

TOWN OF TUNBRIGE

2024 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Tuesday, March 5th, 2024, 10:00 am

Meeting called to order at 10:07 am

Moderator Provoncha led the town in the Pledge of Allegiance. Moderator Provoncha gives some background on Town Meeting and Robert's Rules.

174 voters present.

Art 1: To elect a Moderator for the ensuing year.

Provoncha opens the floor to nominations for Moderator. Nominations for Israel Provoncha. Seconded. All aye. So moved.

Art 2: To hear the reports of Town Officers

Collector of Delinquent Taxes Joe Paquin

Report found on Page 36. Tax sale on February 22nd. One delinquent property sold; one did not sell due to no bidders. We will hold another tax sale in the Summer of 2024. Total delinquent taxes due are \$54,903.80. Jarilyn Zarrogian asks if we are able to look to see where these parcels are located. Paquin states that once they go to tax sale their address is posted and you can also use the grand list to look up the Parcel ID.

Auditors Betsy Race, Anissa Morrison & Linda Hoyt

The auditors spend the year reconciling bank statements, going over journal entries and in the fall reports are collected and the Town Report is created. They make a note of an error on page 36.

Library Mariah Lawrence

Lawrence is not wearing her strawberry skirt, but instead is wearing her strawberry socks. Marsha Higgins retired, but are so happy for all she has done for the library. Theresa Fitzgerald has been hired in her place and is a wonderful fit. Big thanks to the Friends of the Library. There are so many programs offered at the library for all ages- see the website for all the listings. The library received a \$20,000 grant to make the library more accessible for those who are neurodivergent.

Listers Rudi Ruddell

Report on page 34. Sales have been pretty wild the last few years. The typical threshold for statewide town mandated reappraisal is the CLA below 85% or above 115%. 65% of the state fell within this mandated reappraisal. Last townwide reappraisal was 2010. The new trigger is the COD being above 20%. We are at 21.14% COD and are mandated by statute to do a townwide reappraisal. We are still looking at a couple years out before we are able to conduct this townwide reappraisal with the proper resources. Rob Howe asks if we fall below that 20% if that mandated appraisal will be cancelled. Ruddell states that it will not. Once it is triggered, we need to get it done.

Cemetery Commission Baxter Doty

Doty gives a quick update on mowing and the cemeteries.

Planning Commission Rudi Ruddell

Ruddell gives an overview on projects the Planning Commission is working on such as flood plains, town forests, trails, sidewalks etc.

Recreation Kathy Galluzzo

The recreation supported 5 baseball teams, a rookie baseball team and a rookie softball team. Many birthday parties were hosted there and many softball tournaments. Recreation breakfasts are going great. Last month they had over 150 people come to the recreation breakfasts. Tess Mix asks about upgrading the playground. Galluzzo states that they are getting quotes and are hoping to get it upgraded this year.

Selectboard Mike McPhetres, Gary Mullen, John O'Brien

Selectboard report is found on page 7. Flooding last summer kept the road crew busy. We have 71 miles of dirt road and they have been busy with six mud seasons this year. Strafford Road bridge was replaced. The Selectboard tries to look ahead long term on projects with can do with grants that can save the town money in the end. On the general fund, the biggest ticket item is ARPA funds. We had a series of meetings to see where people wanted that money to go. We did some account swapping, which allows us to have a surplus now and have longer time to get those projects finished.

Trustees of Public Funds Liz York, Rob Howe

Report is found on page 38. As of the end of June, things were up and that trend has continued. York asks if there are any questions. Laura Ginsburg asks who is allowed to apply for and what can special funds be used for. These are funds that have been donated and oftentimes there are parameters to these funds being donated. Example: upgrading the transfer station, the town hall, the library etc. Anyone can apply or suggest that the funds are used for certain projects.

Conservation Commission Eliza Minnucci

The funds that the Conservation Commission has is either donated or been raised. Green Up Day is coming up and we are looking for pledges of people cleaning up that day. Trying to set a Guinness World Record for the most pledges.

