Town of Woodstock
Selectboard Meeting
July 7th, 2026
8:30 AM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes

Draft minutes are subject to approval.
28 on zoom, 18 in person
Present: Chair Susan Ford, Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr., Cliff Johnson, Gay Travers, Dick Sweeney
Staff: Eric Duffy, Kitty Mears Koar, Robert Densmore, Kathy Avelino, Charlie Degener, Emily Collins, Fire Chief David Green
Public: Byron Kelly, Peter Shoemaker, Nicholas Seldon, Barbara Otranto, Sally Garmon, Ann Swanson, Joe Swanson, Alison Taylor, Clay Reed, Cori Fredricks, Dennis Shillen, Gail Childs, Jefferson Atkins, John Curtis, Kathleen Kjerulff, Kevin Clark, Molly Kaylor, Nancy Barr, Susan Berge, Tom Ayers, Ed Durgin, Peggy Fraser, Jill Hasting, Susan Chiefsky, Sofia Longlois, Donna Durgin, Scott Smith, Elisa Tarlow, Suzanne Wooten, Jim Otranto, Jennifer Falvey, Mary Ann Sweeney, Jon Spector, MaryBeth DeFalco

A. **Call to order**

Chair Susan Ford called the Selectboard meeting of July 7th to order shortly after 8:30AM

Chair Susan Ford noted that the meeting was being conducted in hybrid format with participants attending via Zoom, though technical difficulties prevented the Zoom feed from displaying on the in-room screens due to settings altered by a prior user of the space.

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

Sewer abatement for 3 Church Street
Move item 7 on the agenda to after the sewer abatements
Vote Town Grader

Thank You to the Fire Works Committee

Chair Susan Ford extended thanks and recognition to the 250th Anniversary Committee for their outstanding work organizing the Independence Day weekend events.

C. **Citizen Comments**

Chair Susan Ford reminded attendees that comments on agenda items should be reserved for when those items are taken up. A three-minute limit per speaker was observed.

Nicholas Seldon expressed serious concern regarding the disbursement of Town funds related to the Village's Swanson employment matter, alleged misappropriation by

Municipal Manager Duffy, and called for an independent investigation and administrative leave.

Sally Garmon raised a question about whether voters in the upcoming special election could vote for two candidates across all four candidates rather than by assigned seat.

D. Municipal Managers Update

Eric Duffy thanked the Public Works Department for post-fireworks cleanup at the high school, the school district for the use of the facility, and the Police and Fire Departments for their presence and support throughout the weekend. Eric Duffy also acknowledged the emergency services teams for their response to several exceptional incidents over the preceding three weeks, including a rollover truck near a river and a tornado. He noted that the Town has already secured multi-year contracts with the fireworks company to ensure July 4th fireworks continue in coming years, and that the matter would be brought before the relevant committee. He also advised that with the close of FY26, he and Finance Director Robert Densmore would be reviewing the financials over the next few weeks and would schedule a meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair to review year-end results, with a broader update anticipated by the end of July.

Chair Susan Ford also noted a letter received from Green Mountain Power regarding the planned relocation and reconstruction of the electrical substation, which appears likely to be rebuilt in Hartland at the corner of Routes 12 and 4, rather than near the covered bridge. Further information is expected.

F. Votes

Liquor Licenses

Motion: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. to approve a 1st and 3rd class liquor license for Positive Pie, 2nd class liquor license for Woodstock Village Market, all on the assumption that the State is reviewing the applications because they no longer give us enough information to do so (8:40AM)
Seconded: by Dick Sweeney
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Sewer Abatement – 10 Maple Street

Robert Densmore presented a request from the property owner at 10 Maple Street to abate the sewer charge for a previously rented apartment unit, which the owner reported has not been rented for years and is now used solely for personal storage and home office purposes. He stated that because the unit is no longer functioning as a separate residential connection, he was inclined to approve the abatement. The Board agreed that a review should occur every three years to confirm the unit has not returned to rental use, consistent with past practice.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve the sewer abatement for 10 Maple Street, subject to a three-year review (8:46AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Sewer Abatement – 164 Butternut Lane

Robert Densmore reported that the property owner at 164 Butternut Lane had come in to pay his bill and informed staff that his wife had relocated to Missouri, leaving him as the sole resident. The property had previously been billed at the double-occupancy rate. He recommended reducing the billing to a single rate under the change-of-use guideline, subject to periodic review.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve the sewer abatement for 164 Butternut Lane (8:47AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Sewer Abatement – 3 Church Street

Finance Director Robert Densmore explained that the property at 3 Church Street had two water meters from a previous owner, one of which is located under Route 4. The new owners have consolidated to the meter inside the building. Excavating Route 4 to remove the second meter would be cost-prohibitive. He recommended inactivating the second meter in the billing system while continuing to monitor it for any usage. If usage is detected, the homeowner will be contacted. The Board discussed how usage would be tracked and confirmed that the meter, though inactive in the billing system, would still be readable.

