

**Town of Woodstock
Selectboard Meeting
September 23rd, 2024
6:00PM
Town Hall & Zoom
Minutes**

Draft minutes are subject to approval.

Present: Chair Ray Bourgeois, Susan Ford, Laura Powell, Greg Fullerton

Staff: Eric Duffy, Stephanie Appelfeller, Robert Densmore

Public: Jeffrey Kahn, Steve Fulkerson, Peggy Fraser, Keri Bristow, Ed Esmond, Jon Spector, Joe DiNatale, Charlie Kimball, Tom Ayres, Sarah Glasser Tucker, Michael Peters, Wendy Wright Marrinan, Tom Debevoise III, Brenda Blakeman

Call to order

1. Chair Ray Bourgeois called the Selectboard meeting of September 23rd to order at 6:00PM

B. Addition to & deletions from posted agenda

a. Deletion Executive Session 1 V.S.A 313

C. Citizen's Comments -None

D. Discussion

Discussion of the Town's acquisition of the Woodstock Aqueduct Company

Eric Duffy begins his presentation by thanking several people for their help with this project. He continues with the purpose of acquiring the water system: ensuring stable water supply, fire safety, and a secure future.

He discusses the current issues with fire hydrants and the economic importance of the village and potential of growing the grand list and combining the water and sewer systems.

Eric Duffy emphasizes the financial benefits of town ownership, including lower costs and access to grants that are not available if the water system is owned by a private company. That the least expensive option for the taxpayers is if the municipality owns the water system.

He recounts the severe impact of the flood 14 months ago that caused a water crisis in the town for 10 days, including business closures and no water for residents and tourists.

Eric Duffy discusses owning the water company making it easier to receive FEMA grants almost immediately, which means we can make these repairs and get reimbursed at 75% to 90% of the total costs.

Eric Duffy emphasizes again Fire hydrants are not compliant with state regulations.

Eric Duffy emphasizes that the town needs water infrastructure in Woodstock for businesses or residents who cannot get a new water connection currently

Eric Duffy discusses the Woodstock Aqueducts' assets are somewhere between \$3.2 to \$4.1 million which includes non-property assets like machines, piping, tools.

He outlines the funding available, \$463,000 total for the acquisition of funding they received from the state which consists of state grants to the town and the aqueduct's contribution.

Selectboard and the Aqueduct Company have come to terms for an acquisition, Selectboard has agreed to purchase Woodstock Aqueduct and all its assets not including of the Vondell Reservoir property for \$920,000.

He explains the financial implications for taxpayers and the benefits of eliminating the aqueduct's debts.

Eric Duffy discusses the state's timeline for grant funding being moved up and the implications for receiving funds from the state.

He details the timeline, and the steps involved in the acquisition with three separate options.

Eric Duffy explains the plan to hold a special town meeting on October 29th, 2024, ask the residents for approval to use \$457,000 from the town's undesignated fund balance toward the purchase the Woodstock Aqueduct and all its assets, not including the Vondell reservoir.

Eric Duffy explains details regarding the undesignated fund balance.

Eric Duffy explains step one is to hold a special town meeting about acquiring the Aqueduct Company on Oct 29th, which will not cost the taxpayers anything at that time. Step two are capital projects that are mandated by the State.

The second vote will be in December to approve a bond for the Vondell reservoir purchase and capital improvements.

Informational meetings will be held for residents to ask questions and bring up concerns

The Selectboard views ownership of the water company as vital and necessary to the future of Woodstock.

Reason for two votes:

Eric Duffy explains that we do not want to lose State grants

Eric Duffy explains wanting to give the town more than 5 days to discuss the Vondell Reservoir purchase and capital projects before making them vote in 30 days.

The Selectboard is going to hold another meeting Wednesday September 25th at 5:30pm where they are going to sign the warning for the special town meeting on October 29th, 2024, 6PM for a floor vote.

Capital projects the Selectboard discussed so far include the Elm Street Bridge water line, Option 1B from the engineering report of the Woodstock Aqueduct Company – repair pipe coming down Cox District Road along Route 4 to the bridge by the Rec Center, and a new water tank on Route 12

Eric Duffy explains more about the undesignated funding balance which totals roughly \$1.7 Million

Eric Duffy reiterates the goals of owning the water company and how it will help the town in the future.

Questions from the public:

Jeffrey Kahn: Vondell Reservoir, is that acquisition unencumbered, or is other money owed?

Eric Duffy answers: unencumbered \$1.6 Million for the total property

Steve Fulkerson: Is Vondell Reservoir a source of water for the town along with the wells? It is that an essential part of the strategic plan to make sure that Woodstock has sufficient reservoir capacity for growth in the future?

Eric Duffy: In the acquisition, we'll have easements, so we have access to that property, the reservoir could be used for future use. It is not a primary source for the town now.

Steve Fulkerson asked about the engineering reports and the details of the capital projects in the report being complete or are there more projects than the report states.

Eric Duffy answers: The report details some but not all projects that could happen in the future.

Peggy Fraser asked: Could the Economic Development Council pull back on some of the financing for next year and dedicate those funds towards the acquisition of the water company.

Eric Duffy answers: in the future they will be meeting to discuss funding capital projects, and he encourages everyone from the public to attend.

Keri Bristow expresses concern about the financial burden of the acquisition and the potential increase in taxes.

Eric Duffy and Laura Powell explain the current financial situation and the benefits of town ownership.

Keri Bristow suggests considering developers funding some of the capital projects.

Ed Esmond raises concern about the town buying the debt owed by the water company and all the money that will need to be spent in capital projects afterwards to bring it up to standard.

Eric Duffy and Susan Ford emphasize the need for town ownership to manage costs more effectively.

Jon Spector commends the presentation and emphasizes the importance of changing the way Woodstock manages its services.

He highlights the need for the community to recognize the financial reality and the benefits of town ownership.

Susan Ford emphasizes that there was an audit done of Aqueduct Company

Joe DiNatale raises concerns about the potential for a private equity company to turn off fire hydrants.

Eric Duffy and Charlie Kimball explain the legal and practical considerations of private company ownership.

Sarah Glasser Tucker asks about the division between the residents who are on the water system versus those who have a well and private septic.

Eric Duffy responds town residents pay for the fire hydrants and sewer system it is in the budget for each year.

Michael Peters asks what would happen if the first vote gets passed but the second vote does not pass.

Jeffrey Kahn asks about the staffing and maintenance plans for the new water system.

Eric Duffy explains the transition process and the current staffing structure.

He emphasizes the need for a licensed water operator and the potential for existing staff to transition to the new system.

Eric Duffy outlines the administrative and operational efficiencies of integrating the water system with the sewer department.

Charlie Kimball expresses his support for the proposal and highlights the historical significance of the acquisition.

Wendy Marrinan asks about the relationship between water and sewer systems and the potential for shared staffing.

Tom Debevoise III provides historical context on the debt and the recent infrastructure improvements by the aqueduct company.

Ray Bourgeois and Eric Duffy thank everyone for their participation and emphasize the importance of community input.

They announce the next steps, including the Special Town Meeting on October 29th, 2024, and the informational meetings leading up to it.

The Select Board members introduce themselves and encourage community members to reach out with any questions or concerns.

The link to this meeting and the presentation is available on our website

<https://townofwoodstock.org/about/acquisition-of-the-woodstock-water-system/>

E. Adjournment

Motion: by Chair Ray Bourgeois to adjourn the meeting at (7:20 PM)

Seconded: by Greg Fullerton

Vote: 4-0-0, passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Kitty Mears Koar