



Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary

March 9, 2022

7 p.m.

Select Board members Present: Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston and Mitch Garnett

Others Present: Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson, Broadband Committee members Sara Bullard, Lee Shane, Misty Darton and Will Darton, Lynn Carroll. Via Zoom: Susan Corbett from the National Digital Equity Center, Broadband Committee member Patience Eaton, Mark Ouellette from Axiom Technologies, Deb Bocko and another unidentified person.

Wes Daniel called the Select Board/Assessor's meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. following some sound issues with the Zoom meeting. He invited Susan to speak about Digital Equity programs and her organization.

Susan Corbett is the executive director of the National Digital Equity Center, a board member for ConnectME Authority, on the infrastructure subcommittee and former CEO of Axiom Technologies. She left Axiom in 2018 to found the National Digital Equity Center, which has so far raised \$5 million to help connect students, low-income people and families, elderly and/or rural populations with internet or technology. The Center has a multi-pronged approach to affordable broadband, affordable equipment, digital literacy education, public computer access, community advocates and broadband adoption that includes a program offering a \$30/month discount for low-income families. The Center looks at communities to see if there is any affordable equipment available and what it is; helps establish digital literacy education ranging from basic email use to using streaming services to privacy and internet safety to business training on Quickbooks. The least common trainings are on using social media.

Susan said the Center also will produce the report with information about availability of public wifi and computers (she noted both are available through Gibbs Library). She talked about the "take rate" (number of households who connect to the system) for broadband internet adoption, and said it's important to know during the construction process. She presented preliminary numbers based on the 2018 census of 580 homes in Washington, of which 483 have computers and 397 have internet access. The numbers do not take into consideration seasonal residents. Based on the average household income of \$50,870 and with 22 percent of households reporting making less than \$25,000 per year, Susan said Washington must be sure to offer affordable options for lower income households.

Digital Literacy classes are offered free to all Washington residents. Gibbs Library already has scheduled several classes (see the library website and town website for classes) and additional options could include aging well, internet safety, identifying "fake news," connecting to telehealth caregivers and more. While the classes are free, residents must sign up – data collected helps the Center determine it is meeting its goal in reaching vulnerable populations.

The free device program requires completion of a safety course. Gibbs Library already is working on the free device program and could offer Android devices, laptops or desktops.

The Center expects to complete its report on Washington in six to eight weeks. Misty Darton volunteered to be the contact person during the information collection process.

Approve Summary of March 2, 2022: Motion to approve summary by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded. Wes made one correction regarding a possible location for a central office for broadband: The tower referred to by Tom on March 2 is the one behind the fire station. Vote on the Select Board summary, as amended, all in favor, motion carries.

Sign Treasurer's Warrants dated March 10, 2022:

P/R Warrant #20: \$6,035.41

A/P Vendor Warrant #21: \$9,787.20

Motion to approve by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Road Foreman Report: Written by Frank Jones Jr. and read by Wes Daniel

2/27: Frank called Steven, David and Jason to plow

2/28: Still plowing; replaced cutting edges on P200 wing and P500 plow; opened up ditch on Hopkins Road

3/1: Worked on P500 headlights; plowed and called Ricky in

3/2: Still plowing, Ricky left at 8 a.m., Steven and David left at 10:30 a.m., Frank left at 4 p.m.; Frank put in salt and waited for Portland Glass to fix P600 windshield.

3/3: Frank called Steven, David and Ricky to plow.

Wes said the P600 windshield could not be repaired in place, as the damage is on the curve of the glass. It will have to be replaced.

CEO Report: None

Health Officer Report: None

Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report: Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson said the checking account balance is \$491,324. Because of the audit, last week, she moved money from checking to designated savings accounts for Road Reserves, Fire Truck savings and Plow Truck savings.

The town report proof was received today (Wednesday).

The First offers a Simple IRA retirement plan for municipalities and Mary will have more information available next week about it. Mitch mentioned a new law mandating employers provide retirement plans and Mary confirmed as of April 2023, any employer with more than five employees will be required to do so.

Other Agenda Items: None.

Other business: Wes said the fire station meeting room needs to be painted. Tom said Don Grinnell volunteered to paint the room if the town purchases materials. Wes made a motion to buy materials, Tom seconded; all in favor, motion carried.

Wes asked what the Board would like to do with town meeting warrant articles 22, 23 and 24 after hearing concerns about wording. He made a motion to delete articles 23 and 24 and amend article 22 to add “in partnership with Axiom Technologies.” Mitch seconded. Tom said when he wrote the articles, he did not have all of the information and felt time pressure to complete the warrant to meet print deadlines. He agreed with adding Axiom to article 22.

Tom said the existing Broadband Committee has done a great job but that article 24 to form a new committee should remain as part of the warrant because it is a different mission for the committee. The original Broadband Committee was formed to explore options, he said, and the new mission is to work with Axiom and Select Board members to create the municipal broadband network. Tom said smaller groups work better together, and work faster. Establishing the Broadband Committee during town meeting also makes it harder to disband, he said.

Tom also argued that the warrant has already been sent out and changing it now by removing two articles might seem strange to some.

Sara Bullard said her biggest concern with the articles is that Axiom was not specifically named. She said the grant spells out the partnership between the town and Axiom and working with Axiom is the only way to accept the grant. Tom said he felt there were assumptions being made and there should not be assumptions on a multi-million-dollar project. Wes said the partnership allows for negotiations. Sara noted the contract terms also must be met or the contract can be terminated. Will Darton reiterated the grant is written as a partnership between Washington and Axiom, which is the only way it can be accepted.

Mitch said the Select Board members can create committees under article 4 on the warrant without needing another article to create a new Broadband Committee. Sara said she didn’t feel comfortable telling volunteers on the existing Broadband Committee that they were no longer needed and asked if the new committee could be renamed as a (Broadband) Oversight Committee. She agreed it is important for the new committee to be smaller, and include people who will be present for meetings and engaged in the process.

After some additional discussion, Wes withdrew his motion. Mitch made a motion to amend article 22 to include “in partnership with Axiom Technologies” and to amend article 23 to change “vendors” to “Axiom Technologies.” Tom seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Tom amended the articles for the warrant and Select Board members signed the amended warrant following a motion by Wes that was seconded by Mitch. Mary certified the warrant and distributed it as needed, including to the printer of the town report.

Questions/comments: None.

Motion to Adjourn by Mitch Garnett, Tom Johnston seconded; all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell