

MINUTES
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
March 6, 2018

Pursuant to notice the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax, Vermont, who are legal voters in the Town Meeting met at the West Halifax Elementary School multi-purpose room in West Halifax, Vermont, on Tuesday, March 6, 2018 for the 241st Annual Meeting of the Town of Halifax.

Moderator Paul G. Blais called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. and announced that the polls would be open from 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. for voting by Australian Ballot for Town and Town School District Officers.

Moderator Blais called for a moment of silence in memory of those who had passed away.

The Board of Selectmen led the voters in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

The town officers were introduced: Town Clerk - Patricia Dow; Selectmen - Lewis Sumner, Chairman; Mitch Green and Bradley Rafus and Robbin Gabriel as Selectboard Assistant. Moderator Blais stated that the meeting would be run by Roberts Rules of Order except where state law overrules and gave a brief explanation of parliamentary procedure.

A Brief Recess was taken to allow Representative John Gannon to speak. Representative Gannon spoke about education and income tax proposals in the house. The house ways and means commission has proposed changes to fund education. The goal was to help people see the relation between their property tax bills and school spending. This proposal would have lowered property tax by half and imposed a new school tax and eliminated the income sensitive program. This proposal would have reduced the homestead property tax rate but it would have increased the tax burden on households earning \$ 75,000 or less. This proposal has been stopped. Income tax changes: retirees with adjusted gross income of \$ 45,000 for single filers and below \$ 60,000 filers for married couples will be 100% exempt from paying state income tax on social security benefits. The change creates a Vermont standard deduction for single filers of \$ 6,000 and \$ 12,000 for married filers and a Vermont personal exemption of \$ 4,150 per exemption. This will be less burden on Vermonters. The income sensitivity program doesn't change, that stays. There is an elimination from the general fund transfer to the education fund. This means up until this proposal 20% of the general funds were transferred to education funds. That will be eliminated and replaced with 100% of sales tax proceeds will go to the education fund and 25% of rooms and meals tax proceeds will go to the education too.

Homer Sumner asks what is going to be transferred from the general fund to the education fund and how much is that going to cost schools? Gannon: I do not have a figure on that and all this happened within this last week. Sumner asks where the new special education bill is going? Gannon: Special education bill has been voted out of the house education committee and will be up for a vote when we return from town meeting break. A concern is how they will divide up the special education money and it will be solely dependent on your population. It will depend on how many special education children you have in your district. There is a lot of belief that rural schools and lower income students have more special education costs.

Marilou Parkhurst: asks about cleaning up Lake Champlain and a surcharge imposed on property owners. Gannon: The legislature passed the clean water act. The legislature did not figure out how to pay for this. There is a proposal in the Senate to have a per parcel fee on each property.

Craig Stone: We need to protect our environment. Montpelier needs to know that increasing taxes the landowners will say enough if enough. Gannon: Putting another burden on the property owner with a parcel fee is not a good idea.

Brad Rafus: another issue will be the requirements this act will make for the highways. It will require new ditches, remove burms, increased trucking costs and we will increase our carbon footprint. It will cost the towns a lot in highway costs. Gannon: That is true, there will be more burdens on town for more storm water requirements.

Doug Parkhurst: If the appropriations from the general fund to the school fund are being eliminated and it will come from the sales tax and rooms and meals tax which can be variable, would you say in the future the money would have to come from the general fund? Gannon: This is a concern of doing the funding in this way. The house ways and means really wanted to shift the burden from the property tax and onto the income tax. The age demographic income data shows an aging population and there may not be enough of the income tax revenue in the future. Property taxes as revenue are very stable.

Town Meeting was reconvened and Moderator Blais read the Warning in its entirety.

ARTICLE 1: The following Town Offices were elected by Australian Ballot:

| | |
|---|----------------|
| TOWN MODERATOR - one year..... | Paul G. Blais |
| SELECTMAN - three years..... | Mitchell Green |
| LISTER - three years..... | Patricia Dow |
| AUDITOR - three years..... | Diane Longe |
| COLLECTOR OF DELINQUENT TAXES - one year..... | Laura Sumner |
| GRAND JUROR - one year..... | Joe Tamburrino |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| TOWN AGENT – one year..... | Tina Blais |
| TRUSTEE OF PUBLIC FUNDS – three years..... | William Moore |
| CEMETERY COMMISSIONER – three years..... | Bradley Rafus |
| LIBRARY TRUSTEE | Catherine Bell |

ARTICLE 2: To see if the Town will vote by Australian ballot to expand the size of the Selectboard from three to five members, with the two new members to each have a term of two years.

