TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 2, 2024

Draft

Members Present: Chach Curtis, Fred Messer, Christine Parisi, Brian Shupe, Larissa Ursprung
Staff Present: None
Others Present: Laura Arnesen (MR Recreation District), Ron Graves (Fayston SB), Tripp Johnson (WFFD Fire Chief), Mike Jordan (Fayston SB), Chuck Martel (Fayston SB), Craig Snell (WFFD), Sarah Stavraky (Fayston Treasurer), Madison Vasseur (Fayston TC/SB Assistant)

I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm by Brian Shupe. The meeting was held in person at the Waitsfield Town Office and remotely via Zoom.

1. Review agenda for addition, removal, or adjustment of any items per 1 VSA 312(d)(3)(A).
No adjustments were needed.

2. Public Forum.
Nobody presents requested time to address the Board.

II. Regular Business.

1. WFFD FY 2026 Budget.
Tripp Johnson reported that five of the Department's volunteers had completed Firefighter One training in the past year. The Department responded to 109 events in the past year, a little lower than average, five of the responses were to structure fires. Currently there are 25 volunteers active with the Department, and two more in the process of joining up.

Mr. Johnson indicated that the extractor tank and pipes are in place, and that once the electrical work is complete, the extractor will be operable.

Ms. Parisi noted that she and Mr. Graves had met with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Snell to review this year's budget actuals, and explained that the current year's labor expenses are over budget. The group then reviewed the proposed budget, making notes of significant increases and decreases.

There was some discussion regarding adding insurance coverage for firefighters in order to cover any personal policy deductibles if there is damage resulting due to responding to an event in a personal vehicle; it was agreed that the administrative time needed may make this coverage more expensive than it is worthwhile, and that there may be better approaches to covering these deductibles if the situation arises.

Tire replacements will be continuing as required, so that line item needs to remain at $25K. Air packs, AED replacements, and replacement of older style hoses over the next two years are included in the budget.

The labor line includes both a proposed rate increases as well as allowance for more hours, which reflects what is anticipated. Mr. Johnson explained that there is more need for assistance calls, and time spent on homeowner education. He also outlined that volunteers are often leaving well-paying hourly jobs in order to respond to an event, and so proposed raising the compensation rate to $20/hour from the current $17/hour. There was further discussion of the need to retain firefighters, and Board members proposed that the rate be set at $18.50 for the current year with a commitment to continue with further incremental increases in upcoming budgets. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Snell expressed that this would be a satisfactory solution. The anticipated number of hours was included as 2700.

The proposed budget as edited totaled $216,360. It was noted that last year's budget did not include the Capital West contribution, and so the increase is from a budget of $200K rather than the $190 indicated; an explanatory note will be included in the Town Report.

The Capital Improvement Plan was discussed, particularly the $550K needed for an upcoming truck replacement. Mr. Johson explained that more seating capacity is needed, and that a six-person cab truck would be more in the $800K range. He proposed that purchasing a quad pack pickup for $75K would both solve the seating issue and provide additional benefits for the Department. It was confirmed that trucks still need a two-year lead time for ordering and delivery, and that plans should be made accordingly.

Mr. Johnson then addressed facility needs at the Fire Station, explaining that currently the dining area is adjacent to the equipment cleaning area, a situation which creates health concerns for the volunteers. He also indicated that finding another location for storage of the sidewalk plow would be helpful. Septic capacity considerations were raised, and it was acknowledged that this is a complicated issue; Mr. Johnson reiterated that gear decontamination is critical and that younger volunteers are much more aware of the consequences of exposure to chemicals involved in firefighting.

MOTION: *Mr. Martel made a motion to adopt the Fire Department budget in the amount of $216,360. The motion was seconded by Mr. Shupe, and passed unanimously.*

2. Fayston Winter Road agreement.

Road Department budget numbers were reviewed, and it was discussed and agreed that it would be both more straightforward as well as equitable to simplify this agreement by incorporating a percentage increase each year, at either 3% or the rate of inflation, with a more detailed review of numbers approximately every five years. Last year's agreement was for Waitsfield to compensate Fayston in the amount of $11,800.

MOTION: *A motion to agree upon a $12,500 payment from Waitsfield to Fayston for the 2025 calendar year passed unanimously.*

3. ARPA funds update.

This topic was postponed.

4. Mad River Rec District update.

Ms. Arnesen provided a budget report, and indicated that the Rec District is proposing a level funded budget for the upcoming year. She noted that it is anticipated that Moretown will join the district as a partial member, and that the MOU will be adjusted accordingly if Moretown approves joining at March's Town Meeting.

Ms. Arnesen reviewed some budget details, noted that an extension had been granted on the finalization of the CRV work and completion of deliverables, and provided an update on some of the district's projects and programs.

5. Covered Bridge.

It was reported that work on the bridge will commence on December 16, and that Miles Jenness (VT Heavy Timber) will be providing an updated itemized outline of costs, which are now anticipated to be approximately $16K. Mr. Shupe will need this itemization in order to proceed with insurance coverage logistics. The additional work outlined by Mr. Jenness to address longstanding defects on the bridge is anticipated to cost approximately $13K; it was confirmed that there is at least $10K in appropriate reserve funds to cover most of this expense, and that having all the work completed at once is the most cost-effective strategy.

MOTION: *Mr. Curtis made a motion to approve the additional work outlined by VT Heavy Timber, at a cost not to exceed $14K. The motion was seconded by Ms. Ursprung, and passed unanimously.*

It was agreed that further discussion of construction of a portal entrance to prevent similar damage from occurring in the future will take place at an upcoming Board meeting, and Mr. Messer reiterated his proposal that a related ordinance be drafted and adopted so that fines may be imposed if similar damage is experienced moving forward.

6. Selectboard Roundtable.

Mr. Shupe explained that Sam Robinson (MRVPD) had drafted a letter for the MRV towns' Selectboards to sign regarding the closure of the Health Center; this will be sent to all pertinent parties once the signatures are in place.

Meetings with FEMA regarding the damage from the July 2024 flooding are continuing; it has been requested that work on the Meadow Road bridge be covered, as it suffered significant degradation due to the heavy truck traffic experienced during flood repair work.

The MRVPD will be discussing the upcoming year's Work Plan and Budget at their December meeting.

7. Consent Agenda.

APPROVAL: *The Consent Agenda was approved with no objections or concerns raised.*

- Bills Payable and Treasurer's Warrants

8. Executive Session.

MOTION: *A motion to find that premature general knowledge of confidential attorney- client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the public body would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage passed unanimously.*

MOTION*: A motion to enter Executive Session pursuant 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a) (3) [Personnel] passed unanimously.*

The meeting entered Executive Session at 8:05 pm and returned to open session at xxx pm.

III. Other Business

1. Correspondence/reports received were reviewed.

IV. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at xxx pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary