

## TOWN MEETING      MARCH 5, 2024    MINUTES

**Article 1:** Polls were open for voting under Article 1 from 10AM to 7PM. The following officers were elected:

Town Moderator	John Hill
Cemetery Commissioner	Susan Brown
Cemetery Commissioner 3 years	Hannah Brown
Library Commissioner 5 years	Robin Wilson
Auditor, 3 year	Cheryl Murray
Selectboard 3 year	Brad Barrett
Selectboard 1 year	Linda Swarm Peltier, Jim Pritchard
Delinquent Tax Collector	Barbara Burlett
Trustee of Public Funds	Jayme L.V. Purdy
Lister 1 year	Martha Savageau
Lister 3 years	Edward Peltier

Representative William Canfield spoke prior to the meeting. Mr. Canfield addressed Education spending and how it will affect property taxes. He also addressed Transportation projects. Route 22A will have more money allocated for Right of Way. The project is slated to begin 2026 with 2028 being the completion date. The Federal government will fund 80% of the project and the State will fund 20%, no local funds will be used. Lynn Bowen asked about lottery money being used for education. Mr. Canfield stated that around 28 million was allocated to the Education fund from the Lottery sales. Nancy Elkington asked about the Education budget. Mr. Canfield stated that it would not be determined until the budgets were passed.

Moderator John Hill called the floor meeting to order at 10:05AM and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Moderator reviewed the rules of the meeting. Selectboard Chairperson Linda Peltier reminded everyone that we were here for a common cause. We celebrated and thanked Thomas Bartholomew for his many years of service. She talked about the town putting off budget increases for years and that there were no easy answers. Linda stated that the Board was very transparent this year. She closed by saying that the Town garage will be breaking ground in April.

The Moderator proceeded to consideration of the warned articles as follows:

Guy Charlton made a motion to move Article 16 to be read first. Jack Helm seconded it. Guy Charlton reasoned that it would affect the budget articles. Motion carried.

Article 16: Shall the Town vote to expend \$250,000 (Two Hundred and Fifty thousand dollars) of ARPA funds on construction of a new highway garage. Said funds to be used to reduce the amount to be borrowed?

Jack Helm passed out a handout showing how much interest would be saved by reducing the principal. Joe Trenn asked about restrictions on the ARPA funds. Guy Charlton stated that the restrictions were loosened, but that they could not be put into reserved funds or pay down existing debt. Daphne Bartholomew asked if Guy Charlton was speaking as a Selectboard member. Guy Charlton replied he was speaking as a member of the public. Tracy Howard asked what the downside was to reducing the current budget. Thomas Bartholomew, speaking as a member of the public, stated that ARPA money could be used to decrease the current tax rate and that this was not a binding Article. This was a preference vote, the voters cannot direct the Selectboard on how to spend ARPA money. Daphne Bartholomew suggested using \$160,000 of ARPA funds to reduce the amount to be raised by taxes. Karen Barber figured the savings for the loan reduction would be about \$6,500 over fifteen years. Ted Kellogg asked why the money wasn't spent or earmarked already and he had no problem spending

the money on the garage. Wayne Fletcher stated that we will still have the same money for the budgets without ARPA funds and we should use it for big ticket items, such as the garage. Paul LaFond concurred with paying the principal down, stating that the school budgets always increase, but we control our own budgets and ARPA funds shouldn't be used to plug the gap. Jayme Purdy move to call the question, Jon Dodd seconded it. Motion carried. By a show of hands, counted by Ed Peltier and Lynn Bowen, 64 yeas and 25 nays. Motion carried.

