

Minutes
Williamsburg Board of Selectmen
November 16, 2023

The members of the Board of Selectmen met in regular session on Thursday, November 16, 2023, at the town office. The chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Present: William Sayre, Denise Banister and Paul Wetzel

Also present: Nick Caccamo (Town Administrator), Sharon Strzegowski (Collector and Treasurer), Nathan Rosewarne (Accountant), Eleanor Warnock (Administrative Assistant)
Mill River Greenway: Nick Dines, Gaby Immerman, Matt Chase (VHB), Jim Czach (VHB)
South Main Street residents and others: Mark Albright, Lisa Maria Bertoldi, Madelyn Breen, Michael Bullock, John Ryan Conway, Donald Dextraze, Cora Lee Drew, Elizabeth Ducharme, Libby Jalbert, Ned Jalbert, Gary Linscott, Anne McCabe, Pawel Pasiut, Joseph Pasternak III, Gerry Shattuck, Alan Verson, Mary W, Jim Weigang

1. Welcome to new Select Board member – The chair gave a warm welcome to Paul Wetzel, the recently elected Select Board member.
2. Introduction and open comment period for members of the public – The chair announced that for the South Main Street/ Mill River Greenway item later in the agenda, he had asked Michael Bullock to represent the residents and if there were comments, they should be given to Michael. For the opening period of public comment, he invited people to speak and asked that comments be kept to two minutes per person. There would be no response or discussion at this time. One resident commented that if the current plans for South Main Street go through, South Main Street would be a one-way street, creating problems for the tour busses and large trucks coming down Walpole Road and wanting to get onto Route 9.

3. Collector and Treasurer – Collector and Treasurer Sharon Strzegowski gave her regular report.

Collector – For real estate taxes, all unpaid FY23 amounts have been moved into tax title. FY24 has a 94% collection rate so far and payments are still coming in. She is working with the Assessors and Accountant on setting the tax rate. For personal property taxes, one customer hasn't paid for FY23, and the same for FY24. Excise taxes, which work on a calendar year, are in good shape and there will be a mailing next week. Water/Sewer payments for FY24 were due on November 9 and are still coming in. FY23 amounts will go onto real estate bills if not paid by December. The highest outstanding balance is being paid off at \$10,000 a week. In summary, things are in good shape.

Treasurer – She is the new Town Treasurer as of July 1 and has been working on getting underway in the Treasurer role. She was both Collector and Treasurer in her previous town. Payroll has involved a lot of distribution of paper, and she is working on transition to a payroll portal, which will be paperless for people who have direct deposit. She will still issue W-2 forms in paper. In terms of staff, Assistant Treasurer Karen Karowski has given notice but will stay on for five hours a week through the end of the calendar year. Karen is also available to come back for certain projects on a per diem basis. Finally, Sharon has put all of the unpaid FY23 real estate taxes into tax title and has been working with Town Counsel. Her goal is to get

the town's money and to get the property owners current with the taxes. Select Board members said she was doing a fantastic job and congratulated her on passing her certification as Collector; she is now certified as both Collector and Treasurer.

4. Accountant – Town Accountant Nathan Rosewarne gave his regular report. He is working on closing out FY23. Work in preparation for setting the tax rate is progressing. The new auditors flagged some things in last year's audit that had already been fixed. Town Administrator Nick Caccamo noted that there have been significant personnel changes and the financial team has been working pretty effectively.

5. Appointments – **Motion** was made and seconded (PW/WS) to appoint Denise Banister as Emergency Manager for the town for a term to expire June 30, 2024. **So voted** (2-0, DB recusing herself). The chair thanked her for her ongoing service in this role, even while the board was unable to act on her appointment because of too few members for a vote, noting that this vote allows her to be paid the usual stipend.

6. Licenses – live entertainment – **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/PW) to approve a live entertainment permit for the American Legion for a band or D.J., 6 to 11 p.m., on Saturdays, December 16, 2023, and January 13, 2024. **So voted** (3-0). It was noted that the Board is the licensing authority and having these requests come before the Board gives the town an opportunity to do something if there are complaints.

7. Waste to Hydrogen project – Julia Peters of Local Power LLC presented information about the project and asked for a letter of support. She and her husband, Paul Fenn, are involved in local power and decarbonizing and building renewable energy. Landfills are full, incinerators are shut down, Forever chemicals (PFAS) are being recycled and put on farm land. They looked for the best technology and found Waste to Hydrogen, which uses high heat and converts solid waste to hydrogen. It is used in Europe and Japan and they are working toward a privately funded regional site in Western Mass. They are getting letters of interest so they can develop a proposal. The cost to the town would be no more than is being paid now. Other towns are interested. Board members were enthusiastic. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/PW) to sign the joint letter of interest for the Western Mass. Waste to Hydrogen with Char Sequestration Project. **So voted** (3-0).

