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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices

Meeting Minutes

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Water Board

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM on June 17, 2026. Present were Water Board members Zoe Kearl, Naomi Miller, Mike Cichanowski, Marlene Hall, Eamon Mulligan, Water Dept. superintendent Josh Brace, and non-voting member Art Whitman.

Ms. Kearl added an agenda item as #5 Public Comments.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

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

3. Minutes

Minutes from the May 4, 2026, meeting were reviewed. Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to accept. Ms. Hall moved. Ms. Miller seconded. The minutes were accepted without amendment 5-0-0.

4. Announcements

Ms. Kearl started with a summary announcement about a public meeting which may have bearing on the Shaftsbury water system. The State of Vermont is holding a public meeting to provide an update on PFAS testing and investigation work in parts of Bennington and Shaftsbury. This meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 24th at 5.30 PM at the Bennington Fire Department. This information is posted on the Town website.

Ms. Kearl said that the issues of hydrant flushing and fire safety will be discussed under other business because it came up after the creation of the agenda.

5. Public Comments

Corrine Levin said she has come to the Select Board and Water Department numerous times and felt she was being ignored. She went to North Bennington and felt that she got a lot of clear-cut answers, including that not flushing the hydrants could affect chlorine. She stated that the Shaftsbury hydrants have not been flushed. Mr. Brace said that where Ms. Levin is located (on Cleveland Ave.), flushing the hydrant is not going to affect the chlorine residual. When he tested chlorine levels at Ms. Levin's house, it was 0.94. Ms. Levin changed the conversation from drinking water to the safety of the hydrants. Ms. Kearl offered some information regarding the hydrants saying that Mr. Brace said Shaftsbury does not have a current

flushing schedule but that he has flushed several of the hydrants over the course of the past year and the fire department also flushes some of them. Ms. Kearl thought it interesting that the North Bennington Water Department was concerned about hydrant flushing but had never communicated that to Shaftsbury.

Ms. Levin reiterated some of her earlier frustration over not being able to drink water from her tap. Mr. Brace said that would be a conversation with North Bennington because they input the chlorine into the system. Ms. Levin said that flushing the hydrants will help. Mr. Brace disagreed, saying free residual of chlorine leaving the plant is about equal to that in her water. There was some further discussion of documentation of hydrant flushing. Ms. Kearl suggested creating a log to document it.

Mr. Brace spoke to why hydrants are not flushed on an annual basis, which has to do with infrastructure concerns. He said the hydrants are being flushed, just not annually. All the hydrants were pressure tested and flushed for the study for Phase 1 of the main line repairs. He periodically flushes random ones, when there's issues that arise, when there are line breaks, and to get sediment out of lines. He said it's not just what's above ground, also what's below it. Replacement requires excavation; replacing the whole hydrant would be several thousand dollars. There are parts and pieces that break off that can be replaced, and every hydrant touched isn't going to break. But the pipes in the ground are very aged, and even if the hydrant is closed very slowly, there's a water hammer created when you close the hydrant, a shock wave that travels throughout the entire system, that can create issues at joints and fixtures, leaks, and issues in the piping. Mr. Brace also said that flushing each hydrant uses from 15,000 to 45,000 gallons of water. Flushing 20-plus hydrants would cost thousands of dollars that residents would have to pay. It would also lead to more water loss for Shaftsbury through potential breaks and issues due to the aging infrastructure.

Ms. Iken described the plan for infrastructure repair. The Town has a plan to replace the main water lines in three phases. The Town is waiting to hear from the bond bank on a bond for Phase 1. That bond is very favorable. She noted that if you're going to have debt, it's good to have it with no interest. The bond is only for Phase 1, which will probably take a decade to complete. Ms. Iken noted that this is a long-term project, and the Town must manage the debt to try to ease the burden on taxpayers. Fire Chief Joe Vadakin spoke about community fire safety saying that the fire department's SOP for the village, within the hydrant system, is to use the hydrants as a backup. It depends upon its trucks and mutual aid for firefighting. The fire department doesn't "play" with the hydrants because of their age, rarely flushing them. Ms. Levin asked if he was concerned that some of these hydrants may not work. Chief Vadakin responded that he was confident that the hydrants will work if needed, but the fire department doesn't rely on them because of their age and variable water pressure. The fire department's primary plan is to use the tanker trucks. He noted that some hydrants are painted black because they aren't rated for State fire flow requirements. The fire department is not supposed to use those hydrants because it could create a low-pressure system and back drain into the

system. Chief Vadakin said that the current fire safety plan has been effective for many years. They are not going to depend solely on the hydrants, because they don't provide the amount of water for the trucks to work properly. The new truck will have double the tank capacity of the old truck. This will help protect the outlying town of Shaftsbury as well as the village.

Ms. Levin then said that she has talked with numerous people that say they feel that their water lines are leaking because they're getting outrageous water bills and asked if lines were going to be tested. Ms. Kearl said that a water leak test had been done recently and no leaks were found. She offered to send the results to Ms. Levin. Ms. Kearl ran through a timeline of the request for an increased water allocation from North Bennington. (Further discussion in Items 6 and 7).

Karen Mellinger started a conversation on the transparency of water costs. Due to the inability of water bill payments to cover the cost of water, all taxpayers in Shaftsbury share the burden of water costs even if they are not on the municipal line. Ms. Mellinger said she thought it was unfortunate that the water budget was not available at town meeting because it is a town issue. It didn't bother her that water costs were spread across all taxpayers, because it made it easier for the 330 individuals receiving water bills, but she took offense at the fact that, as a taxpayer, she hadn't been made aware of it. She talked a bit about past collaboration between the Shaftsbury and North Bennington water boards and the difficulty of aging infrastructure.

Andrea Bacchi asked Ms. Mellinger if she was saying that the taxpayers of Shaftsbury are not being told that they're paying for something. Ms. Mellinger responded that essentially, yes. Ms. Miller explained that while the water department began to go into significant debt the Town still needed to pay its water bill to North Bennington. That isn't accounted for in the budget that the town votes on at town meeting, so the town isn't voting on the water budget. Payment comes from the general fund. Ms. Miller said it has been mentioned at every Water Board meeting, so it's not a secret. Next year, it will be on the Town Meeting agenda. There was continued discussion around transparency and communication, including possibly hiring someone to work in communications. Ms. Kearl said that it might be useful to create a bi-monthly update that has a list of things that have happened, and maybe every set of minutes from meetings that have taken place could be attached to that email. She thought that it would be possible within the existing structure of the Town without adding cost to the budget and taxpayers. She continued that it's important for the board and for the town to use the resources it has.

Ms. Iken described the efforts underway to return the Water Department to independence. The Town has worked with a consultant, who was paid through a grant, and has developed a 5 year plan that should reverse the current deficit.

6. North Bennington water rates

Ms. Kearl said that on March 4th the North Bennington Water Board implemented a rate increase of \$2.00, up from \$6.50 per 1,000 gallons of water used to \$8.50 per

