

## **Worcester, Vermont**

### **Town Meeting - March 5, 2024**

Paul Hanlon called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m.

**Article 1** - Allen Gilbert nominated Paul Hanlon as town moderator. Alan Erdossy seconded. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 2** - No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 3** - Alan Erdossy moved to adopt the Article as written. Second by Marlene Kovacs A correction was made on page 31 of the Town Report. The total if all pass was increased by \$2,700 to \$1,143,997.95. No further discussion. With the consent of the assembly to consider the correction as part of the original motion, The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 4** - Lacey Osborne nominated Shawn McMannis as Town Constable. Victor Ely seconded. No other nominations were made. Shawn McMannis was elected Town Constable.

**Article 5** - Peter Strobridge nominated Fran Cerulli as Cemetery Commissioner for a term of three years. David Book seconded. No other nominations were made. Fran Cerulli was elected Cemetery Commissioner.

**Article 6** - David Book nominated himself as Cemetery Commissioner for one of a three year term. Fran Cerulli nominated Julia Shedd as Cemetery Commissioner for one of a three year term. David Book withdrew his nomination. Marcia Hill seconded Julia Shedd's nomination, and Julia Shedd was elected Cemetery Commissioner.

**Article 7** - Marcia Hill moved to adopt the motion as written. The motion was seconded by Marlene Kovacs.

Curt Ericson Kurt Ericsken made a motion to amend Article 7 to state that if a tax payment is submitted postmarked by or on the due date, there would be a late penalty of \$50 as a processing fee. Anything submitted or postmarked after the due date would incur the eight percent late fee. The amendment was second by Michelle Hill.

Mr. Hanlon asked Town Treasurer Katie Miller to respond to the amendment. Ms. Miller responded that she was not sure legally what the processing fee could be. She was hesitant to support the amendment because she felt there is plenty of notice for when taxes are due. But also shared that this is the decision of the people. She also noted that Worcester is one of very few towns that have almost no delinquent taxes.

Peter Strobridge noted that the point of having a deadline is to meet the deadline.

Marcia Hill shared that you can't always read the postmark.

There was further discussion regarding the postal service not being as efficient as it has been in years past, a discussion of grace periods and postmarks.

Town Selectboard member Carter Stowell shares that “tax payments make up about 75 percent of the town budget. Anything that reduces or delays the incoming revenue costs the town more because we’re having to borrow and we’re paying more as a town. Keep that in mind as we’re trying to manage the town budget.”

Further discussion was had on the support of accepting the postmark date and the legality of accepting the postmark and late fees. Allen Gilbert noted that “Some day there will be a time when there may be a flood and we all can’t get to the town clerk. I’m going to vote in favor of a \$50 fee.”

*Town Clerk Jennifer LeStat noted that the polls were open at 10:04 a.m.*

Kathy Barrows made a motion to close debate. Victor Ely second. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hanlon read the amendment to remove the \$50 processing fee. Upon a voice vote, the amendment failed.

Mr. Hanlon reread the original amendment offered by Mr. Ericksen. The amendment failed.

Mr. Hanlon read the original motion as printed in the town report. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 8** - Victor Ely moved that the article be passed as written in the town report. Marlene Kovacs seconded.

Selectboard Chair John Kaeding shared some details on the town budget. He noted that the highway budget change is caused by movement of expenses from an existing account into the general fund. What appears to be a new budget item is simply bringing this old highway equipment fund into the general fund.

Mr. Kaeding noted that flood repair expenses thus far for the July 2023 floods are over \$1.5 million, and more expenses are expected to be incurred as work is done on Calais Road this summer. He expects FEMA will cover 75 percent of costs. The State will cover 17.5 percent of costs, and the Town will pay 7.5 percent of expenses. He also shared that during the last 5-10 years, “there were several smart people in our town who saw the wisdom in complying with state recommendations to follow complicated guidelines to prepare for and minimize results of weather disasters. They completed five separate and complex programs. How fully a town completed those programs determined how much reimbursement a town would get. Had they not done that, our reimbursement would have been 7.5 percent. Their work saved the town 100k for each million of damage. We are indebted to the service of those people.”

He also shared that “it’s true that 2024 will be a year of higher costs to the town. It’s also true that due to new housing and increased tax base, revenues are expected to increase. After six years of stable tax rates, rates will increase from 0.686 to 0.799. We hate that increase but we did the best we can do.”

Mr. Kaeding opened the floor for questions. Discussions were held regarding the new town grant administrator position, traffic fine revenue, changes to escrow amounts for property taxes and Peter Strobridge asked what was funding the highway account in the past. Mr. Kaeding noted that it was the equipment capital fund. Each year there was a payment made to that fund. He shared that moving this to the general fund makes it easier to pay for equipment.

Further discussion was held of the money appropriated to the recreation committee, the safety equipment fund, and payments for elections officials.

Mr. Hanlon read the motion as moved and seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

*Mr. Hanlon asked to break to hear from State Representatives Avram Patt and Saudia LaMotte who shared about what is happening at the State House and updates from their committees as well as bills moving through the legislature.*

**Article 9** - Nadya Beck made a motion to waive the reading of the article. Alan Erdossy seconded.

Ms. LeStat noted that in the back of the town report, there is a list of the agencies that service the town and who they are.

Marlene Kovacs moved the article as written. Allen Gilbert second. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 10** - Michelle Hill moved the article as written. Nadya Beck seconded. The ayes had the vote.

**Article 11** - Alan Erdossy moved the article as written. Second by Martin Kovacs.

Lauren Chabot noted that she would prefer to see the money spent in a different way, and felt fireworks are not the best use of the town’s money.

Fran Rousseau stated that she started the fireworks many years ago. Ms. Rousseau read a report from an old article about the fourth of July festival printed in the WORLD newspaper. She suggested finishing the fireworks for this year and coming up with something for next year.

Fourth of July Committee member Dell Waterhouse shared that the committee had looked into drones and they are very expensive. A meeting is scheduled for March 21, and Ms. Waterhouse invited town members to come and share their thoughts and opinions at the meeting.

Peter Strobridge asked what the committee has raised so far. Ms. Waterhouse responded that it was about \$3,500.

Several residents voiced various opinions and ideas regarding their favor or disfavor of fireworks. Some other topics included the safety of private fireworks shows, chemicals from the fireworks, and the fireworks being something positive for the town - especially teens.

Joanne Herring moved to close discussion. Bill Dodge seconded. The motion to close debate passed unanimously.

Mr. Hanlon read the original motion, and the motion was passed.

**Article 12** - Peter Strobridge moved the article as written. John Sherbatskoy second. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 13** - Allen Gilbert moved the article as written. Alan Erdossy seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 14** - Sara Baker moved the article as written. Marcia Hill seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Article 15** - A discussion was held regarding votes on motions that are not unanimous. Mr. Hanlon noted that the pause after he says “the ayes appear to have it” allows for people to call for other procedures under Roberts Rules.

Marcia Hill noted that the Neighbor Network has a form on the table by the door for anyone who wants to help neighbors in need.

Mr. Stowell stated that the fire department also needs volunteers, and the planning commission is also looking for new members.

Ms. Rousseau noted that there is Bingo on Sundays from 3-4:30 p.m., and it will go on through March and on July fourth.

Cary Johnson, the secretary for the recreation committee, shared that the committee is looking for land owners who have private trails who might want to connect to the larger trail network and offer their trails for public use.

Marcia Hill moved to adjourn at 12:05. Seconded by Marlene Kovacs. The ayes had the vote with one (laughing) objection.

Respectfully submitted by,

Hollie Friot