

**Town of Woodstock
Selectboard Meeting
May 5th 2026
8:30AM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes**

Draft minutes are subject to approval.

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

Staff: Eric Duffy, Stephanie Appelfeller, Kitty Mears Koar, Abbie Sherman, Robert Densmore, Chief David Green, Interim Police Chief Chris O'Keeffe

Public: Gay Travers, Nicholas Seldon, Peter Shoemaker, Peggy Fraser, Roger Logan, Wendy Marrinan, Loren Fisher, Matt Stout, Byron Kelly, George "Whit" Manter, Mary Ann Sweeny, John Powell, Eric Nesbitt, Kathy Avellino, Andrew Heyward, Seton Mcilroy, Deb Gravel, Mark Harris

A. Call to order

Vice Chair Laura Powell called the Selectboard meeting of May 5th to order at 8:30AM.

B. Additions to & deletions from posted agenda

Move Housing Task Force and MSK contract to top of the votes section

Vice Chair Powell noted she would add a Selectboard update under Discussion, before the Approval of Minutes

C. Citizen's Comments

Vice Chair Laura Powell explained the citizen comment guidelines: comments are limited to three minutes per resident, are for matters not on the agenda, and must be addressed to the Board as a whole. Speakers must state their name and place of residence.

Gay Travers addressed the Board with a request to include the number of meeting attendees in the minutes. The Board acknowledged the request and expressed support for recording the number of attendees, noting that capturing every individual name could be challenging.

Nicholas Seldon requested that the Board direct Municipal Manager Eric Duffy to release a unredacted police report.

Peggy Fraser inquired about the process for getting questions answered through the Board, noting that questions submitted well in advance had not been placed on the agenda. Vice Chair Laura Powell acknowledged the concern and noted that agendas are

made at the discretion of the Chair and Vice Chair, and that the Board would work to clarify the process.

Deb Gravel requested advance notification of roadside mowing operations so that property owners could take precautionary steps to prevent the spread of invasive species. Eric Duffy indicated he would coordinate with the relevant staff.

D. Manager's Report

- a. Crosswalk striping on key routes is planned for May 11, weather permitting.
- b. The draft audit was received the prior week; staff provided responses to auditor questions, and a final draft is expected within approximately one week, at which point a meeting with the auditor will be scheduled before June 30.
- c. The final tax bills were due the previous Friday. Eric Duffy thanked Finance staff—Robert Densmore, Kitty Mears Koar, Ashley Wohler, and Patricia Martel—for managing approximately \$15,000,000 in deposits processed through the Finance Office over the past month. Utility bills (Water and Sewer) remain due June 11.
- d. Eric Duffy and Stephanie Appelfeller attended the Vermont City Manager Association's Conference, where they presented on Woodstock's short-term rental ordinance.
- e. The Finance Department processed over 1,200 deposits and sent more than 1,000 utility bills in April, in addition to assisting with the draft audit.
- f. The Fire/EMS Department recorded 22 fire calls, 43 EMS calls, hosted 19 Dartmouth student ride-along, and performed 20 building inspections.
- g. Police Dispatch handled over 278 calls for service (146 Village-related, 132 Town-related), conducted 96 motor vehicle stops resulting in 57 tickets and approximately \$9,207 in fines.

E. Finance Report

Eric Duffy reported that the Town is currently projecting a surplus of approximately \$180,000, though this figure is subject to change as additional expenses—particularly fuel—are incurred. He noted that the Fire and EMS department has continued to run over budget, primarily due to the difficulty of retaining part-time staff, which has required full-time employees working at overtime rates to cover shifts. This issue has been discussed with the Fire Chief over the past several months, and the board previously approved two new full-time positions effective July 1 to address the ongoing staffing challenges.

Mary Anne Sweeney, inquired about a wellness benefit line item that was significantly over budget. Finance Director Robert Densmore explained that the overage relates to a personnel policy benefit that reimburses employees for 75% of gym membership costs at the Woodstock Recreation Center or the Woodstock Athletic Club, paid on a quarterly basis. Ms. Sweeney expressed concern about the cost structure, particularly as the Woodstock Athletic Club already provides a substantial discount to Town employees on top of the Town subsidy, and suggested that directing employees exclusively to the

Recreation Center—which the Town already funds—would be more cost-effective. The board noted this could be considered in a future review of the personnel policy.

G. Votes

Housing Task Force

Economic Development Director Abbie Sherman presented a revised proposal for the Woodstock Housing and Economic Development Task Force. The revision was made in response to prior board feedback requesting a sharper focus on housing. The proposed task force would work under the Economic Development Director to develop and implement housing strategies supporting workforce growth, local business, and new resident attractions.