8. Mill River Greenway – Lower South Main Street project - Gaby Immerman, Mill River Greenway – Gaby Immerman of the Mill River Greenway Committee explained that the group was created by the town in 2010 to create a shared-use path connecting Haydenville and Williamsburg, and they have come up with a plan they are happy with. She acknowledged that the residents of South Main Street are uniquely affected and the plan has been changed to address their concerns. She made two main points. First, that there are two separate projects on South Main Street, the Lower South Main Street block, which has been designed by the town and funding secured from the Transportation Bond, and Upper South Main Street, a project by MassDOT as part of the bridges project – two different projects with two different funding streams. Part of the goal was to avoid the state requirements of Complete Streets. Second, that there will be increased numbers of bikers and walkers on South Main Street when the Greenway is built, and the town needs to decide what to do to anticipate the increased

usage. The topic tonight is an update on the Lower South Main Street project. They feel they have solved the problem of increased bikers and walkers, with an 8 foot shared use path, as compared to the Complete Streets alternative with two sidewalks, two bike lanes, and two car lanes, a much larger footprint. In the town plan, no trees are affected, no changes on the west side of the street, only three properties affected at all. The plan has pulled one foot away from properties on the east side. They have worked hard to make as light a footprint as possible. Currently MassDOT District 1 is holding \$2.39 million in an account for the Lower Main Street Project. The committee will be asking the Select Board for a letter asking for release of those funds.

Michael Bullock, representing residents – Michael Bullock of South Main Street started by saying that the neighborhood residents want the Greenway project to work. Second, he said that the South Main Street residents should have been consulted from the beginning, and they have had to catch up. Third, the neighbors have made a proposal, because the MassDOT plan (for Upper South Main Street) was problematic. There is a meeting planned with MassDOT on December for MassDOT to respond to the community's request. The neighborhood wants to hear about MassDOT's flexibility.

Discussion – Returning to the Lower South Main Street project, discussion included: The project is shovel-ready. People haven't seen the plans yet. There are individual concerns about parking. Elements that have changed since the original plan were reiterated (e.g., no impact on west side, no moving utility poles, poles not shifting across the street, parking addressed). There have been nine community forums to have public conversations. There will be lines and stakes and flags to make the proposal easier to visualize (and will be removed afterward), and electronic plans will be made available. The town doesn't need to have a shared use path but then wouldn't get the Transportation Bond money. The plan will realign the curve to make it safer, the roadway will be rebuilt, adding drainage. There will be another meeting to go over all the issues. Resident representative Michael Bullock will work with Town Administrator Nick Caccamo to set a time for a meeting. The chair summarized, saying that all are willing to get together to discuss details, reach consensus, and hopefully present a unified town position before the meeting with MassDOT and not jeopardize the Transportation Bond bill.

9. Public Safety Complex Charge Order #8 – This change order had come to the Board at the last meeting and the questions raised at that time have been resolved. But there has recently been a revised requisition and there will be a revised Change Order #8, so no action was taken.

10. Mill River Watershed MVP grant – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo presented the contract with Dodson & Flinker, the third of the four contracts for the Mill River Watershed MVP grant, the first two having been signed at the last meeting. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/PW) to authorize the chair to sign the Dodson & Flinker Agreement for Upper Mill River Watershed Planning for Flood Resilience. **So voted** (3-0).

11. ARPA accounting – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo presented the spending of the ARPA funds to date. The original total amount was \$737,104, the current balance on hand is \$428,842. Money spent so far is \$308,262, there is \$88,012 in ongoing projects, and \$322,500 set aside for other projects, leaving \$18,330 not yet allocated. Some specific items were discussed, including Old Town Hall repairs and work on the Town Office Building

12. Town Administrator's report –

Public Safety Complex – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that the certificate of substantial completion has been issued by the Building Inspector. There was an issue with the generator. There are some things that the architect should have thought of. The budget is near zero. Cameras and a security system are still needed. The town is making ongoing purchases and will need to be more flexible with other budget lines. Selectmen commented that the new facility will be wonderful.

Select Board meeting time – Thursday 4 p.m. is the new Select Board meeting time.

Fire Chief contract – Nick Caccamo will get in touch with Town Counsel and the Fire Chief and see where we are. The new full-time position starts January 1, at double his current hours, and the salary has already been set.

13. Minutes – **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/PW) to accept the minutes of November 2 as presented. **So voted** (2-0, PW abstaining).

14. Warrant – Chair William Sayre will review and sign the warrant. Payroll warrant WP24-11 for \$133,556.19 and expense warrant W24-11 for \$1,204,689.15, payable 11/22/23.

Documents used

Agenda and notes

Collector's report

Live entertainment permit

Lower South Main Street plan

South Main Street residents concerns

Dodson & Flinker contract (MVP)

ARPA accounting

Public Safety Complex budget accounting

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Adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Approved:

Clerk