1,000 gallons of water used. The reason stated was that there are several infrastructure repairs needed, including repairs to the North Bennington diversion dam, well field, pump station, bridge to access to the well field, filtration plant updates, and section of R100 20-year-old transmission main. To repair, maintain, and update their system, they need funds. Although it's North Bennington's system, Shaftsbury will have to pay for part of the cost of upgrades. Shaftsbury pays for upgrades to its system with bonds. One has been applied for. The Town is having trouble getting cleared for that bond, due to significant debt from litigation fees paid when the North Bennington Water Dept. sued the Town of Shaftsbury. The rationale that Shaftsbury pays for North Bennington's water infrastructure to be improved, and North Bennington doesn't pay for Shaftsbury's seems unfair to Shaftsbury ratepayers. She continued that the Town has a significant number of people who do not pay their water bills, and now has the burden of this increased water rate. Ms. Kearl continued that there is an outstanding water department debt that's been accruing year over year for decades, and now that cost is borne across all Shaftsbury taxpayers. The Town pays water bills when they come in from North Bennington. The bill was usually about \$70,000 for 6 months of water. This time, it was \$103,000.00, \$30,000 more, because of the rate increases to improve North Bennington's system. And, because Shaftsbury hasn't been given a water allocation increase, the Town will pay additional fines and fees to the State. The allocation increase was approved on August 6th of 2025, verbally in an open meeting, by the North Bennington Water Department. There is a series of requests dating back 2024 and earlier. All these costs accumulate and result in issues, for example: should we flush a hydrant for the cost of \$10,000 and add to this deficit? The population of Shaftsbury has not increased significantly, the cost of water has. There was some further discussion of the relationship between the water boards, the timeline for allocation requests, and other related issues.

7. Other Business

North Bennington Water Department Chair Steve Goodrich began by saying that they don't set the standards for chlorine. They have equipment that is testing it every 60 seconds as chlorine is being injected. He said that chlorine sometimes sits in the pipe and gets stagnant, and it comes out "quite bad". He agreed with Mr. Brace that it takes a lot of water to flush it out. Ideally the system is looped together, so the chlorine flows like water.

Mr. Goodrich started a discussion of Shaftsbury water allocations with some average gallons/day: 2013: 40,315; 2014: 41,721; 2015: 43,082; 2016: 43,727; 2017: 40,700; 2018: 43,000; 2019: 42,000; 2020: 45,000; 2021: 49,000; 2022: 57,698; 2023: 60,000; 2024: 63,041. He pointed to the spikes starting in 2022 as evidence of leaks. He then said that he had asked for some allocation numbers at the August 6, 2025, meeting, i.e. what the bond bank wants for a number. He said he heard 70,000 gallons and had a statement from the State for 60,000 gallons. Ms. Kearl said the board had a letter from the State asking for 75,000 gallons, had sent a request to the North Bennington Water Department for that amount on September 19, 2024, and

that was the number discussed at that the August 6, 2025, meeting. The letter from the State was forwarded to the North Bennington Water Board by certified mail, but Mr. Goodrich said he had not received that letter. He continued that the water department doesn't have a problem giving Shaftsbury an allocation, but the issue is fixing leaks. The board would like to know how much Shaftsbury really needs for an allocation.

Ms. Kearl said she was frustrated because on August 6, 2025, she was given the same presentation and was told that Shaftsbury would receive this allocation and promised a contract to fix the issue. She said it's difficult to have asked for a resolution for almost a year, received nothing, and then be given the same presentation She thought it challenging for the entire board and wanted to know why Mr. Goodrich hadn't responded for a year.

Mr. Goodrich continued that at the August 6th meeting, he requested information from Shaftsbury's engineer, or whomever felt 70,000 gallons were needed when it was apparent that there were some significant leaks. He was looking for a number that the board could justify, not 75,000 when usage should be between 40,000 to 50,000 gallons. He said the North Bennington water department was trying to avoid chlorinating too much water, having it unused, or having it leak into the ground. Mr. Goodrich said he was willing to come up with a number that everybody was comfortable with and asked if the State would accept 65,000 gallons per day. Ms. Kearl responded that the State said that Shaftsbury needs 75,000 gallons per day. Mr. Goodrich asked for a copy of the letter from the State. He will call that person and ask them how they arrived at that that number. He said it's unfair to both Shaftsbury and North Bennington. There was further discussion of leaks, how to detect them, and the lack of a map for pipes.

