

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

Board of Selectmen
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Special Meeting Minutes
Via web interaction (via Zoom platform)

October 19, 2020
6:30 PM

**Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

First Selectwoman Wiecenski called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM with the following in attendance; Selectmen Boritz & Blessington and residents.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then referenced item 11 on the agenda noting that the wording is misleading and should be changed to Assistant Assessor hiring committee and the reason is because the position is currently vacant. She then made a motion.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to change the wording on item # 11: executive session Assistant Assessor hiring committee.

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

Approval of Minutes

Selectman Blessington moved to approve the minutes of October 5, 2020 with the following edits:

Page 2 under Public Works DPW now has a certified welder the name Red should be reflected as Jeff Hanson

Page 3 under Old Business A. COVID-19 the update for COVID -19 cases should reflect the town of Willington has had 24 cases cumulative since March 2020

Page 3 under Good and Welfare 1st paragraph the last sentence reflecting the 6% tax penalty should reference delinquent tax payments and not absentee ballots.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

Present to Speak

Peter Tanaka spoke about the importance of the school roof project. The Board of Finance appropriated \$1 million and he would like to emphasize how important it is.

Jim Bulick stated that he chaired the Board of Finance when the money was appropriated for the school roof project the town's people voted on the capital improvement project to allocate \$1 million dollars for the repair of the school roof project. They were told at the time that it was very important. Mr. Bulick expressed surprise that the project has not been started almost into 2021. Mr. Bulick expressed disappointment that the roofing project has not been started as it was prioritized over other important projects.

Selectman Blessington read a letter from Matthew Clark. Mr. Clark questioned why the town appropriated money 2 years ago for a school roof repair then failed to complete the project. It was Mr. Clarks

understanding that the Board of Finance and the town's people of Willington approved the project. Mr. Clark doesn't feel it is a high priority for the Board of Education. He wants to know if the delay has resulted in additional damage. Mr. Clark also suggested for the Board of Selectmen to charge the Town Engineer with assessing the school roofs for damage because the repair never took place. He suggested hiring a contractor to complete the roof project that was approved by the people of Willington two years ago. Mr. Clark thinks the Town Engineer should also inspect our school buildings for other signs of neglected maintenance and report his findings back to the Board of Selectmen.

Correspondence

A list of Correspondence was available for the Selectmen to view.

First Selectman's Status Report

Presidential election – The Registrars of Voters are working diligently preparing for the upcoming election which will be held on November 3rd. Because of the pandemic the location has been moved to Hall Memorial gymnasium at 111 River Road to accommodate social distancing with one way in and one way out of the building. Post cards were sent to all Willington residents notifying them of the polling change.

Assistant Assessor position - closed last week the Selectmen will discuss later at this meeting

Administrative Assistant for the Board of Selectmen - was recently filled, the Board welcomed Heather Sharpley

Emergency communications Task Force Committee – a new meeting has been rescheduled to this coming Wednesday due to inclement weather where First Selectwoman Wiecenski lost power. An update will be provided at the next Board of Selectmen's meeting.

STEAP Grant we are still waiting to hear what projects have been awarded. We received notification from OPM the State of Connecticut Office of Policy Management they will be meeting with the governor's office to decide, they apologize for the delay.

Public Works

Troy reported the following that has been done by Public Works:

- Roadside mowing is continuing around town
- Installed two new catch basins on Battey Rd
- Burnt brush pile at transfer station
- Did some spot paving on Village Hill and paved a portion on Pinecrest Rd
- (Red) Jeff Hanson has been servicing trucks in the shop
- Trash at park
- Working on replacing a catch basin on Fisher Hill
- Dug out water ways around town
- Chipped and opened up Burma Rd do to downed trees

New Business

A. Tax Refunds

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to refund \$20.09 to Lauren Munyard on a certificate of correction.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

B. Appointments

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to re-appoint Don Berg on the WiSE Committee; effective November 5, 2020; expiring November 4, 2023

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski Moved to re-appoint Pam Wheeler on the WiSE Committee; effective November 5, 2020; expiring November 4, 2023

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski Moved to re-appoint Norm Nadeau on the WiSE committee; effective October 20, 2020; expiring November 4, 2022

Nadeau expired in November of 2019, so this is truing his appointment up

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked Don Berg, Pam Wheeler & Norm Nadeau for all of their continued work on the WiSE Committee and service to the town of Willington.

