

TOWN OF
TUNBRIDGE
VERMONT

Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes

The Tunbridge Selectboard held a Regular meeting on July 28, 2026 at the Tunbridge Town Office and over Zoom.

Present: Gary Mullen (Chair – arrived around 8pm), Mike McPhetres (Vice Chair), John O'Brien (Clerk), Aileen Lem (Assistant), Becky Hoyt, Michael Miller, Emily Howe, Jen Loftus, Roger Clark, Baxter Doty, Betsy Gaiser, Simon Bradford, Chris Battcock, Jonathan Bicknell, Amy Frost, Fred Pond, Jeff Young, Mike Barnaby, Ken Ashley, James Patterson (Valley News), Sofia Langlois (Valley News)

Call to order

Mike M. called the meeting to order at 6:03pm.

Agenda additions, changes

There were no additions or changes to the agenda.

Public comments and announcements

There were no public comments or announcements.

Road Foreman report (Rodney H.)

Rodney Hoyt, Road Foreman, was unable to attend the meeting. Mike M. provided information on Rodney H.'s behalf. There are trucks that need their taillights replaced. Pickett's, Inc. (Chelsea, VT) started hauling sand and Chase Site Services (Sharon, VT) is continuing to haul granite sand from Barre, VT.

Simon B., Chief of the Volunteer Fire Department, reported that four out of the six bridges are washed. The six bridges are the five covered bridges and Foundry Bridge.

Two truck body quotes were received: Viking-Cives of Vermont, to be delivered by September 30 or October 1, 2027 if they receive an order in July 2026 and HP Fairfield, to be delivered 12-14 months after the date the order is signed. The Selectboard would like to hear from Rodney H. before deciding in case there are options not included in the quotes. Decision tabled until the Selectboard's next regular meeting on August 11.

Mike M. and Gary M. were contacted by a property owner on Dickerman Hill Rd concerned about the work done to install four stormwater diverters, as part of maintaining the road, on and/or affecting their property. Mike M. visited the site but couldn't see the issue. The Selectboard looked over documentation provided by the property owner and asked Aileen L. to schedule a time for the Selectboard to meet Rodney at the site.

Aileen L. reported that the Flint Bridge project RFP is posted. Bids are due August 6 and bid opening is scheduled for the Selectboard's August 11 meeting. In partnership with Vermont Agency of Transportation, Aileen L. has been managing questions from interested contractors, including clarifying the specifications of wood the Town has on hand to use as siding. Repairing the historic Flint Covered Bridge is a grant-funded project.

Discuss support for the Village Trust Initiative non-municipal grant application due Sept 8 (Betsy G.)

Betsy G. updated the Selectboard on addressing the need for affordable housing in Tunbridge, especially for the aging population, and at a scale appropriate to preserve Tunbridge's historic villages. She and others in Tunbridge have been working with state and regional agencies since August 2025, including the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), and Preservation Trust of Vermont. They have also been referring to the Vermont Department of Housing & Development's Vermont Homes for All Toolkit.

Betsy G. and other founding directors (Janet Wells, Nan Frost, Chris Wood, and Sarah Danly) recently incorporated a nonprofit 501(c)(3) through the State called Tunbridge Affordable Housing, Inc. This nonprofit is a Community Land Trust with a mission to create permanently affordable housing and access to community owned land in Tunbridge.

Betsy G. read excerpts from the Preservation Trust of Vermont's page titled *What is a Community Trust* summarizing a community trust as "a 501c3 organization with a locally-based mission to revitalize and sustain resilient and vibrant rural communities. Community trusts respond to needs identified by the community, coordinate with available resources and partners, and pool funds together to help fund community-driven projects. These Trusts serve a variety of needs, often with a focus on supporting local community development, historic preservation, or small-scale housing."

The Tunbridge Affordable Housing Board has been looking at properties in Tunbridge on paved roads (Route 110), in a village setting, and walkable. In this case, walkable means there is flat ground to get out and walk around; however, it could also mean walking access to businesses when properties are in a village setting. Crosswalks and sidewalks may need to be added.

Of these properties, the Housing Board identified an 8+-acre property owned by Stephen and Margaret Willoughby, located in North Tunbridge next to the Tunbridge Grange. The property has potential village green space and potential for a small village water supply. Simon B. mentioned that pond is a main source of water for putting out fires in North Tunbridge. It also fills the skating rink. There is a barn that could be rented out or serve as a small business space. Betsy G. offered tours of the property for anyone interested.

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The Housing Board would aim to buy the Willoughby's property. Ultimately, the Housing Board would own the land and another entity (Betsy G. thinks another nonprofit) would own the buildings. Mike M. asked which party would be responsible for property taxes. Betsy G. didn't know but mentioned the possibility of pursuing an exemption.

The next meeting of the Housing Board is August 6 at 10am at the Tunbridge Library. Anyone who is interested is encouraged to join. They are looking for more board members and can have up to 15 people.

For funding this project, Betsy G. is considering the Village Trust Initiative grant; however, the timeline on acquiring the property is tight and Betsy's contact at the Preservation Trust thinks they may not need to apply through that Initiative. Betsy mentioned applying for other grants. She talked with Maryann Caron about grants as well. John O. said we should come up with a protocol for lending Maryann's time to entities not officially part of the Town. Aileen L. mentioned some grants pay for administration.