Mr. Goodrich then addressed water rates saying that everyone pays the same amount for water. He spoke about some of the history of the system and infrastructure. Mr. Whitman said there were at least two contracts between North Bennington and Shaftsbury in the past that set the water rate at a certain amount. Mr. Goodrich said that he did not know of these contracts and continued that the Water Board has no right to set a contract with anybody or sell water to anybody for less than what everybody pays. Mr. Whitman responded by saying that was not always true. There are two previous contracts that showed that there was a time when Shaftsbury paid less than what other people were paying.

Ms. Levin asked if water was leaking from the main line or leaking from the main line going into people's homes. Mr. Goodrich responded that it's probably leaking in the main line. Ms. Iken commented that this was one of the reasons the Town is replacing the main lines. Mr. Brace said that Shaftsbury hired a professional who spent a week doing an extensive survey using ultrasound to detect leaks in the entire system. He didn't find anything major. Mr. Brace continued that there's a certain percentage of every water system that leaks, 10 or 12% on average is lost. He said that Mr. Goodrich has stated that Shaftsbury has a leak on a mainline without evidence. There's also a discrepancy between Shaftsbury's aging infrastructure and meters, and the new meter that North Bennington has, reading 100% efficiently

every day. He noted that the issue with allocation has been going on for over 11 years. When it first started, the State had requested the Shaftsbury allocation from North Bennington. North Bennington wrote a letter to the State, saying they would give Shaftsbury a portion of the allocation, but not the total amount requested. The State accepted that, even though Shaftsbury was using more water then, and has continued to use more water. Now the Town is in a situation where the State is asking for documentation showing allocation of the 75,000 gallons. North Bennington continues to not give the allocation, even though Shaftsbury is using it, paying for it, and it's not affecting the North Bennington treatment plant.

Mr. Goodrich went back to leaks, recounting that North Bennington had a leak that was running into a basement. They tried 3 times to find the leak with ultrasound but couldn't find it. Finally, they found a document about a connection by the railroad station, dug up and fixed the leak. Ultrasound went over that location 3 times and never picked up the leak. Mr. Goodrich says he prefers isolation pressure test location over ultrasound. Ms. Kearl said it seemed Mr. Goodrich had a lot of knowledge in this area, and asked if he could assist Shaftsbury. If North Bennington has methods that have worked, Shaftsbury would be happy to receive help. Mr. Goodrich said North Bennington would help.

There was further discussion on the allocation letter with Mr. Goodrich saying he would call the State and if 65,000 to 70,000 gallons will satisfy the State, he will write the allocation letter. The board, through Ms. Iken, will resend by email the letter from the State re: 75,000 gallons allocation.

Mr. Brace asked if a notification letter should be sent about the rates, to give ratepayers a heads up, because the plan was to start reading meters quarterly in July or September. He said he would still read meters in July to gather data. The board decided, in consideration of communication and transparency, to start the new quarterly system in September. This will give ratepayers time to read the notification letter and be prepared for the changes.

Mr. Whitman asked a few questions about the responsibility for hydrant flushing and which fund legal fees came from. Mr. Brace said hydrant flushing wasn't a big deal and Zach Bull would help if needed. The funds will be investigated. Ms. Kearl also said that the implication that the board is deliberately hiding the water deficit is untrue. That that information is publicly available at any time, and they can ask Town Treasurer Melanie Dexter.

8. Review of Action Items

Send letter from State to Steve Goodrich, cc North Benn water board and board of trustees and Zach Bull

Send notification letters to water ratepayers re: September start of quarterly reading
Talk to Jen about a bi-monthly newsletter, maybe post on Facebook to try to get more subscribers.

9. Executive Session: Legal, tax sale & water bill

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to enter executive session. Ms. Miller moved. Ms. Hall seconded. Motion approved 5-0-0 and the board entered executive session. The board came out of executive session. Ms. Kearl said that the Shaftsbury Water Board met about the three items that are listed on the agenda. There was no action on these items.

10. Adjournment

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Motion to adjourn approved 5-0-0.