



**Town of Underhill**  
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**SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**Thursday, January 18, 2024, 6:00 P.M.**  
**Underhill Town Hall**

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**Present:**

Selectboard Members: Dan Steinbauer, Bob Stone, Patricia Richards

Town Staff: Brad Holden, Russ Clark, Jennifer Silpe-Katz, Sherri Morin

Others: Amanda Bosley (remote), Michael (remote)

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. *Call Meeting to Order / Adjustments to Agenda***

Dan called the meeting to order at 6:00. No changes to the agenda were needed.

**2. *Opening Public Comment (6:00)***

No members of the public wished to comment.

**3. *Review and Consider Accepting a Final FY25 Budget – Version 5 (6:01)***

Jennifer said there is \$282K of unassigned surplus from FY23. We have a policy of maintaining 15% of the budget as a contingency fund, separate from reserves. That means we need to have at least 15% of the budget in our unassigned fund balance. If we have more than that, we have a surplus and if we have less we have a deficit. If we have a deficit, statute requires us to make it up. There are several ways to do that. The simplest is to add it to the budget we are working on. According to her calculations we are \$165K in deficit. She had added a line to the budget for that. But then today she questioned whether we really need to ask the voters to pay that much. In FY24 the voters voted to put \$100K into highway contingency reserve. That is \$100K of the \$165K. We have the \$100K so we don't need to put the whole \$165K in the budget. If we do add the whole \$165K that results in a budget that is about a 3% increase. If we only add \$75K, the increase is a lot less. If we add the whole \$165K into the budget as an expense we are basically adding an extra \$100K and she believes that is unnecessary. Brad said the \$100K will not show in the FY23 audited fund balance because it was not added to the reserve fund until FY24.

Jennifer said we didn't get our final audit report until this week. In it are several things that affect the fund balance. We had a \$350K short term loan. Usually when we get a loan the money is considered revenue on our balance sheet. But our auditor's boss said that is not how you handle a short term note. They said we can't count it as income so we pulled it out. Before that we thought we had a surplus, not a deficit. She recommends adding \$75K to the FY25 budget as an expense due to the deficit.

Another change to the budget is that \$10K was added for Veteran's Park upgrades. Brad said he followed up on Bob's recommendation about doing maintenance on the Veteran's Park fountain. He spoke to Alan Morse and Randy Clark, Sr. The consensus is to repair the fountain structure but the more important thing is that the sidewalk that goes to and around the fountain is not in good condition. Alan Morse got a rough price of \$4K for new sidewalk. Brad talked to Russ about getting rid of the old sidewalk and prepping the surface. Then we could get the fountain fixed, maybe get the water district to set a tap and curb stop, and pour new sidewalk at the end. He thinks \$10K is a good number to pay for all of that.

Dan asked how much of the park is in Jericho. Brad said a little of it is in Jericho but the fountain is all in Underhill. Maybe we could get some in-kind contribution from Jericho.

Jennifer said we got a letter about Chittenden County Court tax. There was a small change. She doesn't remember if it went up or down.

Russ said he talked to the owner of Radio North yesterday and got a quote today. It doesn't include a total because he didn't know how many radios we would need. The quote includes a repeater system. We would have to find a location for it. We need handheld radios and a few new radios for some pieces of equipment.

Bob said his understanding is that if we changed to UHF we could use a repeater on Mt. Mansfield and communicate almost anywhere in the state. That would take away the need for a repeater and antennas. We might want to see what it would cost to rent licenses for our trucks and portables and save the price of installing antennas. He wonders if we could get another quote and have a special meeting. He is assuming the cost for the Mt. Mansfield option would be lower. In the quote Russ got, the repeater alone costs almost \$13K.

Russ asked what the fire department does. Do they have UHF? Bob said no. They struggle with communications in some parts of town. They have multiple antennas but they still struggle. Antennas and repeaters cost money. It would cost us to switch from VHF to UHF but the equipment is already there on the mountain.

Dan asked why the fire department doesn't use the Mt. Mansfield repeater. Bob said he thinks the technology has come about relatively recently. He also doesn't know if the antenna would be available for emergency communications. It is mostly used by businesses. Dan asked who owns the antenna. Bob said he doesn't know. He thinks Radio North could probably tell us and also tell us how much it would cost to use it.

Bob suggested an email with the price information could go out by noon Monday and board members could respond by 6:00 saying which option they want to go with. He and Russ can try to get the price information and get it out to the board.

Patty said she tallied up the prices Russ got and the total is close to \$23K. Do we put a placeholder of \$25K in the budget for radio equipment? Brad said the warning has to be signed next Thursday and it has to include the budget number. He likes the sound of what Patty is suggesting.

