

Approved: February 26, 2024

TOWN OF WINCHENDON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023
Town Hall, 109 Front Street, Winchendon, Mass.

Board of Selectmen Present:

Audrey LaBrie, Chair
Rick Ward, Vice-Chair
Danielle LaPointe
Melissa Blanchard
Barbara Anderson

William McKinney, Interim Town Manager
Mary Calandrella, Executive Assistant
Debra Dennis, Administrative Assistant

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Long road Winchendon Commitment Letter dated December 6, 2023
 - Residents Handouts-Highlights, Protecting Winchendon's Vision, Solar Promises are not certain, and tree information
 - 2024 License Renewals
 - Town Manager Contract-William McKinney
 - Proposed Flag Policy
 - Draft Minutes October 10, 2023
 - Draft Minutes October 23, 2023
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Chair LaBrie called the meeting to order at 7:00P.M. All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. A moment of silence was taken for Fire Fighter Jim Bevilacqua who passed away. Chair LaBrie asked if anyone would be audio or video recording this meeting tonight to which there was no response heard.

1. **SELECTMEN'S COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Selectwoman LaPointe thanked everyone for the interest in participating tonight. Chair LaBrie said on social media I saw they said we have a solar moratorium. She commented we did not vote. It was informational only.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:** There were no public comments or announcements this evening.
3. **PUBLIC HEARINGS: 3.1 – First Right of Refusal –Off North Ashburnham Road**
Chair LaBrie said when the Board opens the public hearing, the first to speak will be the representatives of the solar project. The Board will ask questions. The second will be Mount Grace and Audubon Society who will make a presentation. The Board will ask questions. Then there will be public comments. Vice Chair Ward read the following:

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the provisions of G.L. c. 61, §8, the Winchendon Board of Selectmen will conduct a Public Hearing on **Tuesday, December 12, 2023, at 7p.m.(if inclement weather meeting will be held on Thursday, December 14, 2023, at 7p.m)**, 2nd Floor Auditorium, Winchendon Town Hall, 109 Front Street, Winchendon, Massachusetts, regarding the proposal to assign to a non-profit conservation organization the Town's option to purchase certain parcels of land in Winchendon and Ashburnham, Massachusetts (the "Property") arising under that certain Chapter 61 Notice of Lien for Forestry Land dated December 3, 2014 recorded with the Worcester South

Registry of Deeds in Book 53186, Page 180. The Property is located off North Ashburnham Road in Winchendon, Massachusetts and off East Side Depot Road in Ashburnham, Massachusetts and is identified by the Winchendon Assessors as Parcels 3-0-6 (Town Lot), 3-0-7, 3-0-8 and 3-0-9 (Norcross Lots), 6-0-18 (Esty Lot), 6-0-33, 6-0-59, 6-0-60 and 6-0-61 (Baldwin Lot), 6-0-88, 6-0-89 and 6-0-92 (Pierson Lot), 9-0-26, 9-0-27 and 9-0-49 (Goodale/Tenney Lot), 6-0-85 (Syndicate Lot), 6-0-79 (Perley Lot), 6-0-10 (Wyman Lot) and 12-0-13, 12-0-14, 12-0-15, 12-0-77, 12-0-78 and 12-0-101 (Bemis Lot); and the Property is further identified by the Ashburnham Assessors as Map 5, Lot 2 (Naukeag/Tenney Lot) and Map 44, Lot 42 (easterly portion of Baldwin Lot). The Property is owned by Winchendon Forest LLC (the "Owner").

The Board of Selectmen will consider whether it will assign the Town's option under G.L. c. 61, §8 to purchase the Property to Massachusetts Audubon Society, Inc., a Massachusetts non-profit conservation organization. Any person interested or wishing to be heard on the matter may appear at the Public Hearing at the time and place designated above.

Selectwoman Blanchard moved to open the public hearing. Selectman Ward seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.

Long Road Energy –Cliff Shure, Developer Director Long Road Energy, and Chad Allen, Long Road Energy. Mr. Shure went over a presentation of the potential project. He said the purchase and sale agreement is in place to purchase 1,385 acres of managed timber property exiting Chapter 61 in July 2024.

