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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, August 17, 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, Zoning Administrator Carlyn Mickle, and Interim DPW foreman Tim Gulley.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

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

3. Minutes

The minutes for the July 23, 2026, Special Select Board meeting were reviewed. Ms. Kearl noted an amendment to the date and Mr. Mulligan to times. Ms. Hall suggested amending wording regarding history of water billing and delinquencies. Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to approve with amendments. Ms. Miller moved. Mr. Cichanowski seconded. Minutes approved with amendments 5-0-0.

The minutes for the August 6, 2026, Special Select Board meeting were reviewed. An amendment was made to a date. Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to approve with amendment. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Minutes approved with amendment 4-0-1. Mr. Cichanowski abstained.

4. Warrants

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to approve CW27003 for \$77,016.34. Ms. Miller moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Ms. Kearl read some random smaller items and all items over \$2,500.00. Fire Department and Recreation expenses came out of budgeted reserves. Half of the recreation expense for tennis/pickleball court resurfacing came from a grant. CW27003 was approved 5-0-0.

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to consider PR004 for \$24,240.79. Mr. Cichanowski moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. PR004 was approved 5-0-0.

5. Announcements

There were no announcements.

6. Public Comments

Corrinne Levin asked about the dog park, stating that a woman had donated \$35,000.00 for the dog park. She said that there should be a public knowledge of the spending breakdown. She was corrected by Ms. Iken that Joyce Cowper had donated \$5,000.00 for the dog park and that the breakdown of

spending was available to the public. Ms. Kearl noted that the dog park was under the purview of the Recreation Committee. Ms. Iken will provide Ms. Levin with requested information.

Andrea Bacchi asked again about her questions regarding the medical clinic, stating that they had never been answered and that Ms. Kearl had asked her to hold her questions. Ms. Bacchi said that it was part of her First Amendment rights to ask questions. Ms. Kearl responded that questions are welcome and will be answered when the board has the information to do so. Ms. Bacchi then stated that the minutes for 2 meetings had not been posted by the 5 calendar days required by the State. She asked what the process was to make sure that Shaftsbury complied. Ms. Kearl answered that select board secretary Sarah Costin will write up the minutes to be posted in draft form to the website within 5 days. The minutes are reviewed, if needed amended, and approved at the next select board meeting. The final version is then posted on the Town website. Ms. Bacchi said she wasn't referring to select board minutes and asked if the same process applied to all meetings. Ms. Kearl answered that the chairs of other committees decided how minutes were handled. After some further discussion Operations Manager Jen Holley said that Ms. Bacchi's concerns had been addressed, describing the process she applies to every meeting: listing meetings on the Calendar, contacting the committee/commission/board, checking off when minutes were received, and posting draft minutes to the Town website within 5 days. Ms. Kearl noted that once it was brought to the Town's attention, the process was changed to correct the noncompliance.

The next comments were from Carol Lomax regarding property rights and boundary issues at her property on East Road and a class 4 unmaintained section of Trumbull Hill Trail. Trumbull Hill Road comes to 2 stone walls where Trumbull Hill Trail begins. Ms. Lomax and her husband Jeff hold the title to the land under the trail, including the 2 historic stone walls that flank the corridor. A neighbor, John Cerreta, has been using heavy equipment to clear the corridor to plow this coming winter, without the Lomax's permission. Ms. Lomax said they recognize that the Town holds an easement for travelers to pass through, but it belongs to the Town, not private citizens. She cited VT Title 19, Sec. 901 which prohibits private individuals from altering vegetation or performing mechanized maintenance on a town highway right-of-way without permission from the Select Board. Private plowing of a town road requires a right-of-way permit. Ms. Lomax asked the board to confirm whether any private maintenance or plowing permits have been issued for this section of Trumbull Hill Trail. If a permit was issued, she asked that the Select Board share it with her husband and her. If a permit was issued since they bought the property in early August 2024, it was done without notifying them as the landowners. The previous owner was Ms. Lomax's mother, and the family has owned the land since 1779. The stone walls are precious and protected under Vermont law. If a permit is found, Ms. Lomax asked that work immediately be stayed or suspended pending a formal boundary review. If no permit exists, she requested that the appropriate town official issue Mr. Cerreta an immediate stop work order to prevent further illegal right-of-way alteration, timber trespass, and imminent structural damage to the historic stone walls. Ms. Lomax said that they wanted to be cooperative in order to resolve the issue with the town and their neighbor and must also protect their deeded property. She has submitted a formal written objection, a deed and photos to the Town Clerk.

Ms. Kearl responded that the Select Board and the town and zoning administrators had reviewed the letter that Ms. Lomax submitted. They would investigate the permit issue and then figure out the stop work order. She continued that the Town would keep in contact with Ms. Lomax.

7. DPW Report

Tim Gulley, the DPW interim foreman gave the report. Last week the DPW was working on culverts on Cider Mill Road for a Vermont Better Roads program grant. There is one more to be done at the intersection of Cider Mill with Trumbull Hill. This will be done next week. The road will be one lane, not closed. This week the DPW is replacing large culverts on Murphy Hill Road which has been closed from the intersection with Tinkham Road to the intersection with Sally Gannon Road. They talked to residents to let them know which way to go in and out because there is a big hole across the road. This work should be completed by August 21st. The DPW is also road grading, ditching, and doing general maintenance.

Ms. Hall thanked Mr. Gulley for his help with the voting setup on very short notice. Ms. Kearl thanked him on behalf of the board for stepping into the interim foreman role.

8. Treasurer's Report

Town Treasurer Melanie Dexter presented the cash flow numbers. She pointed out the large amount from tax receipts (\$358,899.33). She noted that this is a mid-month report, so it is not projected to the budget. Ms. Dexter continued that the concern about changes with the reassessment has tapered off a lot. She thought that the people who were the most shocked complained early on so it hasn't been as intense as she thought it might be. She explains the changes to a few people each day, looking at current and prior year tax bills, factoring changes, and pointing out how much is municipal tax or education tax, and how much is their reassessment being more or less than average. Most people have been appreciative of the information. Ms. Dexter said she is happy to explain this to anyone who asks.

9. Westview Place Issue: Rosemarie Lindsey

Mary Morrissey, a Bennington resident and Vermont State Representative, spoke for Rosemarie Lindsey. Some residents of Westview Place had asked her to represent them because she had knowledge of the issues. The residents are asking Shaftsbury town leaders to help resolve an ongoing neighborhood issue that is worsening. The issue is at 44 Westview Place, a property formerly owned by Searle and Elaine Allen, placed in a reverse mortgage, and subsequently under HUD management, has not been maintained and appears to now be uninhabitable. Ms. Morrissey passed photos provided by Rosemarie Lindsey to the board. The neighbors have occasionally mowed the lawn because it is such an eyesore. Squatters broke in and were there until removed by the State Police. An Allen family member has also broken in and inhabited the house without water or electricity. There are rodents and feral cats on the property, and rats are moving on to adjoining properties. There is occasionally a stench coming from the property. This has been going on for years. Ms. Morrissey said that a couple of years ago she had spoken to the Town Clerk about this issue. The town clerk said that taxes were being paid so very little could be done by the town. Ms. Morrissey said that the conditions at 44 Westview Place appear to violate the town's bylaws. She asked that the board seriously look at the matter and contact the current owners. She also noted that it appears the last taxes were not paid. She continued that if nothing can be done, the town should consider lowering property taxes on people living on Westview Place because this issue is lowering their property values.

Ms. Kearl said that both the zoning administrator and assessors' clerk have been looking into the ownership of the property and that Rep. David Durfee brought it to the zoning administrator's attention. Ms. Kearl asked if others from the neighborhood would like to speak.