C. Discussion – School Roof Project

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the previous meeting Selectman Blessington had requested the school roof project be discussed. First Selectwoman Wiecenski shared several notes from the last Board of Education meeting which took place on Tuesday October 13th 2020. The Board of Education met and this item was addressed the Superintendent noted that he was ready to move forward. This is a Board of Education project, the Superintendent is required to apply for the grant from (DAS) Department of Administrative Services for school construction which he had planned to do in April 2020. As you know we do not have a facilities Director, the Superintendent has been assuming this role in addition. Past practice the Superintendent would apply for the grant and would be involved in the project. The only reason this project has stalled was due to the timing. We held a Town Meeting on March 11, 2020, the day before the Governor declared a public health emergency and Willington declared on March 13, 2020. As we all recall, very quickly our attention had to pivot and we progressed into a State shut down. In person meetings came to a halt and while we hoped to have applied and begun the project it was not possible due to the circumstances. At the Board of Education Meeting a member requested additional information on the cost of having someone facilitate this project. This will be discussed at their next meeting. This is not a cost that has been budgeted for however the Superintendent plans on presenting this information as requested. First Selectwoman Wiecenski shared the Superintendents time line for the roof project as it was shared with the BOE.

- December 2018 - this item was submitted to the capital improvement committee
- May 7, 2019 - the budget referendum passed including the CIP roof replacement at that point the grant application could not be submitted until a town meeting was scheduled and occurred.
- November 2019 - the Board of Education requested the Board of Finance to complete a 10 year patching of both schools. At that time we received information from the Department of Administrative Services stating that the grant application requirements require a 20 year commitment to the use of the school buildings. There was concerns at that time due to the start of the new school building committee. There were concerns that we would have to pay

back the funds, The Board of Finance denied the request stating complete the roof project with or without the grant funding.

- January 2020 – the Board of Education requested the Board of Selectmen to call a Town Meeting for roof patching.
- February 12, 2020 RFP was issued for architectural services for the complete roof project.
- February 18, 2020 a mandatory walk through
- February 26, 2020 the RFP (Request for Proposal) was due back to the Superintendent
- March 11, 2020 A town meeting for the full roof project was approved, if you recall on March 10th 2020 the day prior to our meeting the governor declared a public health emergency in the State of Connecticut
- March 13th 2020 the schools were shut down across the state.

The Superintendent spoke to the Board of Education on several occasions that he did not have the ability to have the in person meetings that needed to happen. Without a Facilities Director the entire staff was focused on Covid-19 and the pandemic issues as a pivot in urgency, it was never intended to give the perception that the roof issues are not important. It is agreed that the roof project still needs to be done, the discussion happened at CIP (Capitol Improvement Project) and with multiple Boards. The intention is to continue the roofing project, the patching project was intended to limit additional damage until the roofing project could be completed. The intention was to apply with the Department of Administrative Services in April for the grant and with Covid-19 that could not and did not occur.

Selectmen Blessington commented that it took a very long time, he noted that during that time we were able to facilitate fixing the septic system at Center school which was necessary and we managed to get that done. He expressed concerns that time lapses before projects get done, for example we were supposed to establish a school partial roof committee that could have been done and has not. In review of past minutes he referenced the Superintendent stated he was too busy getting school re-established due to the Corona virus and could not give the roofing project his focus right now. He discussed the possibility of turning over the management of the project to a consulting firm. Superintendent Stevens thinks it will cost \$20,000 to \$30,000 to bring in a consultant to take over the management of the contract. Selectmen Blessington stated from the towns point of view and believes it may be necessary. He wanted a time frame and had concerns if he would still be here when the next steps are taken.

First Selectwoman Wicewski responded that the Town Meeting occurred, the item listed was to see if the town's people would establish a school building committee. The past practice for similar projects was to have the Superintendent facilitate that, he facilitated the oil tank replacement, the last center school parking lot project. I don't believe it is anyone's intention to not want the project completed. The Board of Education understood the patching project, they inquired if the roofs were still leaking and the answer was no. It was noted there are no additional funds for a consultant. The original funds allocated were \$1 million dollars, any additional funds would need to be addressed in a separate manner. We do not have additional funds to allocate.