Motion: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. to approve the sewer abatement for 3 Church Street (8:56 AM)
Seconded: by Cliff Johnson
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Stipulation Regarding the Appeal to Board of Civil Authority – Comcast

Town Assessor Kathy Avellino presented a request that the Board sign a stipulation agreement to bypass the local Board of Civil Authority (BCA) review process for a Comcast grievance regarding communication line valuations set by the State. Ms. Avellino explained that because the issue is a matter of state statute rather than a local factual dispute, the State has recommended bypassing the BCA and proceeding directly to the state level, saving time and expense. All other utility companies that received similar grievance denials had not filed appeals.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve the stipulation to bypass the Board of Civil Authority for the Comcast appeal (8:59 AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Consider and Discuss Written Proposal to Meet with Village Trustees on FY 24/25 Town Payments Involving Village's Swanson Employment Dispute

Chair Susan Ford explained the Board's standard process: the Board would first discuss the matter before opening the floor to citizen comments. Chair Susan Ford noted that, because it appeared many attendees had not read the written proposal in advance, it would be read aloud in full.

Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. read the proposal into the record. The document summarized that over the past year, members of the public had raised multiple questions regarding Town of Woodstock funds that were disbursed to pay legal and other expenses attributed to administrative hearings involving the demotion of Joseph Swanson.

The proposal expressed the Selectboard's hope to work collectively with the Village Trustees, with the assistance of Eric Duffy, to determine the exact amounts and dates of Town funds disbursed in connection with the Village Police Department employment matter during fiscal years 2024 and 2025, including investigation costs, administrative proceeding assistance, attorney's fees, and other related expenses. The proposal further requested that, having reached a common understanding of the amounts involved, the boards jointly discuss and, if possible, reach a resolution on whether any amounts should be reimbursed to the Town or formally ratified by the Selectboard.

Board Discussion

Chair Susan Ford raised a procedural concern: as drafted, paragraph four of the proposal called for the Village and Town to *jointly* request the accounting from the Municipal Manager, which would delay the request until the Village Trustees convened the following week. The Board agreed to amend paragraph four to remove the Village as a co-requestor, making it solely the Town's request. Chair Susan Ford noted that the Village Trustee Chair, Lisa Lawlor, had already been made aware of the letter, and that the Village would be informed of the Board's decision.

The Board then discussed the appropriate deadline for the report. A timeline of 30 days was discussed with the Board asking Eric Duffy if he thought the timeframe was adequate. Eric Duffy responded that he was not involved in the discussion of the Selectboard decision and felt that he should not comment. Gay Travers discussed a bigger picture item of make sure a situation like this does not happen again. Gay Travers discussed oversight including potential bring back the elected auditors, and the potential of having separate accounts. Gay Travers believes that it would have kept the accounts "cleaner to have separate accounts." After discussion and deliberation, the Board reached consensus on requiring the report by July 26th so that it could be discussed at the July 27th meeting, with firm expectation that no extension would be entertained.

