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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices

Meeting Minutes

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Select Board

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order on Monday, June 1, 2026, at 6:00 PM at the Town Offices at 677 VT Rte. 7A and on Zoom. Present were Select Board members Zoe Kearl (Chair), Naomi Miller (Vice-Chair), Mike Cichanowski, Marlene Hall, and Eamon Mulligan. Also present were Town Administrator Paula Iken, Town Treasurer Melanie Dexter, and Assessor's Clerk Gina Jenks.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

There were no conflicts of interest with the agenda. Ms. Kearl asked the board for permission to add an agenda item, an update to the tax sale. Board agreed.

3. Minutes

The minutes for the May 18, 2026, Select Board meeting were reviewed. Ms. Kearl called for a motion to accept. Ms. Miller moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded, then brought up a confusing section of the minutes. After discussion the minutes were amended and accepted with amendment 5-0-0.

4. Warrants

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider CWR 26028 for \$61,755.81. Ms. Miller moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Ms. Kearl read out invoices over \$2500.00 and several random lesser items. Ms. Kearl asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, CWR 26028 was approved 5-0-0.

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider PW24 for \$20,921.51. Mr. Cichanowski moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Ms. Kearl asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, PW24 was approved 5-0-0.

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider PRW11 for \$23,091.96. Ms. Hall moved. Ms. Miller seconded. Ms. Kearl noted that employer expenses for PRW11 are only \$8221.21. The rest comes from paycheck deductions. PRW11 was approved 5-0-0.

5. Announcements

Ms. Iken announced that the cemetery fence project was underway. Fence has been removed and is being preserved as best possible since it matches the fence at another cemetery.

Ms. Kearl thanked Marlene Hall, Ben Hulett, and Bud Krawczyk for organizing the Memorial Day parade. She also thanked the firefighters, MAUHS band, and Father Hugh for their participation.

Ms. Kearl then announced that the Town Offices sign was temporary, placed to direct people from 7A to the new building. There has been some concern around its aesthetic. She suggested that the board ask for design feedback from interested members of the community. There was further discussion of how to solicit community response and the possibility of having the dental office sign and town offices sign having a similar design.

Jen Holley then thanked the board, the CCDC, and Shaftsbury residents for the new town office building.

6. Public Comments

There was a question about a fire at the Waite Cemetery Road solar array that occurred on April 12, 2026. Ms. Kearl described the incident and measures taken at the time by the Shaftsbury Fire Department to put out a fire caused by arcing from damaged solar panels. The fire department had to cut a lock to get to the fire.

She went on to talk about ongoing discussions with a representative of the array's owner- located in Israel- and the PUC. She said she was meeting Shaftsbury zoning administrator Carlyn Mickle, Fire Chief Joe Vadakin, and Town Administrator Paula Iken this week to start working on a plan for creating a comprehensive list of PUC approved projects. Since projects run by the PUC have no level of town approval, Ms. Kearl also suggested the Town write a formal letter to the PUC that would ask it to strengthen the level of protection that it provides to towns, including standardized access and communication procedures.

Even though the array was disconnected in three different places, it was still producing. The PUC, who was aware of this array, never forced the owners to unhook every panel, which would have prevented the fire. What the owner said in the filing with the PUC is that they did not unhook panels because it was deer nesting season. Ms. Kearl said that the fact that the PUC accepted that excuse from the developer seemed very strange. She knew that several members of the community were very concerned and have been speaking out, and she encouraged more people to do so. Questions that Ms. Kearl said she would ask are what products and technologies are being used, who is doing the engineering, and is engineering domestic or outsourced. Safety questions would be prioritized to make sure that an incident like the fire will not happen again. There was further discussion about insurance and liability should another incident occur. Ms. Kearl noted that the email addresses for the PUC commissioners are available on the PUC's website and that she had emailed one of them and had received a reply.

7. DPW Report

Ms. Iken reported for Mike Yannotti. The DPW is doing regular road maintenance now. In mid-June they'll start a couple of big projects which Mr. Yannotti will explain in the next report on June 15th. They are waiting for culvert pipes and materials to be delivered. This is all grant work.

Road grading is being done on Paran Road, Hidden Valley, Mountain View, Glastenvue, Daniels Road, Town Line Road, and Lower East Road. Roadside mowing has begun and will continue on the west side of Shaftsbury, then move to the east side. Culvert replacement: Maple Hill, Birch Hill, Paran Acres. Other DPW projects: Gravel hauling for summer projects, installing the Welcome to Shaftsbury sign that was just refurbished, cleaning up old cemetery fence with Jen Holley, equipment maintenance and grounds keeping at the shop, and mowing the landfill. The DPW is hiring another crew member- part of the new budget. Applications are on the website, or email Mike Yannotti with questions.

8. Treasurer's Report

Ms. Dexter presented the cash flow, saying that the Town received the final cash flow for education funding, almost \$88,000, for the schools' rounding error. The other big number, almost \$50,000.00, is water receipts. Water payments were due last week and are now late. She noted that, as of today, a

penalty has been applied. She then presented the budget status. For reasons previously discussed, both revenues and expenditures are overstated versus budget this year. In the cash by fund, the general fund is at negative \$58,000, which is where it was last month. Because the final cash flow on education tax brought in more than expected, the Town brought in about as much as it spent in the past month. The Water Department is at negative \$124,110.00, better than around negative \$160,000.00 at its worst, but high because bills just went out. She noted that the Listers Fund is down, but most costs from the reappraisal are in. Ms. Dexter asked Ms. Iken if the Town was expecting a paving grant. Ms. Iken said that a couple were still outstanding. This relates to the negative \$60,000 on Line 870.

Ms. Dexter said she is getting calls every day, as is Assessor's Clerk Gina Jenks, from people wanting to know what their new tax bill is going to be. She said that she cannot predict that. Until the Town has a final grant list, the tax rate cannot be set. If people call about anticipated taxes, all she can say is taxes will probably be like last year, but a little bit more. She appreciates people's patience.

9. Reappraisal Update: Gina Jenks

Assessor's Clerk Gina Jenks said that informal informational hearings were held last week. 118 people were heard. She noted that it was very loud and disruptive in the building. She said that the process should be changed before the next reappraisal in 6 years, to eliminate disrupting the Town Clerk and Zoning Administrator. She said it will likely be worse in the future as appraisals go up and more people request informal meetings. On June 15 - 17, 2026, grievances will be heard. Ms. Jenks said if people want to ask for a formal grievance, they need to fill out the grievance application, get it to her, call her and make an appointment. The paperwork must be received before June 15th. It can be emailed to Ms. Jenks. There will be an appointment every half hour during the three days. More assessors will be brought in if needed to make sure everybody is heard.

Ms. Jenks continued by stressing the need to start putting money away for the next reappraisal. The Town paid close to \$200,000 just for NEMRC, and payments start again in 4 years. The Town will not get all that money back from the State. She said that the State gives Shaftsbury \$8.50 per active parcel which goes to the reappraisal fund. The State considers contiguous land as one parcel, if it's owned by the same person and touches. She said there's a lot to figure out that will be clearer after grievances are heard, the Grand List is frozen, and tax rate is determined.

10. Update Zoning Fees: Carlyn Mickle

Ms. Mickle was unavailable and the item was pushed to the June 15th meeting.

11. Update: Tax Sale

The board was provided with relevant emails and the tax sale list. Tiffany Mays said there were 13 parcels on the list, a combination of properties with delinquent tax and/or delinquent water payments. 2 of them are being sold and have a closing scheduled. She recommended to leave them on the list, in case the closing falls through. There is 1 owner contesting the charges, which will have to be discussed at a water board meeting, but again she recommended to leave it on the list so that it didn't have to be readdressed. Ms. Mays asked if the board had any questions about the properties or balances. The board did not. The delinquent tax collector has decided to put all these properties on tax sale, so the select board is being asked to approve payment of a \$50 per parcel fee to the tax attorney to start the demand letters.

Ms. Mays said that the process starts with the attorney sending out demand letters. If there's no response, he moves to researching the properties, finding if there are liens, does a title search and any other necessary research. She said the attorney has asked, as is normal for most towns, that the Select Board agree to purchase any properties that don't get any bids. This is to the benefit of the town, because it can then sell that property to a party that will pay taxes and utilities. She noted that some of these properties have been on this list before. Every 4 or 5 years, a particular house goes on the tax sale with water balances that have the highest usage in the water system, are not paying for any of that usage. She said action needs to be taken. There is a total of \$92,000 between delinquent taxes and water.

Ms. Miller asked about the Town's history on promising to buy. Ms. Hall answered that she believed the Town had purchased homes to resell if the owners don't provide the money owed in a year's time. Ms. Kearl asked Ms. Mays to describe the process of the Town purchasing properties. Ms. Mays described the process at the point of the tax sale, noting that between the Town and the attorney, every reasonable step has been taken to contact these residents. The tax sale is a public meeting, and any member of the public can bid on these homes. She said there are usually not a lot of properties left over. Once the bids are made, the attorney takes those funds, and pays out any liabilities - taxes, utilities, and any fees that he has incurred. The remaining balance sits in an escrow account, because the State of Vermont requires a 12-month redemption period. The people whose homes have sold have 12 months to redeem this full balance from the tax attorney. After the 12 months whoever purchased the property can take possession of it. If the Town purchases a property, its liability is less, because most of the liabilities are town taxes that would be on hold until the Town can take possession of the property and sell it. Then the taxes would be paid. There is an immediate liability line if Town was to purchase any of these properties, no more than \$25,000 plus attorney fees, and that's only if none of the properties get bid on. Ms. May's handout provided the board with the total liability numbers.

Ms. Kearl thanked Ms. Mays for the information. Ms. Hall noted that tax sales are well attended, and it was doubtful that the Town would need to purchase any properties. Ms. Kearl then called for a motion to approve \$50 per parcel to be expended to tax attorney Kevin O'Toole to send out final demand letters for the current total of \$650. Ms. Miller moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Motion approved 5-0-0. Ms. Kearl then called for a motion to approve "the purchase of any and all properties not bid on at tax sale from the attached list of 13 parcels". Ms. Miller moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Motion approved 5-0-0.

12. Sidewalk Scoping Study: BCRC's Nick Zaiac

Mr. Zaiac discussed an opportunity for a scoping grant for a possible pedestrian/bike path between South Shaftsbury and North Bennington. The Town would be liable for \$12,000 of the grant. This does not include any part of the path's construction. The board agreed that this was not the time for the Town to be spending money on this project. It is an annual grant that could be considered in the future. No action was taken.

13. Presentation of Candidates for Cemetery Committee: Linda O'Brien and Kevin Kees

Ms. Kearl explained the process to the candidates and invited them to present their reasons for wanting to join the Cemetery Committee. Ms. O'Brien spoke first. She said that she was into genealogy, and felt good when she visited her family's cemeteries, which are well kept, but

too far away for her to tend, so she would take care of a Shaftsbury one instead. Ms. Kearl asked if anyone had questions. Mr. Mulligan moved to approve Ms. O'Brien to the Cemetery Committee. Ms. Hall seconded. Approved 5-0-0. Mr. Kees then commented on his experience working in the paint and hardware business and how his skills might be useful to the Cemetery Committee. Mr. Mulligan moved to approve Mr. Kees to the Cemetery Committee. Ms. Hall seconded. Approved 5-0-0.

14. Adoption of 2026 Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP): Paul Dansereau

Mr. Dansereau said that every municipality is required by State statute to develop local emergency management plans, with their main purpose being to act as a guideline for municipalities in the event of emergencies or natural disasters. It provides key resources, contacts, succession commands, and fall backs for the municipality and is required to be updated annually.

Shaftsbury key updates this year were the town office location change and select board members. The rest of the plan is mostly the same. Mr. Dansereau encouraged individuals and families to think about emergencies ahead of time noting that the For My Emergency Management website has a webpage, Pre-awareness for Individuals and Families, with information that a family can use to make their own emergency plans. He then asked that the Select Board adopt the Emergency Management Plan 2026. Ms. Kearl asked if there was any discussion. Ms. Hall noted that Cole Hall was not changed to Town Hall on one page. Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to adopt the plan with the change. Ms. Miller moved. Mr. Cichanowski seconded. The plan was adopted 5-0-0.

15. Interim report on EMS restructuring: Paula Iken

Ms. Iken reported on a meeting she attended with representatives from Bennington and Pownal that discussed a restructuring of emergency services prompted by funding issues. The Bennington and Pownal Rescue Squads are considering combining. The Bennington Rescue Squad serves South Shaftsbury and Shaftsbury Center. Ms. Miller asked how combining the squads might affect these areas of Shaftsbury. She also asked how North Shaftsbury, which is covered by the Arlington Rescue Squad, might be affected. Ms. Iken couldn't answer the questions based on information from the meeting. She is a part of the task force and will keep attending the meetings and updating. It was suggested that the Arlington Rescue Squad be contacted to see what they are forecasting. Ms. Kearl asked if there were any thoughts or questions on the report. Ms. Miller offered to contact the head of the Arlington Rescue Squad.

16. Report on meeting with Congresswoman Balint's team re congressional appropriations: Zoe and Naomi

Ms. Kearl gave a synopsis of the meeting with Congresswoman Balint's team. She said the House Appropriations Committee accepts requests from members of Congress for community project funding to support specific worthwhile projects across the country. Each member of Congress may submit projects proposed by government entities and nonprofits to the Appropriations Committee to be considered for funding. Ms. Kearl said that in this meeting she, Ms. Miller and Congresswoman Balint's team discussed what sort of projects Shaftsbury might be able to submit for. Jessica Nordhaus talked about Congresswoman Balint's priorities and types of projects that might be of interest and make their way across her desk. A main priority for Congresswoman Balint is housing and infrastructure that supports housing, which in Shaftsbury would be a wastewater system. Shaftsbury holds property behind Cole Hall suitable for housing and has a sewer feasibility plan already completed.

Ms. Kearl continued that, to participate in this application cycle, the Town would need letters of support from the community, interested parties etc. The Town would compile information about the proposed project, explain why it would be a good use of taxpayers' dollars, and explain how the project would be completed. The Town would have to obligate the funds within a year, which is a significant undertaking. Resident Naomi Bindman has offered to help with the grant application process.

Ms. Kearl noted that Ms. Nordhaus said that throughout Vermont wastewater systems are the main block to housing and was very encouraging about the Town being able to get a grant. Ms. Kearl said that there's no immediate action to take, she was giving an update on the meeting and about the idea, because the Town would need to start moving forward on the application in July.

Ms. Hall asked what the project would cost. Ms. Miller said about \$1,000,000.00. Ms. Hall asked and what was given out versus what people asked for. Ms. Kearl said the amount given was it about what was requested, and Rep. Balint's team would help the Town with what to request. There was further discussion that included the Sewer Feasibility study, the Cornerstone meetings regarding affordable housing, the country store, and Cole Hall. Ms. Kearl noted that these secured fundings don't happen every year. Obligating the funds within a year doesn't mean building the system, which provides flexibility. The discussion was to look at the possibility of undertaking the project. Mr. Cichanowski commented that one of the reasons the Sewer Feasibility study was good was that it is available when such an opportunity comes along.

17. Discussion of Clinic Space in Town Office Building

Ms. Kearl discussed the some of the history surrounding the idea of a free medical clinic, first in the long discussed community center, then in the new town office building. The idea was to offer free eye clinics, foot clinics, mental health services, etc. to be offered to uninsured and underinsured community members, at no cost to them, and no cost to taxpayers. Ms. Miller said that she has discussed the possibility of the clinic with Dr. David King and Dr. Avery Wood, and of making that clinic an offshoot of the Bennington Free Clinic, which is run by GBCS. Ms. Miller continued that GBCS has a new grant to offer extended community services but have been struggling with implementing these. They have been running pop-up vaccination and wound care clinics but are always seeking locations. They would like to extend a variety of services on a regular basis, under their insurance, medical supervision, and coordination, for free, to underinsured and uninsured people in Shaftsbury. She has met with Dr. Wood, Dr. King, Natalie Basilone, the Executive Director of GBCS and the two nurses who work at the preclinic in Bennington. They are very motivated to figure out ways to fill the gap for all the people who are losing their Medicare and Medicaid. Ms. Basilone wants a formal go ahead to begin developing more specific plans for it, and Dr. Wood wants to be able to start formally recruiting physicians. Ms. Miller said that the medical exam room in the back of the Town office building has its own entrance and exit door and the break room could be used as a waiting room. Ms. Kearl asked if GBCS would work on specifics with the Select Board directly. Ms. Miller said it could be with the board as a whole or with a representative. GBCS has requested that there be a liaison assigned by the select board who would deal with that interfacing. This could be either a member of the select board or a volunteer appointed by the select board.

Ms. Hall raised some potential issues and there was lengthy discussion on the building's multiple uses, past surveys of Shaftsbury residents, use of ARPA funds, and the work of the CCDC (Community Center Development Committee).

It was decided that Ms. Miller would reach out to GBCS and invite them to speak to the select board. This will be posted on the Town's social media so that other residents and town employees can attend and be heard. Ms. Kearl suggested that the representatives of GBCS visit the space before the meeting.

18. Other Business

Ms. Iken received a new contract from Bennington County Sheriff Gulley. Fees are increasing to \$88.00 per hour. The Town budgeted \$90,000.00 for FY27, thinking fees would only increase by a few dollars. The Town contracts 24 hours per week coverage with the sheriff's department. \$88.00 per hour multiplied by 24 hours, by 52 weeks is \$109,824.00 per year, which is \$19,824.00 more than the budgeted amount. Ms. Iken opened a discussion of the number of hours, asking if she should have a conversation with Sheriff Gulley about limiting some weeks to less than 24 hours to offset the increase. She said the contract also states that if gas goes over \$4.00 per gallon there might be a surcharge. Since gas is over \$4.00 per gallon she contacted Sheriff Gulley. The sheriff said he would reach out if a surcharge seems imminent, but he doesn't anticipate it happening. Ms. Iken also noted that the sheriff's department has a governor's fund that they access when called for extra service, so the Town doesn't get charged beyond the contracted hours.

Ms. Kearl asked the other board members for thoughts. It was noted that the contract is a lot less expensive than having a Shaftsbury police department, that the sheriff's department responds rapidly when needed, and that they had recently protected Town employees. The board did not agree with cutting back hours. It was agreed that Ms. Iken should sign the contract with the increase.

19. Review of Action Items

Ms. Miller will reach out to Arlington Rescue Squad and Natalie Basilone
Action on the new sign was moved forward to the next meeting

20. Executive Session: Personnel

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to enter executive session to discuss a legal matter with regards to a personnel. There would be no action taken. Motion to enter executive session approved 5-0-0.

21. Adjournment