- Conservation: Committed to permanent conservation or town ownership of 1,000 acres.
- Solar 50MW avoiding emissions equivalents to carbon sequestered by 44,000 acres in US Forests per year.
- Revenue: Forecasting almost \$20,000,000 in revenue to area over 40 years.
 - Chapter 61 roll back taxes \$320,000
 - Property Taxes prior to solar operations \$65,000 a year
 - Operations property tax under PV \$100,000 a year
 - Additional revenue and local employment opportunity if Winchendon operates the project

Total estimated revenue to be more than \$19.5 million over 40 years.

Mount Grace Land Trust and Audubon Society–Sarah Wells Conservation Director at Mount Grace, David Santomena, Senior Land Director at Mass Audubon, and Dr. Jonathan Thompson, Senior Ecologist at the Harvard Forest. Ms. Wells went over the presentation:

- Town can assign it to a conservation organization, which can then purchase the property.
- Asking the Board to assign the towns Right of First Refusal to Mass Audubon and conserve this land.
- Mass Audubon has proof of having the funds of \$6 million dollar purchase price
- The goal of the project is landscape connectivity.

David Santomena, Mass Audubon said ultimately the hope is for Mass Audubon to convey the property to appropriate conservation partners, with most of the property likely to be added to Mass Fish and Game's Winchendon Springs Wildlife Management Area.

Dr. Jonathan Thompson Research Director Harvard Forest-sees the need for green energy. He commented we could meet our clean energy goals without sacrificing land.

Board questions: Selectwoman Anderson Mass Audubon temporarily hold this property partner with Mass Fish and Game Wildlife. David Santomena said the strategy working on in an assisted basis, which

is proposed here. Selectman Ward questioned reaching the goal of greenhouse gas by 2050. Dr. Thompson said it is going to be hard but necessary. Selectwoman LaPointe asked if they envision any other pockets that would work. Mr. Santomena said we have not done an analysis. Our goal is to protect all the land.

Public Comments:

- Wendy Gendron, Certified Lake Manager and Aquatic Ecologist-commented on the impact of the wildlife. She said the proposed solar development impacting the soil and storm water runoff temperatures, which in turn increase wetland and waterway temperature, creating an environment ripe for harmful algal blooms.
- Fred Sellers-Representing homeowners – concern clear cutting affecting the water.
- Gina Gala-Skay- concerned citizen-summarized current small solar farms in Winchendon, eight solar farms. Current acreage almost 130 acres. Sighted on previously disturbed land and minimized the land clearing. We have over 34 megawatts of solar. This solar project would use 400 acres to produce 50 megawatts of solar.
- Ellaine Morose-asking the Board not to be seduced by the 20 million dollars it can bring in.
- MJ Gallant-preserving Winchendon's history land and values. Mass Audubon has the funds necessary and they are committed to preserving the land.

The following concerns were expressed:

- Peter Holsky-major concern issues with solar panels contaminating water.
- David Whitaker- Mount Grace purchase has not come before the Board yet. Protecting the headwaters of Miller's River is crucial. Supports Mount Grace.
- James Harbo-supports Mount Grace. The Board needs to make the right decision for our kids, and our kid's kids.
- Michelle Peterson-impact real estate. Decrease value of properties around the solar farms.
- Molly Velasco-this really matters to the community. #1 resource is the wildlife and the trees. Supports preserving the land.
- Beth Ingham-Mount Grace ability to preserve land. In support of Mount Grace's purchase of this land.
- Jennifer Lafrenniere – asked what happens after 40 years? Clearing metals? Chad Allen said we would be responsible to return the land to the original condition.
- Barbara Zess-beside financial gains-tap into the energy produced. Chad Allen said we could look into that.
- Travis Drudy-we are not going to make out. Detriment to the water and species in the area.
- Ronnie Brewer- taking land and resources and walking away. It means nothing to them except for profit.
- Adam Sherman-Mount Grace and Mass Audubon have our best interest.
- Jill Sackett-importance of Master Plan in the Land Use Chapter. Support will expressed in the Master Plan.
- Liz Wilson-wants the forests to stay, as they are to share with her children.
- Russ Gollen- said he is concerned with soil disturbance.
- Benjamin Cloutier-utilize dams and convert them into hydroelectric dams.

Selectwoman Anderson moved to close the public hearing. Selectman Ward seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.

Chair LaBrie moved to assign the town's right of first refusal arising under that certain Notice of Intent to sell given by Winchendon Forest LLC dated September 5, 2023, to Massachusetts Audubon Society, Inc. a nonprofit corporation, pursuant to G.L. Chapter 61, Section 8, upon the terms contained in that certain Assignment and Acceptance of Right of First Refusal dated December 12, 2023. Selectwoman Anderson seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.

Chair LaBrie called a five-minute recess at 9:52pm.

The Meeting reconvened at 9:57pm.

4. **BOARDS/COMMITTEES/COMMISSIONS/DEPARTMENTS-**There was nothing on this agenda item this evening.
5. **APPOINTMENTS/RESIGNATIONS:** There was nothing on this agenda item this evening.
6. **PERMIT/LICENSE APPLICATIONS:**

6.1 **2024 Board of Selectmen Annual License Renewals-** Chair LaBrie read the licenses that were being renewed and also any issues. Chair LaBrie recommended a three-month renewal for any license renewal that has any outstanding issues. Selectwoman Anderson agreed a ninety-day renewal would be appropriate. The following would receive a 90-day license for Lickity Splitz, Like New Auto Parts, Camelot Farms, and C&S Pizza. The owner/manager of Camelot Farms needs to attend the meeting in March with a viable plan. **Selectwoman Anderson moved the Board of Selectmen approve the renewal of the 2024 licenses as presented this evening with the exceptions of the 90-day notices mentioned previously and also to execute the Renewal Certification 2024 form to the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission. Selectman Ward seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe nay, and LaBrie aye.**

6.2 **New Year's Eve Closing for Section 12 Liquor License Holders-**Chair LaBrie said it has been customary in the past that the Board, acting as the Local Licensing Authority, extend the hours of operation for Section 12 (on premises pouring) liquor license holders until 2:00 a.m. on New Year's Day. **Selectwoman Anderson moved to extend the hours of establishments to extend the hours of operation for Section 12 liquor license holders until 2:00AM on New Year's Day. Selectwoman LaPointe seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.**

7. **NEW BUSINESS:**

7.1 **Discuss/Approve the Town Manager Contract-**Chair LaBrie executed the Town Manager Contract. **Selectwoman Anderson moved to ratifying the vote to hire Mr. William McKinney as Town Manager. Selectwoman Ward seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.**

7.2 **Discuss/Adopt Flag Policy-** **Selectman Ward moved to adopt the flag policy as presented. Selectwoman Anderson seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.**

8. **OLD BUSINESS-**There was no old business presented.

9. **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**-There was no Town Manager's report presented.

10. MINUTES:

10.1 Meeting Minutes:

October 10, 2023- **Selectman Ward moved to approve the minutes of October 10 2023 as presented. Selectwoman Anderson seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.**

October 23, 2023- **Selectman Ward moved to approve the minutes of October 23, 2023 as presented. Selectwoman Anderson seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.**

11. **COMMUNICATIONS:** There was no communications shared this evening.

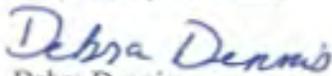
12. **AGENDA ITEMS:** The Board of Selectmen discussed the next meeting will be January 9th unless something comes up that needs to be addressed.

13. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**-There was no scheduled executive sessions this evening.

14. **ADJOURNMENT**-**Selectwoman LaPointe moved to adjourn. Selectwoman Anderson seconded. Vote: Blanchard aye, Ward aye, Anderson aye, LaPointe aye, and LaBrie aye.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11PM.

Respectfully submitted



Debra Dennis
Administrative Assistant