

Special Selectboard Meeting Minutes

September 29, 2025

Present: Pat Harvey, Chad Richardson, and Mike Teetsel

Guests Present: Kristen LaPell, Julie Smith, Rob Gardner, Vic Ribauda, Terry Severy, Nancy Woolley, Mary Fratini, Orca Media, Larry & Lesley Straus, Bruce Jones, Asia Kennett, Kathryn Schenkman, Deb Moore, Steve Hoffman, Jannah Swedick, Tara Murray, Bonnie Wildwood, Russ Jacquith,

Guests Present on Zoom: Orca, Martha Slater, Burma Cassidy Wisner, Brenda Downs, Sarah Wraight, Mickaela Richardson, Ason Despathy, Lori Church, Regina Cahill, Louis Donnet, Erica Koch, Midge Scanlan, Sean, Don & Jean Murray

Pat called the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Pat confirmed the open meeting law conformity.

Prior Meeting Minutes: September 9, 2025 & September 22, 2025, selectboard meeting minutes were approved by the board.

Utilities Operator Update:

- Terry reported all pumps are running.
- He reminded residents that a statewide burn ban remains in effect due to the continued drought conditions.

Grant Updates:

- Kristen filed reimbursement for the Grant In Aid FY25 Project (Lower West Hill): total \$24,632 with \$15,000 reimbursed.
- She is also working on reimbursement for the Bethel Mountain Road Paving Project under the Class 2 Grant. Updates will follow once submitted.

VHI Management Updates:

- Working with Terry and Asia on the operational improvements, they went over the septic plan to install risers for ease of septic access, and a filter was installed to the tank. A camera inspection on the distribution box to the lines was completed by a contractor.
- The front door lock system is now obsolete, so alternatives are being reviewed for replacement.
- The management agreement remains under review.
- Mike asked about a change order document submitted by WLA. Vic explained Wiemann Lamphere Architects contract was amendment to include Civil and Structural additional services and would require review by Dick Robson, VHI Board Member.

Selectboard Updates:

- Jones Mountain Road continuation: Pat reached out to the U.S. Forest Service and Bruce Flewelling on Ancient Roads regarding the road's end location. Information has been received from both sources but is inconclusive. Work is ongoing to support landowners in finding a resolution.

- Grants in process: Transportation Alternatives Program Grant-working with Rochester Outdoor Collective in pursuit of project.
- Municipal Highway & Stormwater Mitigation Grant-possible future ditching projects.
- Better Roads Grant-upcoming meeting with Rita (TRORC) and John Champion to identify potential projects.
- The license agreement between RSUD and the Town for use of classrooms was signed by selectboard chair Pat.

Participation in Multi-Town Community Conversation Organized by Two Rivers

Ottawaquechee Regional Commission-Sarah Wraight: Sarah Wraight, planner with TRORC, attended tonight's meeting to discuss holding a multi-town meeting with Hancock, Granville, Pittsfield, and Braintree. The purpose is to help the Regional Commission update their regional plan through discussions about current conditions, future needs, and visions for the communities.

- The meeting will be a one-time visionary session for "mountainous towns" scheduled for Thursday, October 23, in the former Rochester High School Auditorium, with refreshments provided. A hybrid link will also be available.
- Pat asked why the Town of Stockbridge was not invited to the multi-town discussion. Sarah explained the Town of Stockbridge is not considered as mountainous, but Pat emphasized their connection through the school and importance to Quintown area. Sarah agreed to raise this with her team.
- Regarding how to get the information out to the public, the Board suggested using Front Porch Forum, the newspaper, and the town-wide email to get the word out. Sarah added that surveys will also be distributed for those unable to attend.
- A complaint was received regarding solicitors setting up in the parking lot on trash day, interrupting traffic flow. A letter was mailed asking them to move to the opposite side of the parking lot.
- A junk car complaint has been received and is still under investigation.
- Budget and Finance discussions are underway, including consideration of purchasing a new town truck to replace the Ford F550.
- Ownership of the underground storage tank at the former high school building has been successfully transferred to the town.
- Pat signed a USDA Haynes Project update for \$40,000 in additional funding.

Announcements:

- Kristen noted that the town's Zoom account only lasts 40 minutes, so she will need to restart the meeting if the session time is out.

Approve the August Treasurer's Report: The August Treasurer's report was approved by the selectboard. Motion by Pat, seconded by Mike.

Driveway Permit Application-Keith & Joanne Mills: Driveway permit was approved with conditions from the Road Foreman.

First Response FY26 Appropriation Discussion and Decision:

- Chad reported Valley Rescue has notified the Town they will no longer provide service to Rochester and in fact have not for some time.
- Rochester Fire volunteers are forming Rochester First Response, and Chad proposed reallocating the appropriation to this new service.

- VLCT attorney confirmed this is allowable so long as the funding purpose did not change.
- Chad recused himself from voting as a fire department member.
- Mike moved to transfer funds from Valley Rescue to Rochester Fire and Rescue. Pat seconded. Motion approved.

Cell Tower General Discussion: Pat invited comments limited to latest information.

- Erica Koch spoke, noting:
 1. Alternative ways exist to provide reception without a tower and wanted to know if the board was aware.
 2. She asked how the Selectboard will uphold the Town Plan and bylaws given concerns about violations, including fire hazards, flood hazards, and health impacts.
- Board response:
- The chair stated the selectboard is not forming opinions, making decisions, or lending information until a formal application is filed by Vertex.
- Pat asked Erica to clarify what she meant by “alternative means of communication.” Erica responded by asking if the Town had investigated other options for providing service besides a cell tower.
- Pat replied that the Town is not the party initiating the application and has no interest in pursuing or evaluating alternative methods.
- Mike added that the Planning and Zoning Commission is reviewing these issues and has requested input from the state experts. He emphasized that the commission is seeking more technical expert information to address the concerns raised.
- Pat explained that Planning and Zoning has already raised these concerns with the PUC. She noted all can review the commission’s specific requests to the state by visiting the PUC website.
- Deb Moore reiterated her concerns from the last Planning Commission meeting stating:
 1. Health concerns were raised by the public, but she felt they were dismissed “not germane”. Deb pointed out that the Town Plan specifically emphasizes health and safety, and she believes these factors must be considered.
 2. She also raised concern about fire hazards, noting that lightning strikes combined with drought conditions could put the mountain and the village at risk
 3. She urged the Board to consider the precautionary principle, meaning look before you leap.
- Board Follow-Up: Pat said she would look further into fire hazards related to cell towers.
- Continued discussion followed regarding opposition to the tower.
- No formal action was taken.

Continued Discussion about School Street Traffic: no discussion. Tabled

Discussion About Catering on Town Property-Asia Kennett: Following up on prior meeting discussion, Asia reported she had checked with surrounding towns regarding their alcohol policies on town properties and found they varied widely.

- Board member Chad Richardson worked with Julie, Town Clerk to locate a boilerplate policy that could be adapted to Rochester’s needs.

- Chad proposed that alcohol service be limited to River Brook Park and the Rochester Community Center (former high school building), and only when provided through a state approved caterer.
- He further proposed the Town create a one-time facility use application to be used alongside the facility use policy.
- For events with 25 or more attendees, applicants would be required to obtain additional event insurance coverage and provide for law enforcement presence on site, to be paid by the applicant.
- Chad moved to proceed with creating a town policy on facility use and one-time use. Pat seconded. All in favor-motion approved.

Public Comment-limited to 3 minutes: Continued comments were made in opposition of the cell tower.

Meeting adjourned at 6:38pm

Board went into executive session at 6:48 pm. No decisions were made. Executive session ended at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Smith