

WEST WINDSOR SELECTBOARD

Draft Minutes
October 1, 2013

Present: Glenn Seward, Tom Kenyon, Bruce Boedtke, Dan Cody, Bill Ley, Jim Kenyon, Don Burke, Mike Spackman, Mark Rodin, Arthur Steinberg, Phil Arvidson, Edson Pierce, Joan Seward, Cathy Archibald

- 1) Call to Order – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.
- 2) Public Comment – None
- 3) Review 2013 town and highway budgets – Glenn said for the first 9 months of 2013, the town has spent \$375,000, which leaves \$138,333 for the last 3 months of the year. On the highway side, the town has spent \$463,000 and has \$149,456 left for the rest of the year. Glenn said the year-to-date highway expenses include flood repairs and 75% of that should be reimbursed by FEMA. Not included in the budget are the town's share of the flood damage costs, and repairs to Bowers Bridge that are not covered by insurance (approximately \$30,000). Glenn said the town historically keeps budgets tight to keep the tax rate as low as possible. Glenn had a handout showing the tax rate, the Grand List and the tax revenue raised annually since 2004. If spending had stayed at the rate of inflation (3.5%), the revenue raised in 2013 would be \$796,548. The actual revenue budgeted for 2013 is \$1,052,972. The \$256,000 in spending over the rate of inflation is due to “double digit increases” in specific areas: storm events, police protection, legal fees, and health insurance. Tom said the decrease in the value of the Grand List from 2012 to 2013 is primarily due to a decrease in the value of the condominiums at the resort; if those values go back up, the tax rate should go back down. Phil asked if the employees contribute to their health insurance costs. Glenn said yes; for 2013, the employees pay about 20% of their out-of-pocket costs. In 2014, the employees will pay about 50% of their out-of-pocket costs. Glenn said the town spent \$60,000 on health insurance in 2013 and has budgeted \$65,000 for 2014. This year, Glenn said, the employees have health savings accounts so they keep any unused contributions. Next year, the town will have a health reimbursement account so the town will keep any unused contributions.
- 4) Discuss 2014 town and highway budgets – Looking ahead, Glenn said he has asked Windsor about any increases in the emergency services contract but he has not heard back from them. Glenn said the Selectboard has not discussed cost of living adjustments for employees yet. Glenn said we had an audit conducted this year, which cost approximately \$13,000. Glenn said we will not need another audit in 2014 but we will need to budget for some accounting assistance. Glenn said the town may be able to temporarily reduce its contribution to the Listers Fund since the reappraisal is done. Glenn said the town is open to any suggestions for decreasing costs but any large-scale reduction in the budget will result in a dramatic decrease in services (e.g. road maintenance, police protection). Glenn said the amount of increase in the state education tax this year was nearly equal to the entire town and highway budget. Arthur asked about the projected decrease in current use revenue. Cathy didn't have that number. There was a question about the town's control over the school budget. Glenn said the town has no control over the school budget. Glenn said the state allows schools to spend approximately \$9,000 per student, and West Windsor spends about \$15,400 per student. Beyond that, Glenn said, residents need to approach the school board because there is a complicated formula for figuring out the education tax rate and the Selectboard has no control over school costs. Glenn said our elected representatives are the ones who have an impact on the mandates that come down from Montpelier. Bill Ley noted that there were dramatic decreases in appraised property values at the higher end. Bill asked if the Selectboard is concerned about the effect on the common level of appraisal (CLA) if there's a rebound in sales of high end properties. Glenn said the Selectboard needs to keep an eye on the CLA. Glenn added that they are very concerned about the huge reduction in the Grand List and are doing everything they can to get it back up, including encouraging the sale and reopening of the talc plant and the resort. Glenn said resort condos that were valued at \$250,000 to

\$300,000 are now selling for \$90,000 to \$100,000, which should be a “wake up” call for everyone who said they didn’t care whether the ski area was operating or not; if the ski area reopens and the values go back up, there should be a decrease in the tax rate. Bill Ley asked if the Listers gave a justification for the dramatic drop in high end valuations. Glenn said it’s his understanding that open land was over-valued in the 2006 reappraisal and much of the drop in the value of large parcels in 2013 was due to a decrease in the value of open land. Glenn encouraged Bill to discuss the matter with the Listers. There was a question about the status of the talc plant. Glenn said the property has been sold to the Querrey Group and they will be making improvements to get their wood pellet plant open in about a year. There was a question about the status of the resort. Glenn said the foreclosure has been issued and it’s now in a “redemption period” during which any of the parties involved can write a check for \$5.4 million and own it. Glenn said there will be an auction in early November but the current owner does not believe that anyone will purchase it at that time. Glenn said Orange Lake is doing well and the time shares are within 1% of being sold out. Tom said last year the county budget was \$7,000 or \$8,000 higher than expected. Tom encouraged any party that is requesting funds through an article on the Town Meeting warning to let the Selectboard know as soon as possible. Phil said he thinks the Selectboard and the town employees are doing a good job. Glenn said the Selectboard is trying to keep a handle on expenses while keeping the level of services up and doing what’s necessary in a measured way so there’s not a huge impact on tax payers. Tom asked Glenn to comment on the events of last Saturday given that some people are not happy about the mountain bike trails in the town forest. Glenn said there were nearly 1,500 people here on Saturday taking part in an event (the Vermont 50) that used a good portion of the town trails. Glenn said the town did spend some money on marketing the trail system, which is beginning to pay off in increased trail use and an increase in business at the General Store. Glenn said Seth Warren told him that he has had two recent property sales specifically attributed to the trail system. Glenn said he hopes the town will continue to invest in the trail system. Bill said Brownsville-Hartland Road has turned into a raceway. Bill said he has discussed the issue with the Police Chief and asked if the Selectboard has had complaints. Glenn said yes. Glenn explained that additional patrols, beyond the 25 hours per week that we’re currently paying for, would impact the budget. Bill said there are a fair number of walkers and bikers on Brownsville-Hartland Road between Cemetery Road and the village. Bill suggested a reduction in the speed limit. Glenn said the Selectboard recently reduced the speed limit from 35 MPH to 30 MPH on Bible Hill and Harrington Road and will consider Bill’s request. Edson asked about electronic speed signs. Glenn said it’s worth investigating, perhaps for use near the school. Phil noted that the service from the Windsor Police Department has exceeded his expectations. Glenn said the general consensus is that the arrangement has worked well. Tom said he has been pleased. Glenn said the Selectboard will go over the budget item by item, increasing or decreasing as they see fit, and then have another evening meeting to present a draft budget.

5) Adjourn – **The Selectboard adjourned by consensus at 7:15 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison