



TOWN OF HARTFORD SELECTBOARD
LISTENING SESSION
Tuesday, September 10, 2024, 6:00pm
Wilder Library, 78 Norwich Avenue, Wilder, VT

MINUTES

JAM Link: <https://www.youtube.com/live/cKcl15sn1AA?si=QolmDMsaq4KxuoaD>

- I. **Call to Order:** Selectboard Chair Mike Hoyt called the Selectboard Listening Session meeting to order at 6:00 pm.
- II. **Introductions:** Selectboard members, the Town Manager and the Town's new Communications & Media Specialist introduced themselves and welcomed the members of the public who were attending in-person and remotely.
- III. **Attendees:** Those attending in-person number approximately 35, while there were approximately 17 remote attendees. In-person attendees included Selectboard members Mike Hoyt, Kim Souza, Mary Erdei, Lannie Collins, Sue Buckholz, Brandon Smith and Ida Griesemer.

Also attending in-person were: John Haverstock, John "JD" Hawks, Joe Major, Alison Clarkson, Becca White, Patti Holmes, Faith DuBois, Barbara Middleton, Tim Fariel, Jennifer Mattern, Tim Thibodeau, Marcy Bartlett, Cathy Melocik, Jonathan Rugg, Sharon Cook, Richard Cook, Christina Dolan, Mary Lou Scelza, Beth Malow, Sara Ferguson, Phil Sargent, Bill Moore, Cathy Moore, Marie Alvin, Bonnie Fields, Nancy Promersberger, Brian Promersberger, Greg Eaton and Anita Drake

- IV. **Discussion:** There followed an extended discussion among all participants, facilitated by Greg Eaton and Anita Drake of Prism Conflict Solutions, about how the Town might improve its communication to the public.

- PRISM has provided these notes from the Listening Session:

Hartford Selectboard Listening Session – Communication

6 – 7:30 p.m. on September 10, 2024

Notes taken by A. Drake and G. Eaton (PRISM Conflict Solutions)

Goals for communication from the town:

- Any communication plan must connect to our values as a town.
- Communication is based on grass roots and doesn't come from the top down. How can we think about pot lucks and other ways to encourage residents to interact?
- Part of the goal of communication is to avoid conflict.
- As local news coverage has decreased, there is an information void. It can be hard to track down information.
- There is a lot of unofficial information out there, which is confusing. People would like a consistent place to go.
- We need to make information accessible – in that anyone looking for it can find it via town outlets. It can then be propagated to the listserv and other outlets.
- Residents want some accountability from town officials. It is hard to have that without information.

Content Requests – What kinds of information?

- Some would like to see policies, procedures and protocols for the various town departments posted on the website
- It would also be useful to see a condensed version of the board meeting minutes on listserv. This existed previously.
- It would also be useful to communicate to the town residents how local government functions— budget process, town meeting cycle.
- There should be more information put out to the public to inform them about the impact of various proposals – for example, the impact on local property taxes of a local option tax.
- There is interest in hearing information communicated from the town regarding safety.

Ideas for how information can be propagated out:

- Is there a point person to ask questions to?
 - J. Haverstock (town manager) indicated that he was happy to be a point person.
- Suggestion that the town could have a phone number people could call to hear the meeting minutes. This would give access to those without computers or smartphones
- Meeting minutes don't give a complete picture of what happens at the meetings. Videos of the board meetings are available on the website
- Parks and Rec Dept. and Bugbee Center are excellent at communication and should serve as a model.
- Hartford Parks & Recreation sends out a newsletter regularly. This includes dates, and links for further information. There is nothing like that from the town.

- Could the town implement a ticketing system for tracking inquiries? And some kind of commitment to respond to residents?
- It would be nice to have a newsroom – a central place to access information.
- Could there be an FAQ – a clear layout of who to contact for specific services?
- Could the town move to a system like VT-Alerts, where people can opt-in to receiving text messages or emails regarding information they are interested in?
- Could there be a robo-calling system for alerts?
- It is currently hard to find the minutes – can they be posted in a way that makes them easily accessible?
 - The website does currently have a “notify me” option for town news, minutes, and agendas.
- How do we help folks that cannot access information online?
 - Mass mailing?
 - A town bulletin board? This could be a place where people can access information by town hall.
- E-newsletter from town manager – this is a way that Windsor is distributing information. Every Friday, an e-newsletter is sent out, and gives a window into what the town is doing. They also make printed copies available at the town hall, and it could be distributed to community groups.
- The mailers from the town regarding town meeting are well received – could we do an annual mailing regarding selectboard meetings? In this way, we could make the calendar more visible and shared.

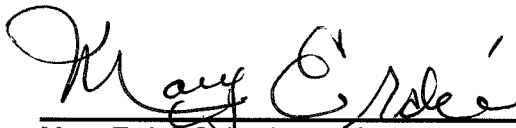
How is the town receiving information from residents?

- Concern regarding the public comment portion of the board meetings being reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes. Sends message that what the public has to say is not important.
- There was a suggestion that the selectboard comment time be limited to three minutes as well.
- There is currently tension in decision making processes. There are decisions being made without getting buy-in.
- When the townspeople are communicating via vote, it does not feel like the town is listening.
- All were receptive to the suggestion that the board hold further listening sessions, perhaps on a quarterly basis

Miscellaneous

- Comments about parking meters, and whether they have already been purchased.
- Comments about public safety, and what is being done about current safety issues in town.
- Comments regarding the police department and outreach officer.

- V. **Adjournment:** Selectboard Vice Chair, Kim Souza made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:36 pm. Selectboard Member Lannie Collins seconded the motion. All Selectboard members approved, and the motion passed.



Mary Erdei, Selectboard Clerk

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