

THE MILLER'S RUN



Wheelock Community Initiative <https://wheelockcmty.org/> **Email** wheelockcmty@gmail.com
Facebook <https://bit.ly/3weRn94> **Phone:** 802-626-3109, leave message



Information is posted for these meetings and other notices on the Town Hall message boards and at <https://townofwheelockvt.org/>

WHEELOCK SELECTBOARD

- * **Monthly Meeting**
TUESDAY Jan. 4, 6:00 pm
Additional Meetings Possible
To Plan for Town Meeting

TOWN HALL ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT Committee Meeting

- **MONDAY Jan.10, 6:00 pm**

FOR ALL MEETINGS

In Person: Wheelock Town Hall
Masks/social distancing advised

By Phone: +1-646-558-8656
Meeting ID: 810 8003 1813
Passcode: 055553

By Zoom: <https://bit.ly/3DFnbXt>
Meeting ID: 810 8003 1813
Passcode: iN9YcK

Selectboard News and Notes

In addition to the regular monthly meeting, the Selectboard scheduled three additional meetings (12/9, 12/16, and 12/20) to draft the 2022 town budget, as well as the articles for the 2022 Town Meeting warning (see update below).

The road crew outlined plans for 2022 activities focusing on fleet maintenance and ways to improve their ability to communicate in the town's cellphone "dead spots." Ditching and culvert projects in summer 2022 will be aided by submitting a \$20,000 "Better Roads" grant proposal.

Governor Scott recommended that the Vermont Legislature pass legislation giving municipalities the authority to adopt face covering policies ("mask mandates"); it passed on November 22 and he signed it into law the same day. Noting that Wheelock does not have the ability to enforce it, the Selectboard declined to approve a face covering policy.



Selectboard:
Ann Lawless, Chair
Jim Blackbird
Michael Richardson

Wheelock Town Meeting Update

At the Selectboard's regularly scheduled meeting on December 7, members agreed to table a decision about how and where to schedule the 2022 Wheelock Town Meeting until the Selectboard's January 4th meeting. The Vermont Legislature reconvenes in early January and is expected to consider legislation allowing municipalities flexibility with Town Meeting plans similar to last year. Last year towns were allowed to replace Town Meeting with Covid-safe voting, warm-weather gatherings, and/or secret Australian balloting.

Town Clerk Vanessa Seguin

Office Hours: Tues. 12:00-5:30; Wed./Thurs. 9:00-2:30
Email: wheelocktown@gmail.com
Phone: 802-626-9094
P. O. Box 1328, 1192 Route 122, Wheelock VT 05851



Residents who helped fill the Holiday Food Drive boxes!



Cemetery Taskforce Reports



The Cemetery Taskforce reported on their 2021 clean up work and research at the Selectboard's 12/7 meeting. The Taskforce will also provide a summary in the Town Meeting annual report.

Five of the 10 Wheelock cemeteries are considered public: West Wheelock, Sulfur Springs, South Wheelock, Drown, and the Village cemetery. The Taskforce and other **volunteers** inspected all five and took care of the more pressing needs in West Wheelock. The town's cemetery fund accounts contain roughly \$21,000, so the Taskforce is not recommending any appropriation in the 2022 town budget other than the usual mowing contracts. The cemeteries need significant attention requiring resources, so the Taskforce will clarify how these funds can be used to address them.

ARPA Funds for Wheelock

Wheelock's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) \$246,912.91 appropriation must be committed no later than 12/31/24 and expended no later than 12/31/26. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns advises towns on how to manage these extraordinary new resources. Project suggestions include improving the fire district water system; digitizing town records; **accelerating the broadband project**; reducing taxes; and expanding Town Hall to safely hold community meetings. The Selectboard is interested in calling together a citizens' committee to consider these projects and other options for using these funds.

NEK Community Broadband Update

NEK Community Broadband, the communications union district (CUD) set up to **improve internet access in the Northeast Kingdom**, is a new type of municipal entity in Vermont. This 50 member district includes Wheelock and many NEK towns with poor Internet access. The CUD is building **fiber-optic Internet access** with capacity exceeding most of the currently available services. Each town appoints one representative (David Stahler) and one alternate (Steve Amos) to the Governing Board, which is developing the publicly-owned network. Evan Carlson (Sutton) is the board chair and the Executive Director is Christa Shute, Esq., a Northeast Kingdom native with a solid history of working in telecommunications.



During the 2021 calendar year, NEK Broadband completed a business plan (available at <https://nekbroadband.org/>) and a work plan, ordered fiber, and secured agreements with local power companies to use their utility poles. **The overall project will require roughly \$140 million and will take 5 years to complete.** (Wheelock is projected to be completed in 2-3

years.) Funding is through grants and municipal bonds, as well as income from subscribers. **Towns are encouraged to set aside some of their ARPA funds to contribute to the project and help speed up the network construction (see ARPA sidebar).**

The work will be completed in four phases with the district divided into zones where work begins on the outer perimeter and builds towards the "spine" of the zone and then from the center to the outer ring. The project will bring high paying jobs to the area and provide specialized training for the staff who are hired.

Meeting dates and minutes are posted on the NEK Broadband website. The public is encouraged to log on and ask questions during meetings.

Wheelock Town Hall Accessibility Project

The Selectboard completed a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) summarizing the town's efforts and actions to address the Town Hall's lack of accessibility. (The DOJ requires this report by the end of December.) The letter draws from the work of the Town Hall Accessibility Project Committee volunteers and consultants hired by the town during 2021. Community feedback during the fall helped refine the two final design options. Design proposals and a video of the September community meeting are available at <http://placesense.com/wheelock/>. Committee meeting minutes and materials are at <https://townofwheelockvt.org/agendas-minutes/>.

The Selectboard wants Wheelock voters to choose between the two recommended options at the 2022 town meeting. All voters will receive updated information via the US mail in January. It will outline the two designs' features and cost estimates, potential loan options and grant opportunities, and projected effects on property taxes.