Alice Alice asked why we need 5 Selectboard members?
Linda Lyon stated that while she was on the Planning and Zoning Board and appreciated that it was a five members board. It made it easy to talk to the other members. The research assignments could be spread out over all of us, and it provided us with diversity of opinions and that provided better representation of the people of Halifax.
Doug Parkhurst stated he was in favor of increasing the size of the Selectboard. We live in world of increasing complexity and diversity, and having other viewpoints is beneficial.
Joe Tamburrino stated that the Administrative Assistant is the best thing for the Selectboard. She takes a big load off the Selectboard. With five Selectboard members we will be paying more money on taxes and also pay for the Administrative Assistant. We will have to have a special election and salaries are not conducive to this town.
Marilou Parkhurst is it my understanding that there is a ruling that two Selectboard members cannot discuss outside a meeting. Do we see Halifax down the line having three people being enough to have diversity. With five members there will be people in the wings that can step forward with training. Peggy Rafus stated it is not illegal for two members to have conversations, as long as decisions are not made.
Cara Cheyette I've looked at the statute, any discussion between two members of a three member board must be warned.
Lewis Sumner stated that a law was just passed that two Selectboard members can get together on a three member board for discussions without making a decision. The law was just passed about a week ago.
Patti Pusey asked what does the Selectboard think?
Lewis Sumner stated he is against this article and it will be more costly, new members should get training and other towns that went to five members wished they were back to three.
Mitch Green stated he was also opposed to a five member board. I believe it will be more work for the board members. It will take more time to make decisions with a five member board.
Brad Rafus stated he was also against this article. Everyone should look at the town report where 3-4 people have multiple positions, there is not enough people to run for offices. The Planning and Zoning Board a few years ago went from a seven member board down to 5 because there wasn't enough people interested.
Alice Aldrich stated that there are not many people that are volunteering for positions within the town. It was asked how long each current member of the board has been serving: Sumner on 36 years off for 3 and on 13 yrs, Green has been on for a total of 8 years; Rafus has been on the board for 2.5 years.

ARTICLE 3: Andrew Rice moved that the Town hear the reports of the Town Officers and to accept the Town Report as printed for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2017.
Joseph Tamburrino seconded the motion. Reports were heard from town officers as follows:

- Patricia Dow: Treasurer for the Town, Thanked everyone for being re-elected. Also spoke on the previous years article for the Town Celebration and how the money was spent.
- Mary Brewster: The Listers reported that the towns people have been gracious when we have to go to a persons' house, and we bring your whole file with us to answer questions, and we have received 100% positive feedback on how we collect data.
- Laura Sumenr: Collector of Delinquent Taxes reported that the current uncollected balance is \$18,298.25.
- Stephen Cohen: Trustee for Public Funds for the Cael Fund. This is a scholarship fund for post-secondary schooling. There are two major things to report, we are phasing out a Certificate of Deposit at TD Bank and moving it to Brattleboro Savings & Loan. There was a new school scholarship provided by a donation from William Ashcroft for academic progress.
- Brad Rafus: Road Commissioner stated he would first like to thank the road crew for all their hard work and dedication to town. Highway spending is down by seeking grants. We received a \$175,000 paving grant for Branch Road, a \$45,000 bridge structures grant for Deer Park Road and an \$8,000 Better Back Roads grant for an erosion study. We will be getting a \$14,200 grant for ditches and culverts on

Stark Mountain Road. We also just received a \$20,000 Better Back Roads grant for Reed Hill to be used in Fiscal Year 19. We were able to crush 9,000 yards of gravel which costs \$45,000 compared to buying it from a vendor with trucking for \$162,000. We also reduced the electric bill by \$100 a month with a grant to upgrade the lighting in the Town Garage. We changed from a uniform company to a clothing allowance which cut costs.

Andy Rice: pound keeper: Please keep collars on your dogs with license tag on it so we can identify your dog when they are found.

Stephan Chait for Windham Regional Commission: WRC put together a watershed study to make people more aware of water shed. This is meant to improve flood resilience and making people more aware of floods, and how water moves into the Green River. This also provides an education study for local schools. WRC received a grant from High Meadow Fund for \$40,000 to put this study together. It was an 18 month grant.

Lewis Sumner: Representative to Windham Solid Waste Management District: Brattleboro Recycling facility closed July 1, 2017. Halifax went with Tam. The district has 20 year lease with Sky Solar in the District landfill in Brattleboro and it should be online by June 2018. Halifax signed up to get cheaper electricity.

Andy Rice: Loan Review Committee: We have over \$300,000 in funds to loan and we would like to thank the members of the committee for all their hard work.

Lewis Sumner: Recycling Coordinator: We still have recycling bins and we need to try to keep the correct items in the correct bins, if the items get mixed Halifax gets charged extra. Halifax had to pay a lot of money when there was dirt in the bottles and cans bin. Please break down cardboard boxes so the bin doesn't have to be replaced so often, it will save the town money if we can get more in the bins.

Malcolm Sumner: Fire Warden: thanks everyone for being careful with their fires and to please give a call if you want to burn or call Wayne Courser.

