

WAITSFIELD SELECTBOARD 2015 Report

The Selectboard typically meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month at 7:00pm 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. Meetings are open to the public and citizens are encouraged to attend. Agendas are posted at www.waitsfieldvt.us/sb/agenda.cfm. Most of our meetings are filmed for broadcast by Mad River Valley TV on channel 45.

With last year's election, the Selectboard acknowledged Chris Pierson's service and welcomed Kari Dolan.

The past year has, once again, been characterized by continued investment in public facilities and infrastructure: new Town Office construction; Covered Bridge rehabilitation; Bridge Street stormwater system replacement; Bridge Street reconstruction and enhancement; Waitsfield Village sidewalk construction; Joslin Hill Road culvert repair; and paving of Tremblay Road, North Road, and Joslin Hill Road.

Sidewalks. Sidewalks—existing, new, and planned—continued to be a focus of discussion and debate. The grant agreement with the VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program for the Village West Phase 2 sidewalk was executed in spring 2014 and Kevin Russell was hired as the Local Project Manager. The design and engineering firm of Stantec was brought on board in June 2015. Following a public concerns meeting in August, a steering committee was formed that included representatives from the Selectboard, VTrans, Path Association, Planning District, CVRPC, property owners, and Bridge Street. The Selectboard remains concerned about the scope and cost of the project. More public input will be solicited later this year.

A request was made to VTrans this past year for additional funds to cover the cost overruns associated with the 2014 Route 100 Transportation Path project. VTrans has indicated they will provide some additional funding, but the amount has not yet been determined. Funds received will either be used to help replenish the Sidewalk Reserve Fund or be used to reduce the loan taken to cover past sidewalk-related expenses.

And then there are the sidewalks on Bridge Street. What began as a basic infrastructure improvement project not only turned into quite a transformation but a destination, thanks to the initiative of AnneMarie DeFrest, Barbara Gulisano, and others who garnered community, volunteer, and financial support to pull it off. People from near and far now visit Bridge Street to view their brick(s), peruse all the other bricks, or just enjoy the renewal of this treasured place in our community.



New brick sidewalk enhancements. Photo: V. Capels

Covered Bridge and Bridge Street Improvement Projects. After years of planning, multiple efforts to solicit bids, and several Town Meeting articles for voter authorization to borrow, the Covered Bridge rehabilitation project and the Bridge Street stormwater and street reconstruction were finally completed.



Bridge Closed, 05/29/2015

Photo: V. Capels

The Selectboard worked with the contractors and members of the community to identify the project schedule and develop a plan to minimize the impacts of having Bridge Street closed for several months. All agreed that regular communication would be important. Town Administrator Valerie

Capels published weekly updates in *The Valley Reporter* and posted information on the Web site, Facebook, Front Porch Forum, and direct e-mails.

The 5th annual Mad Marathon, having been scheduled to go up Bridge Street and through the Covered Bridge on July 12, added complications to the project schedule. Thanks to the cooperation of all involved, the marathon was a complete success; however, the event did not bring customers' attention to Bridge Street businesses that had been anticipated.



Mad Marathon.

Photo: V. Capels

The Selectboard recognizes that the closure of Bridge Street from May to November was a great inconvenience to the community, with Bridge Street businesses and property owners taking the brunt of the physical and economic impact. It also provided a catalyst for bringing citizens together to work creatively and support a shared goal of revitalizing Bridge Street and Waitsfield Village. Events like the Mad River Round Up and the Bridge Street Art Fair could become regular summer features.

AnneMarie DeFrest and Barbara Gulisano first approached the Selectboard in May 2015 with the idea of adding brick enhancements to the sidewalks. They were tasked to come up with a plan for funding and implementation. In June they were joined by Peter Edlund and Jay Seekins and made a detailed presentation that included not only installation of bricks, but street lamps and benches made from decking removed from the Bridge, a plan for raising the funds privately to pay for them, and a schedule for implementation. The next step was to coordinate with the contractors to see if and how all of these things could be incorporated in the scope of the project without adding costs or delays. Long story short: today we can see the results of all their efforts. Their achievements are a remarkable example of what citizens and community spirit can accomplish.

Considerable effort was also made by citizens, the Selectboard, and representatives of Green Mountain Power and Waitsfield-Champlain Valley Telecom to explore the removal and/or relocation of the utility poles on Bridge Street and whether conduit should be installed below ground to accommodate their relocation sometime in the future. In the end, no poles were removed and no conduit was installed.

Excavation for the abutments and retaining wall revealed subsurface conditions that required numerous redesigns of the wing walls to tie them back to the riverbank. This added delays, additional disturbances, and costs to the project.