Citizen Comments

Mr. Seldon urged the Board to retain an independent investigator. Peggy Fraser questioned why a joint agreement with the Village was necessary at all, given that the Selectboard controls Town finances. Chair Susan Ford explained that while the Town controls its own funds, any reimbursement from the Village would require the Village's cooperation, and the Board wished to proceed methodically rather than risk additional legal complications. Dick Sweeney clarified that the 30 days falls before the August 11th election. Peter Shoemaker called for the Board the ask for an independent audit of the matter rather than relying solely on Eric Duffy to produce the accounting. Peter Shoemaker commented "that it would be like the bank robber deciding on how the bank got robbed." He stated back to Gay Travers comment and creating "some controls" in the future to catch this from happening again. He called for accountability by the Municipal Manager, he asked where the information originally come from and wheaterBarbara Otranto argued that 30 days was too generous a deadline given past experience with delays and suggested a 14-day window instead. The Board acknowledged the comment but retained the deadline of July 26th, noting that staff vacation schedules had to be taken into account. Jim Otranto asked whether the Board was setting clear parameters for what the report must include, so as to prevent omissions that would require follow-up. Chair Susan Ford indicated that the letter itself, particularly its second paragraph, outlined the scope of what was being requested. There was more discussion on the time frame for the letter, and the amount of staff time needed noting summer vacation schedules. Dick Sweeney stated that 27th was reasonable and we all find ourselves working during vacations. More discussion on the letter date deadline. Eric Duffy noted that this item was warned on the agenda as a discussion and vote with the Village Trustees, and not as a deadline for Eric Duffy to come up with reports. The report that was in the packet described it as a meeting with the Village Trustees and asking the Village Trustees to agree to Eric Duffy to do the reports.

Vote

After more discussion the Board voted to approve the written proposal as amended: paragraph four (4) was revised to remove the Village of Woodstock as a co-requestor, making the request solely that of the Town of Woodstock Selectboard, and the deadline for the Municipal Manager's written report and accounting was set at no later than July 26, 2026, for discussion at the July 27th Selectboard meeting.

Motion: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. to approve the written proposal with amendments — removing the Village as a co-requestor in paragraph four and setting a deadline of no later than July 26, 2026, for delivery of the accounting (9:38 AM)
Seconded: by Dick Sweeney
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

August 11th Warning for Special Election

Chair Susan Ford introduced the need to issue a warning for a Special Town meeting election to be held on August 11, 2026, concurrent with the state primary, to elect two Selectboard members to fill the vacancies. Chair Susan Ford explained that because the seats carry different term lengths (two-year and three-year terms), candidates must run for a specific seat, and it is not possible to allow voters to choose any two of four candidates.

Motion: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. to approve the warning for the August 11th Special Election (9:43 AM)
Seconded: by Dick Sweeney
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Selectboard Protocol/Procedures

Chair Susan Ford introduced two related items: the VLCT-recommended agenda request form and the broader Board meeting protocol document included in the packet. Gay Travers raised concerns about public accessibility and the overall atmosphere of Town governance, including: the automated phone system at Town Hall creating a barrier to residents; the three-minute limit on citizen comments feeling restrictive; the inability of Board members to respond to citizen comments due to open meeting law constraints; and the practice of posting agendas only at the last legally required moment rather than proactively.

Chair Susan Ford clarified that the restriction on responding to citizen comments is legally advised to avoid conducting unnoticed public business, and that meeting schedules and agendas should be posted as early as possible. Chair Susan Ford and Eric Duffy noted that the Chair and Vice Chair plan to meet with the Municipal Manager two weeks before each meeting to begin setting up the agenda, which could be posted earlier in draft form.

Several members of the public also commented, including Peggy Fraser, who supported the effort toward greater transparency but expressed frustration that citizen-submitted agenda items had not consistently received responses, and that the forthcoming agenda request form process should ensure accountability.

Motion: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. to approve the Selectboard meeting protocol document (10:10 AM)
Seconded: by Dick Sweeney
Vote: 4-0-1, passed

The Board then considered whether to formally adopt the VLCT agenda request form on a trial basis. Noting that it had not been formally warned as a vote item, the Board agreed to table the agenda form adoption to the July 27th meeting.

Water Improvements Route 4 – Change Order to Contract with MSK

Craig Jewett from MSK Engineers presented a proposed contract amendment relating to the water distribution project approximately $20,500 to engage a subconsultant to field-locate water main positions along Route 4. He explained that existing records from the former Aqueduct system are insufficient to confirm precise pipe locations and depths — in some areas pipes are 18 to 20 feet underground — and that relying on incomplete records would expose the contractor to risk and likely increase costs significantly. Also, the high expense of traffic control on Route 4. The plan is to first complete the Cox District Road portion of the project, tie it into the existing system, use it to establish temporary water supply, and then proceed with the Route 4 main replacement pipe in the same location as the previous pipe.

Board members questioned why this scope was not included in the original contract. Eric Duffy noted that the bids were based on the engineers' qualification and not by the cost, the scope of work was based on the amount of documentation the Aqueduct was able to provide. In response, a Board member suggested that MSK share in the cost of the change order, given that the gap in scope was the firm's professional responsibility. The representative agreed to take the matter back to the firm for consideration.