Selectmen Blessington commented that this was based on the recommendation of the Superintendent. He advised another recommendation that he has is to have the Town Engineer look into this. Someone should be reviewing this, he is concerned that costs are increasing due to Covid-19, we appropriated the funds last March and months in advance the costs may rise.

First Selectwoman Wicewski noted that the Superintendent had submitted the RFP (request for proposal) and they were ready to apply for the grant to the Department of Administrative Services in April 2020, the quotes were only good for 90 days. There were limited resources within that time frame. In the first 90 days of the pandemic she didn't believe we would have been able to hire and get all of the necessary walk

through process done during the pandemic as we were not able to meet in person and Zoom calls for large projects would have been difficult. Cost was certainly an issue, when the RFP (request for proposal) was issued in February nobody could have foreseen the shutdown that occurred.

First Selectwoman Boritz commented that she wanted to add to the conversation her frustration. We are having this conversation and to not remember the extent of the work the schools had to do just to function and educate our children. If we can't stop pause and reflect on the context which we are currently functioning then there is nothing further to say about this delay. I think it's quite clear and quite obvious that any delays that are going on right now are related to the fact that our whole world literally shut down back in March and we are still trying to figure out how to catch up. We can have conversations on how to move forward. I think the assumptions of Mr. Stevens's intent in the letter that you read from Mr. Clark that is somewhat frustrating to me in that at no point did any of the assumptions take in to account that the world shut down. I want to bring a bit of reality back into this conversation. I think we can talk about how to move forward but anybody that does not understand why we're in the delay we're in is pretending that things are not completely whacky and outside of normal for nearly a year. Selectwoman Boritz noted she is frustrated with everyone pretending that there is some sort of malicious intent on the delay when our school has had to do work that is unprecedented of any school system in modern history.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski commented that she agreed. She advised that she went to the Board of Education meeting last week because this item was put on our agenda and wanted to hear and understand how to move forward. I heard very clearly the Superintendent say he was moving forward. We are ready to move forward. The Board seemed ready to hear that and move forward with that. A member then asked about getting prices for them to have someone else manage and facilitate this. It is not clear at this point where that funding is going to come from. Remember this is a Board of Education project, the Selectmen's office role in this is to call a Town Meeting to get the town's people to vote and they voted in favor of the project. First Selectwoman Wiecenski agreed this project needs to be done, she agreed it needed to be done a year ago. There is no argument there everyone at the table agrees and feels it is important. I will not entertain the accusations referenced in the letter by Mr. Clark, the comments are fully without merit as the process had already begun. The RFP (request for proposal) had already been solicited and were due to the superintendent on February 26, 2020. The process was well underway and again the world stopped and here we are today. A week ago I heard the Superintendent say he is ready to move forward and continue this process. He has contacted The Department of Administrative Services and is trying to understand how you pick up from a process that was left almost a year ago as this is new territory.

Selectwoman Boritz commented that we have covered this topic at this point and didn't know what else could be discussed. She suggested at this point that we move on.

Selectman Blessington commented that he hopes to see some progress on this. That is all he can say right now as we have discussed the matter as much as we can tonight.

D. Call Town Meeting

First Selectwoman Wiecenski read the call:

**TOWN OF WILLINGTON
NOTICE AND WARNING
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING**

The electors of the Town of Willington and all persons who are entitled to vote in Town Meeting on the matters mentioned in the following warning are hereby warned and notified to meet in Town Meeting at Hall Memorial School Parking Lot, 111 River Road, Willington, at 7:00 P.M. on Thursday, October 29, 2020 for the following purpose:

ITEM I

To see if the town's people, based on the recommendation of the Board of Finance will authorize the appropriation of \$135,000.00 from the non-lapsing education fund for Willington Public Schools to install ventilation relative to COVID-19 at Center Elementary School and Hall Memorial School.

Dated at Willington,

This 19th Day of October, 2020

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No

Selectmen Blessington commented that he has not seen the minutes as of yet he is not sure what we are talking about related to ventilation. He wanted more information as to what we would be installing.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski commented that all of the details would be shared in a town meeting before any vote would be taken. The Superintendent will share all the information related to that specific project and all of the requirements that need to be done in order to follow the reopen guidelines for our schools.

Selectmen Blessington commented that the meeting is October 29th 10 days from now, he wanted to know if there would be information distributed to the citizens prior to this meeting.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski commented that typically the information is presented and made available at the town meeting. It is not typical that we send out information prior to the Town Meeting. She stated if she has information to share she will.

