. They suggested asking for year-over-year comparisons or percentage increases as success metrics.

The committee monitors transportation and serving bottlenecks as indicators of capacity limits.

Peggy Fraser raised concerns about parking problems on High Street during Wassail weekend, with cars blocking driveways despite police calls. Eric Duffy noted this would be addressed with Village Trustees and Police.

### **Chamber of Commerce LOT Budget Presentation**

Jim Kelly presented their budget request using local option tax funds. Jim Kelly emphasized that all requested funds serve as pass-through expenses with no markup or staff time charges. Requested items include flower baskets and maintenance, tree lights (with reduced equipment costs from the vendor), and restoration of Wi-Fi service on the Green through collaboration with Jim Langhans.

The Welcome Center would be fully staffed on weekends year-round and daily during peak season (June through October), but may not guarantee staffing during slower months (January-May, November) when visitor traffic is minimal.

The marketing budget of \$2,000 supports a new "Fourth Friday" community event, similar to White River Junction's First Friday, featuring music, activities, and coordination with local nonprofits.

Laura Powell questioned potential coordination with the Town's marketing committee to avoid duplication. Jim Kelly confirmed they would work together while noting some traditional marketing avenues (newspapers, radio) might still require separate funding.

Chair Susan Ford asked about a previous agreement for shared funding of flowers and trees between the Chamber, Village, and Town, which Jim Kelly was not familiar with due to leadership transition.

Peggy Fraser asked about the date for Taste of Woodstock. The Chamber announced they're canceling this year's event because it hadn't truly represented Woodstock businesses (only one local restaurant participated) and actually hurt downtown members. They plan to redesign it for next year with a more "Woodstock-y" feel, less like a street carnival and more beneficial to local businesses.

### **Selectboard Meeting Protocol Memo**

Chair Susan Ford presented a protocol document to clarify meeting procedures, explaining why the Board doesn't respond to citizen comments (items must be warned on agendas) and how public discussion periods work. The protocol would be read at meetings with many new attendees but not necessarily at typical smaller meetings.

Vice Chair Laura Powell suggested posting the protocol on the website and possibly including it with meeting agendas, and following up on Mary Anne Sweeney's template from VLCT for agenda item requests.

Several citizens supported the protocol concept, with suggestions for name tags for board members and official processes for agenda requests.

### **Vondell Purchase and Sale Conservation Document**

Chair Susan Ford explained that as part of the Woodstock Aqueduct purchase, the Town also purchased the Vondell Cobb property containing the Reservoir. They're now working with Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board on a potential \$604,000 grant by signing a purchase and sale agreement to sell development rights (not the property itself) on all but designated areas including the water body, parking lot, water tank, and approximately 10 acres by the existing parking lot.

The decision will be made in May, with private fundraising underway for the additional \$396,000 to reach their \$1 million goal. All current recreational uses, including mountain biking, would continue.

Laura Powell noted the Town had hosted five public forums in the fall where over 100-150 residents expressed overwhelming support for conservation. This grant opportunity through VHCB is time-sensitive, and pursuing grants was promised during the original purchase campaign.

Gay Travers questioned the rush to conserve land the Town already owns and can control. She didn't understand the need for additional conservation steps when municipal ownership already provided protection.

Tom Debevoise III supported conservation, explaining that the Vondell Cobb topography, lack of infrastructure (Class 4 road, no electricity), and watershed protection needs make it unsuitable for development. He argued that such recreational areas will become increasingly rare while housing can be developed in more suitable locations with existing utilities.

Peter Shoemaker sought clarification on using grant funds to pay down bonds as previously discussed in public meetings, versus newly mentioned dam repair costs.

Laura Powell explained that bonds were bundled and that decisions about grant fund allocation would require future Selectboard votes. She emphasized the reservoir as a community asset, especially for climate resilience.

### **Merger Analysis Working Group**

Chair Susan Ford explained this would be an independent feasibility study led by Charlie Kimball to examine legal requirements and financial implications of Town-Village merger, emphasizing this doesn't advocate for or against merger but simply gathers facts.

Laura Powell noted this was a joint board goal from the previous summer.