Linda Meskun, who has lived just North of the property for 51 years, said she agreed with Ms. Morrissey's comments and added to the comments that she had seen birds entering the house. She said

that assessors had not entered the house when properties were being reassessed. She requested that the health inspector or state police enter the house to see the conditions. She and her neighbors are worried about pests migrating from that property to theirs. Ms. Kearl agreed that something needed to be done but that the town needed to be careful of property rights. Ms. Meskun said that the vacant building also attracted undesirable persons. Ms. Kearl said that one of the first steps the town will take is to alert the sheriff and ask for them to keep an eye on the property.

Zoning administrator Carlyn Mickle said that she had been tracking ownership of the property after HUD jurisdiction to a debt collector, GITSIT Solutions LLC of Orange, CA. She had contacted the debt manager who agreed that the issue is out of line. He has reached out to locals, seeking someone to at least maintain the lawn and check on the property. Ms. Mickle said this is probably an RFP process so won't be immediate, but she has the manager's direct line and will contact him frequently until something happens. The manager said the property was tied up in probate. There isn't an owner. When the property clears probate, it will go into foreclosure. Ms. Mickle will be informed and provided a docket number when that happens. Both Ms. Mickle and Rep. Durfee have contacted health officer Jackie Myers to see what steps she can take. Ms. Myers needed reportable activity as a reason to visit the property. Animal activity on the property provides that so Ms. Mickle will call Ms. Myers immediately. In the past Ms. Myers has responded rapidly.

Another Westview Place resident said that there was a partially cut tree on the property in question that was leaning over their property line and threatening an outbuilding. She asked if something could be done about this. Ms. Kearl asked the resident to send the information by email to Ms. Mickle so that she could pass it on to the debt manager. Ms. Mickle will go by 44 Westview Place and take photos and video. She will also work on permission to enter the house. Ms. Kearl said the town will keep residents updated as resolutions are worked out.

10. Discussion of Formation of Budget Committee

Ms. Kearl gave some history of budget committees in Shaftsbury. She suggested that it not be a standing committee, rather a budget committee for fiscal year 2028. Each year the select board could readdress moving forward with a budget committee. There would be a 2 week window, ending August 31st, for people to submit a letter of interest and a resume. The select board would review the applications and appoint 5 members of the committee. The budget committee will be advisory. Recommendations to the board and town administrator would be nonbinding. Mr. Whitman gave a brief description of earlier boards. There was some discussion on the logistics of discussing candidates without revealing personal information. It was decided to number the applications. Ms. Kearl said for transparency it was preferable to blind the applications and discuss the candidates in a public meeting instead of in executive session. Since the budget needs to be settled well in advance of Town Meeting, it might be necessary for a budget committee to meet weekly for a month, then make recommendations. There would not be a select board member on the committee and the contact would be the town administrator.

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to form an ad hoc budget committee consisting of 5 members who are residents of Shaftsbury. Ms. Miller moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Motion passed 5-0-0.

11. Other Business

The next select board meeting falls on Labor Day, so the meeting will be moved to Thursday, September 10, 2026, at 6:00 PM in the town office building. The town Calendar will be updated to show the change.

12. Review of Action Items

Ms. Kearl and Ms. Iken will work on finalizing the budget committee process

Ms. Holley will post budget committee information on the Town website and Facebook, and on Front Porch Forum.

Ms. Holley will update the town calendar with revised select board meeting information.

Ms. Kearl and Ms. Mickle will continue to work on resolutions for the Westview Place issue.

13. Executive Session: Personnel

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to enter executive session. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded.

Motion passed 5-0-0. Ms. Dexter joined the board for the first part of the session. The board entered executive session at 7:08 PM. The board left executive session and discussed the offer of the Town Administrator position to Carlyn Mickle. The offer letter will be sent on Tuesday, August 18, 2026.

14. Adjournment

Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Motion passed 5-0-0. The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 PM.