Wing wall construction, 09/17/2015

Photo: V. Capels

The new abutments and wing walls created new land areas on each side of the bridge that are both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is how now to install guardrails or other measures for public safety and deter climbing and jumping. The opportunity is how to integrate these new public spaces into the overall street enhancements. These will require local and state floodplain review, which is currently underway.

The deteriorated condition of the Covered Bridge roof was a great concern. The Selectboard solicited cost estimates for replacing it with either cedar shingle or standing seam metal roofing. The cedar shingle replacement was significantly more costly. After much consideration, the Selectboard voted to replace the roof in the spring 2016 with metal. The color and whether it will be standing seam or corrugated will depend on the state's approval and the results of bidding in the spring.

Completing the projects on schedule was touch and go as they stretched into November. Reopening of the street on November 18 after the final inspection was concluded was anticlimactic but celebrated nonetheless.

Covered Bridge Pocket Park. The prospect of spending up to \$200,000 for the development of the former barber shop/Birke Photo Studio site into a Pocket Park has inspired considerable interest and debate about the vision for a park, costs, use of public funds, flood protection, character of the area, and more. The site's small size and location in the floodplain limit what will be possible. Although the grant would cover 90% of the planning, permitting, engineering, and construction costs, the federal funding also adds requirements and costs that would not apply if the Town chose to develop the site with only local funds. This project came about as a result of the public input from the economic recovery initiative through the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development and the funds for its implementation would come from a CDBG Disaster Recovery grant.

Any changes to the site will require state and local floodplain approval. Development of a plan will require a survey and engineering services to ensure compliance with floodplain standards. All of these will result in project costs regardless of whether funded locally or with a grant. The Selectboard made a decision to continue forward to secure the grant funds, hire a local project manager, form a steering committee, and proceed with the site analysis and public outreach to determine what would be most appropriate and achievable for the site. The Selectboard will remain cautious about project expenses and will continue to value public input to shape the outcome.

Paving. In an effort to catch up and get back on a regular paving program, Old County Road is proposed to be paved this summer. The Fire Department parking lot is in much need of repair and proposed to be rebuilt. The combined cost for these are estimated to be approximately \$117,000. **ARTICLE 6** asks voters whether to approve borrowing up to \$120,000 for not more than five years.

Town Office Relocation. In late 2013, the Selectboard appointed a Town Office Design Committee to work with the Maclay Architects design team to develop final plans and cost estimates for the new Town

Office. Members included Tom Buzckowski, Charlie Goodman, Peter Reynells, Corinthia Richards, Brian Shupe, and Selectboard members Chris Pierson and Scott Kingsbury. Peter Reynells and Chris Pierson have since stepped down from the committee and Darryl Forrest and Bob Cook were appointed.

The Selectboard approved the final design for construction in 2014. Following completion of the environmental review process and legal review of the bid documents, the project was advertised for bid from February 19, 2015 to March 18, 2015. Of the four bids received; one was disqualified. The project was advertised with the main building as the base bid and 17 add/alternate elements. The base bids ranged from the low of \$1,275,000 to the highest of \$1,525,525. Added with other project costs, the low base bid exceeded the funds available by more than \$160,000. Adding the \$84,154 value of the 17 add/alternates brought the gap to more than \$245,000. The low bid contractor, Millbrook Building and Remodeling, Inc., agreed to hold his bid price for an additional 30 days to June 18, 2015.

The Town was able to secure an additional \$123,200 in CDBG-DR grant funding and, with a reduction in costs of more than \$30,000 by eliminating some of the add/alternates, was able to issue a notice of award on June 16. Since then the Town has received more than \$30,000 in additional grants with another \$20,000 pending to cover costs of the generator.

Meanwhile, removal of the farm stand remained a question right up until the contractor mobilized on the site. Several prospective options to give it away fell through. The Selectboard wishes to express its thanks to Renee Pierce and her family and friends for stepping



Farm stand removal, 07/07/2015.

Photo: V. Capels

up to find a new home for different parts of the structure and for handling much of the remaining disposal.

One of the cost-cutting measures included eliminating the Clerk of the Works position and accepting Maclay Architects' proposal that they provide additional on-site representation for a fixed fee of \$12,000. A number of situations arose that has required a considerable amount of Maclay Architects' attention and it became clear that the level of Town oversight needed to be increased. Bob Cook of Waitsfield, with more than 30 years construction management experience, volunteered to serve as the Town's on-site representative in addition to Maclay Architects' attention. The Selectboard wishes to thank the team at Maclay Architects for all their efforts above and beyond their scope through this project and Bob Cook for generously offering his time and talent.

More information about the project and funding can be found on pages 91 to 94.

Solar Array. Construction of the new solar array was completed in November 2014 and began producing energy in December 2014. Implementation of the new accounting at Green Mountain Power took some trial and error over the course of the year and continues to be a learning experience for Town officials. For example, Energy Coordinator Chris Badger monitored the system closely over the year and noticed a discrepancy between what the GMP meter was reporting



Solar array, Nov. 2014.

Photo: Aegis Renewable Energy

for output and what the solar array inverters were reporting. With assistance from Aegis Renewable Energy to identify the problem, it turned out GMP inadvertently installed an undersized meter when the

system was first energized and it was unable to register the full amount of output. As a result, the GMP accounts were under-reporting the system's output for the year. Once the problem was identified, GMP quickly fixed it and issued a credit for the underreported output.

Water Main Break. On September 4, 2014, a subcontractor for VTrans doing repair work on the abutments of Bridge 171 on Route 100 near Tremblay Road drilled through the water main. Customers were without water for more than 30 hours. The contractor relied on plans prepared by VTrans that showed the water line as being further away than it actually was and the contractor failed to contact the Town to identify the location of the water main. The Town took out a \$125,000 line of credit to pay for the costs for repair, which, including legal and engineering costs, has mounted to more than \$140,000 and counting. Efforts to reach a settlement with VTrans failed and the Town has filed lawsuits against VTrans, their contractor and the contractor's subcontractor.

Decentralized Wastewater Management. Substantial progress was made on the Community Wastewater Loan Fund Program this year with three loans issued and two projects in the ground.

The Selectboard wishes to thank Juli Beth Hinds of Birchline Planning and Peter Lazorchak of Wilcox & Barton for all their work to bring the many moving pieces of this complex undertaking together into a program that will benefit property owners, tax payers, and the overall community.

The program is currently limited to the Irasville and Waitsfield Village service area because of the federal funding involved. After the program has been more fully established and self-sustaining, the Selectboard intends to explore expanding it townwide.

ARTICLE 5. In 2014 voters authorized the Town to borrow money from reserve accounts in anticipation of taxes and state aid money as an alternative to commercial tax anticipation notes, but the language of the article was not clear whether it was a one-time or on-going authorization. The purpose of **ARTICLE 5** is to clarify the original intent that it be on-going. The Town Attorney and auditors have confirmed it is an acceptable practice with voter approval. In the past this has saved the Town thousands of dollars in bank interest charges.

Audit. Due to complications encountered with our former auditor, the draft audit of the 2014 short year was never completed. In November 2015, Sullivan and Powers was hired to undertake the 2015 audit. Upon their recommendation, the Selectboard voted to change from a modified accrual accounting basis to a cash basis. They are doing a thorough job, including reaching back into the 2014 accounts, but we will not have a complete audited 2015 general fund balance in time for finalizing the proposed budget.

Charter. Following voter approval of the Charter that changed the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer positions from elected by voters to appointed by the Selectboard, it was passed by the 2015 Vermont legislature and is now officially approved. The current terms for both positions run through Town Meeting 2017.

Lareau Swim Hole Park. The Lareau Swim Hole Park is an important town recreational asset. The site is in the floodplain and experienced considerable flooding and damage from Tropical Storm Irene. That, plus the presence of invasive knotweed, the design of the roadside berms, trash, and vandalism have made the area increasingly difficult to maintain in recent years. The Town-owned port-o-let was replaced with a leased unit to help improve maintenance.

Several efforts over recent years to develop and implement a restoration and maintenance plan failed to gain traction. The need remains to develop a restoration and maintenance plan that will be compatible with its floodplain function. The Selectboard intends to continue this effort this coming year. Floodplain development approval will be required through the DRB and the state.

Law Enforcement. Law enforcement services continued to be provided through the Washington County Sheriff's Department (WCSD) on a contract basis for 16 hours per week. Waitsfield has been fortunate for the many years Peter Laskowski has served--and continues to serve--as Constable. Finding other qualified and motivated citizens to serve as Constable as he transitions toward retirement has not been easy. Funds are included in the proposed FY2017 budget for training of prospective Constable recruits. Meanwhile, crime continues to be a serious concern. The provision of reliable and cost-effective law enforcement in Waitsfield and the Mad River Valley will require on-going discussion.

Emergency Operations Planning. We wish to express our thanks to Fred Messer and Carla Straight-Messer for their diligent efforts to strengthen Waitsfield's ability to prepare for and respond to a range of disasters. They continue to remain up to date on state and regional emergency preparedness initiatives and have been instrumental in keeping our Local Emergency Operations Plan up to date.

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission assisted town officials in updating our All Hazards Emergency Plan and submitting it to FEMA for approval.

Town officials are continuing to work with Vermont Emergency Management to implement the VT-Alert emergency notification system, which will enable citizens to subscribe to receive alerts about pending disasters, weather conditions, traffic and road issues, public health notifications, and countless other issues or events. The system allows the public to receive notifications through a number of delivery systems such as text, e-mail, or telephone.

Waitsfield on the Web. Though keeping the Web site updated has been a challenge with so much going on, Waitsfield's official Web site continued to be a source for information about Waitsfield, works in progress, departments, boards and committees, up-coming and past meetings, and more. Selectboard agendas, for example, are posted at www.waitsfieldvt.us/sb/agenda.cfm and often include links to the documents the Selectboard will be discussing. It is also used to promote Waitsfield businesses through the comprehensive listings of *Services, Shopping, Foods & Eateries, Lodging, Arts & Entertainment, Recreation*, and more.

Maintenance of the Web site has been the sole responsibility of the Town Administrator, who built it from the bottom up in 2007. In an effort to move it to a new platform that will enable others to help post and update information, the Planning Commission investigated a number of options and obtained quotes from various companies. The Selectboard accepted the recommendation that we contract with Town Web Design, located in Madison, Wisconsin. If all goes according to plan, we may have a new Web site to unveil by Town Meeting.

The number of people who “like” Waitsfield’s Facebook page reached more than 600 by the end of the year. It was launched in an effort to increase citizen outreach and promote Waitsfield events, businesses, and other activities. Waitsfield also posts information on Front Porch Forum.

Budget Task Force. The Budget Task Force (also referred to as the Budget Committee) was created in the summer 2009 to examine all aspects of Waitsfield’s budgeting process, explore opportunities for improvements and efficiencies, and present recommendations to the Selectboard. Bill Coyle stepped off the Task Force this year. Members include Bill Parker, Darryl Forrest, Steve Shea, Charlie Goodman, Ted Laskaris, and Deri Meier. Ted Laskaris subsequently stepped down.

The Selectboard wishes to extend its sincere thanks to the time and effort the Budget Task Force and Town Administrator have put in these past many months.

Town Meeting Research Group. In response to the level of interest about voter participation at Town Meeting and voting on the budget in particular, the Selectboard appointed Sally Kendall, Gary Kingsbury, Ted Laskaris, Deri Meier, Suzanne Peterson, Nancy Turner, Brian Shupe, Sheila Ware, and Rob Williams to a Town Meeting Research Group to explore issues affecting voter participation at Town Meeting and present recommendations to the Selectboard. In response to their findings and recommendations, **the Selectboard agreed to change the start time of Town Meeting to 5:00pm and School Board agreed to start theirs at 4:00pm. There was also agreement to identify a specific time—6:30pm--to discuss and act on the budget.**

Other than establishing the warning, the Selectboard does not control Town Meeting; that is the role of the Moderator. Consequently, the Selectboard cannot set a time for a particular matter to be discussed and was advised not to include a time in the warning. The order of Articles has been arranged so that if **ARTICLE 3** comes up before 6:30pm, it can be postponed to a specific time—6:30pm—with the concurrence of the electorate.

Town Reports and information about the Annual Meeting have been on Waitsfield’s Web site at www.waitsfieldvt.us/annualmeeting/ since 2007. Information about the budget traditionally had been at the end of the

Selectboard reports. Budget information can be found in an independent section starting on page 44 along with some analysis and illustrations. The Capital Projects section beginning on page 76 provides more detail about the various projects that have direct effect on the proposed and upcoming budgets.

We thank the TMRG for their work and look forward more discussion about how participation at Town Meeting and in the budget process can be improved.

Races, Relays, and Events. Though the Selectboard is not responsible for initiating the many events that happen in Waitsfield throughout the year, we recognize that having roads, bridges, and facilities in good repair is important to accommodate them. The various construction projects and flood recovery efforts over the past few years and coming up present challenges for these events to work around. The Selectboard wants to recognize and express appreciation for the collaboration that exists among the organizers, businesses, sponsors, volunteers, local officials, and others that make these events a success year after year. Waitsfield, and the Valley, are fortunate that events such as the Mad Marathon, the Green Mountain Stage Race, 100 on 100 Relay, Craft Fair, Mad Dash, Music Fest, Festival of the Arts, Bridge Street block parties, Baked Beads sales, and other events bring participants, spectators, customers, and others to the community, contributing to the economy and vitality that help make this such a great place to be.

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

Paul Hartshorn, Chair
Sal Spinosa, V. Chair
Logan Cooke
Kari Dolan
Scott Kingsbury