Eric Duffy clarified the group would be unofficial and non-associated with the boards, members with diverse viewpoints and history to survey residents and analyze information before presenting findings to the joint boards.

The working group would likely include 5-7 people with different expertise, similar to previous working groups. Charlie Kimball would lead when his legislative schedule permits.

Peggy Fraser asked whether renaming it as a Township might provide access to more federal funding, which Laura Powell agreed to include in the committee's research questions.

Jon Spector supported the merger study but suggested considering an appointed commission for transparency, though acknowledging a private group could work effectively.

Peter Shoemaker noted a similar study was conducted in 2007, approved by the Town but rejected by the Village, suggesting this shouldn't be lengthy since much groundwork exists.

Roger Logan emphasized the urgency due to the Village's unsustainable budget increases (49% department head request reduced to 13%) and the need for a more reliable financial structure beyond just efficiency gains.

Gay Travers, who served on the 2007 merger committee, strongly recommended a public rather than private group with an open selection process by both Boards.

### **Housing Group**

Economic Development Director Abbie Sherman proposed creating a Housing and Economic Development task force to replace the Economic Development Commission. This advisory group would serve as "eyes and ears" to identify community housing discussions and coordinate various efforts.

The group would have at least five members with staggered three-year terms and housing development backgrounds. While most members would be Woodstock residents, some knowledgeable non-residents could participate. A Planning Commission ex officio member would provide liaison services.

Primary objectives include consultation, policy recommendations, public education, partnership development with developers and nonprofits, funding model development, and collaboration on local option tax usage recommendations.

The first initiative would be developing a housing and economic development strategy as a collaborative roadmap for job creation, housing stock increases, marketing efforts, and redevelopment investments.

Jon Spector praised this as a significant upgrade from the EDC housing subcommittee, providing focused expertise and better serving the Selectboard. Sarah

Glasser Tucker Planning Commission Chair expressed full support for housing-focused initiatives.

Peter Shoemaker emphasized the urgent need to identify developable properties with Water, Sewer, and electricity access before they're lost to other uses. He stressed the need for large-scale projects (100-200 units) rather than small developments, noting Vermont's building costs are double the national average.

Ed Esmond observed that recent development appears focused on high-end housing rather than workforce housing, questioning whether restrictions drive this trend.

## **G. Vote**

### **Liquor License**

Motion: by Ray Bourgeois to approve the Kedron Inn (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and OCP permit), 4 Mechanic LLC (1st, 3rd, OCP permit), R.L. Valley Inc. (2nd and tobacco), F.H. Gillingham and Sons (2nd class), and Farmer and the Bell (1st class), all conditioned on state review of applications. (8:43 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Appointment to Town Development Review Board**

Nina Phelan introduced herself as a South Woodstock resident for just over five years. She serves on the Green Mountain Perkins Academy Board and saw the Development Review Board opportunity at the athletic club. Her experience as a property owner managing projects, combined with understanding Woodstock's historic character and development needs, motivated her application.

Laura Powell confirmed Phelan could meet the 80% attendance requirement.

Motion: by Ray Bourgeois moved to appoint Nina Phelan to the Town Development Review Board. (8:46 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Letter of Thanks- Economic Development Committee**

Eric Duffy presented a comprehensive thank you letter recognizing the Economic Development Commission's critical role in boosting Woodstock's economic and cultural vitality. The letter praised their thoughtful, creative approach focusing on affordable housing, childcare, marketing, downtown beautification, and community events, resulting in tangible outcomes including grant funding for events like Wassail Weekend, Pride of Woodstock, mountain bike trails, and village flower baskets.

The letter highlighted studies addressing housing and small business concerns, the visionary document "Our Woodstock, Our Future," direct resident engagement, childcare facility support, COVID-19 pandemic response, and forward-thinking incentive programs for rental housing and business startups.

Jon Spector thanked the Board for the smooth, transparent, professional transition process over the past year and committed EDC members to supporting Economic Development Director Abbie Sherman going forward.

Abbie Sherman praised the EDC's impressive program development, particularly their complete, well-thought-out housing programs and extensive COVID community support efforts.

