

Town of Vershire Selectboard Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 24, 2023 at 6:45pm, Vershire Town Center.
There will be a remote option for this meeting via Zoom or by phone.

Attendance: Ken Bushey-chair, Nicole White-Fogarty, Vern Stone, Gretchen Harvey-secretary, Debra Kingsbury, Jean MacDonald, Lucas Daniels, Dale Ricker, Rod and Suzanne Maile, Gary and Connie Goodrich, Chris Goodrich, Mark Fogarty, Nate Thames, Kathy Hooke, Sheila Bedi, Mark Harvey, Erika Thurston, Eleanor Zue, Sabra Ewing, Niko Horster, Marc McKee, Rosie Wawrzyniak, Reva Seybolt, Kelly Bushey, Mary Levin Sarazin, Greg Pulaski, Barb Griffen, Andy Dodge, Devan Waters, George Osgood, Nick Bennett, Holly Shore, and some unidentified residents.

Call to Order: K. Bushey called the meeting to order at 6:46pm.

Agenda Review & Modifications: There will be no road report tonight.

Approval of Last Meeting Minutes: V. Stone moved to approve the meeting minutes of 10/10/23. K. Bushey seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Current Period Warrants Approval: K. Bushey moved to approve the current period warrants. V. Stone seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Animal Control Report: N. White-Fogarty reported that there has not been much activity. A couple of loose dogs have been returned to their owners.

Community Discussion 7:00- 8:00 pm - School Board Special Meeting:

Opening remarks from Kathy Hooke-chair of the Rivendell Interstate School District Board: she wanted everyone to know that the recent special board meeting was a working session rather than a community forum. Community forums will be held to discuss the 2024 budgeting decisions the Board must face on Wednesday, November 1st from 6:30-7:30pm (Zoom only) and Thursday, November 2nd from 6:30-7:30 (In-person only). See the District calendar for the Zoom link and more information: [Calendars - Rivendell Interstate School District \(schoolinsites.com\)](https://www.schoolinsites.com)

So far, the Board has taken a "first pass" at several possible scenarios for shrinking the budget projections. Much work will need to occur between now and February 2024 when the proposed budget is warned for a vote in March. She handed out a document that summarized a draft of options first discussed on 10/12/23. It is available on the website noted above. Nate Thames, Board member from Vershire, also wanted to note that they represent Vershire residents and welcome hearing from them.

Questions from the Selectboard preceded questions and comments that alternated between in-person attendees and Zoom participants. The following are some general takeaways from the wide-ranging discussion:

- The School District will increase the Zoom cap beyond 100 for the next online board meeting to accommodate all who want to attend.

- When considering this initial list of cost-cutting scenarios, it is important to know that the savings noted in parenthesis reduce the predicted budget increase of between 1.2M-1.4M. There will be an increase no matter which options are approved; it is the size of the increase that is being considered.
- The total number of Vershire students is approximately 88.
- In response to why the budget continues to increase when the number of students is dropping, the answers include: the rising cost of insurance; an increase in special needs of students, especially since the pandemic; the rising special education budget and level of services required, which is not set locally but determined at the state level; inflation; and the fact that staffing makes up 70% of the total budget.
- Suggestions for cost cutting include: combining elementary education classes in the building(s) that can accommodate them and closing building(s) that are not at full capacity; tuitioning out HS students; putting all students PK-12 in RA; surveying families to find out how many children there are under 4 years of age in Vershire; focusing less on cutting teachers and support staff and more on cutting administrative costs; and finding ways to increase revenue via grant writing or other means in order to include strategic reallocation of funding and devoting more resources towards communication.
- Vershire families are concerned about: longer travel times if Westshire Elementary closes; finding places for their HS students in schools nearby; rising homestead taxes (Vershire is 3rd highest in VT) that are being driven by repeated increases in the education budget; and busing options.
- Drawbacks to some of the cost cutting scenarios include: tuitioning out saves at the HS level but costs more at the Elem level; there is an enormous amount of paperwork that justifies the current level of administrative staffing; more information about building upkeep is needed but it is unclear if selling buildings is a realistic option in the short term.
- Final/General comments: we need someone to run for the extra seat on the School board from Vershire; whether or not families take advantage of the free or reduced lunch, Vershire needs all of its families who qualify to fill out the form because it impacts everyone's taxes if these students go unreported; we need more advance notice of the budget vote in March if Australian ballots are not an option; we need an informational meeting held closer to Vershire prior to the voting in March; we need to let Vershire's representative Carl Demrow know about these concerns in re: property tax implications of educational budget increases.

Highway: Road Report: A. Lyford–no report.

- Reed Road Signage request: a dead-end sign had been placed on Reed Rd.

Town Garage Update: K. Bushey reported updates on the installation of the gas line and the propane tank. The inside of the garage building is progressing well and they are getting close to being able to heat the building. Site work by Cass & Co. is still outstanding with retaining ponds, lowering the grade, and other work still needing to be accomplished. There are safeguards in place with respect to the subcontractors. The area should also be seeded and mulched but time is running short for that to occur this season. The town needs to make sure photos are added to the hard copy and digital version of the end document/manual. The SB will request that Greg Dixon, civil engineer, attend a meeting and make a site inspection.

Committee Reports:

Recreation Committee: No report.

Energy Committee: No report.

VTC Committee: No report.

G. Pulaski asked for an update on Eastman Cross Road. The town is waiting for FEMA to report back about how the road should be repaired. No decisions will be made to change the road without resident input and because of the lateness of the season, the road will not be restored as a 'crossroad' before spring.

Action Items/Assignments

- FEMA Documents–G. Harvey requested signatures on two site reports needed by FEMA.
- Admin. Asst. Report-G. Harvey requested approval to sign off on a PACIF Insurance (Vermont League of Cities and Towns) change request.

Action: N. White-Fogarty moved to authorize G. Harvey to sign the PACIF insurance change document. K. Bushey seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjourn: N. White-Fogarty moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 pm. V. Stone seconded. The motion passed unanimously.