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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices

Special Meeting

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Shaftsbury, VT
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Select Board

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order on Thursday, August 6, 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), Marlene Hall, and Eamon Mulligan. Mike Cichanowski was unable to attend. Also present was Town Administrator Paula Iken.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

There were no conflicts of interest with items on the agenda.

3. Minutes

The minutes for the July 20, 2026, Select Board meeting were reviewed. They were approved without amendment.

4. Warrants

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider CWR 27002 in the amount of \$100,292.65. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Ms. Kearl read out items over \$2,500.00 and several random items less than that amount. The following items were noted as paid for by grants: \$11,110 to Contact Engineering Solutions- culvert project, \$5,500 to the Dufresne Group- sewer feasibility study, \$9,000.00 and \$6,800.00 to Southworth Milton Incorporated- culvert project. Ms. Kearl asked if there were questions about any of the items. Hearing none, the board voted to approve CWR 27002 4-0-0. Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider PR03 in the amount of \$22,964.37. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Ms. Kearl asked if there were questions about the payroll warrant. Hearing none, the board voted to approve PR03 4-0-0.

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider PRW01 in the amount of \$40,516.51, for payroll taxes, retirement funds, and employee expenses. She noted that the Town pays \$15,482.71 in benefits, the rest comes from employee paychecks. Ms. Kearl asked if there were questions about the warrant. Hearing none, the board voted to approve PRW01 4-0-0.

5. Announcements

Ms. Iken announced that she is stepping down from her position as Town Administrator on September 25, 2026. Her contract would have been up in May, and she wants to give the Select Board ample time to find a suitable replacement while she has the time to train them. She thanked the Select Board for the opportunity to serve in a challenging role and is grateful to have been embraced by the community and enriched professionally by working in Shaftsbury. Ms. Iken said she is committed to ensuring a smooth transition and very willing to help train the new town administrator

to take over a complex position with many projects and issues that need continuity of knowledge. Ms. Miller commented that Ms. Iken began her role as Town Administrator in a time when Shaftsbury lost a town administrator who had been there for 10 years, and lost the Select Board chair at the same time. She continued that Ms. Iken pulled together the bits and pieces of information that had been left to her from the previous town administrator, figured out how to get the town up and running again, opening the doors of the Town Hall in many ways that it had never been opened, including digitally. She noted that Ms. Iken has been a great advocate for the people who work in the town offices. She advocated for health condition improvements, pay, and for respect in many ways.

Ms. Kearl announced that Shaftsbury DPW foreman, Mike Yannotti, has been offered an excellent opportunity in the private sector. It was an unexpected offer- they approached him. As a “born and raised” resident of Shaftsbury, he struggled with the decision. She continued that Mr. Yannotti has been an incredible DPW foreman for many years, doing so much, including writing DPW grants and Shaftsbury has been very lucky to have him. Art Whitman commented that roads in Shaftsbury had improved a lot under Mr. Yannotti’s leadership, so much so that the State uses them as an example for other towns to follow. Ms. Kearl said that the position will be posted on the Town website and other media outlets on 8/7. Long time DPW crew member/assistant foreman Tim Gulley will be the interim foreman.

Ms. Kearl then gave an update on the vicious dog status conference that she and Marlene Hall attended on July 24th. It was to synchronize all parties’ schedules. She anticipates that there will be a de novo hearing where the Town will present the entire case again, as will the victim of the dog attack. The board will keep residents apprised of the findings of the county.

Ms. Kearl said that Board of Civil Authority (BCA) hearings are underway for residents who continued to escalate grievances with their reassessments. Site visits are currently taking place. The BCA is composed of Justices of the Peace, the Select Board, and the Town Clerk. They complete site visits after presentations are made. The next meeting to continue conversations will be on August 25th at 5:00 PM. Information is posted on the Town website.

Ms. Kearl reminded that the primary election is on Tuesday, August 11, 2026, at the Town garage from 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM. Absentee ballots are available from the town clerk until noon on Monday, August 10th. Currently, it’s best to return absentee ballots to the gray box outside the Town offices or to the town clerk during office hours.

The next announcement was that the 2nd meeting about the Town Plan with BCRC and the Planning Commission is scheduled for Wednesday, August 12th at 6:00 PM at the Town offices. There is a survey on the Town website and paper forms in the Town office that help inform the Town Plan. Every town in Vermont must resubmit a town plan every 6 years. The town of Shaftsbury is in the process of putting together its next one. Town plans guide the grant funding that the town can apply for and shape the landscape of what might be possible in the years ahead. It’s important that the town plan represents town residents’ wants and ideas. Hard copy surveys can be submitted at the Town office. The meeting will be on Zoom, the link posted on the Town website.

Ms. Kearl then introduced State Representative David Durfee for an update on the new Vermont State Police barracks. Rep. Durfee first echoed Mr. Whitman’s praise of Mr. Yannotti for the road improvements in Shaftsbury. He went on to say that the State is in the early stages of relocating the State Police barracks. The State has not informed the Town yet. There will be a search for a suitable parcel and an RFP going out to owners who might want to sell or lease. The currently leased location in Shaftsbury is outdated and too small, but the area does have good access to highways, allowing for

coverage from Readsboro to above Manchester. Ms. Kearl said the board would reach out to the State Police for information and thanked Rep. Durfee for bringing this to the Town's attention.

Ms. Iken had a public service announcement from the Bennington Banner: "Greater Bennington Community Services (GBCS) in partnership with Remote Area Medical (RAM) will hold their fourth-annual free pop-up dental, vision and medical clinic this weekend, August 8 and 9, at Mount Anthony Union Middle School, located at 747 East Road in Bennington. The clinic opens at 6 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings and the parking lot will open Friday at 11:59 p.m.

Transportation to the clinic will be provided by Dufour Tours with pick-up services available at a variety of locations throughout the greater Bennington, Arlington and Pownal area. Drop-off services from the clinic will also be available with extended drop-off times on Saturday only. All RAM services are free, and no ID is required. Services will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis, until capacity is reached."

6. Public Comments

Ms. Kearl opened the floor to public comments. Andrea Bacchi came forward with a question to the Select Board asking why they hadn't answered her questions about the use of room in the town offices for a medical center (GBCS pop-up). Ms. Kearl responded to her concerns. Ms. Bacchi was not satisfied with her response. She said she felt belittled and not listened to. Ms. Kearl apologized and said that she had tried to address all of Ms. Bacchi's concerns a previous conversation with her. Corrine Levin restated that she did not feel comfortable with a medical pop-up in the Town Office. She that felt there was a huge liability for a hazmat situation or theft of personal information or ballots from the vault. Another attendee said that she thought there were no elderly people in Shaftsbury going without medical care and that local rescue squads can provide care in home. Ms. Kearl noted that she was on the task force working on the regionalization of the rescue services in the area. Shaftsbury is in a difficult situation in that it is on the outside of 2 services. The task force is trying to figure out which part of Shaftsbury will be covered by Bennington and which part will be covered by Arlington. There are issues to be worked out. Ms. Bacchi then asked about a grant regarding the medical center. Ms. Kearl answered that she did not have enough information to answer her question yet.

Angela Milligan commented online that she was frustrated with the rise in taxes, having to use last year's taxes for the prebate, and not finding answers. The State told her that the lister or adjuster needed to send the information to the State. Town Clerk Marlene Hall said the State used the new tax rate, which is much lower than the old tax rate, and last year's assessment, which is much lower than this year's assessment. She thought there should be a way to use the new assessments with the new tax rate, or even it out and use last year's tax rate.

Rep. David Durfee entered the discussion by asking Ms. Milligan if she had talked to the State tax department. She said she had. Rep. Durfee said he could follow up with the State tax department and see if they have a statement that they could share with him that he could then pass on to the town. He noted that he is not the tax department, nor an expert, but he does know that the formula for calculating State education taxes and property taxes is complicated. When there is a reappraisal and simultaneously both the local and school budgets increase dramatically some people, specific to their income and property value, will be negatively affected. There were further comments from many residents about unaffordability, the steep rise in property taxes that residents were not prepared for, and poor communication about those higher property taxes.

Bill Parks asked where the extra money was going. Rep Durfee answered that the town votes on the school budget and that money gets sent to the school. He continued that the legislature does have the power and the ability to change the whole system. There's been legislation over the past 2 years that will, if it stays on track, move the State away from the current educational funding system to what is called a foundation formula. Basically, taxpayers would not be wondering about their tax bill every year. It would be controlled much more by the State than it is today, and it would be a number that doesn't go up dramatically every year or go by inflation. The hard part will be getting everybody on board with this idea. It was suggested that residents attend school board meetings and provide input on the school budget.

Several residents asked if the grievance period could be reopened. Ms. Kearl said that the grievance period was determined by the State, but she would contact the State, explain the hardship caused to some Shaftsbury residents by the combination of reassessment and the statute requiring use of prior year tax for prebate, and ask if the grievance period could be reopened.

7. DPW Report

Ms. Kearl reported that the DPW was working on the culverts on Cider Mill Road. A couple of the spends that paid for the work that's being done on Cider Mill Road were just spread out. The DPW is also mowing. She then reiterated that the DPW foreman has taken a new opportunity, and assistant DPW foreman Tim Gulley will be handling DPW affairs. The DPW foreman job will be posted.

Ms. Iken said that the DPW foreman had been moved off the liaison list because they report to the town administrator. Due to Mr. Yannotti's departure, she requested that the board put a liaison to the DPW back on the list. The board agreed, and Mr. Mulligan said he would be the liaison to the DPW.

8. Treasurer's Report

There was no treasurer's report. There will be one at the regular meeting on Monday, August 17th.

9. PFAS Update: Landfill

Ms. Iken gave some history, saying the Town began testing wells near the landfill for PFAS in 2016. The State's acceptable level was 20 ppt. 3 wells had point of entry treatment (POET) systems installed at the Town's expense. Recently, the State lowered its acceptable level to 4 ppt which triggered more testing and more wells. She approved testing and 5 more wells were found for which the Town must purchase POET systems. Residents of 1 house refused the testing, or it would have been 6. so, they would like to send letters out, so they've just asked the staff board, is it okay to send the letters out to these houses saying, this is what will happen, and they handle it from there. The POET systems are estimated at \$4,000 each, so a \$20,000 spend.

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to allow KAS Engineers to notify the affected parties and move forward with the process. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Motion passed 4-0-0.

10. Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Review of Action Items

Ms. Kearl will contact the State regarding prebates. She will also contact officials in Arlington to ask how they handled their similar situation.

Ms. Kearl will follow up with Rep. Durfee regarding a contact for questions on prebates and opening grievances again. She thought that the State should hear what Shaftsbury residents are experiencing. It would probably be a written statement.

Discussion of a Budget Committee will be added to the next meeting's agenda.

12. Executive Session: Legal/Real Estate & Personnel

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to enter executive session to discuss a real estate matter and a personnel matter. Ms. Hall moved. Ms. Miller seconded. Motion passed 4-0-0 and board entered executive session.

The board came out of executive session and discussed the matter of a land purchase. There are 2 conditions that differ: the purchase price is slightly different and there is 1 stipulation regarding the DRB. Ms. Kearl called for a motion to approve the sale of 0.18 acres of town-owned land northerly of Buck Hill Road to Marie Watson for the price of \$3,500, contingent upon DRB review and approval of boundary line adjustment plat submitted. Ms. Miller moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Motion passed 4-0-0. The DRB must review and sign off on the plat to formalize the deed.

The final comment coming out of Executive section was that the Town Administrator has recommended to the Select Board an internal candidate for the role of Town Administrator, and an interview with that candidate will be scheduled in a special executive meeting next Thursday, August 13th.

13. Adjournment

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Motion approved 4-0-0. the meeting was adjourned at 8:24 PM.