Selectmen Blessington commented his concerns that the towns people will walk in there with no prior knowledge. They will be handed a piece of paper saying here is what we want to do, now vote yes or no.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski commented this is no different from any other Town Meeting, there is opportunity for town's people to ask questions regarding the matter, and the discussion in this motion is whether or not we call a Town Meeting.

Selectmen Blessington commented that he understands and we are discussing the merits of the project to have the Town Meeting. His concerns are that a town's person walks in and has no idea what we are talking about, then they are told what we are talking about. Then they can ask any questions without a chance to digest the content. We will have the Town Meeting and I will vote in favor however I would find it a lot easier to support this at the town meeting if I knew more information prior. As of now I want to mention that I do support this project, I would like it noted that it would be helpful to have information prior to the meeting.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to hold the town meeting

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that we changed the location of the Town Meeting to allow for social distancing with adequate lighting for better visibility.

- E. Adoption – Memorandum of Understanding with Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, in collaboration with watershed communities and many other stakeholders, has been developing a watershed protection plan for the Natchaug River basin.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN THE EASTERN CONNECTICUT CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND THE TOWNS OF ASHFORD, CHAPLIN, EASTFORD, MANSFIELD, UNION, WILLINGTON, WINDHAM AND WOODSTOCK.

This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) is hereby made and entered into by and between the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, hereinafter referred to as ECCD, and the eight Natchaug River watershed municipalities, Ashford, Chaplin, Eastford, Mansfield, Union, Willington, Windham and Woodstock.

The purpose of this MOU is to develop a framework of cooperation between the parties for the purpose of collaborating to implement recommendations as set forth in the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan.

Whereas, the rivers and groundwater in the Natchaug River Basin, the Fenton River, Mount Hope River and the Natchaug River, provide high-quality drinking water to residents throughout its watershed and the forests therein are essential to purifying that water; and

Whereas, the rivers and forests in the watershed provide rich habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna; and

Whereas, these natural resources are critical to maintaining the lifestyles and social and economic well-being of residents within the watershed; and

Whereas, the watershed towns, under *The Natchaug River Basin Conservation Compact*, previously entered into a voluntary compact acknowledging their commitment to working collaboratively to balance conservation and growth; and

Whereas, the undersigned have collaborated to develop the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan;

Now, therefore, all parties hereby agree to the following:

A. SCOPE OF COMMITMENTS UNDER THE MOU:

1. Sign onto this inter municipal/interagency agreement to demonstrate support for the Plan; Inter municipal/Interagency MOU

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2. Be represented on the Plan advisory board to meet regularly to review progress on implementation schedule;

3. Participate in the development of a public outreach plan; and

4. The eight watershed municipalities shall incorporate the Natchaug River Healthy Watershed Plan into their municipal Plan of Conservation and Development.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties here to have executed this agreement as of the last written date below.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to adopt Memorandum of Understanding with Eastern Connecticut Conservation District.

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

A. Old Business

A. COVID-19 Update

First Selectwoman Wiecenski commented the town of Willington's cumulative cases of COVID are 27 with 1 probable case since March. It was noted that the town level response has been changed by the governor as of last week. First Selectwoman Wiecenski shared Governor's office framework of reporting of an average daily rate in a community setting and population by town. This map is updated weekly, it was

noted that Willington was in the gray zone which means we have less than 5 cases per 100,000 people. As the cases fluctuate the town tracking will change as appropriate for the reported cases. The governor's office is encouraging people to practice safe practices as individuals and organizations. It was noted that the town of Windham had an uptick in cases recently which puts them in the red on this specific chart. This is very close to home for all of us. The executive order attached to this allows the town of Willington to be in discussion of rolling back into phase 2 limiting business as necessary. As of this weekend The town of Windham did take that step and went to full online learning, they rolled back to phase 2. We will share this information and guidance as it becomes available. The full State of Connecticut COVID guidance can be found at <https://portal.ct.gov/coronavirus>

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that the Town office building is still closed to the public however we are available by appointment. We have not turned anyone away, everyone is being served and assisted. Most surrounding towns are operating in the same manner. We are continuing in this manner for social distancing, for the safety of our residents but also for our staff. We have a small staff in the town office building if we were to have multiple people become sick with Covid it would be detrimental to the functioning of required town business. We are taking the necessary precautions to limit risk and lesson impact.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski then went on to discuss the upcoming Halloween holiday. There is some concern about trick or treating. She has been asked on several occasions what the town is going to do about it, and her response was the town does not organize or host Halloween. This is an individual activity. We encourage safety and will continue to encourage the CDC safe guidelines. First Selectwoman Wiczenski shared the CDC & the Department of Public Health guidelines on safe trick or treating. One of the recommendations for safe trick or treating is a one way trick or treating where treats are placed outside of your home for families to grab and go while continuing to social distance. It is discouraged to go door to door for trick or treating. It was opened for discussion as the town's position is that we do not regulate Halloween.

Selectwoman Boritz commented that past practice and historically in some instances the town has in fact been involved in the regulation of Halloween with a weather event where it has been a safety concern for residents. Several years ago the town cancelled Halloween due to down trees and wires as a public safety concern. Selectwoman Boritz believes that Covid is also a public safety concern. The concern is with some of the streets and or neighborhoods that historically have many trick or treaters from out of town along with Willington residents. It is not a ridiculous assumption that the town would release some sort of statement to reference how Halloween should be handled or some guidance for our residents.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated she would be willing to make a statement but not enforceable action. She has had multiple requests to cancel trick or treating, some have asked to ensure that trick or treating does not get cancelled. Other requests are to close roads down in particular neighborhoods. There is one neighborhood over all of the rest that seems to be the go to place for trick or treating.

Selectwoman Boritz noted that closing roads is not feasible. Based on history she believes there will be trick or treaters in this particular neighborhood because there hasn't been any statement from the town. It is anticipated to have other town's folks come in for this event in addition to town of Willington residents. Historically this is a large activity with several hundred people on a typical year. There is some value in distributing some recommendations

Selectman Blessington noted the recommendations and guidelines for 2020 Halloween which look like smart recommendations. Closing roads is not feasible and is not enforceable. Perhaps create a mailer or post on the town's website of recommendations.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted we could promote a safe manner for trick or treating to assist in some of these neighborhoods that typically get inundated. Other towns are encouraging folks to follow the CDC guidelines. We will put together a flyer for safe trick or treating.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted November 7th Eastern Highland Health District will be doing a free flu clinic open to the public in Mansfield. As more details become available she will share.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the governor's office has posted additional information on travel restrictions and changes of states and the impacted travel restrictions As more details become available and we will share.

Present to Speak

Peter Latincsics commented that he is in support of the roof project at Hall school and Center school. These are major assets to the community and agree there have been extraordinary circumstances with schools and Covid this year that could not be anticipated. There are concerns that may be additional obstacles to overcome should there be a 2nd waive in the pandemic. It's hard to anticipate what could happen, it is a suggestion that this board provide the superintendent with more support and not less. Having a building committee for the roofs makes a lot of sense. They could act as a body that could move through the process of being preparing and being ready for this summer when school vacant to install the two new roofs. I would encourage the board to solicit the town's people to join that committee to provide support to the Board of Education and the superintendent.

Good & Welfare

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted the polling location change for the Presidential Election on November 3rd will be at Hall School gym and not at the town office building.

The town clerk reported so far we have issued 1,010 absentee ballots from applications 600 have been returned thus far. For a historical reference four years ago, the Town's Clerk office processed 100 absentee ballots. It was noted that a resident can only vote with 1 method, either in person or as an absentee ballot.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski wanted to publicly thank the Assistant Tax Collector Michelle Cyr for stepping forward and assisting in the Selectmen's office with both the meeting minutes and here in the office for day to day tasks in-between Robin leaving to the Town Clerk position and Heather being hired. The office could not have gotten through this without her dedication and assistance. I would also like to thank Robin Campbell for doing double duty for most of her first month and a half in her new position of Town Clerk.

We are very fortunate to have such hard working and supportive team members here at the town office building.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to go into an executive session for the Assistant Assessor hiring committee and invited Walter Topliff & Janice Clauson.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

Selectwoman Boritz did not stay for executive session.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to leave executive session at 8:11 PM

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 2 Yes (Wiecenski & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 PM

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 2 Yes (Wiecenski & Blessington) 0 No.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Sharpley

TOWN OF WILLINGTON, CT

Received for record October 23, 2020

At 12:10pm RMK

TL