

## **Minutes of Town Meeting Monday March 3, 2025 6:00pm VTRANS Building (virtual option available)**

Selectboard Members Present: Megan Smith, chair, Seth Bridge, Sarah Buxton

Others present: Chris Corsones, Moderator; Jesse Bridge, Town Clerk & Treasurer; Joy Hatfield, Assistant Town Clerk & Treasurer; Sara Tully, Town Administrator (virtual); Alan Frasier Rutland County Deputy Sheriff; Jim Harrison, State Representative; Olivia Cadena, Wonderfeet Director; 10 virtual participants; 47 Checked in Voters

Moderator Chris Corsones called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, Chris went over the rules for the meeting including that remote attendees are allowed to participate for informational purposes only. He also announced that it will be the 20-year anniversary of opening the Town Office on March 4, 2005. He also recognized the 22 years of service Nancy Gondella provided to the Town before her resignation in March 2024. Chris asked for consent to allow Sara Tully, Town Administrator, be allowed to answer questions and, there was unanimous consent.

After unanimous consent from the audience, State Representative Jim Harrison updated the voters on what is being discussed in Montpelier. He mentioned a few handouts he has available with some survey links: one the House Speaker has put forth on Education reform efforts, the other is to sign up for Jim's biweekly emails. There is also a handout on key issues the governor outlined at the beginning of the session and proposals he has put forth in education, public safety, housing and changing climate laws. Jim said there is a lot of information on the Education reform from all sides. The Governor put a proposal out and it's getting a lot of criticism. The Legislature has been looking at that and getting testimony. It's unclear what direction it is going to end up going. There is a strong realization that we have a school system that was built for about 120,000 students, we now have 80,000. Enrollment has shrunk over the past 25 years, but the infrastructure hasn't shrunk. Vermont has 119 school districts, and 52 supervisory districts. The Governor proposed 5 school districts; the Senate chair of Education, Seth Bongartz, proposed 9 districts.

- Jessica Posch expressed her strong support for high school choice and hopes that is kept for Mendon.
- Tom Soriano asked if there is any update on taxation on short term rentals, Jim said there is not, the legislature added 3% surcharge on Air B&B's.
- Rich Carlson expressed he is in support of downsizing schools but what about small town schools that want to maintain their traditions and remain a separate entity. Jim said there is verbiage about minimum class sizes and putting education financing through a standardized foundation formula. Every district would get the same per weighted student. Then the school board and superintendent must figure out how to provide an adequate education with x amount of dollars. That money would be raised locally.

- Greg Smith asked how many years away the beginning of those changes will start – Jim said financing changes will most likely take effect in FY 2027.
- Chris VanSciver asked if the legislature is working proactively to consider what the state will do if the federal money doesn't continue such as Medicaid. Jim said they are asking every department agency to share their budget. We get about 36% of total state revenue from Federal gov, the biggest chunk from Medicaid. We get more from the federal government than we pay in in taxes. Per capita we get, about \$3,700 from Washington. We get \$200,000,000 in education support from grants. There isn't a good answer to that yet, but yes, they are concerned about it. We are hoping for the best, but we are going to plan accordingly.
- Liam Fracht-Monroe asked since there is an aging population and decreased pupils, are there incentives for business to come into Vermont? Jim replied that the child tax credit was introduced two years ago to entice younger families as well as the TIF Districts used by municipalities to raise money. Vermont is the world leader in Captive Insurances.
- Mary Rizk asked how many technical schools there were in VT? Jim replied 17, mostly one per county.

Chris thanked Jim.

Jennifer Bagley spoke about the Irene books that are available. Please pick one up to give to your new neighbors.

