

Town of Wallingford
Annual Town Meeting Minutes
March 2, 2020
Wallingford Elementary School

Town Moderator Tammy Heffernan called the annual town meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and welcomed the large crowd. Following the pledge of allegiance, the Moderator asked those new residents of the town to stand and be recognized. The meeting was turned over to Selectboard Chair Nelson Tift who introduced board members Bruce Duchesne, Rose Regula, and John McClallen.

The Moderator reviewed the rules for the meeting and read the warning as follows: The legal voters of the Town of Wallingford, Vermont are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Wallingford Elementary School on Monday evening, March 2, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. to act upon the following articles. The polls will be open on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Wallingford Town Hall for the purpose of voting Australian Ballot.

ARTICLE I. To elect the following Town Officers by Australian Ballot: a Town Moderator, Town Agent, each for one-year terms; three Selectboard members, one for two years, one for three years, and one to fill out the remaining year of a three-year term; a Town Clerk and Treasurer for three years; three Auditors, one for a three-year term, one to fill out the remaining two years of a three-year term, and one to fill out the remaining one year of a three-year term; a Trustee of Public Funds for three years; and a School Director for Mill River Union Unified School District for three years.

ARTICLE II. Shall the Town vote to have scholarships provided under Title 16 V.S.A., Section 2535, the same to be applied for on or before April 27, 2020 at the Mill River Unified Union School District Office? Erika Berner moved the adoption of Article II; Rob Carey seconded. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE III. Shall the Town authorize property taxes and fire protection taxes to be paid to the Town Treasurer in two installments with one-half (1/2) of the fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) due on or before October 19, 2020 at 4:30 p.m. and the remaining one-half of the fiscal year 2021 due on or before April 19, 2021 at 4:30 p.m.? Payments are physically due in the Town Office; post-marked dates WILL NOT be accepted. Christine Palmer moved the adoption of Article III; Donald Spruit seconded. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE IV. Shall the voters of the Town of Wallingford appropriate a sum not to exceed \$1,271,451.41 for the General Operation of the town, with an amount not to exceed \$882,352.78 to be raised in Property Taxes for fiscal year 2021? Cindy Daubenspeck moved the adoption of Article IV; Kathy Upton seconded.

Sharon Nimitz read Rutland Herald reporter Gordon Dritschilo's article that stated the town's amount to be raised in taxes would increase by 19% if voters approved the budget tonight. It was clarified for the crowd that the reporter used the wrong figures from last year and did not include funding articles approved at Town Meeting. The actual increase would be less than 5% if the FY'21 budget was approved. Michael McMahon asked that although nothing is budgeted for the Recreation Director in FY'21, is the position still open. There are some funds still remaining in the FY'20 budget. However, since most of the Recreation Committee has resigned, the Committee has not recommended filling the position. Mark Tessier asked if the position had been posted, and the answer was no.

Tom Barone asked what the 5% increase in property taxes to be raised consisted of. Nelson Tift said the proposed budget would add almost 2 cents to the town tax rate. Total revenue is down almost \$130,000. Over \$139,000 of that revenue was the previous year's carryover balance, which was FEMA reimbursements from the prior year. The Administration budget is nearly level funded while Town Govt. Operations increased over \$8,000 mainly attributable to the Transfer Station operating expenses and the Rutland County tax. Appropriations decreased \$17,000 as Wallingford Rescue requested an extra \$20,000 last year. Paving was reduced to \$55,000 from \$99,500 in the Highway budget. The Sheriff's budget increased almost 14%, from \$74,921 to \$85,400 as the constable position has no authority.

