

## WAITSFIELD SELECTBOARD 2009 Annual Report

The Selectboard typically meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month at 7:00 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 Project.** With the passage of the bond article in November 2008, work focused on wrapping up final design details, permitting, and moving the project toward construction. An important milestone was achieved when USDA Rural Development (RD) announced at our Earth Day celebration at the Waitsfield Elementary School that, not only was our funding committed, but an additional \$800,000 in grant funds were awarded. Representatives of Senator Leahy's office, Rural Development, Agency of Natural Resources, Friends of the Mad River, and others were present to show their support for Waitsfield's project.



Rhonda Shippee (USDA Rural Development), Kate Williams (Selectboard), Ted Brady (Senator Leahy's Office) and Elizabeth Walker (Friends of the Mad River) receiving Rural Development funding award during the Earth Day Celebration at the Elementary School, April 22, 2009. (Photo: Lisa Loomis)

A condition of the RD funding included securing at least 220 ERUs by December 31, 2009.

Other accomplishments in 2009:

- A Water Implementation Task Force (Darryl Forrest, Robin Morris, Robert Cook, and Ray LaRochelle) was formed;
- The Act 250 application was submitted, hearings were held, and the decision was near to being issued at the close of the year;
- Most of the temporary and permanent construction easements are in place;
- There was continued coordination with the water project and paving project;
- The plans are 90% complete and contracts 3, 4, and 5 have been submitted to RD and the State for review;
- An additional \$30,000 no-interest loan was approved from the state revolving loan fund;
- The well source permit was renewed; and
- 192 ERUs were secured by the December 31, 2009 deadline.

Having the water lines in the ground before the sidewalk project and Route 100 paving project remains a high priority. Our efforts in 2010 will be to secure the Act 250 permit; finalize the design plans; secure all other final authorizations; and get the project out to bid.

**Municipal Wastewater Project.** After the defeat of the November 2008 bond vote on this issue and the community feedback resulting from it, the Selectboard determined that Waitsfield voters did not support further spending on wastewater studies at this time. The Planning Commission's fall town-wide 2009 Town Plan survey was inconclusive on this matter: many respondents strongly supported further investigation and many did not. However, there remains a strong sentiment among many Irasville and Village property and business owners that a municipal wastewater system is a high priority and must continue to be pursued. The Selectboard made a decision to focus on completing the water system before resuming efforts to consider other wastewater management options.

**Route 100 Transportation Path Project Update.** The project team focused on working with property owners along the proposed sidewalk route to address final details and secure temporary and permanent construction rights. One outcome of the discussions was the relocation of the sidewalk segment from behind the Bridge Street Marketplace to the front of the building on Main Street. Final approval of this adjustment is still pending, though indications from VTrans look positive. Another outcome was re-evaluation of the design details at the

north end of the project from Bridge Street to the Elementary School. Representatives from the Safe Routes to Schools Program, the Mad River Path Association, VTrans, the project team, and property owners met to consider on-street parking, crosswalks, streetscaping, traffic calming, and other details. The Selectboard affirmed the design plan approved in 2005, but will explore opportunities to address the recommendations that come from the discussions (on-street parking, sidewalks on the west side of the street, etc.) through future projects. All of the necessary easements were secured and the right-of-way plans are again before the VTrans Right-of-Way Section for approval. Once the ROW process and plans are finalized, the project can be bid for construction. The Route 100 Transportation Path project team worked closely with the water project team and the Safe Routes to School team to coordinate the projects.

**Bike Lanes and Cross Walks.** Bike lanes and crosswalks gained some ground this year with the appointment of Sue Frechette as Waitsfield's newly-established Bike Lane Coordinator. The BLC's role is to follow the Route 100 paving project and ensure that adequate provision is included in the plans for bike lanes from Waitsfield to Warren. She helped initiate a tour of the project area with VTrans officials and representatives from Waitsfield and Warren to point out key problem areas and opportunities. She and representatives of the Safe Routes to School program and the Mad River Path Association have also moved new crosswalks forward on Route 100. Plans are underway to include crosswalk connections on Main Street from the Route 100 Transportation Path at the Old County Road by the Mad River Valley Health Center and the new path at the Town Pond in Irasville.

**Gravel Pit.** A change in circumstances regarding the planned easement put development of the access into the gravel pit on hold, and use of the existing access was renegotiated through June 2010. This allowed the Road Dept. to bring in a crusher and crush 5,000 yards of gravel in this summer. Meanwhile, an alternative access through the southerly AmeriGas curb cut was explored. AmeriGas representatives generously granted permission, DRB approval was granted, curb cut approval from VTrans was granted, and a stream alteration permit for an alternative stream crossing was approved by the Agency of Natural Resources. This access will be less expensive to construct and, with the exception of the short distance across AmeriGas, will be entirely on Town property.

**Town Pond.** After a competitive bid process that began in February, Kingsbury Construction of Waitsfield was selected as the low bidder to rehab the Town Pond impoundment and dredge sediment that had built up over the years. Work was not able to get under way, however, until mid-July due to spring and summer rains and to minimize conflicts with local events. With approvals obtained by the Town and the Winter Park property owner, Kingsbury Construction worked with the Mad River Path Association to include construction of a new pathway from Main Street to Carroll Road into the rehab project. A little more work will be required this coming spring to complete the project. More information and pictures of the project can be found on-line at [www.waitsfieldvt.us/wip](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us/wip).

