Town of Woodstock
Selectboard Meeting
September 1st, 2026
8:30AM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes

Draft minutes are subject to approval.
15 in Person 12 on Zoom
Present: Vice Chair Norm Frates Jr., MaryAnn Sweeney, Cliff Johnson, Susan Chiefsky
Staff: Eric Duffy, Kitty Mears Koar, Robert Densmore, Abbie Sherman Sanso, Mary Riley, Michelle Sutherland, Kathy Avellino, Charlie Degener, Greg Fullerton, Stephanie Appelfeller
Public: Tom Ayres, Alison Taylor, Candice Gammill, Dan VeNard, Deborah Gravel, Elise Tarlow, Erin Scott, Nicholas Seldon, Roger Logan, Tom Meyerhoff, Wendy Marrinan, Jim Kelly, Loren Fisher, Keri Bristow, Michael Brands, Barbara Kennedy, Byron Kelly, Gay Travers, Claire VeNard

A. Call to order

Vice Chair Norm Frates called the Selectboard meeting of September 1st to order at 8:30 AM.

B. Additions to & deletions from posted agenda

On citizen comments on the agenda -replacing the word "resident" with "person"
Statement by Cliff Johnson

Statement by Cliff Johnson

Cliff Johnson announced his resignation from the Selectboard effective at the end of the meeting. He stated the main reason was lack of sufficient time to devote to the role due to increasing professional travel and ongoing demands related to his hotel business following two recent disasters. Mr. Johnson stated that, given the Town's current challenges, the position required someone able to commit more time through the remainder of the term ending in March. He expressed appreciation to the community, fellow Board members, and Town staff, and said he hoped to continue serving the Town in other capacities where scheduling was more flexible. Board members thanked him for his service.

C. Vote

Appointment of Selectboard Chair

The Board addressed the organizational appointments following Susan Ford's earlier resignation.

Motion: by Susan Chiefsky to appoint Norm Frates Jr. as Selectboard Chair (8: 33AM)
Seconded: by MaryAnn Sweeney
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Appointment of Selectboard Vice Chair

Motion: by Susan Chiefsky to appoint Mary Ann Sweeney as Selectboard Vice Chair (8: 33AM)
Seconded: by Cliff Johnson
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Ambulance Write-offs

Robert Densmore presented ambulance write-offs through June 30, 2025. He explained that the Town historically bills insurance and then attempts collection on remaining balances for roughly a year before accounts are written off. The amount presented, approximately $113,900, was described as consistent with but slightly lower than the prior year.

Robert Densmore said the Town expected future write-offs to decline because ambulance billing had been transitioned to a third-party vendor as of October 1, 2025. He explained that the outside firm specializes in ambulance billing, is compensated by a percentage of collections, and should improve follow-up on errors, insurance denials, and unpaid claims. Board members discussed the large share of unpaid claims attributable to insurers and government programs rather than uninsured patients, and Robert Densmore noted that denials can arise from claim errors or claim-type issues. Vice Chair MaryAnn Sweeney expressed support for the vendor arrangement and the expectation of improved collections.

Motion: by Vice Chair MaryAnn Sweeney to approve the ambulance write-offs (8: 40 AM)
Seconded: by Susan Chiefsky
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

School Board Vacancy Appointment

David Rubin

David Rubin did not appear either in person or online. The Board noted that he had been invited and discussed whether to act immediately or wait to see whether he joined later in the meeting.

Claire VeNard

Claire VeNard addressed the Board and described her background and interest in serving. She said she and her husband moved to Woodstock three years earlier with their three children, all now attending local schools. She said the school system had been an important reason for choosing Woodstock and that she wanted to help the district navigate current challenges, including budget issues, technology changes, building matters, and state-level developments. She described professional experience in law, higher education administration, policy, and leadership hiring, and said those skills aligned well with school board service. She confirmed that she had attended some school board meetings and had spoken with Keri Bristow.

Motion: by Susan Chiefsky to recommend Claire VeNard for appointment to the Mountain Views School Board (8:45 AM)
Seconded: by MaryAnn Sweeney
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Pomfret Road and Hartland Hill Road Paving Bid Award

Eric Duffy and Greg Fullerton reviewed paving bids for Pomfret and Hartland Hill Roads. Greg Fullerton had secured a paving grant, and the Town also had approximately $239,945.58 in road improvement capital reserves available. Pike Industries was identified as the low bidder at approximately $365,000. The Board noted that Pike had completed prior work for the Town.

Greg Fullerton explained that the proposed work would resurface the roads and address shoulder edge drop-offs where needed. He characterized the project as necessary interim work until more comprehensive repairs could be funded. The Board also noted the bid acceptance timing issue and stated that the price would be confirmed through the Board approval process.

Motion: by Susan Chiefsky to approve the paving bid award to Pike Industries for Pomfret Road and Hartland Hill Road work (8:48 AM)
Seconded: by MaryAnn Sweeney
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Greg Fullerton also gave a brief update on the prior day's water main break near Mellishwood. He explained that excavation work had struck a water line and valve, creating a significant repair challenge while the main well was also offline for control-box work. He reported that a new valve had been installed, service had been restored, tank levels had recovered, and staff had worked late and returned early to stabilize the system.

Town Garage Repair Contract

Eric Duffy presented a proposed lower highway garage roof repair contract. He said staff had spent several months seeking quotes and had obtained one qualifying proposal, which satisfied procurement policy due to documented efforts. He stated that the Town had $105,000 in capital reserves set aside for lower highway garage roof repair.

Greg Fullerton described the lower garage roof as long overdue for replacement, leaking into a heated storage space containing equipment, and causing ongoing deterioration including rotted wood around the edges. He said staff had made temporary repairs by lifting sections of roofing and inserting plywood to divert water. The proposed project included removal and repair of damaged materials, insulation, and installation of standing seam roofing on part of the structure. Board members asked about warranty coverage and whether the scope would address all needed repairs; Greg Fullerton said hidden rot could result in some additional sheathing once the roof was opened but emphasized that delay would only increase damage and cost.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve the Town garage roof repair contract as presented (8:53 AM)
Seconded: by Susan Chiefsky
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Foliage Porta Potties Rental

Eric Duffy requested authorization to spend up to $5,000 from the Economic Development local option tax fund to rent portable toilets behind the Welcome Center during the peak foliage period, at minimum for Indigenous Peoples' Day weekend and possibly the preceding weekend as well. He explained that the account had an ample projected balance and that the request was intended to avoid returning for a small overage if needed.

Chair Norm Frates Jr. asked whether it would be more economical to keep the units in place continuously between peak weekends, Eric Duffy explained that weekend rental, servicing, and locking logistics made that less practical.

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to approve up to $5,000 for foliage-season portable toilet rental as discussed (8:55 AM)
Seconded: by MaryAnn Sweeney
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Trustee of Public Fund Appointment

Mark Hall did not appear, but the Board stated that members had reviewed his application. Discussion noted that the Trustees of Public Funds currently had two members and that this appointment would fill the third position. Eric Duffy stated the Trustees meet at least annually for allocations and that there was interest in having the body meet more regularly and develop a stronger understanding of its full responsibilities.

Motion: by Susan Chiefsky to appoint Mark Hall to the Trustees of Public Funds (8:57 AM)
Seconded: by Cliff Johnson
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

D. Discussion

Forensic Accounting Update

Susan Chiefsky reported on research conducted concerning a forensic accounting review. She said several names had been provided by residents, Board members, and legal counsel. Four potential candidates were screened based on certification, years in practice, and licensure. One candidate no longer performed this type of work, and another was scheduled for a Zoom interview later that week. The Board was awaiting a letter of engagement and information on timing and cost, with the expectation of providing more concrete information at the next meeting.

Mary Riley asked whether the Town's existing auditors had been consulted and suggested they might be qualified and cost-effective. Board discussion reflected differing views: some felt an independent outside review was preferable, while others said there was no reason not to contact the current auditors for information.

Nicholas Seldon objected to considering the auditor on the grounds that the auditor had failed to identify the matter at issue during the original audit. Eric Duffy clarified that he had not had substantive communication with the auditor during the audit beyond limited administrative emails.

No formal action was taken.

Discussion of Open Selectboard Seat Process

The Board discussed how to fill the two Selectboard vacancies created by the resignations of Susan Ford and Cliff Johnson. Chair Norm Frates Jr. outlined three possible approaches: appointing members directly, attempting to place the seats on the November general election ballot, or waiting until the March Town meeting election. He recommended reopening the application process, considering individuals who had recently sought appointment or election, and inviting any new applicants as well.

Town Clerk Charlie Degener advised that state statute requires vacancies to be filled "forthwith," meaning the Board should act as soon as reasonably possible. Mr. Degener explained that trying to combine a municipal vacancy election with the November general election would create administrative complications because of universal state mail-in ballots and the need for separate Town ballot procedures. He recommended making appointments now to serve until Town meeting in March, when the normal election process could occur.

Board members discussed allowing candidates to reuse prior applications if still interested. A deadline of September 10 was proposed so interviews or decisions could occur at the September 15 meeting. Roger Logan supported prompt appointments until March, though one urged the Board not to limit appointments to people unwilling to run later, arguing that the Town needed long-term commitment.

The Board reached consensus to solicit interest from prior applicants and new applicants, with the goal of making appointments at the next meeting. No formal vote was taken.

Agenda Format Change

Vice Chair Mary Ann Sweeney proposed revising the meeting agenda format by replacing the headings "Vote" and "Discussion" with "Old Business" and "New Business."

She stated the revised format could make it clearer whether an item involved discussion only or possible action. She also proposed creating a consent agenda for routine, noncontroversial matters such as licenses, abatements, and possibly minutes, allowing such items to be approved in a single motion unless removed for separate discussion. Ms. Sweeney said the goal was to save meeting time for more substantive items while still preserving transparency. She acknowledged, however, that a consent agenda would require the public to review the posted agenda in advance and request that an item be pulled before or at the start of a meeting. Board members discussed how to communicate clearly that items listed on the agenda might be acted on even if not labeled under a separate “Vote” heading.

Several commenters objected strongly to moving citizen comments to the end of the meeting and argued that it signaled a reduced willingness to hear from residents. Roger Logan supported the change and noted that Vermont law does not require a public comment period on non-agenda items. Wendy Marrinan commented that citizen comments had not always historically been at the beginning and encouraged the Board to focus more broadly on creating opportunities for the public to engage throughout agenda discussions. Elisa Tarlow urged restoration of an “other business” agenda category to allow board members greater flexibility.

The Board indicated it would try the revised format as a work in progress and adjust as needed. No formal vote was taken at this time.

Resident Agenda Request Form

Eric Duffy reviewed the resident agenda request form previously approved by the Board, noting that final edits had been completed with assistance from Vice Chair MaryAnn Sweeney and the Chair Norm Frates Jr. The form would be posted on the website and made available in hard copy at Town Hall.

Ms. Sweeney explained that requests would be submitted to Chair Norm Frates Jr., who would either respond directly or delegate a response, and that a response would be provided within 10 business days. She emphasized that a response might include a decision not to place an item on the agenda immediately, but the requester would receive acknowledgment and an explanation. The Board discussed using the form on a 90-day trial basis and then revisiting whether the process was useful.

No further action was taken.

Vondell Cobb Easement Review

The Board reviewed the Vondell Cobb conservation easement documents primarily to familiarize newer Board members with the matter before closing. Eric Duffy explained that the principal remaining task was final agreement on easement language. He said the 30-day notice period had already been posted, comments had been or were being provided by the Town’s engineering firm, WAMBA, the Upper Valley Land Trust, and Town counsel, and a mid-October closing was still anticipated. Susan Chiefsky asked whether the easement language might interfere with use of the Class 4 road crossing the property and motorized vehicles and whether language regarding public fees allowed future admission charges. Town Clerk Charlie Degener's understanding was that the municipal road itself would remain unaffected by the designation of class 4, though the Board agreed the point should be confirmed. Susan Chiefsky responded that the fee language merely preserved the Town's ability to charge reasonable fees if desired and did not require it.

Public comments again reflected divided views. Gay Travers questioned the need for the easement at all, arguing that Town ownership already protected the property and urging newer board members to reevaluate the project. Chair Norm Frates Jr. responded that, in his view, the easement permanently sold the development rights while preserving Town ownership, protecting the property from subdivision or sale, ensuring recreational use, preserving a water-system backup option, and bringing in approximately $1.5 million. Roger Logan urged the Board not to reopen a decision that had already been discussed extensively and noted that there had been multiple public forums and opportunities for input.

Chamber/Town Website MOU Agreement

Jim Kelly and Loren Fisher discussed proposed revisions to the memorandum of understanding governing the shared Town/chamber website. They said that when the agreement was created, the understanding had been that both the Town and the Chamber would sell advertising. Because the Town had not pursued ad sales, the Chamber requested that the revenue-sharing arrangement be revised so that the Town's website-related expenses would be covered first and the remaining advertising revenue generated by Chamber efforts would go to the Chamber rather than being split equally.

Eric Duffy said staff needed to better identify the Town's full website-related costs, including hosting and staff administration, before the Board could evaluate the proposal. The Board agreed that further discussion among designated board members, staff, and Chamber representatives would be helpful. It was also noted that the current agreement remains in effect through December 31, 2026, so there was time to work through potential revisions.

E. Citizen Comments – Three-minute maximum limit per person

Michel Brands raised the issue of the previously discussed rooster ordinance, stating that although one rooster may have been removed, another younger rooster remained on the property and was beginning to create the same disturbance. Chair Norm Frates Jr. said the matter had been tabled after the Board was informed the original rooster was gone, but the Board indicated it would revisit the issue. Eric Duffy stated he could address options in a future manager's report or agenda item.

Elisa Tarlow commented on the planning commission's work to revise the Town and Village plan and criticized the role of Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission, arguing that local residents should drive the process through broader outreach before outside consultants resume substantive drafting.

Several commenters thanked Cliff Johnson for his service and expressed regret at his resignation, with particular acknowledgment of his efforts to review and publicly explain disputed legal fee calculations. Nicholas Seldon commented regarding concerns over legal fees, transparency, and management actions.

Manager's Update

Eric Duffy thanked public works and utility staff for their response to the water main break and restoration work. He announced that the upcoming Friday would be the last day of summer hours, with Town Hall returning after Labor Day to regular Friday closing at 4:30 p.m.

He also reported that the Village Trustees were planning a public hearing on bylaw Updates for September 29, 2026.

Finally, he reported receiving notice late the previous night that FEMA had approved several post-flood property buyout applications in Woodstock. He explained that, if property owners remained interested, the Town would work with them through the federal process, under which FEMA would provide fair market value, and the structures would then be demolished and the land restricted largely to open-space use. Property owners would also have the option to decline participation. He said staff hoped to provide a fuller update at the next meeting.

H. Adjournment

Motion: by Cliff Johnson to adjourn the meeting
(9:58 AM)
Seconded: by Susan Chiefsky
Vote: 4-0-0, passed

Respectfully submitted,

Kitty Mears Koar