

Town of Tunbridge
Annual Town DRAFT Meeting Minutes
March 3, 2020

The voters of the Town of Tunbridge are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Tunbridge Central School Auditorium on the 3rd day of March, 2020 at 10:00 A.M. to transact the following business.

Moderator Euclid Farnham called the meeting to order at 10:04 A.M., led the Town in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Warning was read. Selectman John O'Brien presented two flags that were flown over the Vermont State House in Farnham's honor, and announced the House concurrent resolution that was adopted on 2/28/2020. (HCR 284 - House concurrent resolution honoring Euclid Farnham for his extraordinary legacy in the Town of Tunbridge.)

Farnham expressed his heartfelt thanks and then said "And now we'll move on to real business, if you will."

Art. 1. To Elect a Moderator for the ensuing year.

Gordon Barnaby and Laura Ginsberg were both nominated to serve as Moderator. Paper ballot floor vote was held. Ballot count showed Barnaby as the winner.

Gordon Barnaby was elected Moderator for the ensuing year.

Art. 2. To hear and act on the Town Officers Reports.

Collector of Delinquent Taxes:

Joe Paquin – Updated report on back table. As of the morning of 3/3/2020, there are \$83,858 delinquent taxes for 2019, \$36,444 for 2018 and \$1,597 for 2017. \$81,000 from 2019 recently went to tax sale. Paquin encouraged folks to communicate with him if they are delinquent on their taxes. He is happy to help them work out a payment plan, but cannot do so if they do not get in touch. He reminded everyone that if you sell or purchase a property in Tunbridge after April 1st but prior to tax bills being sent, be sure that there your taxes are paid or an agreement is made between you and the sellers/buyers on who will pay them.

Robert Howe requested that full names instead of initials were listed in the delinquent tax report, as well as amounts owed. Paquin will change that next year, but did note that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns recommends amounts owed not be listed to protect owner's property values. Many towns don't even list delinquent taxes at all in their town report.

Auditors:

Linda Hoyt and Anissa Morrison – Noted that the town's accounting system has switched to a cash basis on the recommendation of Sullivan Powers and Co., an outside auditing firm. Susan Barnaby asked if the school report could be on the same page numbers between the Tunbridge and Chelsea town reports to make it easier at the school meeting. Morrison responded that would be up to the school district to handle.

Library:

Eve Ermer – Pointed out that the new expense line item titled "Special Projects" will be funded by the Friends of the Tunbridge Library. Ermer thanked Anne Linehan and Sarah Scully for their service to the library. No questions.

Listers:

Rudi Ruddell - ****

Cemetery Commissioners:

Euclid Farnham – Headstones were meant to be repaired last year, but will be this year. No questions.

Emergency Services Committee:

Brenda Field – Field is the Emergency Management Director for the Town. She and the Fire Chief, Simon Bradford, work together closely. They are in process with the state police, school and EMS in creating an emergency plan for the school.

Planning Commission:

Laura Ginsberg, Gary Mullen – Thanks to Ingrid Van Steamburg for many years serving as chair. Commission is working on updating the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Town Forest Committee; there is a forestry plan in place. Timber harvest last year and another coming up in a year. The school uses the forest behind the garage for education. The Forest Committee is looking to build a structure for the public to use and visit the forest.

Recreation:

Matt Galluzzo – Mentioned passing of Kevin Barnaby, who was instrumental on the Recreation Committee. Goals for 2020 are to fix up the dugouts, install a sprinkler system, replace the mound clay mixture, replace mulch at playground, pave the pool, and paint the buildings.

Selectboard:

John O'Brien – There is a 7% increase in the General Fund, mostly due to things out of the Board's control, like health insurance, technology updates, an election year. O'Brien reminds citizens that the budget is up to them and can be amended and changed. No questions.

Treasurer:

Becky Hoyt – Sullivan Powers and Co. came to audit the town, and suggested a switch the cash basis. The Town also began accepting credit card payments for taxes. 3.5% charge is charged to customer. Reminder for everyone to file their homestead every year. No questions.

Trustees of Public Funds:

Matt Frost, Robert Howe – Morgan Stanley accounts are no more, they were moved to Edward R. Jones because Morgan Stanley came up with a conflict of interest in serving municipalities. The Trustees invest in a mixture of stocks, bonds, and real estate to attain diversity. As of yesterday, there are \$108,000 in the Public Library Fund, \$40,000 in the Cemetery Fund, \$142,000 in the School Library, \$32,000 in the Fire Department Fund, \$420,000 in the Highway Fund, \$40,000 in the Special Projects Fund, \$192,000 in another Public Library Fund. The total is at \$975,000. Jim Ludwig asked if there was any intention to divest from fossil fuels. Frost replied that it's been considered, but hasn't been determined to be the cost effective use of funds.

Town Clerk

Jillian Conner – Clarified why vital statistics were left out of the town report this year: page number concerns and privacy concerns. Mark Bomalaski asked if the number of births in Tunbridge last year were those that were physically born in Tunbridge, or born of Tunbridgians. Conner replied that the number is of babies that were born to Tunbridge residents.

Motion to accept all the reports. Seconded. Motion is carried.

Art. 3. Will the Town pay 2019-2020 property taxes on or before the first (1st) day of November, 2019 with delinquent taxes having interest charges of (1) percent per month or fraction thereof for the first three (3) months and one and one half (1 ½) percent each month thereafter and an eight (8) percent penalty charged against them from the due date?

Motion to accept. No discussion. Motion to amend wording to say 2020 – 2021 and November 2020. No discussion. Amendment accepted. No discussion on motion as amended. Article approved.

Art. 4 Will the Town vote to approve the creation of a Disaster Preparedness Fund?

Motion to approve. Question on what the Disaster Preparedness Fund is and how much money it requires. O'Brien replied that it is to front the repair costs of natural disasters to help get us through while waiting for federal reimbursement. Another question is if these funds are available, will that affect how much reimbursement the town will receive. The answer is no.

Anissa Morrison asks where the \$25,000 proposed to put in the fund, Board answers with the correct page number.

Citizen asks if we can receive reimbursement from the state. Conner replies yes, the state always reimburses a certain percentage of what FEMA provides, depending on how developed our Hazard Mitigation Plan is and a couple other factors. As of now, she believes we receive 12.5% of total costs from the state.

Question on whether this is a onetime appropriation, or will additional funds be put in? The Board is planning to add surplus money as they can, until the account totals \$150,000.

Question if this fund will gather interest, Hoyt answers that it will gather some but not a lot.

Laura Ginsberg asked if by putting this fund into the Highway budget, if that limits its use to roads and roadways, and never buildings. The Board says the intent is not to use on buildings, but Conner clarifies that FEMA does cover buildings.

Citizen comments that climate change continues to affect our region, we will be seeing more road damage and therefore more taxpayer costs. Nancy Howe expressed support of the fund being placed within the Highway budget.

Article approved.

Art. 5. Will the Town vote to approve the creation of a Town Forest Fund?

Motion to approve. Seconded. Gary Mullen clarifies that the income generated from timber harvests are to be put in this fund. Question to clarify that this fund will not come from tax payer dollars. Mullen reiterate that it will not. Anissa Morrison asks where the current Forest Income is in the General Fund. Hoyt answers that because the check from the 2019 timber harvest came in during the 19/20 fiscal year, it's not its own line item in the town report.

Article approved.

Art. 6. Will the Town vote to approve the creation of a Conservation Commission Fund?

Motion to approve. Seconded. Eliza Minnucci informs citizens that they are asking for a place to hold funds should they end up successful in fundraising. They are not asking for tax payer funding.

Article approved.

Art. 7 Will the Town vote to approve the budgets of the General Fund and Highway Fund for fiscal year 2020-2021?

Motion to approve the general fund budget for FY 20/21 of \$623,653 with \$361,138 to be raised from taxes.

Helen O'Donnell notes that she feels the taxpayers cannot keep sustaining these tax increases. Anissa Morrison asks if raising the Orange County Sheriff budget is a good idea. Lori Berger said she would like to see that budget cut. David Eggum, who is familiar with the OCS, said that the department does as much as they can with the budget they have. Multiple people asked if the \$4,000 proposed increase to the OCS is worth arguing over.