Gary Fredette is concerned about the Public Safety budget because it has increased over 50% during the last three years. He recalls when an extra \$10,000 was added to increase 30-hour per week coverage to 40. Mr. Fredette has never supported full-time sheriff coverage and believes that the flashing speed limit signs help alert drivers. He would rather see the \$10,000 spent on additional flashing lights. Mrs. Nimitz discussed the high volume of traffic that travels along Route 7 in the village from 6-8 am and suggested having flashing lights at all four ends of town. Dave Seward asked if the town expects more revenue from the Green Mountain National Forest with the sale of the land to GMNF. No answer was given as the sale is still pending. Mr. Seward asked about the \$20,000 proposed for the Highway Sinking Fund.

There was a lengthy discussion about the Recreation Director vacant position with voters questioning why someone hasn't been hired, why the salary isn't budgeted in FY21, whether it was a one-time occurrence as proposed in FY20, or whether it should be ongoing, and why the employee didn't work out. Former Rec Committee Chair Michelle Kenny explained how the position evolved over many months and although it was approved at last year's town meeting, the Selectboard did not support it. It was understood that it would take time to get the programs up and running; however, the duties demanded by the Selectboard were too much for the elementary school teacher who was hired for the job. Mrs. Nimitz stated that the Selectboard and Recreation Committee should work more closely together to fill the position.

Don Emery moved to call the question. Tony Masuck seconded. Motion to call the question passed by unanimous voice vote.

Motion to approve Article IV passed by majority voice vote.

ARTICLE V. Shall the Town approve the Reports of the Town Officer as submitted? Rob Carey moved the adoption of Article V; Kathy Upton seconded. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE VI. Shall the voters of the Town of Wallingford appropriate the sum of \$35,000 to rehabilitate the basketball court at the recreation fields off Meadow Street? Don Emery moved the adoption of Article VI; Michelle Kenny seconded.

Wallingford Day organizer Maria French alerted the Selectboard that the court has to be available on Wallingford Day, which is July 18th. Bruce Duchesne stated that the total cost is approximately \$54,000 and funds from a CD and funds in the present budget will be used towards the court. The Town Administrator obtained quotes for this project. It was explained that this project is a total court replacement as it has been patched several times over the years. Tom Barone asked the Selectboard to consider establishing a sinking fund. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE VII. Shall the voters of the Town of Wallingford appropriate the sum of \$10,000 for Wallingford Rescue, Inc. to establish a Sinking Fund for ambulance replacement? Dave Seward moved the adoption of Article VII; Cindy Daubenspeck seconded.

Wallingford Rescue's Eric Davenport stated that one of their ambulances is 20+/- years old. New ambulances cost \$160,000; however, they are looking for a refurbished vehicle. They have approximately \$52,000 available for the purchase. Tom Barone asked if the price is for the vehicle only, and Mr. Davenport replied yes, that it costs another \$70,000 to equip the ambulance. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE VIII. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,993 to the Rutland Marketing Initiative, a collaboration of the Rutland Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Rutland Economic Development Corporation along with area municipalities and businesses with the goal of growing the economy of the region? Tom Barone moved the adoption of Article VIII; Don Emery seconded.

Lynn Edmunds stated that this is the third year for this request, and he does not see any benefit in contributing to this effort. He and others felt that the funds would be better spent on town expenses such as the basketball court or ambulance. The article failed by majority voice vote.

ARTICLE IX. Shall the voters of the Town of Wallingford authorize the Selectboard to borrow a sum of money not to exceed \$66,000 for the purchase of a Highway Department excavator to be financed for a period not to exceed four years? Michael McMahon moved the adoption of Article IX; Kathy Luzader seconded.

Tom Barone asked how much the excavator would cost, and Road Commissioner Phil Baker stated that it would be approximately \$110,000. The balance of the Highway Sinking Fund would be the down payment. Cindy Daubenspeck asked what an excavator is used for. Mr. Baker explained that the machine is used to dig ditches as well as load material and will cut down work and travel time. Eric Williams asked if the town considered used equipment. Mr. Baker stated that it's more beneficial to have a warranty on heavy equipment. Dave Seward stated that the town of Mount Holly hires someone to perform this work each year. Mr. Williams asked if the excavator would require a trailer, and Mr. Baker answered that the town will be using his trailer for the next year or two at no charge. The article passed by majority voice vote.