Article 2: Jayme Purdy moved that the Town vote to approve the expenditure of \$507,530 for the General Fund Budget of which \$364,271 shall be raised by taxes. The motion was seconded by Nancy Elkington. The maker of the motion and the second declined to speak. Daphne Bartholomew, believing the increase was more than people could tolerate, asked that the amount of the expenditure to be reduced by \$35,000. The reductions could come from the Fire Department Equipment reserve fund and the Building reserve fund, stating that we shouldn't be saving for the future when the budgets are increasing so much. She noted that about two-thirds of the General Fund payroll budget was used to cover highway liabilities Daphne Bartholomew made a motion to approve the expenditure of \$472,530 for the General Fund Budget of which \$329,271 shall be raised by taxes. Joe Trenn seconded it. A question was raised as to why the insurance increased so much, the response was that the Highway department was adding another person. The town approved the amendment to approve the expenditure of \$472,530 for the General Fund Budget of which \$329,271 shall be raised by taxes.

Article 3: Brad Barrett moved that the Town vote to approve the expenditure of \$807,620 for the layout, repair and maintenance of Town highways of which \$667,445 shall be raised by taxes. The motion was seconded by Ben Bartholomew. Brad Barrett spoke about the increase in daily line item cost. Ben Bartholomew talked about how he was called to help the Town during this winter's storm damage, how many places were still not fixed and how we need this money to put the roads together. He also commented on the rising cost of trucking, diesel, tires, etc. Question were raised as to why Article 22 was not part of this budget. Brad Barrett talked about the cost and the construction work for the two projects. Dan Ryan asked why the Town crew wasn't doing the project. Answer: they do maintenance and have no experience building roads. Lee Chapman asked about grants. Brad Barrett answered that the Town had funding for Carter Street, Money Hole Road and South Stage Road. Sam Bartholomew stated that we didn't need to build up the Equipment Reserve Fund this year, so \$50,000 could be cut until next year when the Selectboard has an Equipment plan in place. Sam Bartholomew made a motion to decrease the Highway budget by \$110,000, seconded by Kate Hill. Jean McKeever asked where the cuts would be. Sam Bartholomew said he would cut the \$50,000 from the Equipment fund, chloride and gravel, there should be no need to cut services. Guy Charlton said we should order a new truck now. Jaci Lussier called the question, Gina Parker seconded it. Motion to call carried. By a show of hands, 48 yeas and 38 nays, the town approved the amendment to approve the expenditure of \$697,620 for the layout, repair and maintenance of Town highways of which \$557,445 shall be raised by taxes.

Article 4: Ben Bartholomew moved that the Town of Benson vote to appropriate \$2,000 for the Benson First Response for the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 to help defray the cost of major expenses. Adam Stewart seconded the motion. Following the discussion on the great job they do, the motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 5: Ben Bartholomew moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$62,336 for support of Fair Haven Rescue Squad to provide services to residents of the Town. Jayme Purdy seconded the motion. Benson's representative, Sam Bartholomew discussed how EMS services are in trouble countrywide, there are not many EMTs willing to work for low wages. Most of them have a second job. They need a new ambulance and the need for more full time positions. When there is a two car accident and they only have one ambulance, they need to rely on struggling neighboring towns. Three people, Tom Neumann, Wendy Fitzgerald, and Sean Galvin help keep the squad going. Lisa Chalidze commented on how the Rescue Squad has helped her and many people in Town. There was no further discussion. The motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 6: Lisa Chalidze moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$11,000 for the Town Library. Gail Ryan seconded the motion. The maker of the motion, Lisa Chalidze commented that the Library was a great resource, that is becoming more active, the services are enjoyed by both children, parents, and the library is so important, Kate Hill asked how last years money was spent, answer on page 38 of the Town Report. Joe Trenn asked about the increase, Gina Parker responded that they need funding for increased programming and to pay the Librarian. The article was approved on a voice vote.

Article 7: Janet Ladd made a motion that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$20,000 for the maintenance and care of the Town cemeteries. The motion was seconded by Hannah Brown. The maker of the motion stated that they need to work on over 400 stones in the old cemetery. They should be repaired out of respect to the families. Richard Legault asked if this money includes \$15,000 for the lawn

mowing. Yes and the excess is used to fix stones. Daphne Bartholomew said to look on page 37 of the Town Report to see the balance on hand to use for repairs. Wayne Burleson commented that the cost for the mowing was a good deal. Jayme Purdy called the question with a second from Jon Dodd, motion to call was approved. The Article motion was approved on a voice vote.

