

HARTFORD BOARD OF ABATEMENT
Thursday, January 23, 2025
Hartford Town Hall, Room 2 (moved to Room 1)
171 Bridge Street, White River Jct., VT 05001

MINUTES (DRAFT)

Members present: Ken Baldwin; Sara Blood; Lynn Bohi; Lannie Collins; Pat Cook; Mary Erdei; Scott Farnsworth; Don Foster; Ida Griesemer; Nancy Howe, Chair; Susan Kirincich; Brett Mayfield; Mike Morris; Lisa O'Neil, Clerk; Gayle Ottmann; Nancy Russell, Vice-Chair; Brandon Smith; Kim Souza; Ryan Walther.

5:30pm: Nancy Howe opened the meeting of the Board of Abatement (BoA). She provided a brief overview of the Abatement process and procedures.

5:40pm:

Hearing #1: Susan Barrett (Life Estate) & Ralph Barrett (deceased)
Property Location: 361 South Street
Parcel ID #24-89/SPAN #285-090-10243

The Chair opened the hearing and identified the property. Susan Barrett was present (Ms. Barrett's daughter, Robin Messier, attended but did not provide testimony).

Ms. Barrett explained due to the flooding in July 2023 the steep ravine opposite her home behind Cumberland farms washed out up to her foundation. Based upon the recommendation from the Hartford Fire Marshal they moved from their home in November 2023 after living there for 35 years. The Barretts also hired a private engineer to determine if there were feasible ways to mitigate the situation; it was determined it would be cost prohibitive.

According to documentation provided by the applicant, the Fire Marshal indicated they and the property "were in imminent danger and need to move". The applicant has also been advised not to access the property including the land and there is caution tape around the property. When the storage shed was cleaned out the Fire Marshal was present. With the help of Hartford Planning Director, Lori Hirshfield, the Barretts started the FEMA Buyout process. Ms. Barrett referenced and showed a copy of the Valley News article regarding the Buyout process.

Lori Hirshfield provided an update via e-mail to the Clerk stating "*The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) Buyout was approved. Given the landslide conditions the property is undergoing an engineering analysis to determine the best method to demolish the buildings and stabilize the site. The property is several months away from acquisition.*"

Ms. Barrett stated this has been a financial burden requiring them to reside in a rental at \$2100/month for eight months; rent a storage unit for their belongings and continue to pay taxes on a property they cannot access. She has purchased another property in Hartford and is paying taxes on that property as well. Ms. Barrett requested abatement for the taxes she paid in August 2024 (\$804.69) and for the amount due in February 2025 (\$804.69).

Lannie Collins inquired about use of the storage unit. Mary Erdei asked if the buyout covers property taxes. Brett Mayfield indicated he does not think so, but not certain. Lisa O'Neil noted the applicant may have to provide documentation before a FEMA payout. The Chair closed the Hearing.

Ken Baldwin made a motion to go into deliberative session. Gayle Ottmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mike Morris made a motion to abate property taxes paid in August (\$804.69-refund) and those due in February (\$804.69-credit) totaling \$1609.38. Ken Baldwin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Nancy Howe reviewed the revised Hartford Board of Abatement Rules of Procedure drafted by the Clerk using the VLCT template to reflect the legislative changes made at the end of the last legislative session. She highlighted some of the changes to include:

- Purpose section: clarified water/sewer fee language now reads “...*water and sewer charges, interest, collection fees, or any other municipal charges or fees for utilities or services.*”
- Notice section: added notice to taxpayers of class designations. Nancy explained Class designations would permit hearing a group of requests based on an established class rather than individual hearings (the applicant, upon notice of the established class, may opt out of a group hearing). Nancy explained a sample of a class designation might be flooding in an area of Town or a neighborhood fire affecting multiple properties.
- Procedure section: Noted the hearings must be recorded (Hartford has done that in the past), but the recording is now required to be posted for 30 days. We also amended the phrase *tape-recorded* to say *recorded*. We changed the language regarding membership threshold to amend the Rules of Procedure from “*two-thirds majority vote*” to “*majority vote*” of the members.

Nancy Russell moved to adopt the revised Rules of Procedure. Sara Blood seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Nancy Howe noted the Decision Letter has been updated to reflect the legislative changes utilizing the VLCT template. The Decision Letter does not require Board action.

The Chair thanked the outgoing Board of Civil Authority members, Ken Baldwin; Kevin Christie; Mike Morris; Gayle Ottmann; Kim Souza; and, Nancy Russell, for their service and dedication noting they have gone above and beyond and have served the community well. She added, “you will be missed”. A round of applause followed.

Kim Souza made a motion to adjourn. Gayle Ottmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.

Submitted By Lisa O’Neil, Town Clerk