United of Winchester
Ad Hoc Water Level Committee
February 15th, 2024 – 5:00PM
Town of Winchester Town Hall
338 Main Street – 2nd Floor – Probate Conference Room
MINUTES

1. Call to Order/Roll Call
Chair Willard Platt calls the meeting to order at 5:01PM. In attendance are committee members Jen Perga, Andrew Champagne, and Ellen Babcock. Also present are Lance Hansen (Town Planner), Geoffrey Green (Asst. Town Planner and ZEO), Jim Rollins (Director, DPW) and David Batista (Engineer/Representative Haly Ward).

2. Approval of Minutes
January 25th, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes:
A motion to accept the minutes of the January 25th, 2024, Ad Hoc Water Level Committee is made by Andrew Champagne. The motion is seconded by Ellen Babcock and the motion is unanimously approved by the committee.

3. New Business
Discussion with engineer David Batista about draw down level issues on Highland Lake and a mysterious water run-off issue pertaining to 25 Boyd Street. Water at 25 Boyd Street just appeared out of nowhere and quickly. Once it began coming into the building it was never clear where the water was coming in from. Could a pipe from penstock be open? If the H2O gets in, it could be blocked off or plugged. Without anywhere to go, the water could just flow right into the basement of 25 Boyd?
David Batista leads the discussion, aided by old Sanborn Maps. Using new and old maps of the problematic site, Batista narrows down possible ways and places in which water might be making its way from Highland Lake to the basement of 25 Boyd Street. Hypothesizes that perhaps one of our town’s historical floods had a hand in tearing out a bridge (once perpendicular to Boyd Street) and/or plugging a section where the bridge once was. Flooding can move the landscaping of an area and thus, water patterns of water run off also fluctuate. Following significant rainfall or deep draw, river flooding causes water to fill the penstock and due to this “plugging” issue, the water has nowhere to go, and this could be the cause of flooding and further, the bigger picture, Highland Lake deed draw levels are not reaching normal low levels.

Interesting little puzzle, which will involve lots of intricate detective work to locate and determine how water is getting in.

Jim Rollins reports that he and his crew searched endlessly to no avail, for ways that the water could be entering Boyd Street. Mentions a peculiar rock that seems to have been intentionally placed in an upright position on the property. Secret passageway? Cavities through which water flows into basement?
Move the rock and send a camera behind it to track water flow.
Each year, more water is getting into the building. If we don’t fix this soon, Highland Lake will move further from where it needs to be for deep draw levels. This is the ultimate problem!!!!

Tools to help remediate Boyd Street Mystery: Review historical documents, surveys, ground penetration radar, use of small cameras. Mini excavator. Obtain permission from property owners. Inject a color dye into run-off stones to help pinpoint location of water entrance/exit.

Budget? We will need funds for this project. Clear documentation to support funding for Board of Selectman. This problem was manageable until we began receiving 50% more yearly rainfall. It is no
longer a problem considered to be “manageable” per Jim Rollins. Is it the town's right and responsibility to fix and/or manage? The state's problem? Property owner? Public funding on a private site? Creates a tangled web of questions and all these factors play a role in decision-making for funding.
Financially, Jim Rollins has some money ($4,000 in engineering until June 2024) to help fund this project. However, Town Planner Lance Hansen will need to request further funding (approximately $10,000) through budgeting and BOS approval.
Top 3 hurdles to overcome: Make this project a top priority - get going and keep going. Use the funding we currently have (per Public Works/Jim Rollins) to begin narrowing down Boyd Street problematic water entrance/exit options. Need the temperatures to remain above freezing, consistently. Hold off on contact with the town attorney until we have some clearer answers. Eliminate “low hanging” obstacles first. This is NOT an overnight fix.

David Batista intends to create a visual of the mysterious and problematic flooding site using a combination of old and new Sanborn Maps.

Committee member Ellen Babcock will put together a monetary request with supporting documentation for the Board of Selectman.

4. Old Business
5. Other Business
6. Adjourn

No motion made. The meeting adjourned at 6:15PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Lauren Dombrowski, CCTC
Asst. Town Clerk, Town of Winchester
Board Clerk