

## TOWN MEETING AUSTRALIAN BALLOTS March 3, 2026 MINUTES

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

Town Moderator	John Hill
Selectboard 1 year	Daryl F Burlett James Pritchard
Selectboard 3 years	Benjamin Bartholomew
Delinquent Tax Collector	Barbara Burlett
Cemetery Commissioner	Joe Carlisle
Trustee of Public Funds	Carrie LaFond
Library Commissioner	Annabelle DeBoover
Library Commissioner 2 years remaining	Jaci Lussier
Lister	Lois Trenn
Auditor	Lynn Bowen

## TOWN MEETING February 28, 2026 MINUTES

Moderator John Hill called the floor meeting to order at 10:03 AM and the Honorary Mayor Henry Brown led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance. Brad Barrett congratulated Henry Brown on becoming the new Honorary Mayor of Benson and presented him with a certificate.

The Moderator reviewed the rules of the meeting.

Senator Terry Williams addressed the assembly. Senator Williams states that there were currently 1,300 bills on the floor waiting to get to the Governor's desk for his signature. Senator Williams talked about his commitment to stabilizing taxes. He stated that he was on the Natural Resources Committee, working on Act 250 and Act 181 and the Education Committee, working on Act 73 reform and district boundaries. He took questions from the audience. Moderator John Hill spoke to the need to rebuild and widen 22A, with safety being a high priority. Diane Drake asked about fixing 22A versus building a new interstate. Senator Williams stated that there was 36% cut in transportation funds, the state cut back on 100 miles of class 2 highway spending. Senator Williams talked about the need to have electric vehicles help to increase the funding. Bonny Baldwin asked about the financial burden that insurance plans create on Vermonters. Senator Williams stated that there is not any competition for plans in Vermont. Dan Ryan asked about the cut to Federal funding, Senator Williams believes it is a spending problem. Pete Lowell asked about the percentage of homeless people in the State. Senator Williams answered that it was privileged information, answering that the number of homeless is decreasing, the 3-Squares funding was cut and the lack of COVID funding. Jacalyn Ambrozaitis asked if the redistricting would affect test scores. Senator Williams believes that redistricting would not affect the test scores, he talked about the need to cut administrative costs.

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

**Article 2:** Shall the Town of Benson adopt all budget articles by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2680 (c)?

Guy Charlton made the motion to adopt all budget articles by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2680 (c), seconded by Lynn Bowen. Guy Charlton spoke to the fact that we have many voters, with only a few voting on the budgets. Lynn Bowen agreed and stated that less than 10% show up to Town Meeting. Moderator John Hill explained the Article to the floor. There was discussion on how this would work. Guy Charlton explained that there would be an informational meeting and would like to see more people come to the budget meetings. Lisa Fontaine thought that 5:00 PM was too early. Jim Pritchard said that no matter the time, people don't show up. Diane Drake asked about the informational meeting. Guy Charlton said that there could be no changes to the Warning once it is posted. Brooke Bartholomew said that the same people come, higher turnout doesn't necessarily mean better government. Daphne Bartholomew, the maker of the petition, stated that this year there would be no change. If the budget is voted down, there will be a revote within thirty days. Daphne Bartholomew believes this would be fairer to the people who are not able to sit in the chairs for a long time and those unable to hear well. There was discussion on the Selectboard

meeting room being too small and not welcoming. Barbara Burlett called the question. Lynn Bowen seconded, Lynn Bowen asked for a vote by paper ballot. The motion passed with 50 yeses and 36 noes.

**Article 3:** Shall the Town of Benson adopt all public questions by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2680 (d)?

Guy Charlton made the motion to adopt all public questions by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2680 (d). Jim Pritchard seconded it. The maker of the motion stated that it would defeat the purpose to vote this Article down, it only makes sense to vote all public questions by ballot. The motion passed on a voice vote.

**Article 4:** Shall the Town vote to approve the expenditure of \$829,735 for the layout, repair and maintenance of Town highways of which \$693,735 shall be raised by taxes?

Lynn Bowen moved to approve the Article, seconded by Barbara Burlett. The maker of the motion and seconder declined to speak. Guy Charlton started the discussion saying that the payroll expenses for the Highway use to be in the General budget and are now where it belongs in the Highway budget. Brad Barrett stated that the highway budget has been level funded for the past four years, while we have had 3% inflation. We have had major upgrades to Sunset Lake Road and Hulett Hill Road. He also thanked the community for their support. Discussion on the purchase of the 2027 truck. Daryl Burlett called the question. The motion passed by voice vote.

**Article 5:** Shall the Town vote to approve the expenditure of \$420,730 for the General Fund Budget of which \$248,047 shall be raised by taxes?

Gina Parker motioned, seconded by Diane Drake to approve Article 5. Guy Charlton spoke to the town hiring Law Enforcement this year. After no more discussion, the motion passed on a voice vote.

