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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

Meeting Minutes

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Town of Shaftsbury Water Board Meeting

Date of Meeting: Monday, April 6, 2026, at 5:00 PM, in person at Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom.

1. Call to Order:

The meeting came to order at 5:00 PM. Present were board members, Zoe Kearl, Naomi Miller, Mike Cichanowski, Marlene Hall, Eamon Mulligan, Water Dept. Superintendent Josh Brace, non-voting member Art Whitman, and Town Administrator Paula Iken.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement:

No one expressed a conflict of interest with any item on the agenda.

3. Minutes

The minutes from the November 17, 2025, meeting were reviewed. Minutes could not be voted on due to a lack of quorum but were accepted as accurate and signed.

4. Announcements

Ms. Iken had an announcement regarding new Zoom procedures to prevent people breaking into the meeting. When someone logs into a Zoom meeting, their camera and audio are off. To speak, click the hand raise and the chair will recognize you. She thought there should be a discussion on identity verification where the person provides in the chat their whole name and town of residence. She suggested that cameras never be turned on. Mr. Whitman asked if registration on Zoom was required. Ms. Iken said it was not because it would be an "administrative nightmare". The purpose is to keep everybody safe from obscenity etc. while also being as open and inclusive as possible.

Ms. Kearl said that there will be a Water Board meeting in two weeks, with a presentation by Ashley Luft, who has been reviewing the Town water system. Ms. Luft will have some advice on new billing structures and other comments. Her expertise is provided at no cost as this is a grant-funded program.

5. Public Comments:

There were no public comments.

6. Other business

Mr. Brace gave a Water Dept. update. He will be doing regular media readings this month. Last week, he and the DPW fixed a curb stop on Twitchell Hill. Another curb stop will be scheduled on Holiday Drive. Mr. Brace provided the board with a booster pump station quote. Last year there was an issue with an alarm at the booster pump station that feeds 7 houses. He inspected it, found a water leak and fixed it, but the alarm continued. A company looked at the pump station and identified that both booster pumps needed to be replaced. There were hour meters on the panels which were not connected to the pumps, so the hour meters on the wall did not correspond with hours on the pumps. Wiring and the panels also need to be replaced. Mr. Brace has been delaying the work, ideally until this Spring/Summer. He said there hasn't been an issue yet, and he is going to get an updated quote because the number has likely increased. Along with the refreshed number, he will confirm the scope of work, and items the Town would be responsible for. He gave the information to Ms. Luft as a priority. Mr.

Brace then said the Water Dept. was considering reading quarterly instead of twice a year, using a Neptune device- a pocket reader, tablet, and software. If Arlington and Shaftsbury split the cost, it would be \$3,100 for each town. Each town would have its own software but share the reading equipment. Mr. Brace described the process: He can go up to the touchpads, which both towns currently have, the amount will log on to the tablet, then upload to NEMREC. All that's left is to print the bills. The system also works as a radio, a drive-by system with a 25 MPH restriction, if the Town ever wants to implement radio read meters. Currently Mr. Brace records the amount on paper and inevitably makes a few mistakes. Mr. Brace said the next reading was in July, which gives a little time to consider. He added that the initial setup takes time, and that the Neptune system reads census. The cost is about \$2 annually per customer for the software. He has a budget that he will provide to the board members. Mr. Brace then gave an update on conversations with Ms. Luft. Changing from 2 to 4 readings per year will change the reading structure, and the billing structure. The billing structure will likely be a fixed number instead multiple line items. He said he expects that rates to rise, then asked if there were any questions. Mr. Whitman asked him to explain the current line items that will be eliminated. Mr. Brace replied that the cost of items added up will still be built into the rate structure, but the listed line items, like maintenance fee, bond fee, and other extra charges will be eliminated. There will be one flat fee, like Arlington. In Arlington, the bill is \$155 if usage is under 11,000 gallons. If it's over, there's a per 1,000 gallon charge. All that will be on the bill is the cost for the service. Mr. Whitman thought that the bond amount should remain on the bill because it differs from water usage. He said that if/when the Town gets the water line put in that cost should distributed equally among all users. If it's included with the price of the water, the people using more water would pay a bigger share of the bond. Mr. Brace explained that the current bond is almost paid off and there would be a standard rate for water. Currently, the bond is X amount per person which would remain the same, but it would be in the total amount, instead of broken out. This can be discussed that when the Town needs another bond for a new phase of a project. Mr. Whitman asked if the booster pump replacement would be put on a bond. Mr. Brace answered that it should be included within the current budget that Ms. Luft working on. He continued that the structure is changing and water rates going up. Ms. Kearl noted that the water system is not paying for itself, but it will be fixed, slowly. Mr. Whitman asked if the Town should we be sending out a warning letter. Ms. Kearl said that there was a rate change notice that came out on March 4th that went into effect yet on April 1st. Shaftsbury is going to contact North Bennington about the fact that that notice was delivered less than 1 month before the change went into effect, and the increase was high, a little over a 30%. She continued that the Town isn't ready to deliver any announcements to the public, just because there's more to be worked out, but as soon as things are set, the Town needs to inform the public that water rates will be increasing, and readings will be quarterly. She said the Town want to be transparent, aiming to inform the public at least 90 days in advance of any change. Mr. Brace said he put a synopsis in the town report, noting pending changes, and a rough overview, but not exact numbers. Ms. Kearl noted that system is not making keeping up with its own costs. Ms. Miller said that this means that the actual cost of people's water is distributed amongst all the taxpayers. Ms. Kearl agreed, saying this has been for many years, but the Town is working hard to change this.

7. Review of Action Items

Ms. Kearl said to be ready for the next Water Board meeting, in 2 weeks, with a presentation by Ms. Luft.

8. Executive Session

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to enter executive session to discuss the increased water allocation request that the Town of Shaftsbury delivered to the North Bennington Water System on August 9, 2025. No action will be taken. Ms. Hall moved. Ms. Miller seconded. Motion passed 5-0-0.

9. Adjournment

Ms. Miller asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion passed 5-0-0. The meeting adjourned at 5:18 PM.