Russ asked, if we went to UHF, what would that do to our other communications, like with the bus garage? Bob said he doesn't think we would get rid of what we have. This would be in addition to that.

Jennifer said she can send out a new budget draft on Monday with the radio cost estimate and any other changes we want to consider. The warning can be written according to that budget and the board can adjust it on Thursday if necessary. Dan asked if Monday gives enough time. Brad said Tuesday would probably be more realistic.

Jennifer said if she changes the \$165K to \$75K and adds \$25K for radios then the budget results in a 1.1% increase to the tax rate, less than a penny increase. That is without any changes to payroll and benefits.

Brad said he was asked to look into the post office. The floor is sagging in the middle. The walls have been spray foamed and they are just open foam. There are joists sagging. He met with Pete Czaja today and he

thought it would be a day's work and materials to address the sagging floor. Pete suggested a cost of around \$1200. Brad doesn't know what can be done with the foam.

Bob said when it comes to vapor barrier over foam you have to get the product that goes with the specific foam product. The first step is to try to identify the foam product used. We could put plywood or drywall over it or we could put ceramic or paint over it but we have to make sure the paint is appropriate for the type of foam. Brad said it would be difficult to build a wall in there. You can't stand up. Bob said they make a rated plastic we could consider as well to go over the foam. Trying to identify the foam is the first step.

Jennifer asked if we should we put money for repairs and maintenance at the post office in the budget. Bob said he thinks we should at least put in a couple thousand dollars for the floor.

Dan said this budget starts July 1. We want to do the post office work before that. Brad said we might not be able to get anyone to work on it before that. Jennifer said if we put it in the budget then we are waiting until July.

Russ asked, when the foam was installed was it not required to have a barrier over the foam? Bob said it was.

Jennifer said there was \$1000 budgeted for the post office this year that was not spent. She proposes using that for the floor joist work and increasing the amount in the FY25 budget from \$1000 to \$2500 for the other work.

Bob asked if any additional funding is needed to deal with expansion of the parking area at Casey's Hill. Russ said he got a quote for culverts after it was discussed at a previous meeting and the highway crew started stockpiling clean fill. Jennifer asked how much she should add to the budget for culverts for the Casey's Hill project. Brad said he would find the quote.

Bob said he was asked about streetlights on Park Street. It is very dark there. Brad said he thinks we should hold off on that given other things that are happening. Jennifer and Dan agreed.

Brad said the cost Russ got for culverts needed for Casey's Hill is \$3484. It was agreed to add \$4K to the budget.

4. ***Receive Voter Petition Regarding Increasing the Number of Selectboard Members from 3 to 5 (6:58)***  
Sherri said we received a voter backed petition for adding 2 new members to the selectboard. It meets the requirement to have signatures from 5% of voters.

**Bob moved and Patty seconded to accept the petition regarding increasing the number of selectboard members from three to five as presented.**

Sherri said this is a binding article. It will be a ballot question because Underhill votes all public questions by ballot.

Dan asked Sherri to explain why the selectboard has the right to reject some petitions but not others. Sherri said binding articles are those concerning matters that the statute gives voters authority over. All others are advisory. The selectboard does not have to accept articles regarding things we have no control over but if it is about something the voters can control then we have to accept it.

Sherri said if this article passes we would have to have a special election. If it passes the board will immediately fill the 2 vacancies by appointing people until the next election. There has to be a special election at some point. It could be in August or November when we already have elections happening. The terms for the new positions would be one year initially.

Brad asked if there is a time limit for having the special election. Sherri said no. Brad asked why the appointments can't go until the next town meeting then. Sherri said there has to be a special meeting. We could have a special town meeting and the state primary at the same time in August. Dan asked if the voters could circulate a petition to have a special meeting earlier than that. Sherri said yes. Dan said if the article passes the selectboard will probably announce quickly when the special election will be and if someone disagrees with that they could circulate a petition. Brad asked if the percentage of signatures needed for a petition for a special town meeting is higher. Sherri said no; it is still 5%

**The motion was passed.**

5. *Executive Session (7:06)*

**Dan moved to enter executive session under 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3) for the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, with Jennifer invited as finance officer to remain initially, Patty seconded and the motion was passed at 7:07.**

The board exited executive session at 8:39.

Bob said the board is authorizing the chair to make the finance officer aware of compensation increases the board agreed on for several positions that will be included in future drafts of the FY25 budget. Dan said the board is also authorizing the finance officer to develop policies around some items discussed.

6. *Adjourn (8:40)*

**Bob moved to adjourn, Patty seconded and the motion was passed at 8:40.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*

Read and approved as submitted/amended:

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Dan Steinbauer, Chair

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Date Signed

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Date Approved