TOWN OF
TUNBRIDGE
VERMONT

Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes

The Tunbridge Selectboard held a Regular meeting on August 25, 2026 at the Tunbridge Town Office and over Zoom.

Present in person: Gary Mullen (Chair), Mike McPhetres (Vice Chair), John O'Brien (Clerk), Aileen Lem (Assistant), Baxter Doty, Jeff Solsaa, Lois Gross, Rodney Hoyt, Andrew LaRosa, Amy Frost, Maryann Caron, John Durkee, Brenda Field; **Present on Zoom**: Michael Miller, Chris Battcock, Ari Lattanzi, Kathleen Berk

Call to order
Gary M. called the meeting to order around 6:05pm.

Agenda additions, changes
There were no additions or changes to the agenda.

Public comments and announcements
There were no public comments or announcements.

Next steps on Town Garage project with Andrew LaRosa
Andrew L., Architect PLLC, walked the Selectboard through a proposal for next steps on the Town Garage project. It includes two approaches. For both approaches, Tunbridge would appoint a group of people with diverse knowledge, motivations, and perspectives to a Town Garage Committee. This Committee would explore current and future needs for a Town garage and the Highway Department in general, including buildings, equipment, and staffing. There are several municipalities in Vermont who are thinking about, have started, or have just finished building a town garage. The Town Garage Committee will visit sites and talk with relevant parties to gather information.

Option 1 is a feasibility study – a comprehensive evaluation of the feasibility of building a garage to meet the Town's current and future needs. This study would be developed by Andrew L. in partnership with the Town Garage Committee to provide information for the community and for the Town to determine whether to proceed with design and construction. Part of this process will include talking with contractors and suppliers to get a sense of options, along with preliminary coordination with state agencies on the environmental impacts.

Option 2 is more comprehensive planning and project definition, which would involve the Town Garage Committee working with an engineering firm, identified through a bid process, as the firm drafts a concrete and specific design. This type of design development is more of an engineering study, and the architect's role is smaller.

Option 2 requires more initial investment (Andrew L. estimated at $40,000-$50,000) than Option 1 (Andrew L. quoted $120 per hour, not to exceed $10,500). The two options can be linear, and we could move straight into Option 2 from Option 1. Or after Option 1, we can pause and plan for the project financially before moving to Option 2.

The Selectboard would like an assessment put together in time to include in the budget and the Town Report for discussion in Town Meeting 2027. That discussion could be the bridge between Option 1 and Option 2. The aim is to begin more comprehensive planning for fiscal year 2028 with completion of the garage by 2030.

Baxter D. suggested seeing the Chelsea garage and wondered if we should concentrate on building a new garage. Road Foreman Rodney H. mentioned Chelsea, Strafford, and Vershire are roughly the same size and agreed that we might want to consider a new garage. If building new, we may want to plan to allow for future growth of the building and/or build as much as possible even if it isn't all insulated since the longer a project takes, the more building costs go up. The plan so far has been to bond the building.

One piece that should be completed as soon as possible is to drill to see the shape of the soil of the site.

Andrew L. left the meeting.

The Selectboard created a Town Garage Committee: Mike McPhetres as chair, Jeff Solsaa, Baxter Doty, Rodney Hoyt, Aileen Lem. The Committee will make progress on determining preferences before a decision is made on Andrew L's role. If the Town decides to contract with Andrew L., we'll want to have a signed agreement clarifying costs and deliverables.

Road Foreman report (Rodney H.)
The Highway Department is close to finishing the grant project on Bicknell; they may need to touch up the sand in some areas. Whitney, Dickerman, and Hanson grant work is also complete. Rodney H. and Rita Seto, Senior Planner from Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), will go out tomorrow to set up for the next grant. Trucks are all running okay; Rodney H. mentioned needing battery for the lawn mower, but mowing is ongoing. A bit more than half of the sand is put up. Rodney will work on getting photos of completed projects to Maryann C., Grants Manager.

Review and adopt Tunbridge LHMP (Amy F./Ari L)
The Tunbridge Planning Commission worked with Ari L., Regional Planner at TRORC, to update Tunbridge's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) which is guided by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements and must be updated every five years. The LHMP helps the Town qualify for certain types of FEMA funds and gives the Town a better rate on the state's Emergency Relief and Assistant Fund (ERAF).

The Town's LHMP expired in June after it had already been submitted to the state, but there is no lapse from FEMA or the state's perspective as the state had a backlog.

Adoption of the plan means the Selectboard and the Town commit to hazard mitigation and to working towards the goals of the plan. Changes may be made without re-adoption. It is recommended that the Town review the LHMP annually to evaluate progress. This can be done at the same time as updating the Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP). The LHMP should also be reviewed when the Town Plan or the bylaws change. The LHMP should be updated three months after a federal disaster declaration that affects Tunbridge. If all goes well with adoption and approval, the LHMP will expire in August or early September 2031. The Planning Commission will begin to work to update the LHMP in 2030 to allow for substantial public engagement.

TRORC is not aware of any penalties in place for not meeting the actions in the LHMP. If applying for a grant, it helps to have the project linked back to a priority in the LHMP.

The Planning Commission and Tunbridge Emergency Manager and Coordinator took public comment and scored natural hazards based on how likely they are to occur in Tunbridge. The top concerns ranked 1-5 are: (1) Drought; (2) Flash flood, inundation flood, fluvial erosion, landslides; (3) Severe wind; (4) Severe ice / snow; (5) Extreme heat. Other hazards can be addressed, but they aren't a focus in the LHMP. Each prioritized hazard has at least one corresponding mitigation strategy for 2026-2031. The overall goal is to "reduce injury and losses, including loss of life and to infrastructure, structures and businesses from..." each natural hazard. Climate change is addressed in discussion of specific hazards and future vulnerability.

The LHMP includes information on what Tunbridge already has in place, along with specific mitigation actions, including developing communication plans, developing a road captain program, finding sources of water for fire-fighting or to provide water to residents who lose their potable water supply, applying for BRIC funding to mitigate landslides on Strafford road, looking into warming and cooling shelters.

Federal funding for disasters seems more uncertain than ever. There are municipalities setting funds aside for disaster response. Tunbridge can coordinate fund priorities with priorities in the LHMP.

Mike made a motion to adopt the Tunbridge LHMP. John O. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Aileen L. will get the signed resolution to Ari L. who will post on the TRORC website once approved. Aileen L. will post on Tunbridge's website once approved.

The Planning Commission will begin work on the Town Plan due to be updated in two years.

Bell Atlantic/Verizon Wireless Certificate of Public Good for changes to existing cell tower (Amy F.)

The work described in the Certificate of Public Good for Verizon wireless involves updating existing wireless equipment on a utility pole on Route 110. The work won't add height and should improve signal quality. The wireless equipment was added to the utility pole in 2017 to help improve signal, especially for emergencies on the Fairgrounds. It is possible to designate certain emergency numbers to take priority when the network is clogged. Amy F., chair of the Planning Commission, would like this information added to the Cell Tower page on the website. Aileen L. will have it updated.

There is no update on the Vertex cell tower proposal, which expired in October 2025. The Planning Commission is expecting the proposal won't stay dormant as a similar proposal in the Town of Rochester was updated and submitted multiple times before going through.

Flint Bridge next steps

Maryann C. spoke with the state and, if the Selectboard would like to move forward with the bid from contractor Randall Hoyt LLC, the state will need the contractor to complete the pre-qualification form that was included in the bid documents. Maryann C. also asked if the Selectboard was comfortable receiving a lump sum bid from the contractor even though the RFP asked for an itemized bid. The Selectboard is fine with the lump sum bid and would like to move forward with the contractor provided they are approved by the state. Maryann C. will coordinate with Aileen L on being in touch with Randall Hoyt LLC.

The grant deadline for the Flint Bridge project was December 2025; however, because of delays at the state level, they provided the Town with an extension until the end of December 2026. Given the current timing, Maryann C. will ask the state if they are open to providing another extension.

Aileen L. will add this project to the agenda for the next meeting.

Contract for LED lighting update on Town Office, HVAC contract may also be ready

TRORC is managing the Town's MERP grant and awarded the bid for the Town Office LED lighting upgrade to Energy Management Consultants. The bid to upgrade the Town Office HVAC has not yet been awarded by TRORC.

Mike M. made a motion to accept the contract for the Town Office LED lighting upgrade. John O. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

For Town Hall work covered by the MERP grant, the weatherization is close to complete. The electrical upgrade can be done, but the full HVAC upgrade can't be done due to the inability to completely weatherize the roof. TRORC suggested the Town consider upgrading the electrical and then HVAC in the basement only.

The Selectboard approved Maryann C. having TRORC put out RFPs requesting bids to update the electrical in the Town Hall and HVAC for the basement. If the Town would like to do upgrades to the Town Hall not covered under MERP, like replacing windows and fixing the roof, it's possible to use the money in the Special Projects Fund. Maryann C. confirmed her time is not covered by grants that TRORC manages.

The Selectboard approved Gary M. to sign the 2026 Small Scale Local Highway Improvement Program (HSIP) grant memo that Rodney H. confirmed was correct. The Road erosion inventory is complete and TRORC is sending a report that will be shared.

Non-town orgs using Grant Manager's time
In the past, Maryann C. would notify the Selectboard of requests of her time and the Selectboard would approve or deny. So far, the Selectboard approved Maryann working on grants for the Fire Department, Cemetery Commission, and Historical Society, although the Historical Society didn't end up needing her help.

There are two outstanding requests for Maryann C.'s time from non-Town organizations: The Tunbridge Affordable Housing Trust and the Tunbridge Grange. The Selectboard does not want to authorize public funds to be used for private organizations. However, Maryann C. is free to work for these organizations on her own time. Maryann C. will let the Tunbridge Affordable Housing Trust and the Tunbridge Grange know.

Aileen L. will write up a draft clarifying which organizations and groups are Town organizations and the relationship between the Town and organizations like the Fire Department and the Library. They will send to Maryann C. and the Selectboard for review.

Updates to mowing and landscaping quote
Devin Cilley quoted $285 to remove sumac and other trees/plants from the exterior of the Town Office building/foundation, pathways, and fence, including disposal at the Town Garage in coordination with Rodney.

Mike M. made a motion to accept Devin Cilley's quote. John O. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Town Fire Warden and Deputy stipend
The Selectboard reviewed a summary of stipends compiled by Aileen L. from the 2026 Town Report and suggested stipends for the Town Forest Fire Warden and Deputy Town Forest Fire Warden along with the Emergency Management Director and the Emergency Management Coordinator all similar to the Health Officer stipend.

Mike M. made a motion to pay the Town Forest Fire Warden an $800 annual stipend and the Deputy Town Forest Fire Warden a $600 annual stipend effective fiscal year 2027 as Brenda shared that one position was required by statute. John O. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Mike M. made a motion to pay the Emergency Management Director and the Emergency Management Coordinator each an $800 annual stipend (totaling $1,600 annually) effective fiscal year 2027 as Brenda shared that both positions are required by statute. John O. seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Other business
Aileen L. updated the Selectboard on office operations, including development of a road closure notification process, the ongoing migration to Sharepoint, addition of a phone line and email address for the Assistant, and work cleaning up with website. It was decided that Aileen L. would attend the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) annual meeting as the voting representative for the Town. Aileen L. confirm the Town would be closed on Labor Day, Monday, September 7.

The Selectboard approved a liquor license for Blood's Catering & Party Rentals on September 5, 2026.

Mike Barnaby is out on Friday, so the Town needs coverage at the Transfer Station or messaging to close. Aileen L. will call Roger Clark in the morning and connect with Mike Barnaby on coverage.

Aileen L. will follow up with Treasurer Becky Hoyt on the protocol for the Tunbridge Area Cats fund to ensure the Town isn't put in a position to cover funds for the program.

Review and approve July 28 site visit minutes and regular meeting minutes for July 28 and August 11
After minor edits, the Selectboard approved the minutes for July 28 and August 11.

Adjourn
Mike M. moved to adjourn the meeting. Gary M. seconded. Meeting adjourned at 21:03pm (unanimous).

Submitted by Aileen Lem
September 8, 2026
Approved ~~[Month DD, YYYY]~~ by:

Gary Mullen, Chair

Mike McPhetres, Vice Chair

John O'Brien, Clerk