ARTICLE 4: Homer Sumner moved to see if the Town will vote to collect taxes for the Town and the Southern Valley Unified Union School District as follows: Taxes will be due on or before September 30, 2018 payable to the Town Treasurer. Taxes will become delinquent after September 30, 2018 and payable with penalties and interest to the Collector of Delinquent Taxes. Alice Aldrich seconded the motion. Moderator Blais declared Article 4 so passed.

ARTICLE 5: E. Turner Lewis moved that the Town will apply any budget surplus from the current fiscal year (FY18) to reduce taxes in the next fiscal year (FY19). Arthur Copeland seconded the motion.

Cara Cheyette asked if the Town benefitted this year from last years article? Sumner stated that we broke even with the fiscal year 17 budget and we won't know until the June 30, 2018 tax rate is set for fiscal year 19 if there will be a surplus.

Moderator Blais declared Article 5 so passed.

ARTICLE 6: Patricia Pusey moved that the Town will vote to approve Selectboard and Highway expenditures of \$1,369,392 of which \$1,179,892 shall be raised by taxes and \$189,500 by non-tax revenues to care for the expenses and liabilities of the Town for FY19. Joe Tamburrino seconded the motion.

The question has been called and seconded to end debate. Moderator Blais declared calling the question so passed. Moderator Blais declared Article 6 so passed.

ARTICLE 7: Patricia Pusey moved that the Town will vote to set the Treasurer's budget for salary and collection of current taxes at \$15,000 plus \$4,000 for expenses for FY19. Marilou Parkhurst seconded the motion. Moderator Blais declared Article 7 so passed.

ARTICLE 8: Linda Combs moved that the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of:

| | |
|--------|--|
| \$ 200 | Brattleboro Area Hospice |
| \$ 550 | Senior Solutions (Council on Aging for Southern Vermont) |
| \$ 700 | Woman's Freedom Center |
| \$ 750 | HCRS (Health Care and Rehabilitative Services) |
| \$ 200 | Youth Services |
| \$ 50 | Green Up Vermont |

| | |
|----------|---|
| \$ 250 | American Red Cross |
| \$ 790 | Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) |
| \$ 500 | The Gathering Place Adult Day Program |
| \$ 1,900 | Visiting Nurse Assn. & Hospice of Vermont & New Hampshire, Inc. |
| \$ 4,000 | Whitingham Free Public Library |
| \$ 4,000 | Halifax Fire Department (First Responders) |
| \$ 2,500 | Wings Community Programs |
| \$ 500 | Deerfield Valley Community Partnership |
| \$ 2,000 | Halifax Community Club |
| \$ 500 | Deerfield Valley Food Pantry |

Joe Tamburrino seconded the motion.

Sumner spoke about the EMS question that most of the fireman have taken the course, and Whitingham First Responders are toned out at the same time as the Halifax Fire Department.

Moderator Blais declared Article 10 so voted.

ARTICLE 9: Mary Brewster moved to transact any other non-binding business that may legally come before the meeting. Joe Tamburrino seconded the motion.

Patricia Dow spoke about the Town Celebration and thanked several people who helped make the day a huge success.

Patricia Pusey spoke on behalf of the Whitingham/Halifax Lyons club and they are having an informational meeting and they are looking for new members.

Linda Lyon spoke on behalf of the Community Club. The club has made some transitions after Joan Courser decided to leave the club. Every Wednesday morning there is Tae Chi and yoga is taught by Penfield Chester. We are having potluck dinners. We are trying to get the hall insulated and the Club is non-profit so you can donate.

Laurel Copeland mentioned the breakfast on March 24th.

Marshall Case asks for permission to speak. Seeing no objections, the assembly allowed Mr. Case to speak. Marshall runs the nature camp which is held during the first full week in August.

Sandie Pentak spoke about the March reading challenge. We want the community members to be involved and if you keep track of your reading you will be put into a drawing around April 1st for a Barns and Noble Gift Certificate.

Linda Rice thanked the road crew for their service and care they provide. Also Thanked Brad Rafus for his report on how the highway department is saving us money instead of skimping on the sand when the roads are slippery.

Turner Lewis thanked the road crew for a fabulous job.

Doug Parkhurst spoke about his appreciation to the Halifax Historical Society and if anyone is interested in history or genealogy to contact us.

Patricia Pusey moved and it was seconded by Marilou Parkhurst that the meeting be adjourned. The meeting was adjourned at 11:59 A.M.

Attest: Patricia Dow
Town Clerk

We, the undersigned, approve and attest that the record of the Annual Town Meeting of the Town of Halifax held at the West Halifax Elementary School multi-purpose room on Tuesday, March 6, 2018 is a true record of all action taken at the meeting.

Attest: Paul S. Blais
Moderator

Attest: Lewis L. Sumner
Other Election Official