Question if the Board has looked into changing health insurance plans to cut rising costs. Board, Hoyt and Conner answered that there is only one option of health insurance through our carrier.

General fund budget is approved.

Motion to approve highway budget of \$984,495 with \$849,146 to be raised from taxes.

Motion to amend the HW budget by reducing it by \$15,835 with the intent to remove it from wage increase line item. Many folks voiced their disapproval of that idea and their support of our road crew. Motion fails.

Highway budget is approved.

Article is approved.

Art. 8 Will the Town authorize the Selectboard to borrow money as needed for current expenses in anticipation of taxes?

Motion to approve. Seconded. Article approved.

Art. 9 Will the Town vote to appropriate a sum of money to support the Tunbridge Volunteer Fire Department, Inc.?

Motion to approve a \$43,450 appropriation to the Tunbridge Fire Department. Seconded. Article approved.

Art. 10 Will the Town appropriate \$17,797.00 to support the following organizations?

Motion to approve. Seconded. Discussion: Maxine asks about the lack of reports from organizations that that are requesting funding, and the addition of some first time requests.

Laura Ginsberg motions to amend the article to take \$450 from the Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE) request and transfer it to the Orange County Parent Child Center appropriation. This would total the CVABE appropriation at \$750 and the OCPCC at \$1,450. Seconded. Amendment passes.

Many expressed that they would like the receipt of a report to be required for appropriations to be placed on the warning.

Motion to amend the amended motion to appropriate \$1,829 to the OCPCC and fund \$0 for Public Health Council of the Upper Valley. Seconded. Amendment passes.

Motion to reverse the amendment proposed by Laura Ginsberg. Moderator responded the reversal of the amendment violates Robert's Rules.

Ben Wolfe. Motion to accept the article as originally proposed, prior to amendments, with an addition of \$1,450 to the OCPCC. Not seconded.

Motion as amended is seconded. Article as amended is approved.

Art. 12. To elect town officers as required by law.

1 - Selectboard; 1 - Lister; 1 - Auditor; 1 - Cemetery Commissioner; 1 - Trustee of Public Funds; 2 - Library Trustee; 1 - Town Clerk

Selectboard: Michael McPhetres is nominated. He is elected.

Lister: Helen O'Donnell is nominated. She is elected.

Auditor: Linda Hoyt is nominated. She is elected.

Cemetery Commissioner: Euclid Farnham is nominated. He is elected.

Library Trustee: Mark Bomalaski is nominated. He is elected.

Library Trustee: Billie Smith is nominated. She is elected.

Town Agent: Judie Lewis is nominated. She is elected.

Grand Juror: Lenora Kimball is nominated. She is elected.

1st Constable: Bruce Jones is nominated. He is elected.

2nd Constable: Katherine Adams is nominated. She is elected.

Town Clerk: Jillian Conner is nominated. She is elected.

Article 12 passes.

Art. 12. Will the Town authorize the Selectboard, under the guidance of the Tunbridge Energy Committee, to develop a plan and a budget for a town-owned 30-35 kilowatt solar array that will, subject to approval by town voters, cover the annual electricity usage of all town-owned buildings.

Todd Tyson of the Energy Committee presented his ideas on the solar array. The committee is looking into building a 30 – 35kW solar array at the town garage.

Motion to accept article. Seconded.

Questions from multiple people on size of array, long term replacement cost, how much electricity it will provide, and roof mounted systems. Full discussion can be found on recording at Town Clerk's office.

Article is approved.

Art. 13. Other Business

Jeremiah Caron: requests a vote on a non-binding resolution in support of the 2nd amendment and the right to bear arms. Moderator explains the resolution cannot be passed because it was not on the Town Meeting Warning.

Richard Dybvig: Encourages townspeople to look into ECFiber as their internet and phone service provider. Todd Tyson chimes in that there are many people who cannot afford to have the lines installed under ground or from a pole to their home. Henry Swayze replied that ECFiber covers the first \$200 of an aerial drop and it costs about \$100

Thomas Hoyt makes a motion to adjourn. Seconded. Motion is passed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:21pm.

1,062 voters on checklist. 213 voters in attendance.

Signatures:

Moderator:

Gordon Barnaby

Selectboard:

Gary Mullen

John O'Brien

Mike McPhetres