

TRI-BOARD MEETING
Rockingham Selectboard/Bellows Falls Trustees/Walpole, NH Selectboard
May 31, 2016

Present:

Selectboard: Lamont Barnett, Peter Golec, Ann DiBernardo, Joshua Hearne, Stefan Golec
Trustees: Myles Mickle, Stefan Golec, Colin James, Evelyn Weeks, Steve Adams

Also Present: Willis Stearns, II, Municipal Manager; Kerry Bennett, Recording Clerk; Mary Helen Hawthorne, BFDDA Executive Director; Deborah Wright; Jon Midura; Brad Weeks; Walpole Selectboard – Steve Dalessio, Joe Aldrich and Peggy Pschirrer; North Walpole Road Commissioner Cheryl Mayberry; Bellows Falls Wastewater Chief Operator Rob Wheeler; Walpole Wastewater Operator Mark Houghton

Press: Joey Powers & Alex Stradling, FACT8; Tory Jones Bonenfant, Eagle Times

Call to Order: Tri Board Meeting was opened at 7:05 pm by Rockingham Selectboard Chair Lamont Barnett. Barnett noted that North Walpole Commissioner Cheryl Mayberry was also present and invited her to join the group at the table. Barnett noted that the first order of business was between the Bellows Falls Trustees and the Walpole Selectboard and turned the meeting over to Village President Myles Mickle.

Agenda:

1. Wastewater Contract – Walpole/BF Trustees: Stearns noted that the Board had received a draft copy of the contract in their packets last week and noted that there were a few very minor changes made – a few typographical errors and the new Village President and Trustee names were added. Stearns also noted that the previous contract lapsed approximately 10 years ago and did not include options for the plant upgrades. The new document does address these. Walpole Selectboard Chair Steve Dalessio stated that the Walpole Board has reviewed the document and is prepared to sign tonight. Mickle asked how the fees were calculated. Stearns stated that those fees specific to Walpole are paid by Walpole and all others are split with all users. DiBernardo asked how much it would cost for Walpole to build its own Wastewater facility. Dalessio stated that it would be out of reach. Barnett noted that the Vilas Bridge, which holds the wastewater line from Walpole, is no longer maintained and is an environmental disaster waiting to happen. Mayberry noted that she has been on the NH transportation committee and noted that the bridge is structurally sound but the deck of the bridge is the issue. The boards discussed several items including costs, maintenance, liability, upgrades to the Bellows Falls Plant, etc. Bellows Falls Wastewater Chief Operator Rob Wheeler was present and stated that this is in the agreement and Walpole is liable for its line under the bridge. Peter Golec noted that there is another line from North Walpole that could be used if the line across the Vilas Bridge were to be compromised. Brad Weeks noted that there is a significant amount of retail and housing growth along Route 12 recently and asked how this affects the usage. Wheeler stated that there is sufficient space for this increase and there are provisions in the contract. *Colin James made the motion that the Bellows Falls Village Trustees sign the agreement with Walpole as printed. There was no second and the motion failed.*

2. Vilas Bridge Discussion: Barnett thanked the Walpole Selectboard members for attending noting that Bellows Falls has been hard hit since the closure of the Vilas Bridge 7 years ago. Barnett stated that the State of New Hampshire has been negligent in maintenance of the bridge and referenced a Memorandum of Agreement signed by the Federal Highway Administration, the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, and accepted by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on long-term maintenance of the Vilas Bridge. Barnett noted that maybe it is time that a federal judge look into this. Barnett asked the Walpole Selectboard if they are willing to join with Rockingham & Bellows Falls. Dalessio stated that the Walpole Selectboard will not get involved in any discussion about ownership, maintenance or repair of the bridge, that this is a matter for the State of New Hampshire. Dalessio also noted that the Walpole Selectboard has made its concerns know to the State noting that this bridge has now been removed from the 10 year plan. Barnett asked if given what has unfolded tonight regarding the issue of the wastewater flowing across the Vilas Bridge and the Bellows Falls Trustees refusing to sign the contract if that changes Walpole's statement. Dalessio stated that he believes that would be extortion.

Stearns noted that local historical buff, Stewart Read, has uncovered that at one time Rockingham and Walpole had each contributed \$30,000 and Mr. Vilas had contributed the remainder to purchase the bridge noting that it appeared that 1/3 of the bridge is owned by Rockingham and 2/3 by Walpole. Stearns also noted that Read has yet to find any documentation that the State of New Hampshire acquired this bridge and it may still be owned by Walpole and Rockingham.

Mayberry stated that she has served on the Transportation Board and all should be advocating for the repair of this bridge. Mayberry also assured the boards that this bridge is still be discussed at the State level and it is close to the criteria that has to be met for repair. Mayberry stated that the North Walpole Commissioners are advocating for repair and feels that the State of New Hampshire would look more seriously at this if all advocate together. Dalessio stated that speaking for himself he would be willing to sign a common letter and this will be discussed further at the Walpole Selectboard's next meeting but that they will not get into a federal lawsuit.

Pschirrer stated that it is unfortunate but that most of the money in the State of New Hampshire goes to the west side of the State and none to the east side.

Hearne noted that the State of Vermont has stepped up twice – once with an offer of a 50/50 split to repair the bridge, and once with an offer to fund the entire repair with certain repayment stipulations from New Hampshire and New Hampshire has refused both times.

DiBernardo stated that the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants could be one avenue to pursue and it would be more effective if everyone worked together.

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Stearns also stated that it may be possible to go through Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategy (SeVEDS) as a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) project as this would fit in the criteria for more than 1 community and also would be more than 1 State and he will look into this.

Other Business: None

Adjourn: *Joshua Hearne made the motion to adjourn the Tri-Board Meeting at 7:55 p.m. Motion was seconded by Peter Golec. Motion passed.*

Attest: _____
Kerry Bennett, Recording Clerk