ARTICLE X. Shall the voters of the Town of Wallingford adopt all budget articles by Australian ballot to commence with the 2022 fiscal year pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2680(c)? Tom Barone moved the adoption of Article X; Michael McMahon seconded.

Rob Carey spoke against this article saying that it would be the end of Town meeting. Bruce Duchesne spoke in favor, citing that second shift workers who cannot attend town meeting, are not able to vote on the budget. He feels that voters should be able to vote on the money articles that they are taxed on. Michael McMahon thanked the Selectboard for proposing this article, mentioning that the voters now can vote by Australian ballot on town plan and bylaw amendments. He and six others asked for a paper ballot.

Lynn Edmunds said that we shouldn't disenfranchise voters because they can't make it to Town meeting. Tom Barone suggested establishing committees who can prepare questions and answers on each article to help better inform the voters who can't attend Town meeting. Maureen Duchesne mentioned the "snowbird" voters who can't attend Town meeting. Rob Carey said that interest and attendance will decrease if there is no Town meeting. Brian Finch spoke in favor of Australian ballot as many parents of young children can't attend Town meeting. He also thought that an informational meeting would give voters additional time to reflect on what was discussed at the meeting in order to make more informed decisions at the polls.

Peg Soule recalled that whenever the town budget was second on the schedule, voters stayed for that meeting, but when the School budget was second, voters left early. She questioned whether it's more important to have the "best-informed" or the "most" people voting. She felt that the quality of information heard tonight and discussion that took place could not be duplicated in a newsletter. Christine Palmer asked if Australian ballot could be

conducted at the end of town meeting. Ron Boucher, a former Selectboard member, spoke in favor of the article stating that when the school changed to Australian ballot, the school remained open and if this article passes, that the town will still operate as usual. Mr. Boucher felt that it's important to have confidence in the elected Selectboard members. Brian Pinsonault mentioned that some towns have their meeting on the Saturday before Town Meeting Day.

Deborah Scranton spoke about the "Communications and Events" group's goal to make Wallingford residents aware of happenings around town by mailing the monthly town newsletter to all households. She encouraged residents to complete the survey included in the March newsletter.

Paper ballots were handed out to 84 voters with 45 voting yes and 39 voting no. The motion passed.

ARTICLE XI. Shall the voters of the Town of Wallingford vote to approve the appropriation of any funds in addition to the annual Town budget by Australian ballot to commence with the 2022 fiscal year pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2680(d)? Don Emery moved the adoption of Article XI; Michael McMahon seconded.

Michael McMahon and six other voters asked for a paper ballot. Paper ballots were handed out to 67 voters with 36 voting yes and 31 voting no. The motion passed.

State Representative David Potter spoke on legislative issues that included the Vermont House approving the climate bill requiring the state to meet emissions goals; the Senate approving the new family leave bill; the House approving the minimum wage bill; and a bill to update the State's Act 250 land development and use law was passed by the House.

ARTICLE XII. The School Directors from Mill River Unified Union School District will present information related to the fiscal year 2020-2021 education budget for the Mill River Unified Union School District. THIS IS AN INFORMATION ARTICLE ONLY. There was no discussion on the school budget.

ARTICLE XIII. To conduct such other business as may properly come before the meeting.

Bill Scranton was annoyed that the Town Report lacked a report from the Assessor's office.

Christine Palmer spoke on the impact climate change has on Vermont, citing Act H.688. Opponent Daniel Whipple countered that Vermonters cannot afford additional taxes and will be hit hard with this carbon tax proposal.

With no other business to come before the body, at 9:00 p.m., Ms. Heffernan asked for a motion to recess the meeting. Rob Carey moved to adjourn the meeting; Erika Berner seconded. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Submitted: _____ Town Moderator

_____ Selectboard Chair

_____ Town Clerk

DRAFT