The primary objectives includes housing development in collaboration with public, private, and community stakeholders; providing policy and zoning recommendations based on a strategic plan; public education on housing and workforce topics; and developing partnerships with developers, nonprofits, state agencies, and local organizations. Membership is proposed at a minimum of five members appointed by the Selectboard with staggered three-year terms. The Planning Commission would appoint an ex officio member. Appointments are expected to be completed by July 1.

The Board expressed support for the revised focus and highlighted the importance of the partnerships component, noting that proactive outreach to developers is an area of needed growth. Abbie Sherman's background with state agencies was seen as an asset in building those relationships.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to create the Housing and Economic Development Task Force under Economic Development Director Abbie Sherman, with the appointment schedule as outlined (8:53 AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

MSK Contract – Water Improvement Projects

Eric Duffy reported that draft contracts from MSK Engineering were received the prior afternoon. Two contracts were presented: one for the new Well project at \$90,725, and one for Project 1B at \$174,500. Both figures came in under the original informal cost estimates. Craig Jewett of MSK Engineering, formerly of Otter Creek Engineering, has a long-standing familiarity with Woodstock's water system. Abbie Sherman and staff met with MSK the previous day to review the contracts and were confident in moving forward.

Gay Travers raised a question about the procurement process, specifically whether three competitive bids with cost information were obtained. Vice Chair Laura Powell explained that the Town's procurement policy for civil engineering services uses a qualifications-based selection process, and that staff conducted qualification reviews with four firms. This approach was described as intentional, to avoid selecting a vendor solely on

cost—a factor that contributed to prior difficulties with the South Woodstock plant engineering work.

Peter Shoemaker asked for clarification on how the physical construction work would ultimately be bid. Abbie Sherman confirmed that MSK would design the project and prepare the bid documents, after which the Town would conduct a separate public bid process for the actual construction work, with MSK overseeing the selected contractor. Questions were also raised about what would happen if the construction bids came in under or over the bonded amount, and whether savings could be returned to taxpayers. Eric Duffy indicated he would research the legal parameters around early bond repayment and report back.

Motion: by Norm Frates Jr. to approve the two contracts with MSK Engineering for the water improvement projects, as presented (9:02AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Conservation Committee Appointment – George Whit Manter

George “Whit” Manter appeared to present his application for appointment to the Conservation Commission. Mr. Manter noted that he and his wife relocated to Woodstock three years ago. He holds a degree in Biology and Environmental Studies from Dartmouth College and served ten years on the Conservation Commission in West Tisbury, Massachusetts, including two years as chairman. He has an extensive volunteer background with nature and conservation organizations in Massachusetts and Arizona and expressed readiness to commit to the meeting schedule. The board noted that the Village Trustees had also approved of his appointment the prior evening.

Motion: by Cliff to approve the appointment of George “Whit” Manter to the Conservation Commission (9:05AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Weathersfield Dispatch Contract

Eric Duffy reported that the Town Manager of Weathersfield reached out to inquire about Woodstock dispatching for their newly formed police force. Weathersfield had previously been dispatched through the Sheriff's Office, which already flows through Woodstock's dispatch system. The proposed contract is valued at \$45,000 with a 2.5% annual increase over two years. Staff indicated no additional workload or staffing is expected as a result.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve the dispatch services contract with the Town of Weathersfield (9:07AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Porta Potties at Vondell-Cobb

Matt Stout, President of the Woodstock Area Mountain Bike Association (WAMBA), and board member Mark Harris presented a request to place a single seasonal portable toilet at the Vondell-Cobb reservoir trailhead. WAMBA has maintained trail agreements since 2016 and recorded approximately 68,000 trail crossings at the site last year. The portable toilet would be provided by Wind River at approximately \$180 per month on a month-to-month basis, with service every two weeks. WAMBA would be responsible for the cost. Mr. Stout proposed two potential placement locations—both set back from the road. He noted that portable toilets at the Saskadena 6 and Mount Tom trailheads operated without incident the prior season. The request was described as particularly important for female riders and families, with the unit to be ADA-accessible.

Public comments were mixed. Several residents expressed concern about setting a precedent for providing sanitation infrastructure at public recreational lands, the potential for misuse or overnight camping, and the aesthetic character of the property. Supporters cited practical need—particularly for women and families—and noted that the precedent concern was limited given the uniqueness of the Vondell-Cobb property among town-owned recreational lands. WAMBA representatives responded to concerns about overnight camping and incidental use by noting their active volunteer management of all trailheads and the absence of documented problems at comparable sites.

The Board expressed general support. Vice Chair Laura Powell noted the trial nature of the month-to-month arrangement and stated a preference for placement. Cliff Johnson indicated support, particularly given that WAMBA would bear the cost. The Board approved the request on a trial basis, contingent on confirmation that WAMBA's insurance coverage meets the Town's standards.