Motion: by Chair Susan Ford moved that all board members sign the letter of thanks to the Economic Development Committee. (8:55 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Potential Disbanding of the Economic Development Committee**

Motion: by Ray Bourgeois moved to disband the Economic Development Committee. (8:55 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 3-0-1, passed

### **Housing Economic Development Strategy**

Abbie Sherman proposed contracting with an outside consultant to develop a strategic plan supporting the Joint Board's priorities: a five-year housing plan, strengthened off-season tourism through marketing, and ongoing Economic Development efforts.

The six-month process would bring together community groups and stakeholders through visioning efforts, conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), and produce an actionable roadmap. The plan would guide strategic investment and coordinate public, private, and community partner efforts.

The one-time investment of \$35,000 from local options tax Economic Development funds would support Woodstock's long-term economic vitality. Eric Duffy noted approximately \$285,000 annually allocated from this fund, which brought in about \$420,000 last year, leaving sufficient surplus for this initiative.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson moved to approve the Housing Economic development strategy proposal (9:02 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Village Conservancy Trees Planting Plan**

This item was moved to the discussion section earlier in the meeting and was not voted on.

### **Setting Advertising Fees for Woodstockvt.com**

Roger Logan presented the Marketing Committee's proposal for up to 10 advertisements on the jointly owned Town-Chamber Website. Each advertisement would run for three months at \$1,500, with chamber members receiving a 50% discount (\$750). The committee decided against homepage ads following digital marketing best practices to avoid a "spammy" appearance.

Lauren Fisher questioned this decision, advocating for homepage ads, but Roger Logan and Laura Powell supported the committee's expertise in avoiding ads that might distract from the site's primary goal of encouraging extended visits to multiple Woodstock businesses.

Revenue would be split equally between the Town and Chamber, with Town revenue going to the general fund as miscellaneous income.

Motion: Ray Bourgeois to adopt the policy setting advertising fees for Woodstockvt.com. (9:11 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

#### **Driveway Variance –0 Carlton Hill Road**

Director of Public Works Greg Fullerton explained that the proposed driveway doesn't meet Vermont Department of Highway Standards for sight distance (209 feet versus required 250 feet) and intersection proximity (245 feet versus required 390 feet). While some trees can be removed to improve sight lines, topographical limitations on neighboring property prevent full compliance.

Matthew Paul, the applicant, was hoping to relocate to Woodstock full-time, committed to doing whatever necessary to ensure safety, including potential mirrors or other measures. Greg Fullerton noted the sight distance issue affects only one direction, with adequate sight lines in the other direction.

Motion: Ray Bourgeois to approve the driveway variance at 0 Carlton Hill Road (9:19 PM)

Seconded: by Vice Chair Laura Powell

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

#### **Delegation of Accounts Payable Warrant Review and Approval**

This position involves weekly visits to Town Hall to review and sign accounts payable warrants, currently performed by Ray Bourgeois. Chair Susan Ford volunteered to take on the responsibility with Vice Chair Laura Powell as backup.

Eric Duffy emphasized the need for reliability and potential availability for time-sensitive special circumstances.

Motion: Vice Chair Laura Powell moved to delegate accounts payable warrant review and approval to Chair Susan Ford with Vice Chair Laura Powell as backup (9:21 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

#### **Selectboard Meeting Schedule**

Eric Duffy proposed adding a second regularly scheduled monthly meeting to reduce the need for special meetings. The current third Tuesday 6:00 PM meeting would continue, with a new first Tuesday morning meeting added at 8:30 AM to accommodate different schedules while minimizing evening meetings for staff.

The new schedule would begin in May, providing predictable meeting times that could be canceled if unnecessary.

Motion: Vice Chair Laura Powell to add a regularly scheduled meeting at 8:30 AM on the first Tuesday of each month, with the existing 6:00 PM meeting on the third Tuesday continuing. (9:27 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

**F. Approval of Minutes**

Motion: Vice Chair Laura Powell approve the minutes from 02.17.26, 02.19.26, 03.04.26, 03.10.26 (9:27 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 3-0-1, passed

**G. Adjournment**

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to adjourn the meeting (9:28 PM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

*Respectfully submitted,*

Kitty Mears Koar