**Tree Project.** The Town continues to implement its Scenic Roads Management Plan through new street tree plantings, tree pruning, and removal of dead trees. More pruning was done along Main Street to improve visibility of street signs and ensure pedestrian safety. And more dead trees were removed along the Common Road, one of Waitsfield's most beautiful stretches of scenic roads.

**Flemer Field.** The Flemer-Compere family's gift to the Town of the 7-acre open piece of land in Waitsfield Village, commonly known as the Polo Field, was completed late in 2009. It was the family's wish that the site be kept open and free of permanent structures, though the terms of the gift provide for tree plantings and amenities (such as picnic tables) in a designated area on the north end of the field. Individuals or organizations interested in using the site for events should contact the Town Office.

**The 1833 Covered Bridge.** The Town was awarded \$273,000 in federal funds in 2008 to address the cantilevered sidewalk on the north side of the Waitsfield 1833 Covered Bridge and repair the bridge's abutments. The cooperative agreement was secured in 2009 and work began to get the bid process going for design, engineering, and permitting services. With the Town Pond construction nearly complete and the water project nearing the end of the design phase, we expect the project to go out to bid by spring 2010, after which design, engineering, and citizen outreach will begin. 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.** Law enforcement services continue to be provided through the Washington County Sheriff's Department. Waitsfield and Warren together contract for 40 hours of patrol coverage per week, with Waitsfield and Warren Constable Peter Laskowski providing 40% of this with 16 hours of patrol 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/Constable Laskowski has also been working with the constables of neighboring towns through the recently-formed Mad River Community Police Association (MRCP) in an effort to increase the effectiveness of local law enforcement in the Valley.

Deputy Sheriff/Constable Laskowski has been in search of modest-sized office space in Warren or Waitsfield to be able to process DUIs locally rather than need to drive to the Barre-Montpelier area for processing, which takes time away from patrol. It could also be a meeting place for the MRCP. The Selectboard supports the initiative if space can be found that meets the functional criteria at a reasonable cost, but suitable space has not yet been found.

**Energy Coordinator and Committee.** Energy Coordinator Dennis Derryberry and the Energy Committee continued efforts to address weatherization needs at the Wait House, among other energy issues. Because there is more to report, the Energy Committee now has its own Annual Report page (see page 32).

**Wait House.** The Town purchased and renovated the Wait House in the late 1990s with the help of grants and generous contributions from individuals and organizations. Located at the northern gateway to the historic Waitsfield Village, the Wait House is a tremendous asset to the community and contributes to its economic vitality. It provides office and meeting space for non-profit and community-based organizations that support the operation of the building through their rents. The building also serves as a visitor center, provides public restroom facilities, and includes storage and display areas for Waitsfield history and artifacts.

Other than the energy efficiency measures mentioned above, very little had been done to maintain the building over the years. The building now needs some serious maintenance, including replacement of the roof, exterior paint, shutter repair, interior paint, heating system improvements, interior floor maintenance, and more. While the rents had been sufficient to cover the day-to-day operation of the building and grounds, there was not enough to build a maintenance reserve fund that could cover these deferred maintenance costs.

An article is proposed for Town Meeting asking voters to authorize the Selectboard to borrow up to \$20,000 to address these deferred maintenance needs. The five-year loan is expected to be paid back through a modest increase in rents and the cash-flow realized as a result of the recent energy efficiency investments and lowered fuel costs.

**Ancient Roads.** Beginning in 2006, a series of amendments to the state statutes created new requirements for municipalities to be able to retain ownership of legally established highways and rights-of-way. Specifically, these requirements mandate that towns must include these highways and rights of way on the official Town Highway Map by 2015; certain roads will fall into a new category of highway—the unidentified corridor—that comes into effect in 2010 and extends through 2015. What happens after 2015 is not clear, but a risk may be that such rights-of-way not mapped become extinguished. The Town received a \$5,000 grant in late 2007 to help identify any such roads or rights-of-way. The Center for Community GIS was hired and an ad hoc committee formed (Gary Kingsbury, Leo Laferriere, Kevin Russell, Brian Shupe, Jack Smith, Rick Thompson) to help gather and evaluate available information. The information was posted on the Town’s Web site ([www.waitsfieldvt.us/roads/ancient](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us/roads/ancient)) a number of public meetings were held to share the findings and received information. As the Selectboard considers this issue into 2010, the following criteria were developed to guide its decision-making:

1. Level of confidence in whether the road or right-of-way was legally established and represented in the correct location;
2. Public value as a connector: a road, trail, or right-of-way that connects one part of town to another; fits in with some pattern of movement;
3. Public value as recreation: a road, trail, or right-of-way that offer a recreational experience; and
4. Value placed on by public anecdotal and historical information.