Article 8: Amanda Bartholomew moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$1,250 for the Benson Youth League for the support of their program. Lisa Fontaine seconded. Lisa Fontaine spoke on how wonderful it was for children to have sports. The motion was approved on a voice vote

Article 9: Jayme Purdy moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$1,000 for the Community Scholarship Fund. The motion was seconded by Linda Peltier. The motion was approved on a voice vote.

Article 10: Linda Peltier seconded by Jean McKeever moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate, and expend the sum of \$2,000 to support Slate Valley Cares (formerly Fair Haven Concerned, Inc). Maker of the motion spoke about the annual report on page 49 of the Town Report. She also mentioned over \$3,000 directly went to Benson residents last year. The organization provides emergency funding for heating oil and related services. She encouraged everyone to come and visit. She mentioned they had a new director named Jeffrey Jackson. The organization had a name change, and are looking for volunteers. Jean McKeever remarked on the incredible job they do. The motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 11: Diane Drake moved to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$600 for the support of ARC-Rutland Area to provide services to residents of the Town. Lisa Chalidze seconded the motion. Diane Drake stated that she was a Director of ARC-Rutland area and they provide social services to developmental and disabled adults. They provided five dances, outdoor experiences, education and entertainment. The program has been around for 65 years, there are seven members from Benson. They assist the families as well. They do not receive any State or Federal funding. All funding comes from Grants and Town appropriations. Lisa Chalidze said that they do a huge amount for the unseen population on a shoestring budget. The motion was approved on a voice vote.

Article 12: Sam Bartholomew moved that the town vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$1,400 for the support of the Rutland Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice to provide services to residents of the Town. Jayme Purdy seconded the motion. The maker of the motion said that this was a very important service and that they were not asking a lot for what they do. The motion was approved on a voice vote.

Article 13: Jayme Purdy, seconded by Joe Trenn, moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate, and expend the sum of \$2000 to support the programs and services of BROCC-Community Action to provide social services to residents of the Town of Benson. There was no objection from the voters to have Mrs. Eddy from BROCC speak on the matter. Mrs. Eddy thanked the voters for allowing her to speak. She said that this was a minor investment for the social services they provide to the Town. It all goes directly to residents, providing 18 families use of the food shelf twice a month, 23 households with fuel assistance, 10 with financial services, 13 with disabilities and \$29,369 for weatherization. Following her remarks, the motion was approved on a voice vote.

Article 14: Dave Bartholomew moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$900 for the support of Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging to provide social services to residents of the Town. Wayne Fletcher seconded it. Kate Hill discussed about the organization being a great resource for seniors. The motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 15: Jayme Purdy moved that the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$2,500 to support the Family Day Committee, seconded by Donna Kelly. Jayme Purdy said that they work on a shoestring budget and that she loves the tradition. The motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 17: Donna Kelly moved, seconded by Jean McKeever that the Town vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$30,000 for Law Enforcement. The maker and the seconder both agree that every town should have Law Enforcement. Brad Barrett spoke about the Selectboard putting \$8,000 in the yearly budget, but cannot secure any Department to come to Town. Sam Bartholomew stated that the Police don't always show up to calls, State Police doesn't want to answer calls. If hired they could patrol as well as answer 911 calls. Ted Kellogg mentioned the last time we had Law Enforcement, they patrolled at the same times. He was wondering what we get for this type of money, and could we generate money from tickets. Linda Peltier spoke to the fact that throughout the year the Selectboard dealt with many issues that should have been handled by the police. She felt that we needed some type of Law Enforcement in Town, and talked about long response time. The Board looked for partnering with other towns, but at the moment no one was available, so we don't have a commitment from other agencies. Selectboard member Jerod Glover spoke about partnering with another local

