

WAITSFIELD SELECTBOARD 2008 Annual Report

The Selectboard typically meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the Waitsfield Town Office. Citizens are encouraged to contact Town Administrator Valerie Capels to confirm meeting dates or to have a matter placed on the agenda. Our meetings are open to the public and citizens are invited to attend. We are also pleased that most of our meetings are filmed for broadcast on Mad River TV on channel 45. Some of the Selectboard's major work is discussed below.

Municipal Water and Wastewater Projects. Three bond articles to fund both water and wastewater were voted down at the 2008 Town Meeting. Prior to the vote, the Water and Sewer Task Force (WSTF) produced three brochures in an effort to inform citizens about the two projects. The brochures were funded through a municipal planning grant and mailed to each property owner and tax payer, as well as inserted into the Valley Reporter. Following the defeat of the bond votes, the Selectboard elected to suspend any further expenditures on either project. A new citizen task force was formed, with representatives from differing points of view, to better understand why the articles were defeated and to make a recommendation to the Selectboard. After numerous meetings, forums, one-on-one interviews, and other outreach efforts, the task force recommended bringing a modified water project back to the voters, which happened in June 2008. It included a revised funding structure, coverage for the Old County Road, and no fire protection assessment. This article lost by 14 votes (219 no to 206 yes). A citizen petition was submitted to bring the article back for a revote, which was held on November 4 to coincide with state and national elections. This time, the article passed: 595 yes to 558 no. The Selectboard resumed efforts to move the water project forward toward implementation, including re-contacting landowners in the service area with connection agreements, and working with the engineers to finalize the plans, obtain permits, and move toward construction bids. Project planning continues to be coordinated with the Irasville and Village sidewalk improvement project and the Route 100 paving project. If all goes well through permitting, construction is slated to begin in late 2009 or early 2010.

It is not clear what next steps should be taken regarding wastewater. The Planning Commission will be updating the Waitsfield Town Plan over this coming year, which will include many efforts to get the community's input on their vision for the future of Waitsfield. The Selectboard continues to believe it is an essential component to the economic and civic health of the community.

Route 100 Transportation Path Project Update. Preliminary right-of-way (ROW) plans and draft legal documents for the Route 100 Transportation Path

(a sidewalk and bike lanes project along Main Street from Bragg Hill Road to the Waitsfield Elementary School) are being reviewed by the VTrans Right-of-Way Section. The next step is for the project team to work with landowners to acquire either temporary or permanent rights to construct and maintain the sidewalk. Once the ROW process is finalized, the project can be bid for construction. The Route 100 Transportation Path Project Team will be working closely with the Water Project Team to coordinate the projects through the construction phases through 2010. These projects will be followed by a project to repave Main Street and Route 100 south to Warren. The two towns are also working with VTrans Pavement Management on the extension of bike lanes between Waitsfield and Warren to be included with the paving project.

Growth Center Designation and TIF District Applications Update. With substantial funding assistance from a municipal planning grant, Waitsfield's Growth Center Designation application was completed in May 2008. Town officials and Brandy Saxton of PlaceSense presented the preliminary application to the State Planning Coordination Group in February, made adjustments based on their feedback, and the completed the application. The defeat of the water and wastewater bond articles in March, however, halted further efforts to submit the final application because the 20-year build-out and financial projections relied upon the availability of both water and wastewater infrastructure. Work on the TIF District application also came to a halt. A tax increment finance (TIF) district would allow the Town to redirect that proportion—or increment—of property tax revenue generated from new development in the designated area to help fund infrastructure improvements that support the growth center, such as water or wastewater projects. The state legislature has limited the number of municipalities statewide that may establish a TIF district, so time is limited if Waitsfield intends to get in line. We could submit the applications and receive conditional approval as long as wastewater is shown as planned to be implemented within five years.

Gravel Pit. Site planning and permitting to re-establish the gravel pit on the former Howard-Tucker parcel progressed through the year. The Development Review Board issued its approval, with conditions, and we are awaiting State agency approvals to build a small bridge. We are also in the process of working with the Armstrong family to secure an easement allowing access to the site. We expect to be able to extract about 7,000 yards of gravel a year for at least 10 years.

New Pick-up Truck. The Selectboard authorized the purchase of a new pickup truck for the Road Foreman this year, which has already proven to be an excellent investment.

Town Pond. In April, during a period of heavy rains and high water levels, an area in the center of the town pond impoundment at Winter Park caved in,

causing concern about the stability of the dam and potential dangers if it was to give way. Efforts to lower the water level in the wetland below the pond led to an enforcement action by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, which was promptly addressed. The engineering firm of Weston & Sampson was hired to prepare an assessment of the dam and ultimately recommended that the pond remain and that the dam be rehabilitated.

The Selectboard hosted a public hearing at the Big Picture Theater in June to review the options and get public input on a course of action. It was well-attended, and the overall sentiment was that the pond was an important community asset that should be repaired, restored, and improved.

Meanwhile, a consortium of the Open Hearth Community Center and Mad River Path Association was proceeding with plans to implement a path network among the wetlands complex, around the pond, and over to the Mad River Green Shopping Center as an extension of the Village Path. The Selectboard endorsed the project, assisted in securing the Conditional Use Permit from the Agency of Natural Resources, and intends to integrate the plan into the Town Pond rehabilitation project.

Though the pond does not fall within Vermont Dam Safety Division oversight, W&S prepared a rehabilitation plan based on State standards and included design provisions to allow the water level in the wetland to the north rise in the event beavers resume residence there. W&S estimates the cost for rehabilitating the dam to be in the area of \$75,000, which does not include dredging. Although attendees at the public hearing urged the Selectboard to move ahead with the repairs as we would with any other property in disrepair, the Selectboard has chosen to place an article on the Town Meeting ballot seeking concurrence from voters and authorizing the Town to borrow up to \$100,000 to dredge the pond, rehabilitate the dam, and make other improvements to the Town Pond. More information about the project can be found at the Town Office an on-line at www.waitsfieldvt.us/wip.

Three-Board Summit. The Selectboard met with the Planning Commission and Development Review Board in August to continue efforts to improve communications among the three boards. The meeting was moderated by Warren resident and business owner Peter MacLaren, was broadcast on then-Channel 60, and was attended by a number of interested citizens. Key themes included: (1) the permit application process; (2) board interactions with each other; (3) board interactions with the public; (4) infrastructure issues; (5) professional planning assistance; and (6) staff support. A summary of the meeting can be found on the Town's Web site at: www.waitsfieldvt.us/sb/board_summit_2008.cfm. The boards intend to continue meet at least annually to examine these and other issues.

Waitsfield Business Community Summit. In response to concerns raised that the Town of Waitsfield was not supportive of local businesses, the Selectboard held a Waitsfield Business Community Forum on October 27 at the Big Picture Theater. Peter MacLaren also moderated this event. It was remarkably well-attended and much good communication was shared. Four key themes emerged: (1) support existing and new businesses; (2) improve communications; (3) improve infrastructure; and (4) clarify Waitsfield's identity/vision. A summary of the meeting can be found on the Town's Web site at: www.waitsfieldvt.us/sb/business_community_forum_2008.cfm. There was also a strong sentiment that more such forums should be held.

Tree Project. The Town continues to implement its Scenic Roads Management Plan through new street tree plantings, tree pruning, and removal of dead trees. New trees were planted at the Lareau Swim Hole Park, the Wait House, several locations on Route 100, and on the Waitsfield Common. Extensive pruning was done along Route 100 to provide safe visibility of street signs and ensure pedestrian safety. A number of dead trees were removed along the Common Road near the Von Trapp family farmstead, one of our town's most beautiful stretches of scenic roads. We also removed ten dead trees from the Hastings Road. All of this work was done jointly by the Tree Board and the road crew.

The 1833 Covered Bridge. Last year, the Town was awarded \$273,000 in federal funds to address the cantilevered sidewalk on the north side of the Waitsfield 1833 Covered Bridge and repair the bridge's abutments. Also last year, voters approved the establishment of a Covered Bridge Repairs Reserve Fund and an allocation at that time of \$30,000. This will help us meet our required match for the repair work, as well as provide funds for any other repairs the bridge may need over time and leverage other resources. The 1833 Village Covered Bridge is confirmed to be *the* oldest covered bridge in Vermont still in everyday use and the Town is committed to preserving this historic Vermont landmark.

