

Town of Westmore

Municipal Building

30 Hinton Hill Rd

Westmore, VT

April 22, 2026

9:30 AM

Special Selectboard Meeting Minutes

In attendance in person: David Stevens, Bill Perkins, Miriam Simonds, Isaiah Casey, Jason Petrarca, Elaine Cashin, John Zimmer, Robert Kennedy, Russell Curtis, Kimball Johnson, Lillian Young, Meg Carter, Jason Midthune, Chris Veregas, Carol Davis, Harry Fromm

Via Zoom: Carol Casey, Kelly Casey, Laurie Lakin

No Additions to the Agenda

Act 181 - Consideration by the Selectboard

The Selectboard discussed Act 181 with differing perspectives on the current status and appropriate response. One board member noted that the road building portion had been abandoned and questioned whether additional action was necessary. However, another member argued that the entire Act 181 should be repealed, citing concerns that Tiers 1 and 2 contained problematic provisions that were pushed through without adequate community input and despite the governor’s veto being overridden. After discussion, the board decided to take a formal position.

Motion: Jason motioned and Isaiah seconded to write a letter no longer than one page stating that Westmore is in support of repealing the entire Act 181. Motion passed.

Westmore Fireman's Association

The Selectboard conducted an extensive discussion regarding concerns about the current capabilities of the Westmore Fire Department. The discussion was prompted by letters from community members, including Kimball Johnson (founder and life member of Westmore Fire Rescue) and Iggy Pike (former chief who recently resigned), raising questions about the department’s operational readiness and ability to provide adequate public safety services.

Background and Concerns Presented

Kimball Johnson outlined the department's 25-year history and emphasized his continued support for the organization while expressing serious concerns about current operational capabilities. He detailed administrative improvements that had been made, including restoration of 501(c)(3) status, updated tax filings, and improved bylaws through community volunteer

efforts. However, Johnson stated his belief that the current team cannot effectively respond to fire calls and perform firefighting operations safely.

Johnson presented several specific concerns: lack of proper training protocols, absence of pump certifications and ladder certifications, inadequate response times and cultural issues within the department. He proposed that the department be placed on stand-down status to allow for comprehensive retraining while Orleans Fire Department provides coverage through a contracted arrangement.

Fire Department Response

Current department leadership, including Jason Midthun and Secretary Meg Carter, defended their recent progress and operational readiness. They reported having conducted regular monthly meetings, implemented training programs, enrolled five members in regional fire school for the upcoming weekend, and established mutual aid agreements with Charleston Fire Department for automatic response to fire-related calls.

The department representatives emphasized that they have been responding effectively to calls over the past two years and have made significant equipment upgrades since receiving previously withheld town appropriations. They noted their focus on rescue calls, which comprise the majority of their call volume, and highlighted their investment in new medical equipment and trauma kits.

Newark Fire Chief Lily Young provided context on mutual aid operations, explaining that automatic mutual aid agreements are standard practice and that departments routinely rely on neighboring departments for support. She confirmed that Westmore's current turnout gear, while dated to 2009, meets acceptable standards, and that their SCBA equipment requires routine hydro testing but remains serviceable.

Technical and Safety Considerations

Discussion revealed that current department members have varied certification levels. Some have combined Level 1 and 2 firefighter certification plus wildland fire training, while other members have emergency vehicle driver training and wilderness first responder certification. The department acknowledged needing to update equipment and complete additional structural firefighting certifications.

Chief Young confirmed that not all Vermont fire departments require Firefighter 1 and 2 certifications, and that challenge exams are available for experienced firefighters. She offered ongoing training support and emphasized the strong mutual aid community available to assist Westmore.

Liability and Legal Concerns

The Selectboard expressed significant concern about liability issues, citing examples of major lawsuits against volunteer fire departments in other states where inadequate training or

procedures resulted in firefighter injuries or deaths. Board members emphasized the importance of comprehensive agreements and regular oversight to protect both the town and department members from legal exposure.

The current agreement between the town and fire association was noted to be only two pages long and lacking in specific performance standards and accountability measures. The need for a more detailed contract with clear training requirements and regular reporting was discussed.

Insurance and Service Coverage Implications

A community member raised concerns about homeowners insurance requirements, noting that properties must be within five miles of a fire department for coverage. Orleans Fire Department is approximately 10-12 miles away, while Charleston is 9.2 miles distant, potentially affecting insurance eligibility for residents if local fire service were discontinued.

Proposed Solutions

Multiple options were discussed, including: maintaining current operations with enhanced mutual aid support; contracting with Orleans Fire Department for primary coverage at an estimated cost of \$20,000 for eight months; implementing a hybrid approach where Orleans provides coverage while Westmore rebuilds capabilities; and establishing a more comprehensive oversight and training program.

The board acknowledged the dedication of current volunteers while expressing concern about immediate public safety coverage. The discussion emphasized that any decision should provide adequate protection for residents while allowing the fire department opportunity to address training and equipment deficiencies.

Proposed Executive Session: Contractual Obligations Westmore Fireman's Association under 1 VSA 313(a)(1)(A)

David stated that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage:

Motion: Jason motioned and Miriam seconded under 1 VSA 313(a)(1)(a), to move to executive session at 11 AM. Motion passed.

Motion: Jason motioned and Bill seconded to leave executive session at 11:20 AM. Motion passed.

Motion: Jason motioned and Isaiah seconded to table any final decision pending legal review with the town lawyer to occur in the next 7 to 10 business days, with a final disposition coming at the next regularly scheduled duly warned meeting on May 4th, pending lawyer availability. Motion passed.

The board thanked all participants for their input and emphasized their commitment to finding a solution that ensures both public safety and support for the volunteer fire department.

Jason motioned and Isaiah seconded to adjourn at 11:25 AM. Motion passed.

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Prepared by Elaine Cashin; ClerkMinutes 

David Stevens  _____

William Perkins  _____

Miriam Simonds  _____

Isaiah Casey  _____

Jason Petrarca  _____