department and knew that we were interested. Jerod was asked about response time and if they were involved in the community or would just write tickets only. Jerod answered 10 hours per week, 520 hours a year. Court and case work counted as hours. He believes a presence is good and had a mock contract if anyone wanted to look at it. Dan Ryan spoke of the slow response time being so far from town. Sam Bartholomew recommended Fair Haven or Castleton Police Departments since they are the ones that come to the vehicle crashes on VT RTE 22A. Daphne Bartholomew thought there was a need, since State police won't come to non-emergency situations. Gina Parker called the question Kate Hill Seconded it. Motion passed. By a show of hand, 25 ayes and 46 nays, the motion was not carried.

Article 18: Jayme Purdy moved and Linda Peltier seconded that the Town change the date of its annual meeting to the third day preceding the first Tuesday in March pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2640. Jayme Purdy expressed how difficult it was for her to make the meeting today. Linda Peltier spoke on the budget revote last year, saying that she thought they had a large turnout. After some discussion Tom Bartholomew called the question, Linda Peltier seconded, motion to call passed. By a show of hand 49 Ayes, 13 nays, motion carried.

Article: 19 Jerod Glover moved, seconded by Linda Peltier for the Town to vote to eliminate the office of constable pursuant to 17 V.S.A §2651a(d). The maker of the motion deemed the position unattainable. A level 1, 2, or 3 Law Enforcement officer, requires state approval, 700 hours of training, and the budget is already defunded. The seconder stated that the position is obsolete. Ted Kellogg questioned if it had to be filled, and saw no need to abolish it. Sam Bartholomew believes the State is phasing out the position. Brad Barrett recommended an amendment to have the Selectboard appoint a Constable. Jon Dodd stated that the regulations were different for an appointed versus a voted positions. By a show of hands, the motion passed with 50 ayes and 3 nays

Article 20: Tom Bartholomew moved and Linda Peltier seconded the motion of the Town of Benson to adopt its General Fund budget by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A §2680(c)(1). The maker of the motion believed this would allow more voters to be able to vote on larger ticket items. Ted Kellogg thought this would leave nothing of substance to vote on during Town Meeting. Discussion about not being able to make amendments to the Budgets. Discussion about the move to a Saturday Town meeting would bring more people. The motion was defeated by voice vote.

Article 21: Tom Bartholomew moved with a second from Jerod Glover the motion for the Town of Benson to adopt its Highway budget by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2680(c)(1). Tom found no reason to talk about this Article as the previous one was defeated. Jon Dodd called the question, Jayme Purdy seconded. The motion to call the question passed. Tom Bartholomew asked to table the question. The motion to table the question passed. Jon Dodd made a point of order asking for a date and time. Answered to table to until next Town meeting.

Article 22: Tom Bartholomew moved with a second from Jayme Purdy the motion for the town to appropriate the sum of \$100,000 for highway projects, to make improvements to Money Hole Road and Carter Street. The maker of the motion discussed how this was talked about last year, this would give the public an idea of the cost of projects and a say in the process of appropriations. He believed that this was not a good year to pass this motion. Brad Barrett concurred. By voice vote the motion was defeated.

Article 23: Guy Charlton seconded by Brad Barrett, moved that the voters authorize payment of real property taxes in two installments, with the due dates being September 17, 2024, and March 15, 2025. Guy Charlton mentioned that this Article must be included by statute and the motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 24 Guy Charlton, seconded by Jayme Purdy moved that the voters authorize the Town Treasurer, pursuant to V.S.A. § 4791, to collect current taxes. The motion passed on a voice vote.

Article 25: The following topic was discussed under other business: Joe Carlisle brought to the attention of the Selectboard that the refrigerator doors were not being removed at the Transfer Station, he saw this as a liability issue.

At 1:04 pm, the meeting adjourned on a motion from Jon Dodd with a second from Lynn Bowen.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved

Disapproved

Heidi Chandler  
Town Clerk

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