



# TOWN OF WARNER

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## Selectboard Meeting DRAFT Minutes

January 9, 2024

Lower Meeting Room Warner Town Hall 5 E Main St

### Open the Meeting and Roll Call

Chair Harry Seidel opened the meeting at 5:02 PM

Present: Chair Seidel, Faith Minton, and Allan Brown.

Others present: Interim Town Administrator Butch Burbank, Judy Newman-Rogers, and Georgia Flanders.

### Approval of Minutes

The board reviewed the draft minutes of November 7, November 9, and November 21 meetings.

November 7 - No changes

November 9 – edit the section discussing improvements necessary at the Old Graded School (OGS) building. An estimated cost of \$10,000 to improve the bathrooms, but the minutes did not clarify if this was for one bathroom or all the bathrooms. The same was true of an estimate of \$25,000 for stair repair. Additionally, there was some clarification necessary on whether the board was discussing the issue of ADA accessibility versus the safety issues with the current stairs.

November 21 - the roll call listed Faith Minton as being present via Zoom when she was present in person. Correct the spelling of Rachel Lehr's name and some minor grammatical changes.

**Faith Minton made the motion to approve Nov 7, 9 and 21 minutes with the requested changes. Allan Brown seconded the motion, and the motion passed.**

### Conservation Commission Presentation Regarding Auctionability of Town Property- Nancy Martin

Nancy Martin, Chair Warner Conservation Commission, came before the board to discuss the auctionability of town owned property on behalf of the Conservation Commission. The Commission had conducted a study on various parcels of land regarding their potential value as conservation land. The study examined factors such as proximity to sources of drinking water, surface water, agriculture, wildlife habitats, and cultural or historic significance to give each site a numeric score. The higher the score, the more desirable it would conceivably be for the town to take steps to formally conserve it.

Many of the highest-scoring parcels of land were smaller in size and had no structures on them. A high score had no correlation with monetary value, or public interest in purchasing the land. Ms. Martin and the other members of the Conservation Commission present noted that these scores were no substitute for visiting the land and examining it directly, and the reasons the land in question might be suitable for conservation did not all center around the presence of wildlife. It was also noted that the scoring model used to evaluate existing town property could be applied easily to new acquisitions.

A crucial point raised was that none of the evaluated properties would be conserved unless the town formally decided to do so. The study was to evaluate their potential as conservation land. Regardless of the study's findings, the town could still decide to sell the land.

The board requested copies of the existing reports, and for the newly acquired Lang Bridge Lane property to be evaluated under the scoring system. They also suggested that the Conservation Commission inform the Planning Board of their findings.

**Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)- Ed Mical, Emergency Management Director**  
Ed Mical came before the board to request that the board sign the agreement for the EMPG so that it could be passed on to Governor and Council for grant approval at the state level. This grant would be used to purchase computers and an OWL device for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The necessary funds were encumbered, and training was completed by the department as an in-kind match.

The board signed the agreement.

**Faith Minton: Motion to accept the terms of the Emergency Management Performance Grant as presented in the amount of \$7,300 to purchase EOC Equipment. Furthermore, the board acknowledged that the cost of the project would be \$14,600, in which the town would be responsible for a 50% match (\$7,300.00). Allan Brown seconded the motion, motion passed.**

#### **Mink Hills Stewardship Committee- Next Steps**

There was some confusion as to whether the board had voted to establish the Mink Hills Stewardship Committee as recommended by the Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee. The board believed that they had done so at the time but elected to consult with the former study committee before taking further action. They wished to know the new committee's objectives, what their views on conservation of the Mink Hills were, and whether the previous study committee considered a new committee necessary. The board noted that input from residents of the Mink Hills would be crucial to the committee's success.

The board decided to invite the former committee to return for a noticed special meeting on February 6, where these issues would be discussed in more detail.

#### **Class VI Road Issues- Davis Rd.**

The board received a letter from resident Susanna von Oettingen regarding the condition of Davis Road, a Class VI Road in Warner. Ms. Von Oettingen appeared via Zoom to elaborate on her concerns.

Davis Road was in rough shape at the time of the board receiving the letter. It was slowly being eroded by flowing water from a stream. This was partially due to the creation of an illegal ford, which

was eroding private land. The road and its bed of sand and gravel had also been eroded tremendously. Additionally, sediment being washed away from the road was increasing the size of the stream's delta with Lake Massasecum.

Previously, there had been a bridge over the stream in question, but it had gone out over twenty years prior. Offroad vehicles were accessing Davis Road illegally by driving through the stream, which was believed to be exacerbating the existing issues. The stream in question is a class B stream and a habitat for brook trout.

Ms. Von Oettingen stated her belief that future weather events would further damage Davis Road and asked what could be done to improve conditions on the road. However, because Davis is a Class VI Road, town funds cannot be spent to maintain it. There are exceptions if the road is reclassified as a fire lane, and the board discussed this as a potential option. The question was also raised as to whether the residents of Davis Road signed an agreement to live on and maintain a Class VI Road. Other towns were mentioned to have such agreements with residents, but it was unclear if one was present in this case.

The board decided to contact the owner of the property and visit the Davis Road site. The visit will take place on January 12 at 10:00 AM.

#### **Public Comment**

The board was asked for an update on the hiring of the new Town Administrator. Interim Town Administrator replied that the background check was pending and would take around two weeks.

#### **Administrator's Report**

Documents were passed on to the board to sign, ongoing project of inventorying and reorganizing town files was discussed, Georgia Flanders was in the process of putting existing files into the new filing cabinets in the Town Administrator's office, and would inventory files in the attic when this task was complete.

The cost of constructing new office space in the lower meeting room of the Warner Town Hall was discussed. A quote of \$8,509 by a contractor was reflective of the total cost. This number was within what could be funded by an LCHIP grant however, potentially having to reorient the sprinkler system was a concern if the office wall went up all the way to the ceiling, but not building to the ceiling would make it difficult to conduct confidential business. It was noted further discussion and examination of the sprinkler system would be needed.

#### **Planning Board**

Discussion moved to a potential shift in how Planning Board members are chosen. Currently, the Planning Board's members are appointed by the Select Board. However, many towns have begun to move towards an elected Planning Board instead. This would theoretically allow a wider cross-section of the community to have a say on who becomes a member of a very powerful Town Board.

Other than the process of choosing a board, nothing about the functionality of the Planning Board would be changed. Vacancies would still be filled from alternates, although it was unclear what would happen if the board ran out of alternates before all vacancies were filled. The Planning Board would still control their own affairs and make decisions on matters within their purview accordingly.

It was noted that an elected board may be more accountable, and that other town boards with less power were elected. The board made the decision to have a discussion with the chair of the Planning Board regarding their concerns, and the possibility of an elected Planning Board. Faith Minton volunteered to initiate this discussion.

**Chair Seidel made a motion to have Faith Minton initiate a discussion with the chair of the Planning Board regarding the possibility of an elected Board and concerns that had been raised. Allan Brown seconded the motion, and the motion passed.**

### **Warner Community Center (WCC)/Old Graded School Building (OGS)**

The board discussed the fate of the WCC and a viable plan to improve the building. While the WCC houses important services that aid town residents, the building itself has been neglected and is in need of repairs. The current state raises several safety concerns, as well as issues of ADA accessibility.

Currently, the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) is investigating the cost of improvements to the building and possible futures for it. They have looked at acquiring grants or low-interest loans to lower the burden on taxpayers, they hope to inform the public and its uses in 2024 through meetings and potential building tours. The board agreed community input would be crucial in deciding the fate of this building.

The board decided that with the EDAC committee's plans for 2024, it would be best to wait before drafting a warrant article regarding the WCC. After a year of further investigation and information distribution, the board believed the town would be better equipped to decide the building's future.

### **Tax Collector Position**

The current tax collector, Marianne Howlett, has announced her intent to retire and will not be running for reelection. It was posited that the tax collector and town clerk positions could be combined to save money, and potentially move to being an appointed position.

A warrant article would be needed to make this change, but the board decided not to begin drafting one yet, until having more discussion with the Town Clerk. There were concerns whether existing staff and current office space would be sufficient.

Marianne Howlett felt the Tax Collector position should stay separated from the Town Clerk and remain elected. The position of tax collector requires specialized knowledge, and training would be necessary. It was noted that to get a warrant article on the ballot for Town Meeting, a decision would need to be made by the deadline.

### **Potential Warrant Articles Review**

The article regarding the Town Hall roof grant was not needed, and the article will be removed.

The board wanted the amounts for bridge repair and highway department block grants be added to their respective articles. The total amount of funds requested in the drafted articles was \$487,000.

These drafted articles will be reviewed by the DRA before being presented at Town Meeting.

## Consent Agenda

Motion to Approve as signed by the Warner Selectboard:

1. An Intent to Cut for Map 12 Lots 18, 18-1 and 18-2, Newmarket Road
2. Building Permits:
  - a. Map 34            Lot 019            West Main St
  - b. Map 15           Lot 032-2        Brown Rd
  - c. Map 15           Lot 032-2        Brown Rd

## Manifest Motion

Motion for the Select Board to approve the following previously signed manifests:

- Accounts Payable check numbers 7948 through 7989, dated 12/31/2023, in the amount of \$114,992.28.
- Accounts Payable check numbers 7990 through 7991, dated 1/4/2024, in the amount of \$31,024.23 covering the Federal Tax and Payroll deposits for the January 7<sup>th</sup> quarterly payroll.
- Quarterly payroll checks numbers 3552 through 3580 and direct deposit check numbers E01327 through E01328 dated 1/7/2024 for a net payroll of \$2,352.45.

Further motion to authorize the Select Board to approve and order the Treasurer to sign the following manifests:

- Accounts Payable check numbers 7992 through 7993, dated 1/9/2024, in the amount of \$53,328.98 covering the Federal Tax and Payroll deposits for the January 11<sup>th</sup> bi-weekly payroll.
- Bi-weekly payroll checks numbers 3581 through 3589 and direct deposit check numbers E01329 through E01356 dated 11/17/2024 for a net payroll of \$41,311.24.
- Accounts Payable check numbers 7994 through 7999, dated 12/31/2024, in the amount of \$6,765.15.

**At 8:15 PM, Chair Seidel made the motion to recess the board's meeting to Thursday, January 11. Faith Minton seconded the motion, and the motion passed.**

The meeting was recessed to the stated date.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Flanders