### **Article 1 – Shall the Town vote to approve the 2025-2026 Municipal Budget at \$1,419,841?**

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

Megan Smith introduced the Selectboard members, Sarah Buxton, Seth Bridge and Megan Smith and the Town Office employees, Joy Hatfield, Jesse Bridge and Greg Smith the road crew Chris Baird, Thane Beattie and Gabe Moore. The budget has increased under 3% this year. Megan highlighted some changes from last year

1. Admin and salaries went up 3%, the zoning budget was increased due to FOIA requests and increased work. Auditing has gone up \$8500 per year and that will be looked at for other options. Computer Services have gone up due to cyber security. Health Insurance rate is up 12% rate but we were able to save \$42,700 from last year due to employees taking buyout. Sand has increased due to buying more and the price increase. Good news is the Town Office Bond was paid off this year. We have decided to keep \$5000 going into the office main reserve fund.
2. ARPA funds, the town received \$302,000 dollars and half of that has gone to the office upgrades, equipment, storage and safety. About \$60,000 went to the new playground structure. We bought a new truck at \$149,000 and ARPA money was used towards that with the remainder from Reserve fund. We also got two speed radar signs with ARPA money that we will be looking for consideration on where we should place them.
3. Roads

- Journeys End – RFP went out reconstruct and pave dirt section of the end of the road funded by Better Roads Grant and Mendon’s Highway Improvement Fund.
- Notch Rd. - reclaimed and resurfaced with upgrades to all culverts
- 3 dry hydrants – grant funding from Vermont Rural Fire Protection to replace Woodward, Journeys End and Pond Rd.
- We are seeking grants for class 2 roads, structures and better roads

Due to inflation, we are underfunded in our equipment replacement fund; the cost of the new trucks has doubled. We are looking into alternative pieces of equipment and sharing resources with surrounding towns.

Larry Courcelle wanted to share that the construction of the high-speed fiber network is now completed in all the 18 member towns of the Otter Creek Communication District.

Mike Dolce asked about the cost of public safety and why it has gone up. Sara explained that we budget a contract amount based on their rates. The actual amount has been less than what was budgeted for the past two years due to staffing issues within the department.

Rich Carlson asked about the law enforcement breakdown of hours spent. Megans replied about 8 hours per month for meeting coverage the rest patrolling. Rich also asked about the fire calls, and do we try and recover any of the money from negligent parties? Sara replied we do try and recoup the false alarm calls. Rich asked how much we recover from false alarms. Sara said she will post the answer online when she can gather the information.

With no further discussion, Ann Singiser made a **motion** to approve, which was **seconded** by Marsha Bruce. **Article 1 passed unanimously.**

**Article 2 through 5 – Shall the Town vote to appropriate, \$1,200 for the support of Marble Valley Regional Transit District (The Bus), \$700 for the support of RSVP Retired Senior Volunteer Program, \$2,600 for the support of VNA and Hospice of the Southwest Region and \$2,500 for the support of Wonderfeet Kids’ Museum?** Mary Rizk made a **motion** to consolidate Articles 2 through 5, which was **seconded** by Mike Dolce. The motion **passed unanimously.**

Unanimous consent was given to allow the new director of Wonderfeet to speak on the organization. Olivia Cadena stated she’s the new Executive Director of the Wonderfeet Kids Museum and spoke about the program.

Wanda Courcelle spoke on behalf of RSVP  
Marsha Bruce spoke to support VNA.

There was no further discussion. Pati Lancaster **motioned** to approve Articles 2-5, Tom Soriano **seconded**. 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 4, 2025 at the Town Office. Jesse Bridge said the polls are open tomorrow at the Town Office from 8am – 7pm.

Candidates running for these positions introduced themselves.

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

Fred Bagley gave an update on the Zoning Regulations rewrite. He has a handout at the back of what they are working on. Carol Gates mentioned she has a copy of the map if anyone would like it.

John Rizk asked that the brush be cleared out by the side of the road to the entrance to the Mendon Rec Field as it is hard to see going in or out of the parking area.

Pati Lancaster asked about a warning that was put in mailboxes around town and if anyone could speak to that. Chris said no.

Gary Bannister asked next time, could the history of the budget be on the same page of the current budget.

Tom Soriano made the **motion** to adjourn the meeting, Marsha Bruce **seconded**. **All were in favor**.

The meeting **adjourned** at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Jesse Bridge, Town Clerk

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Megan Smith, Selectboard Chair

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Chris Corsones, Moderator