Town Nurse Jodi Hoyt

Health Officer role is no longer in charge of Rental Inspection. This is Hoyt's first year as Health Officer. Couldn't start right away in 2023. Hoyt has helped 162 people, made 40 home visits, 19 office visits to the doctors with the patients and numerous emails and phone calls. Hoyt has helped get a ramp, meals on wheels referrals, new housing, health insurance, medical equipment library, home health care just to name a few. Hoyt has helped people come home from the hospital, ease anxiety, etc. This was a new position and as Hoyt has realized what was needed the position has evolved and that is why the budget has increased as well.

Art. 3: Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes on Monday, November 1, 2024, by delivery to the town hall postmarked on or before that date, with delinquent taxes having an interest charge of 1% per month or fraction thereof for the first 3 months and then 1.5% each month pursuant 32 V.S.A. § 5136, to thereafter and an 8% penalty charged against them from the due date?

Nancy Howe moves. Seconded. All aye. So moved.

Art. 4: Shall the voters authorize Town Treasurer, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 4791 to collect current taxes?

Nancy Howe moves. Seconded. All aye. So moved.

Art. 5: Shall the voters authorize general fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$782,610.00 of which \$462,745.00 shall be raised by taxes.

Nancy Howe moves. Seconded. Robert Child asks to increase \$462,745.00 to \$502,745.00 to have \$40,000 go towards policing. Moved and seconded. Laura Ginsburg asks for an explanation on what the funds will be used for. Childs states that he has been working with Central Vermont Intelligence Based Policing for years. Tunbridge has needs for a police officer about once every 36 hours. Childs has met with the Selectboard and with Royalton Police Department, Windsor County Sheriff's Department and Orange County Sheriff's Department. Sheriff Palmer of Windsor County states that the minimal funds we have now are not enough to provide the policing services we need. Stacy Dion asks what are the next steps: are we looking at getting our own dedicated officer, creating our own department etc.? Also asks if we should increase town nurse hours to help with the root of the problem. Childs states that this puts a presence in the town. For this amount of money this would get us about 15 hours a week of coverage. Childs is concerned for our EMS because they are going into dangerous situations with no police officer to help them. With domestic cases, drug cases etc, they need an officer there to help them. If we work with the department that we decide to go with, then we are more than likely to have someone within 10-15 miles away. Anissa Morrison asks about response time and if the State Police will be responsible to answer the 911 calls. Jack Howe states that often times the State Police get a call and say that they don't have many people and therefore the Sheriff's Department would get called. Howe discusses what we would get from Windsor County if we signed a contract with them. Nancy Howe asks the Selectboard what their recommendation for policing is. Mullen gives information regarding the budget numbers and what options we have for policing contracts. Mullen asks who would like us who would like to go with Windsor County Sheriffs versus Royalton PD. Majority vote for Windsor County. Stacy Dion asks how we will know how to decide on which police department to go with. She feels we need more data before we decide who to go with. 98 aye. 35 nay. Amended article moved and seconded. Rob Howe asks if there is any requirement in state law that we have to support the Orange County Sheriff's Department. Heather Mullen asks how this will increase our taxes. The whole tax rate will increase by .03 cents. Marybeth Lang wants to clarify that we are only voting to increase money for protection but will still be able to hear from both sides. Helen O'Donnell states that she took the figures from the school budget book as well as the budget as written today and that with both combined the total tax rate will go up .40 which will increase her taxes \$1000. Anissa Morrison states that \$1000 tax increase on the budget could be too much for the community and asks the

Selectboard what areas of the budget they think could be adjusted. O'Brien states that if we are looking for cuts we should look at the School Budget cut. The Selectboards goes through the budget multiple times and mostly level fund items, and if we need to then we can look through the budget again. Joe Paquin calls the question. Seconded by Nancy Howe. Motion passes.

Recess for Lunch Break.

Art. 6: Shall the voters authorize highway fund expenditures of \$1,185,935.00 of which \$1,040,585.00 shall be raised by taxes?

Victoria Paquin makes a motion to amend the article to read \$1,210,935.00 of which \$1,065,585.00 to be raised by taxes. Seconded. All aye. So moved.

Art. 7: Shall the town vote to appropriate \$49,500.00 to support the Tunbridge Volunteer Fire Department Inc.?

Margaret Sherlock moves. Joe Paquin seconds. All aye. So moved.

Art. 8: Shall the town appropriate \$21,245.00 to support the following social services pursuant to 24 V.S.C ~ 2691.

Central Vermont Adult Basic Education \$1200

Central Vermont Council on Aging \$500

Chelsea Area Senior Center \$2000

Clara Martin Center \$2019

Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation \$677

Neighbors Helping Neighbors \$500

Public Health Council of the Upper Valley \$669

Safeline \$750

Tri Valley Transport (Formerly Stagecoach) \$1600

The Art Bus \$800

The White River Partnership \$250

Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired \$150

Vermont Family Network \$250

Vermont Center for Independent Living \$150

Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force \$100

Visiting Nurse and Hospice for VT and NH \$2780

One Planet After School Program \$3000

Orange County Parent Child Center \$1000

Orange County Restorative Justice Center \$350

White River Natural Resource Conservation \$1000

Moved and seconded. Anissa Morrison gives background on appropriations and how they get on the item. Morrison states that she looked into the information more and realized that One Planet did not ask Chelsea for the same amount. Lenora Kimball proposes that we amend Safeline from \$750 to \$1000. Victoria Paquin moves. Seconded. A question is asked regarding if the Selectboard has changed the appropriations at all? They have not. The speaker states that if they needed more money, they should have requested more. Maureen Moriarity states that Safeline is

very conscientious about their budget and asking for more money from the community. They always need more but don't want to ask for more to burden taxpayers. Louise Barreda states that Safeline is a wonderful program that helps so many people. All aye. So moved. The bottom line number for appropriations is now \$21,495. Stacy Dion says that she is not happy that Chelsea is not supporting the after school program, but that she is wanting to support the children and the people who take care of them during the afterschool program. Amendment on the floor to take away \$1919 from Public Health Council of the Upper Valley, White River Natural Resource Conservation and Vermont Family Network due to the fact that they have either not done much for Tunbridge or did not include a report. Moved and seconded. All aye. So moved. The new amended article to be voted on totals \$19,576. All aye. So moved.

Art. 9: Shall the town allow the Selectboard to move ahead with a noise ordinance following state statute?

Joe Paquin moves. Nancy Howe seconds. Chair Mullen gives background on the Noise Ordinance and why we started this ordinance. Richard Barnaby states that he has complained to the Selectboard and the Police a number of times over the years, and he states that they have told him if there is no ordinance there is nothing that can be done. Mullen states that voting yes on this today isn't creating an ordinance today, it is allowing us to continue the process. Bob Dunkle asks who will enforce this Noise Ordinance. Tiffany Tucker asks what the hours of this ordinance are and if she will get fined if she lets her dogs out during the morning and they bark. Mullen states that it is just looking for something

Ben Tucker asks about the fair and if this will affect them. Mullen states that no, they will be able to request a noise permit and be able to make a ton of noise.

Christian Zug states that there are some people who want to ride four wheelers and shoot on their property and is concerned that doing it casually if he will get fined.

Jeremiah Caron is also concerned about the slippery slope and doesn't want this to be one of the issues.

Stacy Dion states that she is someone who sits in a rifle and rides a four wheeler but this is just something to be able to be considerate of our neighbors.

Linda Hoyt states that she is speaking for her husband Ted who is worried about the farms and that this will turn into zoning.

Dave Kimball calls a question. Bob Dunkle seconds. 68 aye. 39 nay. Article carries.

