

Minutes
Williamsburg Board of Selectmen
December 28, 2023

The members of the Board of Selectmen met in regular session on Thursday, December 28, 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), Jason Connell (Fire Chief), Cora Lee Drew, Charles Dudek, Mary Dudek, Dick Guzowski, Gerry Shattuck, J.M. Sorrell, Eleanor Warnock (Administrative Assistant), Denise Wickland (Police Chief), Jim Weigang, Melissa Wilson (Senior Center Director)

1. Senior Center – Senior Center Director Melissa Wilson gave her regular report. The Northern Hilltown Consortium was awarded a technology grant for a regional program. She herself was out for a couple of months and the staff did a great job. The transportation program continues to be busy. There have been a couple of requests for transportation to Boston, and they have been exploring options. The food programs are going well. A farmer reached out to donate. They continue to offer help with SHINE, Highland Valley, HEN program, Take and Eat, veterans' services, and technology. She added that with the push these days to age in place in rural communities, services are needed.

2. Fire Chief – update on full-time chief status – Fire Chief Jason Connell said that his full-time status starts next week. He is excited and nervous. First steps will be getting familiar with the new building, looking at things in the background that need to change, and moving from two stations to one. There has been a huge increase in the number of calls, from 400 to over 600 this year. There have been some preliminary talks about the full-time contract and they expect to have something in place for July 1. The question of paying the Fire Chief for training sessions while earning a full-time salary was briefly discussed. It was agreed to address this issue during upcoming contract negotiations with the Fire Chief. A get-together is planned to celebrate and other fire chiefs have been invited. It is hard to leave his other job of 25 years and start over; he is the fourth longest-serving dispatcher in the state. Looking ahead, the hardest part will be not to overdo, since he will be in town all the time; he will need to rely on the others and not go to every call. The department is planning to be fully out of the Haydenville station by the end of January.

3. Police Chief – contract – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that under the Police Chief's contract, six months' notice must be given if the intention is not to renew. The Board confirmed that they absolutely want to renew the contract. An updated version has been received from Town Counsel. The Chief is now officially a strong chief; otherwise the contract is much the same. Chief Wickland said that the department cannot move to the new Public Safety Complex until there are security cameras and access to the state Criminal Justice Information System. They plan to have their office hours in the new building on January 8, and access the state system from a cruiser. They like the new space.

4. Mill River Greenway and South Main Street –

31 South Main Street – J.M. Sorrell, resident at 31 South Main Street, presented her statement to the Board. She has been engaged with the Mill River Greenway South Main Street process from the beginning. She said the early plan with an eight-foot bike path and a five-foot pedestrian sidewalk was too big for the area and would have a large negative impact on her property. The more recent plan for an off-road shared-use path for bikes and pedestrians feels appropriate, and safer than an on-road plan. She has offered easements in support of the current plan, and she hopes the town will move ahead with it. A statement in support of the Mill River Greenway plan was also received from Charles Dudek.

Report on discussion of 12/20 – Select Board chair William Sayre described the recent discussion between representatives of residents, Mill River Greenway and Select Board. They agreed on a number of goals (e.g., safety, preserving the character of Haydenville, wanting connection between Leeds and Williamsburg, acknowledging MassDOT authority) and on several pieces of the project. They are continuing to work through the various options. They don't yet know what MassDOT will consider and not consider, and VHB will make inquiries. The goal is to write a letter to MassDOT with agreement on what the town wants. He noted that everyone is working hard to come to agreement. A suggestion was made to include various choices in the letter – if X is possible then A, if not then B. The plan is to finalize the letter to MassDOT later in January.

5. Mountain Street project – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that MassDOT, which had last been in the town three years ago for the 25% design hearing, has reached out with updated plans. The new plans are very close to the road's current footprint and to MassDOT's original Alternative #4, which was what both the residents and the town wanted. The construction period, through the Transportation Improvement Program (FRCOG for Whately's portion, PVPC for Williamsburg's), is still projected as 2026-27.

