

Minutes of Town Meeting

March 05, 2024

VTRANS Building

61 Voters Present

Moderator Chris Corsones called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, Chris went over the rules for the meeting.

With permission from the audience, State Representative Jim Harrison updated the voters on what is being discussed in Montpelier. Jim Discussed the bills that had already passed. The biggest issue being discussed currently is the education cap on homestead tax rates and the substantial tax increase this could entail. Some increases could be as high as twenty to thirty percent.

Other issues being discussed are allowing retailers to combine shoplifting crimes, looking at the court backlog, lack of housing in Vermont, the Family Leave Act, and the Baby Bond Act – which is not likely to pass.

- Larry Gold asked if a new high school were to be built in Woodstock, Mendon's taxes would go up. Jim responded that the costs are hard to measure but the short answer is yes as the costs are mainly taken together and divided amongst town.
- Lynn Sandage asked if the school budget could be voted on at last years level. This is not possible as the budget is already on the ballot.
- Tom Soriano asked for an update on short term rental regulations. Jim stated that conversations surrounding this topic are happening.

Chris thanked Jim.

Fred Bagley spoke regarding upcoming meetings. There will be two meetings in May or June regarding the Route 4 corridor. The Planning Commission is updating the Zoning Regulation for the first time in 13 years and there will be a series of public hearings over the next year and a half.

- Nicole Kesselring asked if more than just the pedestrian safety was being discussed. Fred stated that they would be trying to slow speed by narrowing traffic lanes.
- Neil Langer stated that he'd been on the road at the time some of the accidents happened and felt there was a lot of snow on the road.
- Nicole Kesselring asked for any updates on the blighted properties along the Route 4 corridor. Fred Bagley state that was a top priority to address during the zoning rewrite.

Article 1 – Shall the Town authorize the Selectboard to set the rate of compensation for non-salaried employees and Town Officers appointed mid-term? Jonathan Reynolds made a motion to approve, which was seconded by Gary Bannister. With no discussion, the motion **passed unanimously**.

Article 2 – Shall the Town vote to approve the 2024-2025 Municipal Budget at \$1,378,303? Bruce Peacock made a motion to approve, which was seconded by Patty Lancaster.

Chris Corsones invited Selectboard members to make whatever presentations they had regarding the budget to be voted on.

Val Taylor stated that there was a carryover from the prior year of \$172,000, of which \$96,000 was rolled over into the current budget and \$76,000 was rolled into surplus highway funds. She further stated that the

appropriations requests were the same as last year \$10,342 and the budget being voted on reflects an increase of 4.34% over last year.

Val also discussed the highlights and objectives of the past year and turned the presentation over to Seth Bridge for further discussion. Seth Bridge stated that he was happy to see such a large turnout and would like to see more participation in Selectboard meetings. Seth then mentioned some of the grants that the Town had received during the year.

Seth discussed the office being closed and said that the safety of employees and visitors would not be compromised. He asked residents to contact the Selectboard if they had suggestions. He also assured the audience that the board was working on the issue and would fix the problem.

Lastly, Seth commented on the "end of an era". Bill Ellis and Newt Jones were not at the meeting but Seth praised them for their hard work. Bill had worked for the Town for 33 years and done a fabulous job taking care of the roads. There was a round of applause for Bill and Newt.

