

## Waitsfield Selectboard 2006 Annual Report

The Selectboard met 29 times in 2006. The Board holds its regular meetings on the second and fourth Mondays of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the Town Office, though this year some of the start times varied. 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. Some of the Selectboard's major work is discussed below.

### **Municipal Water and Waste Water Projects**

**Update.** In 2006, we continued to see slow but steady progress on both of these projects. After considerable review of proposals concerning drilling of a municipal well, a contract was signed for the work and Spafford Well Drillers were hired. In the end, a municipal well was drilled and tested. It appears we have found sufficient yield for the water system we have been planning. Work is ongoing to secure the needed protective easements and to determine the best available delivery system. We also have seen a number of steps forward on the waste



Former Selectmen Sal Spinosa and Elwin Neill, Jr., 2006

water system intended to serve Waitsfield Village and Irasville, which have been identified as Waitsfield's growth center. In November 2006, we hired Michael Cunningham to serve as the project manager. He has been busy contacting various property owners in the service area to acquaint them with the project, identify their service needs, explore needed easements, and identify any hurdles that need to be overcome. He is also working closely with our engineer firm, Phelps Engineering. The [Water and Sewer Task Force](#), which will provide direction on this project, has been re-vitalized. Roy Hadden is the Selectboard member on the task force and was recently elected its Chair. We understand that previously promised public money for this project remains available, although the total price for this project has, as it often does over time, increased. We are vigilant for additional funding sources before any remaining balance is presented to the voters in the form of a bond vote. In order to keep the project moving and coordinate with the Route 100 Transportation Path project, we are aiming for a bond vote in 2008.

**Route 100 Transportation Path Project Update.** The Route 100 Transportation Path, a sidewalk and bike lanes project along Main Street from Bragg Hill Road to the Waitsfield Elementary School, made good progress in 2006. The conceptual alignment approved in 2005 has been advanced to preliminary design. A significant milestone was reached upon receipt of an All Clear Memo from the Vermont

Agency of Transportation (Vtrans) environmental unit, which acknowledges that the project will have no adverse impact on a wide range of environment, historical and archeological values. The Town has received authorization from VTrans to proceed with Final Design and Right-of-Way, which is expected to be completed by the fall of 2007. Charlie Hosford and Sal Spinosa have worked closely with Municipal Project Manager Kevin Russell, engineering consultant Mark Bannon, and State officials to keep the project moving forward. Construction of the project is planned for 2008. The Town is making a concerted effort to coordinate the sidewalk project with the water and wastewater projects and repaving of Main Street. It is our goal to do these projects in a logical sequence to be most cost effective and the least disruptive to citizens.

**Downtown and Growth Center Designations and TIF District.** Discussions occurred in 2006 among the Selectboard, planning commission, and zoning board of adjustment on three related topics. It was agreed that the Town would seek both village center and growth center designation for Irasville and Waitsfield Village. If we are successful in obtaining those designations, the principal benefits will be that we would gain some priority in state grant and other assistance programs, and make village properties eligible for state tax credits to support building renovations and code improvements. Additionally, the Selectboard voted in 2006 to support the creation of a TIF (tax increment financing) District to coincide with the designation. If successful, a TIF District would allow the Town to redirect property tax revenues from new development to fund improvements to infrastructure within the district. Such funds could be used to support the water and waste water projects where, as mentioned above, the search for additional funding is ongoing and necessary.

**Scenic Roads Plan.** In 2006, the scenic roads committee submitted an initial draft of an ordinance designed to guide the town's maintenance and other work performed on our scenic roads. After considerable public dialogue on the subject over many weeks, the initial draft was amended, re-characterized as a "[plan](#)" and adopted by the Selectboard. The Selectboard believes the plan provides useful guidance to the road crew when working on scenic roads, offers ample opportunity for the public to be advised and provide input, and establishes a strong framework for long term protection of our scenic roads. At the same time the plan, is sufficiently flexible to permit the town to care for its roads efficiently and allow immediate responses to any emergency situation that might arise. The plan calls for the creation of a [scenic road committee](#) which is yet to be accomplished. Thanks are in order to Charlie Hosford for his involvement with the original scenic road committee and the balance of the board for their diligent review of the involved proposal.

**New Employees.** We lost four key employees this summer with the departures of long-time Town Administrator Bill Bryant, Road Foreman Mike Ricker, Road Maintainer Robert T. Smith, and Zoning Administrator Cindy Tyminski. Before he moved on the Town of Bristol, Bill Bryant assisted the Board in hiring long-time Waitsfield resident Valerie Capels as the new Town Administrator in August. Both Road Maintainer Kendall Maynard and Zoning Administrator David Jescavage were hired in September, and Road Foreman Stuart Grandfield was hired in October. As mentioned above, Michael Cunningham joined the team as the Municipal Project Manager for the Water and Waste Water Project.

**Gravel Pit.** The Selectboard is pleased to announce that the purchase of a 77 acre parcel of land from Robert Howard and the estate of Phyllis Tucker was finalized in 2006. This land, which was historically a gravel pit, is intended initially for further gravel extraction for the town's use. It is calculated that there is approximately a 10-year supply of gravel on the site. Great care will be taken in the extraction process, as the site has many important natural features and may be used for other important town purposes when gravel extraction activities have ceased.

**Donated Parcels.** The Town was offered two separate parcels of land this year, each along the Northfield Ridgeline. These high elevation parcels, which are likely to be added to the Scrag Municipal Forest, were accepted by the Selectboard on behalf of the Town. The Selectboard recognizes the importance of protecting lands of this nature from development pressures, because of both the well-documented environmental threats posed by high elevation development and the potential for protecting and managing these lands for current and future public use. The Selectboard extends its sincere thanks and appreciation to the two donors.

**Elementary School Generator.** Discussions occurred in 2006 which convinced the Selectboard that in the case of a serious and widespread local emergency, the elementary school is the municipal building best suited to provide shelter and other needed care for the affected citizens. Under the guiding hand of Fred Messer, our local emergency management coordinator, and with \$35,000 approved for this purpose by voters during Town Meeting of 2006, we searched for a suitably sized and priced generator to service the power needs of the school in such an emergency. The Town submitted a grant application that, if awarded, may cover up to \$15,500 of the generator's cost.

**Litigation.** Our costs for litigation and other legal services significantly exceeded the funds budgeted for this purpose. It should be mentioned, however, that nearly all of these costs were incurred by the Town in successfully responding to direct actions brought against the Town or in the similarly successful defense of planning and zoning permit appeals. Some added and unforeseen litigation and transactional costs were generated in connection with the development of our municipal water supply source. While we have a relatively modest amount of ongoing legal activity from last year and beyond (one Supreme Court appeal and a handful of pending hearings on current matters), we do expect some new litigation related to a modest number of current property tax appeals. The proposed legal budget reflects this anticipated increase in legal costs. Sal Spinosa continues to dedicate much time to the supervision of legal actions and their costs. Further, the board as a whole has adopted an express policy whereby the Board will review, prior to the onset of incurred legal costs, any matter, particularly litigation, to assess whether all reasonable alternatives have been fully examined and considered. The hope, of course, is to uncover any overlooked options that might legitimately resolve these matters without resorting to legal services and expense. Finally, the Selectboard continues to support its various boards and commissions and will likewise continue to strongly defend appropriate municipal decisions and positions.

**Paving and Road Projects.** The parking lot at the elementary school finally underwent a much needed re-engineering, reconstruction and re-paving. It was a very successful project. Special thanks to Charlie Hosford, Charlie Goodman, and the road crew (although there are many other thanks owing on this

work) for their special efforts. The project was completed on time. Total project cost was \$99,643, which was less than the \$104,000 estimated. The East Warren Road was resurfaced from Bridge Street to the town line as part of the Town's road maintenance program. North Fayston Road was also resurfaced to the town line. We received a major grant of \$150,000 through the VTrans Town Highway Class 2 Roadway Grant Program to cover some of those costs. The culvert on the Common Road by the Skinner Barn was replaced this year. Over \$29,000 through the VTrans Town Highway Structures Program helped help defray 90% of the cost of that project. Culverts on some secondary roads were also replaced and the planking on the Butternut Hill was replaced.

**Tree Project.** As part of our [Scenic Road Management Plan](#), we have undertaken removal of numerous dead trees within the public right of way. In several instances, private land owners have made contributions to the Town to help defray the cost of tree removal and we greatly appreciate this cooperative effort. Special thanks to Charlie Hosford and Paul Hartshorn for their collaboration on this project.

**Town-Wide Property Re-Appraisal.** The town wide appraisal was completed in 2006. More than 50 appraisal appeals were scheduled for review by the [Board of Civil Authority](#), the last of which was heard in January 2007. It appears that some of those BCA decisions may be further appealed, further extending the Town's need for suitable, future legal services.

**The Covered Bridge.** The Village Covered Bridge sustained significant damage in 2006, including some of a structural nature, after it was struck by an oversize vehicle. Most of the repairs were funded by the responsible party's insurance carrier. In making the repairs, we determined that the Covered Bridge is in need of some significant structural upgrades in the near future. The Town has begun the search for VTrans funds to make the necessary upgrades to both the structure and its abutments. The Village Covered Bridge is now the oldest covered bridge in Vermont still in everyday use and the Town is committed to preserving this historic Vermont landmark.

**Public and Selectboard Forum.** At the urging of Selectboard Chair Elwin Neill, each Selectboard meeting agenda expressly dedicates a portion of each meeting to public input and/or comment on any matter which the public wishes to bring to the Board's attention that is not the published agenda. Each agenda also includes an opportunity for the Selectboard members themselves to brief one another on any subjects germane to the board's duties or interests. Elwin should be acknowledged for his able management of these agenda components.

**Law Enforcement.** As a result of an increased incidence of crime (principally property crimes) throughout the town and valley, a considerable effort was made to engage both local and state law enforcement operations in discussions designed to measure and identify the problem and explore any available and appropriate steps we might take to address it. A Neighborhood Watch program is currently being implemented and other steps will be considered as the need dictates. We thank Peter Laskowski, Fred Messer, and the law enforcement community generally for their willingness to work with us to develop suitable responses to this issue.

**Energy Efficiency and Independence.** In response to rising energy costs, dwindling energy resources, and concerns over energy production emissions, the Selectboard has opened a serious dialogue about and has begun the pursuit of energy alternatives for municipal operations. We have seen these subjects arise in a number of settings ranging from the decision to buy clean and energy efficient town equipment to seeking the services of Efficiency Vermont to help us make the best energy choices available. This is exciting and essential work which we intend to pursue aggressively.

**Agreement to Move to a Development Review Board (DRB).** The Selectboard met jointly with the [Planning Commission](#) and the [Zoning Board of Adjustment](#) in December and, among other things, unanimously agreed to establish a [Development Review Board](#), as many other Vermont towns have, to handle all of the development review functions that are currently handled by the PC and the ZBA. We expect this to occur early in 2007. The DRB will supplant the current ZBA. Its principal duties will include all current ZBA functions plus the administration of the town's subdivision regulations. This will enable persons with building and development interests to appear before only the DRB to make their proposal and receive the required review and final decision. The PC no longer be reviewing subdivisions, it will be able to focus attention on long-range planning, the development of regulatory amendments and policy creation on a range of subjects. Discussions are continuing to reach agreement on the timing and other logistics to successfully shift to a DRB.

**The Selectboard wishes to acknowledge and thank** Town Clerk/Treasurer Jennifer Peterson, Assistant Clerk Janet Smith, Road Maintainer Rodney Jones, and Road Commissioner Charles Goodman for their hard work and dedication during what was an extraordinary year. The loss of four key employees in a short period of time required them all to fill in and take on extra duties to keep Town operations moving with the vacancies and help get the new hires up to speed. This was not an easy task on top of three elections and a record number of tax appeals. Thanks, too, to former Town Administrator Bill Bryant (now in Bristol) and former Town Clerk/Treasurer Sandy Gallup (now in Montpelier) for their generous support during this period of transition.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elwin Neill, Jr., Chair  
Charles Hosford  
J. Leroy Hadden, D.V.M.  
Paul Hartshorn  
Sal Spinosa