6. Meekins gutter project – change order – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo presented change order #2. Change order #1 involved replacing existing copper gutter on the Route 9 side with copper, which came out very well. They are recommending more scuppers instead of a downspout. He noted that the elevator shaft area had not been addressed in the original home-made construction documents. Concern was raised about drilling holes in the roof to mount the gutter brackets. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/PW) to approve change order #2 from Larochelle Construction for the Meekins gutter project, in the amount of \$2013.25. **So voted** (3-0).

7. Haydenville Police and Fire building – The question arose about what will happen to the building and lot. Some suggestions are declaring it surplus and selling it (getting it back on the tax rolls), repurposing it as a parking area or a public park (an issue might be maintaining it). A process is needed for deciding. It was noted that an empty building drives up the town's insurance costs.

8. FY24 Operations budget – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo presented an overview of the budget halfway through the year and flagged some items to keep an eye on. Fire Department Labor line is being spent quickly. Heating and electricity are being watched, especially for the Public Safety Complex. Computer services are high, with bills for excess hours and changes to

the backup storage system. Tech Upgrades and Building Repairs have been used for Public Safety Complex needs. Building Repairs is also depleted because an insurance reimbursement was paid to the town's general fund rather than directly to the vendor, making the insurance money unavailable for building repairs. The sump pumps in the Town Offices just failed. The long-term debt budget line is inaccurate; the money is available, just in the wrong line. There was discussion about better coordination between the Select Board and the Finance Committee in the budget process, and about moving toward adopting a salary structure.

9. Town Administrator's report –

Public Safety Complex – The security system was not included in the overall building contract, and landscaping and signage were removed from the contract for credit, and the town is responsible for procuring them independently. The security system, estimated at \$10,000-50,000, is a chapter 149 public construction project with certain requirements – prevailing wage, advertising to the larger market – and will take some time to put into place. Bob Reinke (Police) and Daryl Springman (Fire) are the point people. Landscaping can be paid from the MVP grant. Because it is a chapter 30B project, it just needs three quotes. Selectman Paul Wetzel noted that he could lend his skills for the restoration, since that is what he does in his work life. The exterior signage went out to bid in November, with an intentionally vague scope of work, and five bids were received. The Public Safety Complex Committee will decide whether to accept the lowest bid or rebid the project.

Solect Energy – Under the agreement signed two weeks ago, Solect has billed some of the project and will be paid from MVP funds.

Tax rate FY24 – The tax rate for FY24 was set at \$18.10, and the town was able to send out tax bills before the January 1 deadline. There were some difficulties along the way including software problems.

Town Office sump pumps – The two sump pumps in the basement have been broken for some time and the big rainstorm last week filled the pit around the boiler with water. They have been replaced. A suggestion was made to install alarms on the sump pumps.

Town Office audio visual – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that a town board had asked for audio visual upgrades to do hybrid meetings, and the Town Clerk had asked about grant funding for speakers for the auditorium. There was a town meeting appropriation that could cover it but none of this has been purchased because energy and attention are being focused elsewhere. He noted that it is not super critical, a want not a need, as most committees are meeting either fully on Zoom or fully in person. While one Selectman would like equipment to make it possible to attend meetings remotely and for the public to attend remotely, he acknowledged that there is not a strong push for it.

10. Minutes – November 30 – The description of the Meekins gutter project change order was clarified. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/PW) to approve the minutes of November 30 as corrected. **So voted** (3-0).

11. Miscellaneous – Finance Committee – Paul Wetzel will resign from Finance Committee, and he read from the statute that the vacancy should be filled by a joint meeting of Finance and the Select Board. The joint meeting will be scheduled for Feb 22, because of some planned absences before that.

12. Warrant – Chair William Sayre will review and sign the warrant. Payroll warrant WP24-14 for \$125,424.80 and expense warrant W24-14 for \$198,895.69, payable 1/3/24.

Documents used

Agenda and notes

Senior Center report

Resident statements on South Main Street

Meekins gutter project change order #2

Budget expense report

Minutes

Adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Approved:

Clerk