Art. 10. To elect All Town Officers as required by law.

Selectboard for the Term of 3 years. Vernon Maxhams nominates John O'Brien.

Lister for a term of 3 years. Mariah Cilley nominates Daniel Rudi Ruddell.

Lister for a term of 2 years. Gary Mullen nominates Deb Mullen.

Auditor for a term of 3 years. Rob Howe nominates Betsy Race.

Cemetery Commission for a term of 3 years. Margaret Sherlock nominates Ben Tucker.

Trustee of Public Funds for a term of 3 years. Rob Howe nominates Liz York.

Library Trustee for a term of 3 years. Mariah Lawrence nominates Anna Dechart.

Collector of Delinquent Taxes for a term of 1 year. Victoria Paquin nominates Joseph Paquin.

First Constable for a term of 1 year. Heather Mullen nominates Nathan Rood. He does not accept. Position stays vacant.

Second Constable for a term of 1 year. Position stays vacant.

Town Grand Juror for a term of 1 year. Joseph Paquin nominates Lenora Kimball. (Town Grand Juror can prosecute if the states attorney does not want to.)

Art. 11 Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to adopt the Declaration of Inclusion?

Moved by Nancy Howe. Seconded. Rick Barnaby asks what it is. Mullen explains. Ben Tucker asks what this resolution would change that any person in Tunbridge isn't already doing? Stacy Dion states that there are people who do not feel safe in this world. Dion says that by doing this it would just show that Tunbridge is making it part of who we are. The motion carries.

Art. 12 If there are surplus funds from this current fiscal year (FY24) shall the voters approve the surplus funds to be moved to the funds that the Selectboard sees fit?

Joseph Paquin moves. Seconded. Victoria Paquin asks if we have a fund balance policy that requires we leave surplus in the general and the highway fund to help us if we have natural disasters etc? Mullen states that no, but we have a disaster relief fund. They are looking at both the general fund and the highway fund surplus to move into the fund. Catherine Freese asks if there is a possibility of putting some of the surplus towards taxes. The Selectboard states that yes, we could, we just are unsure if we even know if there will be surplus this year. The ayes have it and the motion carries.

Art. 13 Other Business

John O'Brien wants to let everyone know that on June 8th or June 9th on Strawberry Hill there will be a picnic to remember Bill Chester.

O'Brien gives a Legislative Update.

Gary Mullen gives an update on Legal Trails stating that we spent \$26,000 on legal council so far to keep Orchard Trail open. Peter Klink asks what the status of this legal battle is now.

O'Brien gives update that we are waiting for the Supreme Court to get back to us with an answer. Klink is in support of moving forward. Stacy Dion asks if we can ask for costs of damages back if we win the case. Mullen states that we have brought this up with our attorney and that there is something that will trigger that to be able to happen, but it is not likely to happen. Todd Tyson states that a court date has not been set yet. Tyson believes that the Town will prevail and that the attorney has stated that the town has the right to do whatever they want to do on the trail. Tyson states that he heard this could take 6-9 months for hearing back from the Supreme Courts. Tyson suggests we just go ahead and start using our legal trials again.

Peter Klink proposes that we go back to voting the way we did pre-covid. He states that the past two election cycles have had many fraud cases and tabulator errors. He would like to go back to single day elections with ballots being sent out by town clerks only.

Stacy Dion states she strongly disagrees and there has been many examples of voter fraud debunked.

Caroline Gordon asked for a straw poll vote to determine if there is support in writing a letter to President Biden condemning the war and demanding a ceasefire.

Fuel assistance program has close to \$7000 and Kay Jorgensen is wondering what we are going to do with that money since it hasn't been used.

Heather Mullen asks for a gavel for next Town Meeting.

Motion to adjourn. Seconded. Meeting is adjourned at 2:25pm.

Gary Mullen, Chair

Mike McPhetres, Vice Chair

John O'Brien, Clerk