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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 Monday, August 17, 2026, at the Shaftsbury Municipal Offices. Present were Water Board members Zoe Kearl, Naomi Miller, Mike Cichanowski, Marlene Hall, Eamon Mulligan, non-voting member Art Whitman, Town Administrator Paula Iken, and Town Treasurer Melanie Dexter.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

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

3. Minutes

Minutes from the July 20, 2026, meeting were reviewed. Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to accept with a heading amendment removing the word "Agenda". Ms. Hall moved. Ms. Miller seconded. The minutes were accepted with amendment 4-0-0. Mr. Cichanowski had not yet arrived.

4. Announcements

There were no announcements.

5. Public Comments

Shaftsbury resident Gail Morin asked if the Town had a bond of some kind. Ms. Kearl described the loan that the Town had approved by the Vermont Bond Bank but said she did not believe there was a current bond. The loan is for 40 years at 0% interest with payments of around \$22,000.00/year. It is for Phase 1 of the plan to repair Shaftsbury's water system infrastructure.

Ms. Morin then asked who does the repairs. Ms. Iken and Ms. Kearl explained that the Town will post RFPs (requests for proposals). These are opened and read out in a public meeting. No town is required to take the lowest bid, it can consider which contractor is best suited to the project. Ms. Kearl noted that there is a map of Phase 1 on the Town website.

There was a brief discussion of this loan payment in relationship to the budget. No payments are due this fiscal year and payments are included in the water department budget plan recommended by the consultant working with the Town and the Water Dept. supervisor.

6. Discussion of department duties & Quarterly Billing Discussion

Ms. Kearl asked if the board was okay with combining the discussion of duties with quarterly billing since they were closely related. There was no objection. She continued that Josh Brace is moving to a quarterly reading of meters and the Town is moving to quarterly water billing on recommendation of the consultant to improve financials around water. The temporary assignment of delinquent water bill collection to the Town Bookkeeper Tiffany Mays was moved back to Town Treasurer Melanie Dexter. There was a brief discussion of the history of water clerks and delinquent bill collection. Ms. Dexter brought up the pros and cons of different ways to collect delinquent water bills, including door hangers and additional mailings. She went on to discuss the 3 proposals made in July 2025 to

bring down water debt: 1- hire an outside debt collector; 2- ask the delinquent property tax collector to take on the delinquent water bills; 3- have the treasurer take them on. An outside debt collector would have only brought in pennies on the dollar, payment of the delinquent tax collector for the additional duties would have been complicated, and the treasurer could not take on additional duties at that time. The other option was a temporary assignment to the bookkeeper. The result was a 1/3 decrease in water debt, bringing it back to where it had been 3 years prior.

Ms. Dexter continued that there is no way to know how the quarterly billing will affect debt. She proposed a hybrid mailing for delinquent water bills that outlined the delinquency, proposed a payment plan, and used somewhat severe language. This could cut down on postage costs, which are already doubling with quarterly instead of semi-annual billing. There was further discussion on the frequency and efficacy of mailings. Ms. Dexter suggested testing a system of less frequent mailings and doing more if deemed necessary. There are about 50 letters that need to be mailed. Ms. Dexter said that she puts about 350 hours per year on water bills so additional mailings aren't a problem for her, but postage costs increase.

Ms. Morin asked how long people go without paying their water bills. Ms. Dexter said it differed depending on situations. She noted that Shaftsbury as a town is not enthusiastic about putting houses in tax sales for delinquent water bills, nor turning off water to houses that have children in them. She said payment plans only bring in about \$700.00/month, but they get people on the path to repayment.

Ms. Kearl asked if there were further questions or comments from the board. Hearing none, she moved to the next agenda item.

7. Discussion of Next Steps of Phase 1 of Water Pipe Replacement Project

Ms. Iken had an update. She had spoken with Christina Haskins from the Dufresne Group who said the Town will need permits from the railroad and VTrans for Phase 1. Dufresne will take care of this. Ms. Haskins suggested that RFPs go out in November or December, to be opened in January. Project work will probably start late in April or early May of 2028.

8. Other business

Ms. Morin asked if the water pipes go under the "million dollar" sidewalk. Mr. Whitman answered that they came close in some places and some sidewalk may need to be replaced. Most of the pipes are under road. Mr. Whitman said the hope had been to have the work completed before 7A was repaved but that budget restrictions prevented that.

9. Review of Action Items

Ms. Kearl will follow up with Ms. Morin on her questions about the water pipe replacement plan.

10. Executive Session: Legal

Ms. Kearl asked for a motion to move into executive session. Ms. Miller moved. Mr. Mulligan seconded. Motion passed 5-0-0 and the select board entered executive session at 5:24 PM. The board came out of executive session with no actions.

11. Adjournment

Ms. Kearl called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hall moved. Mr. Cichanowski seconded. Motion to adjourn approved 5-0-0. Meeting adjourned at 5:40 PM.