**Article 6:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$33,000 for the operating budget of the Benson Volunteer Fire Department and the sum of \$35,000 for the Fire Department Reserve Fund?

Adam Stewart made the motion, seconded by Sam Bartholomew. The maker of the motion stated that their budget is usually lumped in with the General fund and they decided to go with an Article instead this year. He also talked about the cost of gear rising and cost of everything going up. Sam Bartholomew thanked Adam Stewart for stepping up to be the Chief. The motion passed by voice vote.

**Article 7:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate \$2,000 for the Benson First Response for the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 to help defray the cost of major expenses?

Benjamin Bartholomew made the motion, seconded by Sam Bartholomew. The maker of the motion spoke to the Article stating that he believed that it was not enough money for the services provided. Sam Bartholomew talked about the fact that having local First Responders traditionally is winding down. There are only three members left, he spoke to the need for a stronger Fair Haven Rescue Squad and the need for more EMS volunteers. The motion passed by a voice vote.

**Article 8:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$69,154 for the support of Fair Haven Rescue Squad to provide services to residents of the Town?

Sam Bartholomew made the motion with a second by Amanda Bartholomew. Sam Bartholomew believes that the Fair Haven Rescue Squad is doing an amazing job. The rescue squad has converted one of the storage bays into a classroom, they offer classes to be a driver as well as CPR classes. Sam Bartholomew said that there is a need for EMTs. Amanda Bartholomew said she was confident that they would show up when needed. Jim Pritchard asked about the cost of the classes. Sam Bartholomew answered, the classes are offered at cost to pay for the trainer. Sam Bartholomew spoke to the costs of an ambulance ride and that Medicare only pays a portion of the bill. Wayne Fletcher commented that the non-payers are putting stress on the ambulance services. Lisa Fontaine reminded everyone of the Subscription Program, and Sam Bartholomew explained that for a \$55 per year subscription, it provides ambulance services free of charge for the household. Jim Pritchard called the question, seconded by Daryl Burlett. The Article passed by a voice vote.

**Article 9:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate the sum of \$12,000 for the operating expenses of the Town Library?

Motion made by Gina Parker, seconded by Tim Boyd. The maker of the motion discussed about the library doing more events and expressed appreciation for the community's support. The motion passed on a voice vote.

**Article 10:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate the sum of \$20,000 for the maintenance and care of the Town cemeteries?

Janet Ladd made the motion, seconded by Daryl Burrett. Janet Ladd talked about the expense of \$14,000 needed for mowing the cemeteries, lightning striking a tree, and buying flags. After no more discussion, the motion passed on a voice vote.

**Article 11:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate \$1,000 for the Community Scholarship Fund?

Motion made by Tim Boyd, seconded by Jayme Purdy. Tim Boyd thought that it was not a lot of money to show community support. Jayme Purdy concurred. Motion passed on a voice vote.

**Article 12:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$2,500 to support the Family Day Committee?

Amanda Bartholomew made the motion, seconded by Jim Pritchard. Amanda Bartholomew said that this year's theme is Medieval Magic, that they normally have a bake sale today, and that she feels that Family Day is growing every year and appreciates the support. She was glad to see the Fire Department cooking for the event. This year's event will be the first weekend in August. The Article passed by a voice vote.

**Article 13:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate \$1,250 for the Benson Youth League for the support of their program?

Sarah Daigle made the motion, seconded by Brad Barrett. The maker of the motion discussed how the money is used, mainly for baseball and softball, we partner with Orwell to help cover cost of sign up, insurance, uniforms and equipment. Brad Barrett talked about how he spent many years with the youth league and he was grateful that it is continuing. Motion passed on a voice vote.

**Article 14:** Will the Town of Benson vote to appropriate the sum of \$2,000 in support of Slate Valley Cares to provide support to the residents of the Town of Benson?

The Article was amended to say in support of Slate Valley Cares. Linda Peltier motioned and Adam Stewart seconded the motion. Linda Peltier thanked everyone for their continuing support, she said that they serve over 1,500 families each month, mostly seniors and young families. The thrift store helps to make money to support the cause. Linda Pelitier also stated that this serves a large need and they never turn anyone away. Adam Stewart said that he would not oppose an increase in support down the road. He then asked the Assembly if we could amend the Article to \$4,000, seconded by Linda Peltier. Lisa Fontaine asked how many people they support in Benson. Linda Peltier answered that it was hard to tell but would guess around 10%. Kate Hill mentioned that the Methodist Church donates premade meals. Linda Peltier talked about the need for prepared meals as some families do not have access to an oven or have limited cooking facilities. She also talked about a grant they received last year to purchase local produce. Lisa Fontaine called the question. The motion to end the debate, amend the motion and pass the amended motion passed by a voice vote.

**Article 15:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate the sum of \$600 for the support of ARC-Rutland Area to provide services to residents of the Town of Benson?

Diane Drake made the motion, seconded by Robin Wilson. Diane Drake spoke about the program which serves adults living with intellectual or physical disabilities, they provide these families with free dances, free help in life skills, such as paying bills, social security help, cooking and reading. She said that the \$600 goes a long way to provide the services. The Article passed by a voice vote.

**Article 16:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate the sum of \$2,000 in support of BROCC Community Action?

Jayme Purdy made the motion, seconded by Diane Drake, both declined to speak to the Article. Bonny Baldwin asked what BROCC Community Action was. Elizabeth Eddy from BROCC asked the assembly to speak to this question and was allowed by consent. Elizabeth Eddy told the assembly that this was a nationwide program. She also said that 57 individuals from Benson currently use this program. BroCC Community Action helps with housing, food, day care. Elizabeth Eddy talked about home weatherization, including emergency heat and repair, water tank upgrades and adding insulation, with the cost of a full weatherization being around \$12,000. She believes that this is a modest request. Motion passed by a voice vote.

**Article 17:** Shall the town vote to appropriate and the sum of \$1,400 for the support of the VNA & Hospice of the Southwest Region, to provide services to residents of the Town of Benson?

Gina Parker made the motion, seconded by Guy Charlton. The Article was amended to read appropriate the sum of \$1,400, removing the and. Discussion on the need that exists for patients and families. The Article passed by a voice vote.

**Article 18:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate and the sum of \$900 for the support of Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging to provide support to the residents of the Town of Benson?

Motion moved by Gina Parker seconded by Guy Charlton. The article was amended to read as follows:

Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate the sum of \$900 for the support of Southwestern Vermont Council of Aging to provide services to the residents of the Town of Benson? After no discussion the Article was approved by voice vote.

**Article 19:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to appropriate and the sum of \$150 in support of RSVP and The Volunteer Program to provide support to the residents of the Town of Benson?

Gina Parker made the motion, seconded by Ben Bartholomew. The Article was amended to remove the and between appropriate and the sum. Jon Dodd asked about how it was put on the ballot and how he couldn't support the Article if it was not petitioned. Robin Wilson asked about the program. Diane Drake said that this was a Federally funded program that had lost its funding. The program sends out greeting cards to veterans, provides transportation for homebound and elderly people to doctors' appointments and to go shopping. Lois Trenn spoke to the Bone Builder classes. Jayme Purdy called the question. The motion to call the question and approve the funding passed on a voice vote.

**Article 20:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$1,000 for the support of Boys and Girls Club of Rutland County to provide services to the residents of the Town?

Motion was made by Benjamin Bartholomew, seconded by Adam Stewart. Stacey Guyette asked about the money in the school budget. Gina Parker said that the school cut this from their budget and it cost \$15 per student to use the service. Jacalyn Ambrozaitis was not in favor of paying to support other peoples' children. The Article passed on a voice vote.

**Article 21:** Shall the Town of Benson vote to condemn racism and welcome all persons regardless of race, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age or disability, or socioeconomic status, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community?

Guy Charlton made the motion, seconded by Barbara Burrett. The maker of the motion read a quote from a Lutheran Minister, "First they came". Amanda Bartholomew talked about their agenda to not want us to speak up. She believes that the community should have freedom of belief, she found it insulting to question our integrity. She believes that failure to comply with their agenda would create more discrimination, stating that we could adopt the Article or protect the Town, but can't do both. Jacalyn Ambrozaitis tabled the Article. John Hill explained that tabling would take this off the agenda. Request for paper ballot was approved. The motion to table the Article was approved, with a vote of 43 yeses to 39 noes and one spoiled yellow ballot.

**Article 22:** Shall the voters authorize payment of real property taxes in two installments, with the due dates being September 15, 2026 and March 15, 2027?

Guy Charlton made the motion, seconded by Jim Pritchard. The maker of the motion said that this formality is required by statute. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

**Article 23:** Shall the voters authorize the Town Treasurer, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §4791, to collect current taxes?

Guy Charlton made the motion, seconded by Jim Pritchard, after no discussion the motion was passed by voice vote.

**Article 24:** To transact any other business proper to be done at the Annual Town Meeting.

Guy Charlton spoke to the minutes of the previous meeting, Jon Dodd called Guy Charlton out of order. Stacey Guyette asked how we talk about outside money requests without having a meeting? There will be an informational meeting before the elections. John Hill told the assembly that it was an honor and privilege to be the Moderator. Brad Barrett thanked the community and also thanked Guy Charlton for his nearly 50 years of service.

Jon Dodd made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved

Disapproved

Heidi Chandler  
Town Clerk

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