**Emergency Operations Planning.** The Selectboard began a process in 2009 of developing a broad-based Emergency Operations Plan to guide local officials' responses in the event of an emergency. Representatives from various organizations, including the Mad River Valley Ambulance Service, the Mad River Valley Health Center, the Fire Department, and others met this summer to begin the discussions. The EOP is intended to identify individuals responsible for carrying certain duties, limits of authority, chains of command, and more under a range of potential emergency scenarios. More remains to be done in 2010 to complete and test the plan.

**Health Leader.** Town staff continued their participation 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 they undertake to improve their health and well-being. This not only helps improve employees' productivity and well-being, it may help reduce overall health care costs. The Selectboard commends Town staff for taking the initiative to participate in the VLCT Health Leader program.

**Policies.** In addition to the zoning amendment revision put forward by the Planning Commission, the Selectboard adopted Rules of Procedure, a Conflict of Interest Policy, a Recording Fee Policy, and the Town's first-ever Procurement Policy, which guides the town's purchasing practices. Policies guiding the use of the Flemer Field are under way.

**Waitsfield on the Web.** Waitsfield's official Web site continues to be a growing source for information about Waitsfield, works in progress, departments, boards and committees, up-coming and past meetings, and much more. Selectboard agendas, for example, are posted at [www.waitsfieldvt.us/sb/agenda.cfm](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us/sb/agenda.cfm) and often include links to the documents the Selectboard will be discussing. We also use it to promote Waitsfield businesses through the comprehensive listings of *Services, Shopping, Foods & Eateries, Lodging, Arts & Entertainment, Recreation*, and more. Site statistics show that almost 21,000 unique visitors went to the site in 2009, a 25% increase from 2008.

A Waitsfield Facebook page was launched in April in an effort to increase our citizen outreach efforts and promote Waitsfield businesses and events among that increasingly popular social networking platform. Although inspiring folks to becoming a "fan" of a government page is a challenge, we had 144 at the end of the year!

**2010 Budget.** The Selectboard created a Budget Committee in summer 2009 to examine all aspects of Waitsfield's budgeting process, explore opportunities for improvements and efficiencies, and present recommendations to the Selectboard. Members include Selectman Parker, Darryl Forrest, Robin Morris, Roy Hadden, and Steve Shea. They began meeting in September and, working closely with Town staff, met with representatives of all departments to examine every line item of every budget.

The Selectboard and Budget Committee agreed that for 2010, the goal would be to create a budget that maintains funding levels at or below approved 2009 budget expenditures. The Selectboard and Committee also agreed that moving forward, our goal would be to orient any surplus funds toward both lowering and stabilizing future tax rates. A surplus is being brought forward in 2010 that is expected to reduce the tax rate.

This surplus is the result of several things:

- the money allocated for the gravel pit access development was not used;
- substantial savings in the legal budget;
- staff turnover resulting in lower wage payouts;
- use of the actual beginning cash balance rather than the audited beginning cash balance when the tax rate was set;
- significant one-time savings in sand and other Road Dept. items; and
- higher revenues than anticipated.

One risk of simply reducing current year taxes with the surplus carry-forward, is that expenses the following year may increase and revenues may decrease, resulting in a corresponding spike in the tax rate. In that context, the Selectboard and Budget Committee have proposed a hybrid model of allocating a portion of the surplus to reducing taxes and distributing the balance of the surplus into selected reserve funds to position the Town to be able to stabilize a lower tax rate in future years. Specifically, a portion of the surplus was added to the the Road Dept. Truck Reserve Fund to reduce the amount that will need to be borrowed for the scheduled replacement of the 2002 dump truck in 2010, and a portion is proposed to be allocated to a new reserve fund. Article 11 asks whether voters will authorize the establishment of a Budget Stabilization Reserve Fund and an allocation of \$50,000 made to it as a way to reduce a sharp decrease in the tax rate.

Other highlights of the 2010 proposed budget not already mentioned:

- The format has been reorganized to more clearly distinguish the operating budget from capital and major one-time expenses.
- The proposed budget does not include a raise for Town staff.. Health insurance premiums increased by 20%, which represents an increase in their total compensation package. However, employee premium contributions have also increased, resulting in a net loss of income for some employees. Town staff provide essential public services and should be recognized for their diligent work, but in light of the tight economic times and the cuts in jobs and wages others have suffered, the Selectboard agreed this was not a year for raises.
- The operating budget expenses are almost 20% lower than the 2009 approved budget.
- Total debt service (\$203,227) is almost 4% higher than the 2009 budget.
- If all the grant applications are funded, revenues could be 50% higher than in budgeted in 2009.

**Looking Ahead.** The year ahead looks like it will be characterized by continued investment in community assets: gravel pit development, Wait House improvements, and Town Garage and Fire Station improvements, and progress on the Covered Bridge repair. We hope it will also be the year the water project finally goes out to bid, followed by the sidewalk project. It also promises to be an interesting year with the adoption of an updated Town Plan.

**Staff and Volunteers.** The Selectboard wishes to acknowledge and thank the Town staff for their efforts to keep Town operations moving smoothly and delivering a high level of quality service. 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,

Kate Williams, Chair  
Charlie Hosford, V. Chair  
Paul Hartshorn  
William Parker  
Salvatore Spinosa