

**TOWN OF WILLISTON
OLD BRICK CHURCH TRUSTEES
MEETING MINUTES
January 29, 2024**

*Track changes were amendments made at the March 6, 2024, meeting prior to approval.

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Butterfield (Chair), Marge Butterfield, Sara Fitts-Pratt, and Lauren Koumjian
ADMINISTRATION: Bruce Hoar, Director of Public Works; Erik Wells, Town Manager; Erin Dickinson, HR Coordinator & Assistant to the Town Manager; Shirley Goodell-Lackey, Director of Finance & HR
ABSENT: Alice Beisiegel
OTHERS PRESENT: Nancy Brooks, Peter Brooks, Andrew Davis (SAI Communications), Suzanne DeJohn, Louis Hodgetts (Dubois & King), Lisa Howson, Stephanie Hutchins-Robitaille, Michael Isham, Lisa Jordan-Shook, Veronica Jordan, Chapin Kaynor, John Marcotte, Cindy Marcotte, Ginger Morton, Michele Morton, Jenny Norbut, Joyce Oughsten, Kurt Oughsten, Brenda Perkins, Stephen Perkins, Phyllis Phillips, Anthony Robitaille, John Shook, Joe Touchette, Helen Weston, and David Yandell

Call to Order

The meeting was convened at the Beckett/McGuire Meeting Room, 7900 Williston Road, Williston, VT 05495. Chair John Butterfield called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Public Comment

Chair Butterfield announced that later in the meeting, there would be a presentation on the proposed Verizon Cell Phone Repeater Project and encouraged those who would like to comment on the project to do so following the presentation. No additional public comments were made.

Approval of Draft December 4, 2023 Meeting Minutes

The draft minutes of the December 4, 2023, meeting were presented for approval. A motion was made by Marge Butterfield and seconded by Sara Fitz-Pratt to approve the minutes as presented. The Trustees voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

Update on Old Brick Church Fire Suppression System Project

Town Manager Erik Wells reported that the design of the proposed fire suppression system is near completion. A vote to approve an amount up to \$400,000 for construction of the system will be included on the March 5, 2024, ballot.

Information Session with Regarding the Proposed Verizon Cell Phone Repeater Project

Project Description:

Andrew Davis (SAI Communications) and Louis Hodgetts (Dubois & King) provided a presentation on the proposed Verizon Cell Phone Repeater Project, highlighting the following key points:

- Verizon has identified that the Old Brick Church is the ideal location for a cell repeater to address current dead spots in the historic village and surrounding area. They also noted that the steeple of the church is new construction, which makes it a desirable existing structure.
- Verizon prefers to utilize existing structures for new cell phone repeaters, rather than building new towers.
- Verizon had explored the Williston Federated Church as a possible location, previously, but were unable to pursue it due to the size limitations of the space.
- Antennas would be installed in the bell tower of the Old Brick Church. New, non-radio frequency attenuating louvers would replace the existing wood louvers where the antenna elements are located.
- The installed system would not impact the function of the church bells.
- A new equipment room would be constructed at the rear of the church.
- Equipment cooling would be facilitated with heat pump split systems.
- Backup electrical power would be provided by batteries. Provisions for longer term power outages would be addressed by a portable generator.
- Electrical conduits would run on the outside of the building or in the attic. No conduit would be visible inside the church basement or sanctuary.

Following the presentation, members of the public provided comments covering several topics, predominantly falling within the following themes:

- Concerns about noise level that could be produced from Verizon equipment.
- Concerns regarding impacts on the historic nature of the building.
- Questions about why Verizon was not considering alternative locations that would not involve a historic structure.
- Suggestions for alternative locations to be considered, including the Town Hall, Fire Station, Town Hall solar field, Police Station, etc.
- Concerns were raised about the possible impact on future building accessibility options if equipment room is built.
- Potential health impacts from radio frequency emission and concern of the location being close to an elementary school.

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- Many against the project stated they were not against Verizon as a company, but against using the historical structure for the purpose of the cell phone repeater equipment.
- Support for the project from residents that would like better cell coverage.

In regard to some of the larger themes of concern, below is information provided by Davis and Hodgetts:

- The equipment would generate minimal noise, comparable to that of a small generator or residential A/C unit. They noted similar noise levels from external equipment at a nearby dentist office.
- The installation of equipment would minimally affect the historical integrity of the building, as it would be housed within an area of the church that was previously reconstructed following a lightning strike/fire several years ago.
- Verizon conducted a thorough evaluation of the historic village and determined the Old Brick Church as the ideal location to address service dead zones in the area. However, though it is the preferred site to maximize coverage, they indicated readiness to pursue alternative locations if the project does not proceed.
- They explained that, within populated areas, placing equipment in an existing structure aligns with various considerations such as zoning regulations and resident aesthetic preferences for not having a tower within a village area.
- Regarding frequency and health impacts, the presenters assured compliance with Federal Communications Commission regulations and standards.

In terms of next steps, Chair Butterfield explained that the Trustees will consider the proposed Verizon project and decide on their recommendation to the Selectboard at their next meeting to be held on March 6, 2024.

Other Business

No other business was discussed.

Next Meeting

The next Old Brick Church Trustees meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 6, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. Due to anticipated public attendance, the meeting will be held in the Beckett/McGuire Meeting Room, 7900 Williston Road, Williston, VT 05495, rather than in the Old Brick Church basement.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Butterfield
Chair - Old Brick Church Trustees