

**Town of Woodstock  
Selectboard Meeting  
April 7<sup>th</sup> 2026  
8:30 AM  
Town Hall & Zoom  
Minutes**

**Draft minutes are subject to approval.**

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

**Staff:** Eric Duffy, Kitty Mears Koar, Robert Densmore

**Public:** Gay Travers, Nicholas Seldon, Peter Shoemaker, Barbara Otranto, Matt Stout, Kent McFarland, Jen Falvey, Donna Foster, Roger Logan, Tom Debevoise, Byron Kelly, Bonnie Clement

**Call to order**

Chair Susan Ford called the Selectboard meeting of April 7<sup>th</sup> to order at 8:30 AM.

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

**Potential water bill penalties, was moved to be combined with the water rate vote since the topics are related**

**Selectboard vacancy**

**B. Citizen's Comments**

Gay Travers requested that attendance numbers for both in-person and Zoom participants be included in meeting minutes, noting this would provide better documentation and acknowledgment of public participation.

Nicholas Seldon addressed previous statements made about board members not being able to respond to citizen comments. He also questioned whether Open Meeting law violations could be discussed during citizen comments.

Peter Shoemaker expressed concerns about the Water Department's lack of billing for nine months and questioned where funding for day-to-day operations was coming from during this period. He also raised questions about how funds from the Vondell Conservation Grant would be used, specifically whether they would pay down bonds to lessen taxpayer burden.

**C. Discussion**

**Response to Allegations of Open Meeting Law Violations**

Chair Susan Ford read a prepared statement addressing Open Meeting Law complaints. Regarding Alison Taylor's complaint about requested agenda items. First, no regular meeting agenda had been posted since her requests. Secondly while there's no legal requirement for citizen-requested agenda items, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of both the Selectboard and Village Trustees discussed adding citizen questions to regular monthly agendas.

Concerning Nicholas Seldon's complaint about being limited in asking questions during Open Meeting Law training, the statement explained the meeting had a hard stop time, Mr. Seldon's questions were lengthy with some parts already addressed during training, and when time ran short with other citizens waiting to speak, the Chair chose to move to other questioners.

The Board denied any Open Meeting Law violations but offered that Mr. Seldon could submit his question to board Chairs for response at the next meeting.

Barbara Otranto asked why funds from the Town are being used to pay Village expenses, the Board told her that this subject was not warned on the agenda and then they moved on to the next agenda item.

### **Vondell Purchase and Sale Agreement**

Chair Susan Ford explained this agreement would allow the Town to apply for a grant from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for the conservation of the Vondell Cobb Reservoir. The agreement is subject to Boards approval of any eventual grant and requires \$400,000 in private fundraising. Conservation easements would be held by Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Housing Conservation Board, with exceptions for future water use and WAMBA trails.

The Board had held multiple public forums over fall and winter to gauge interest, with approximately 80 people supporting the easement and only 2-3 opposing it. The purchase and sale agreement was modified to specifically reference the Woodstock Mountain Bike Association Trail Agreement.

Public comment was supportive, with Matt Stout from WAMBA expressing full support, noting the conservation was consistent with voter desires when they approved the bond purchase. He emphasized the property's unique recreational opportunities and that conservation would reduce taxpayer burden while preserving diverse uses.

Kent McFarland, a Conservation Biologist, described the property as "one of the crown jewels of Woodstock" with exceptional natural heritage, human history, and recreational value. He supported permanent conservation through the easement.

Gay Travers questioned why the Town would give up control of property it owns. Board member Laura Powell explained that many residents wanted to prevent future Selectboards from potentially selling the land, and this represented the consensus from public meetings.

Concerns were raised about Vermont Land Trust's performance on other properties, with Suzanne Wooten's written concerns about development on conserved land on Grove Hill being noted for the record.

Jen Falvey suggested achieving the same goals through deed restrictions while retaining Town control, questioning whether the Land Trust could be trusted more than future boards. She also suggested the meetings held may not represent the full community and recommended online surveys for broader input.

Donna Foster from Vermont Land Trust clarified the easement would be co-held with Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and addressed concerns about the Grove Hill property, stating there were no conservation easement violations and that residential rights were included in that particular easement.

Barbara Otranto asked a question regarding Selectboard protocol on selling part of the Vondell in the future if the easement was not in place, and whether a Town vote would be necessary.