Byron Kelly raised concern about whether increasing water pressure through new pipe installation could cause failures in the older sections of the existing system. The MSK representative confirmed this was a known risk that had been identified in the prior engineering report, and that the water department would need to actively monitor the system following pressurization.

The Board agreed to table a vote on the change order to the July 27th meeting, pending MSK's response to the cost-sharing question.

G. Discussion

Town Grader Discussion

Eric Duffy reported that the Town's sole road grader had broken down and been towed off the road within the past few days. After researching options, he found that new graders are unavailable for purchase for two to three years, and no rental units could be located. The best option available is to replace the engine, with an initial estimate of approximately $75,000. The capital reserve account for the grader currently holds $84,232.34, which had been set aside toward an eventual new machine purchase. Given the unavailability of new equipment and the urgency of the situation, Eric Duffy requested authorization to draw from that capital reserve for an engine replacement, with the expectation of gaining at least two additional years of service life from the existing machine. The Board noted that reaching out to neighboring Towns to explore equipment sharing was also worth pursuing.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve expenditure of up to $84,000 from the grader capital reserve for a new engine or alternative less-expensive solution (10:27 AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Updating Water Rates

The Board was joined by Robert Densmore and Jon Spector for an introductory discussion on the process for updating the Town's water rate structure. Eric Duffy noted that the current rates were largely carried over from the former Aqueduct system, and that the goal is to have a new rate structure established before the next billing cycle, with bills anticipated around November or December.

Robert Densmore explained that he had developed multiple rate scenarios when setting the current rates and had ultimately used the most equitable structure available given the data at hand. He noted a number of ongoing data challenges, including approximately 80 to 90 meters that still require manual card reads rather than radio-frequency readings, older meters whose accuracy may be degraded, and water connections that may not be reflected in the current billing system. He emphasized that establishing a reliable baseline of usage and connection data is a prerequisite to setting more nuanced rates.

Jon Spector provided context from the Finance Committee's prior work, noting that the committee had developed a long-term model showing the need to approximately double water rates over a five-year period to fund anticipated capital improvements. He noted the model is built and available as a working tool and offered to present it to the full Board — including newly seated members. The Board agreed this would be a useful starting point.

The discussion surfaced on how to treat high-volume commercial users, whether to charge for sprinkler system capacity, how to handle multi-use buildings with multiple connections, and whether to pursue usage-based or conservation-oriented rate tiers. Board members and Jon Spector agreed that some of these policy choices could be made in parallel with the ongoing data cleanup, rather than waiting for a perfect dataset. The Board agreed to receive the Finance Committee's presentation at the July 27th meeting and to re-engage the Finance Committee in support of a rate revision process ahead of the next billing cycle.

H. Discussion Proposed Executive Session 1 V.S.A 313

Motion: by Cliff Johnson go into executive session under 1 VSA section 3 1 3 to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or prosecution to which the public body is or may be a party in concerns of Robinson Farm. (11:01AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to Exit Executive Session (11:10 AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

I. Votes

Legal Representative for Robinson Farm Appeal

Motion: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr. to approve the legal representative SP&F Attorneys for the Robinson Farm appeal (11:13 AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

J. Approval of Minutes

Chair Susan Ford reported that the May 28, 2026 amended minutes had been previously approved but required further revision to accurately reflect a citizen comment. The June 16, 2026, minutes were missing a page.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve June 25, 2026, minutes (11:14 AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

K. Adjournment

Motion: by Gay Travers to adjourn the meeting (11:15 AM)
Seconded: by Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr.
Vote: 5-0-0, passed

Respectfully submitted,

Kitty Mears Koar

Norm Frates

Susan B. Ford

Cliff Johnson

Signature: Richard Sweeney
Richard Sweeney (Aug 12, 2026 09:35:45 EDT)
Email: rsweeney@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: Gay Travers
Gay Travers (Aug 11, 2026 11:08:01 EDT)
Email: gtravers@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: Norm Frates
Norm Frates (Aug 10, 2026 15:43:26 EDT)
Email: nfrates@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: Susan B. Ford
Susan B. Ford (Aug 15, 2026 11:38:11 EDT)
Email: sford@townofwoodstock.org

Signature: Cliff Johnson
Cliff Johnson (Aug 14, 2026 07:47:47 EDT)
Email: cjohnson@townofwoodstock.org