- Al Wakefield said the office had been closed for a long time and asked when the issue would be resolved. Seth stated we are moving forward.
- Neil Langer questioned why the road crew salary line items were so high. Seth said there would be additional time required for training the new road crew. Val Taylor said the town was also anticipating the hiring of a third full time crew member.
- Larry Gold laughingly asked that they find someone who won't hit his mailbox.
- Jennifer Van Sciver asked if the town planned on finishing the repairs to Notch Road which was damaged in last summer's flooding. Val Taylor stated that is one of the Town's priorities for this year.
- William Hagar asked when the rest of Town Line Road would be paved. Val said she would get that information and get back to him.
- Lynn Sandage said that health care costs were rising.
- Fred Bagley wondered why Public Safety income was so far under budget. Constable Lema Carter responded saying the state is now collecting a higher percentage of the ticket revenue.
- Nicole Kesselring asked if the sheriff was spending more time at the Town Office than on the roads. Sue Feenick echoed that the sheriff was spending more time at the office. Val and Seth both said they would review this and get back to the residents.
- Ann Singiser said the upcoming year would mark the final payment on the Town Office bond.
- Lynn Sandage asked if the budget could be changed. Chris Corsones explained the process for budget amendments.
- John Rizk asked how to get a copy of the information the library sends. Val will check with Sara.
- Lisa Brooks asked if we receive information from agencies as to how they spend the money which the town appropriates. Val said no.
- Jennifer Bagley stated that Mendon is one of five towns that support the library. She stated the library had a small 4% increase and there are 462 active card holders. The library stayed open as much as possible during COVID and did whatever they could to keep the programs going. Further discussion regarding the library followed.

Lynn Sandage made a motion to amend article 1 and level fund the budget. Thomas Buzzell seconded the motion.

Discussion followed. Bruce Peacock called the question. John Rizk seconded. The motion **failed unanimously**.

Neil Langer questioned the actual tax increase amount. Val said she would check with Sara Tully who was not at the meeting.

Nicole Kesselring questioned the large jump in health insurance. Val stated that employees had the option of choosing Mendon's health care of staying on a spouse's health insurance. Chris VanSciver clarified with Val that the health insurance line item was the maximum amount that would be incurred and not necessarily the amount that would be spent based on employee health care choices. Discussion followed with clarifying the maximum employee buyout is approximately \$12,000.

Jamie Belchak made a motion to amend the health insurance line item of the budget to \$109,013 (level funding), which was seconded by Nicole Kesselring. Further discussion followed.

Bruce Peacock called the question. Patty Lancaster seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The motion to amend the budget failed.

With no further discussion, **Article 2 passed unanimously.**

Article 3 through 9 – Shall the Town vote to appropriate \$1,500 for the support of ARC Rutland Area Serving Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, \$1,200 for the support of Marble Valley Regional Transit District (The Bus), \$700 for the support of RSVP Retired Senior Volunteer Program, \$1,242 for the support of Rutland Mental Health Services, \$2,600 for the support of VNA and Hospice of the Southwest Region, \$600 for the support of Southwest Council on Aging, and \$2,500 for the support of Wonderfeet Kids' Museum? Steve Singiser made a motion to consolidate Articles 3 through 9, which was seconded by Al Wakefield. The motion **passed unanimously.**

Danielle Monroe stated she's the Executive Director of the Wonderfeet Kids Museum and spoke about the program. She said there will be a grand opening of the new facility on May 11th. There was no further discussion. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Article 10 – To Elect the following town officers: Town Moderator – 1 year term, Selectboard Member – 2 years to complete a 3-year term, and Selectboard Member – 3-year term. This article will be voted on by Australian ballot on March 05, 2024 at the Town Office. Candidates running for these positions introduced themselves.

Chris Corsones asked if there was any other business the voters would like to discuss.

- Ann Singiser stated there were two write in candidates for the school board at large positions. Debbie Singiser is running for the two-year position and Tony Roberts is running for the three-year position.
- Fred Bagley asked that the board recognize retired Selectboard chair Dick Wilcox who in the spring of 2023 was inducted into the Vermont Principal's Association Sports Hall of Fame for a remarkable career coaching boys' basketball at Proctor High School. A round of applause followed.
- Justin Lindholm said he thinks we're getting to an answer regarding the shutdown of the town office. There is a law in State Statutes (13 V.S.A. §1026 & 1026a) against speaking badly. A person who speaks in a loud and nasty behavior can be told to stop. If they do not, they can be told to leave. If the problem still persists, they can be arrested, put in jail for up to 60 days or fined \$500. The longer we let it go on, the worse it gets. Discussion followed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Gondella, Town Clerk
Val Taylor, Selectboard Chair
Chris Corsones, Moderator