Tom Debevoise commented on the historical decisions made by past Selectboard in regard to selling property. Mr. Debevoise was on the Selectboard in the 1980's.

Roger Logan commented that he has participated in many of the discussions on the Vondell Cobb Reservoir and is offended that people believe that there has not been adequate public input, noting that many meetings were held on the topic.

Discussion included clarification that the Town would retain management of the land within easement restrictions and that 10 acres near the parking area would be exempted from conservation.

## **C. Vote**

### **Setting of FY26 Sewer Rate**

Finance Director Robert Densmore presented the sewer rate calculation based on the approved \$1.4 million budget. The rate calculation considered both metered customers and flat rate customers (single, double, and family rates). With estimated usage of 8,733,129 cubic feet, the rate would be \$16.04 per hundred cubic feet, representing a 3.5% increase compared to the budget's 4% increase.

The flat rate system accommodates properties without meters, with single rate at 5,000 cubic feet per year (\$802 annually), double rate at 7,500 cubic feet (\$600.50 for this billing cycle), and family rate at 10,000 cubic feet per year.

Barbara Otranto asked about tiered pricing to encourage conservation, but staff explained the challenge with properties lacking meters. The goal is to install more meters to enable usage-based billing.

Discussion included the need for better communication when properties transfer to ensure accurate rate classifications, as people may not know how to update their household size for billing purposes.

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to accept the FY26 sewer rate  
as presented (9:23 AM)  
Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Setting of FY26 Water Rate**

Finance Director Robert Densmore explained the water rate calculation based on the approved \$735,000 budget for three quarters of the fiscal year. With 1,006 connections but only 748 meters, the system includes minimum usage fees and metered rates above minimums. The rate would be \$7.16 per hundred cubic feet above minimum usage, with minimum connection fees increased from \$240 to \$360 annually (50% increase) due to the metered rate increasing over 100%.

The significant rate increase reflects that the Woodstock Aqueduct Company had not raised rates since approximately 2015, leaving water substantially underpriced compared to neighboring communities.

Over 100 accounts received blue cards during reading because meters couldn't be read, and 80-90 cards remain unreturned. Staff worked diligently to obtain as many readings as possible to minimize rates for all users.

The Finance Office is transitioning to a cloud-based radio frequency system for meter reading, which would allow readings to be completed in hours rather than a week and enable monthly readings for better leak detection.

Discussion covered the need for meter upgrades, with new radio-enabled meters costing \$230-240 each. A full system upgrade of all 748 meters would cost approximately \$220,000-230,000, while addressing the most problematic 80-90 meters would cost \$20,000-30,000.

Peter Shoemaker asked about different rate classifications for commercial users and nonprofits, which staff indicated would be considered for future rate structures based on finance committee recommendations.

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to accept the FY26 water rate  
as presented. (9:44 AM)  
Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Vondell Purchase and Sale Agreement and Potential Water Bill Penalty**

The Board discussed authorizing staff to research penalties for unreturned blue cards (meter reading cards). With 80-90 cards unreturned, this affects rate calculations and billing accuracy.

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to authorize staff to look into water bill penalty for blue cards. (9:44 AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Vondell Purchase and Sale Agreement**

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to accept the Vondell Cobb purchase and sale agreement as previously discussed (9:47 AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to delegate the municipal manager as signatory on the purchase and sale agreement (9:47 AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

### **Selectboard Vacancy**

Eric Duffy explained options for filling Ray Bourgeois's seat following his resignation: Board appointment, election coinciding with scheduled elections (August 11 primary or November 3 general), or special election. He noted petition deadlines require 35-36 days before elections, suggesting at least two months planning time.

Board members expressed preference for an election to ensure voter choice while acknowledging concerns about operating with four members until August. The cost savings of using an existing election date versus a special election was noted.

Several citizens supported the August election timing for cost efficiency and voter participation.

After discussion of appointment timelines and legal requirements, the board reached consensus on holding an election in August rather than making an appointment or waiting until the March Town meeting.

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura to hold an election to replace Ray Bourgeois's vacancy to coincide with the primaries on August 11, 2026 (10:03 AM)  
Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

#### **D. Adjournment**

Motion: by Vice Chair Laura Powell to adjourn the meeting (10:03 AM)  
Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 4-0-0, passed

*Respectfully submitted,*

Kitty Mears Koar