Betsy G. provided draft language for the Selectboard to use in a letter of support for the Housing Board's project. The Willoughby's would also sign a letter of support. The Selectboard will discuss in their next regular meeting on August 11.

Discuss feedback on TRORC regional plan in coordination with the Planning Commission due Aug 10 (Amy F.)

Amy F., Chair of the Tunbridge Planning Commission, presented a letter of objection written by the Planning Commission to send to TRORC as feedback on the draft regional plan. At their last meeting, the Planning Commission voted to draft the letter and request the Selectboard co-sign. Feedback is due August 10.

Amy F. explained that a new representative from TRORC came to a Planning Commission meeting in October to present the plan. The plan was not on the agenda, and the discussion at that time was centered around the potential cell tower. In the draft, there is a lot of "shall" and "shall not" language, indicating requirements, instead of advisory language, indicating guidance. John O. asked if the TRORC town representatives discussed or gave input on the plan. Amy F. said our representative, Janet Wells, was aware of the plan, but it wasn't presented in an urgent way.

John O. moved to support the Planning Commission and co-sign their letter of concern to TRORC. Mike M. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Aileen L. will work with Amy F. on edits and on getting Amy F.'s and Gary M.'s signatures. Once signed, Aileen L. will submit to TRORC through their regional plan feedback email.

Set the municipal tax rate (Becky H.)

This year's municipal tax rate is \$1.0700 (last year was \$1.599) and funds what is voted on in Town Meeting (like the General Fund, Highway Fund, Fire Department, etc.). The school

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rate is \$1.7931 for this year (last year was \$1.6661); it is set by the State. For this year's tax bills, the total Resident Rate is \$2.8631 and the total Non-Resident Rate is \$3.0396.

John O. moved to accept the 2026 Tunbridge municipal tax rate as presented by the Treasurer. Mike M. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Decide on Transfer Station hours after July

No one applied for the Saturday Transfer Station Attendant position. Aileen L. will continue to post. Mike B., Transfer Station Attendant, shared that both Wednesday and Friday are busy, and he hasn't heard much negative feedback. The compost is being turned over on a regular basis by the bear(s). The Selectboard supported Mike B.'s offer to put up a solar-powered electric fence while a wooden fence is built.

John O. moved to continue having the Transfer Station open on Wednesdays and Fridays from 4-7pm, closed Saturdays, through the Tunbridge Fair or until we find someone to work Saturdays, whichever is sooner. Mike M. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Approve Justices of the Peace candidates for ballot

The Selectboard approves the Justice of the Peace candidates to ensure they are included on the general ballot; otherwise, Tunbridge would have to send out separate ballots.

Republican candidates: Gordon Barnaby, Jonathan Bicknell, Judy Howe, Helen O'Donnell, Darlene Miller, Benjamin Tucker, Ingrid Van Steamburg. Democratic candidates: Louise Barreda, Amy Frost, Rob Howe, Marybeth Lang, Maureen Moriarty, John O'Brien, Margaret Rogers.

John O. moved to approve Justices of the Peace candidates for General Election ballot as provided by the Town Clerk. Mike M. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Attorney-client communication – executive session

John O. moved to find that premature general public knowledge of communication from the Town Attorney would clearly place the Selectboard at a disadvantage. Mike M. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

John O. move that the Selectboard enter into executive session for the purpose of receiving confidential counsel from the Town Attorney. Joining the Selectboard was the Town Attorney, Sarah Buxton, along with Simon B., Aileen L., and John D., former Deputy Forest Fire Warden.

Discuss Town Forest Fire Warden next steps, possible appointment

Given the discussion in executive session, Mike M., moved to appoint Brenda Field as Town Forest Fire Warden pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §2541 and authorize her to perform all the duties of the office conferred by law, including but not limited to those related to suppression of forest fires, maintaining records, providing notice and reports to the Department of Forests,

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Parks, and Recreation, issuing permits to kindle fires, and appointing deputy forest fire wardens. This appointment is pending clarification on insurance details from the Town Attorney. John O. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Once the Tunbridge Forest Fire Warden appointment is final, the Selectboard will discuss compensation and the possibility of an ordinance addressing enforcement.

Civil litigation – executive session

John O. moved to find that premature general public knowledge of possible civil litigation would clearly place the Selectboard at a disadvantage. Mike M. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

John O. moved that the Selectboard enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing possible civil litigation. Joining the Selectboard was the Town Attorney, Sarah Buxton, along with Aileen L., Jeff Y., and Baxter D., Cemetery Commissioner.

As a result of the information provided in executive session, the Selectboard instructed the Town Attorney to be in touch with the complainant.

Other business

Liquor licenses were approved: Fox Market LLC for August 22, 2026 and Woodbelly Pizza, LLC for August 1, 2026.

Review and approve July 14 minutes

After a few minor edits, the Selectboard approved the July 14 minutes.

Adjourn

Mike M. moved to adjourn the meeting. John O. seconded. Meeting adjourned (unanimous).

Submitted by Aileen Lem

Approved August 25, 2026 by:



Gary Mullen, Chair



Mike McPhetres, Vice Chair



John O'Brien, Clerk