Motion: by Norm Frates Jr. to approve one seasonal portable toilet at the Vondell-Cobb reservoir, subject to WAMBA's insurance coverage meeting the Town's requirements (9:33 AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Sewer Abatement – 648 Church Hill Road

The property at 648 Church Hill Road requested an abatement of its sewer bill based

on a change in occupancy from double to single residency. The Board approved abatement of the bill from February 2025 forward as a single-occupancy property.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to abate the sewer bill at 648 Church Hill Road to single-occupancy rates effective February 2025 (9:35AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Sewer Abatement – 2 Highland Avenue Extension

The property at 2 Highland Avenue Extension was determined to have a private septic system and has never been connected to Town sewer. Sewer charges had been applied in error. The board approved a full abatement of current sewer charges and reimbursement of all sewer-related payments made in error, going back three years per the Town's abatement policy.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to abate current sewer charges and reimburse sewer-related payments going back three years for the property at 2 Highland Avenue Extension (9:36AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Sewer Abatement – 1658 West Woodstock Road

The property at 1658 West Woodstock Road similarly has an independent septic system and should not have been charged for Town sewer service. The board approved abatement of the current sewer bill.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to abate the current sewer bill for the property at 1658 West Woodstock Road (9:37 AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Water Abatement – 23 The Green

Finance Director Robert Densmore explained that the property at 23 The Green had experienced a prolonged billing error stemming from meter reading cards being submitted to the Aqueduct but not being properly reflected in billing records, resulting in usage not being updated since July 2023. When a current reading was finally captured, it produced an anomalously high bill reflecting years of accumulated uncounted usage.

The property owner, Mr. Heyward confirmed that he had consistently submitted blue cards to Gillingham's and had paid every bill presented to him in good faith. The Board and Finance

Director Robert Densmore agreed the appropriate remedy was to bill only for actual usage reflected between the two most recently received blue cards—a period of approximately nine months. Mr. Heyward also requested confirmation that any sewer bills tied to the incorrect readings would be addressed; the Board agreed to place the sewer abatement on the next meeting agenda, and Finance Director Robert Densmore committed to working with Mr. Heyward offline before the billing deadline.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to abate the water bill for the property at 23 The Green to the recommended usage of 4,988 cubic feet (9:43 AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Water Abatement – 27 Slayton Terrace

Robert Densmore explained that the meter at 27 Slayton Terrace had a reader malfunction causing the second digit to be unreadable, resulting in usage always being recorded with the same leading digits. When the meter was successfully read in the current billing cycle, the accumulated error caused a bill for approximately 24,700 cubic feet to be generated, when actual usage for the period should have been approximately 4,700 cubic feet. The Board approved correction of the bill to reflect the accurate usage. The Board noted that a corresponding sewer abatement would need to be placed on a future agenda.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to abate the water bill for the property at 27 Slayton to the recommended usage of 4,700 cubic feet (9:46 AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Chamber of Commerce Budget

The Board considered the annual local options tax allocation request from the Chamber of Commerce, covering Wassail expenses, flower baskets, tree lights, and the Wireless Woodstock program. Vice Chair Laura Powell noted that the presentation had been made at the prior meeting and that Board members had reviewed the materials. She acknowledged that some of these services had historically been donated but are being transitioned to contracted arrangements for greater reliability, particularly tree lights. She also recognized Chamber representatives Jim Kelly and Loren Fisher for their work in getting the Wireless Woodstock system operational.

Eric Duffy noted that the total FY25 rooms and meals local options tax revenue was approximately \$419,000, and that the aggregate of all approved allocations—including this request—totals approximately \$300,000, leaving a positive balance.

Wendy Marrinan asked a clarifying question about which local options tax fund was

being used; staff confirmed it is the rooms and meals tax, the allocation of which is managed by the Selectboard.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve the Chamber of Commerce local options tax budget allocation for FY26 (9:51 AM)

Seconded: by Norm Frates Jr.

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

H. Discussion

Rules and Procedures for Meetings

Vice Chair Laura Powell presented a draft Rules of Procedure document for Board discussion. She noted it was a working draft intended to formalize expectations for how the Board operates and how the public participates in meetings. Key provisions included: election of Chair and Vice Chair; quorum requirements; motion procedures; agenda preparation and notice requirements; and public participation guidelines.

The public participation section—drawn largely from VLCT guidance—stipulated that comments must be addressed to the Board as a whole, speakers must identify themselves, no individual may speak again until others have had the opportunity to comment, and personal or threatening remarks are prohibited. The Chair retains authority to restore order, up to and including removal from the meeting.

Cliff Johnson suggested that the document be supplemented with language capturing the spirit of community engagement—not just formal rules—and potentially a companion guide explaining how residents can most effectively interact with local government on different types of issues. The Board acknowledged that the size of discussion in meetings is not always proportionate to the importance of the underlying issue, and that clearer pathways could help address that.

Mary Anne Sweeney commended the inclusion of a process for requesting agenda items and recommended that the document also specify how and when requesters would be notified of denial or delay, noting that VLCT templates include sample reasons for denial. Wendy Marrinan expressed support for public engagement while cautioning that formal paperwork should not feel like a permitting process, and that organic communication between residents and the board should remain available.

Roger Logan supported the effort to formalize procedures and suggested the Town consider adopting a help desk system to better route citizen inquiries. Gay Travers offered a caution that any formal process should not create a perception of a two-tiered system in which some residents have easier access to the agenda than others, and recommended that reasons for denial be communicated clearly to requesters. Vice Chair Laura Powell noted that the draft would be revisited when Selectboard member Chair Susan Ford's returns, and

that feedback received would be incorporated into a revised version.

Statement from the Vice Chair

Vice Chair Laura Powell read a prepared statement announcing her resignation from the Selectboard, effective May 11, 2026. She reflected on her service since joining the Board five months postpartum, originally motivated by the goal of facilitating the Town's purchase of the Aqueduct. She expressed gratitude to fellow Board members, Town staff, and the voters of Woodstock for the opportunity to serve, and acknowledged the significant body of work undertaken by the Board and staff in recent years, including the acquisition of the water utility, renovation of the sewer plant, implementation of a local options tax, and professionalization of Town functions.

Vice Chair Powell's statement also addressed the conditions that led to her resignation. She cited a pattern of conduct she described as unacceptable, including offensive signs placed across the street from the Municipal Manager's home equipped with an air tag. Police being called on the Board's Administrative Assistant a single mom who grew up in this community. Threats of legal action against community members who expressed support for the Board or staff. A threatened bar complaint against Selectboard Cliff Johnson; and concerns raised by staff about personal safety. She concluded by expressing hope that "good people will continue to answer the call" of public service, knowing that Woodstock's future belongs to those who seek to build rather than to destroy.

Eric Duffy thanked Vice Chair Laura Powell for her service, acknowledging the personal sacrifice her work represented, and expressed that the Board would be lesser for her absence. Roger Logan addressed the Board stating he was both saddened and angry at the situation—saddened that someone of Powell's dedication had been driven from public service by what he described as "ugliness," and angry that such treatment of volunteers imperils the ability of local government to function. He called on Woodstock citizens to speak up.

Selectboard Vacancy

With Vice Chair Laura Powell's departure effective May 11, and with Norm Frates planned travel in June, Eric Duffy noted that the three-member Board could face quorum challenges. He recommended that the Board open an application process promptly, with a goal of appointing at least one—and possibly two—members at the May 28 meeting, and still proceeding with the previously planned August 11 election for open seats. Eric Duffy indicated that legal guidance from VLCT and outside counsel suggested the Board has authority to appoint members to serve until the election, and that the statutory language requires action "forthwith."

Cliff Johnson expressed caution about moving too quickly, preferring to receive written legal guidance on the precise timeline obligation before committing to an appointment at the May 28 meeting, and raising concern about insufficient time to attract

well-qualified applicants. The Board agreed to launch the application process immediately, with a deadline of approximately May 26th for applications, and to evaluate at the May 28th meeting whether appointments should be made. Language in the public announcement would reflect that an appointment at that meeting is possible but not guaranteed, pending legal and practical review. The August 11 election would proceed as planned, with appointed members eligible to run.

Gay Travers raised a concern shared by others that appointed members gain an incumbency advantage, and advocated for a special election as the preferred path. Gay Travers argued that Woodstock has historically operated with a three-member Board and that the urgency of appointment may be overstated. Eric Duffy acknowledged the concern but noted that certain time-sensitive decisions cannot be delayed and require a functioning quorum.

I. Approval of Minutes

Vice Chair Powell noted a correction to the April 21, 2026 minutes: the spelling of resident Loren Fisher's name should be corrected to "Loren."

Motion: by Norm Frates Jr. to approve the minutes of March 19, 2026, April 7, 2026, and April 21, 2026, as corrected (10:36 AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

J. Adjournment

Motion: by Norm Frates Jr. to adjourn the meeting (10:37 AM)

Seconded: by Cliff Johnson

Vote: 3-0-0, passed

Respectfully submitted,


Kitty Mears Koar

Cliff Johnson

Norm Frates

Signature: 
Laura Powell (May 13, 2026 09:17:57 EDT)
Email: lpowell@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: 
Cliff Johnson (Jun 5, 2026 06:01:28 MDT)
Email: cjohnson@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: 
Norm Frates (Jun 1, 2026 18:43:17 GMT+2)
Email: nfrates@townofwoodstock.org