Law Enforcement. The Town continues its close working relationship with the Washington County Sheriff's Department. Waitsfield and Warren together contract for 40 hours of patrol coverage per week. Our Waitsfield and Warren constable, Peter Laskowski, provides 2/3rds of this with 16 hours of patrolling per week in Waitsfield. The patrols provide an effective deterrent to traffic violations and offer a community law enforcement presence. Constable Laskowski is also a nationally registered EMT first responder who works with the Mad River Valley Ambulance Service and the Vermont State Police. This cooperative arrangement allows quicker law enforcement response to serious complaints and can provide first aid in emergency situations. Deputy Sheriff Laskowski has also been working with the Neighborhood Watch Programs in the Mad River Valley towns, which provide a valuable source of information and deterrent to local crime activities. A new 4-wheel drive cruiser was

purchased this year, financed with a four year loan. The 4-wheel drive allows access to almost any location in most inclement weather conditions. The police cruiser is equipped with oxygen and emergency medical supplies along with the latest speed measuring technology. Under Constable Laskowski's initiative, a new Mad River Community Police Association (MRCP) has been formed in an effort to increase the effectiveness of law enforcement in the Valley. The MRCP facilitates interaction among Valley constables, encourages training and support, promotes communications among law enforcement personnel, and strives for peace and justice through enhanced community policing.

Energy Coordinator and Committee. Energy Coordinator Dennis Derryberry and the Energy Committee focused attention this year on addressing urgent weatherization needs at the Wait House and gathering information about energy efficiency innovations and opportunities. Future efforts are likely to include public outreach about town-wide energy efficiency issues, updating the Energy section of the Town Plan, and continuing to explore cost-effective ways Town facilities might even produce energy.

New Planning & Zoning Administrator. The Selectboard accepted Planning and Zoning Administrator Blaine Laskowski's resignation with regret and welcomed Vickie Trihy of Waitsfield in May to fill the position. The PZA position was restored to full time and she has been working closely with the Town Administrator to follow through on recommendations made at the three-board summit in August as well as other operational improvements.

Health Leader. The Selectboard commends Town staff for taking the initiative to participate in the VLCT Health Leader program, which returns up to 4% of the health insurance premiums back to the town as a result of activities that staff undertake to improve their health and well-being. Not only does this help improve productivity and reduce overall health care costs, more than \$600 was returned to the town this year.

Web Site. Waitsfield's official Web site www.waitsfieldvt.us continues to grow as a source of information for Waitsfield's residents, business owners, and visitors. Our goal is for the Web site to become a reliable resource where citizens can find the information they need about the community, goings-on, Town operations, and opportunities to become involved. We are also using it to promote the town's businesses through the comprehensive listings of *Services, Shopping, Foods & Eateries, Lodging, Arts & Entertainment, Recreation*, and more. Site statistics show that the number of visitors has increased significantly since it was first launched in April 2007.

2009 Budget. The proposed 2009 budget is actually *lower* than the 2008 approved budget, yet still presents a 3.2 cent overall increase in the tax rate. This is largely due to an anticipated reduction in revenues and because the

decision was made last year to apply a large part of last year's surplus toward reducing the tax rate. (That large end-of-year surplus was due in part to receipt of a \$150,000 paving grant in 2007 for work completed and borrowed for in 2006, staff turnover resulting in lower wage payouts, under-spending in some areas, and increased miscellaneous revenues.)

Looking Ahead. The year ahead promises to be a milestone year for several major initiatives: getting the water project out to bid, restoration of the Town Pond as a community asset, update of the Town Plan and the community's vision for its future, and development of the Town's gravel pit, to name a few. The Selectboard looks forward to continuing to reach out to and hearing from citizens about issues of interest to them and the community.

Staff and Volunteers. The Selectboard wishes to acknowledge and thank the Town staff for their efforts to keep operations moving smoothly. Special thanks to all the citizens who volunteer countless hours of time and other resources serving on boards, committees, commissions, and task forces.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Hosford, Chair
J. LeRoy Hadden, D.V.M.
Paul Hartshorn
William Parker
Kate Williams



Paul Hartshorn, Ted Laskaris at the Vermont Yak Company
Photo: Rob Williams