

Annual Town Meeting
Monday, March 02, 2020
7:00 pm, Rochester Auditorium

*Approved
4/1/20
Daniel S. McKinley
Moderator*

The legal voters of The Town of Rochester, County of Windsor, State of Vermont are hereby notified and warned to meet in the Rochester High School Auditorium in said town on Monday, March 02, 2020, at 7:00 pm to transact the following business:

Moderator Dan McKinley called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance. He reviewed Roberts Rules of Order for the meeting. House Representative Sandy Haas reported the Legislature is at the point in the session where any bill which has not come out of committee is dead, not only for this year, but for the biennium. She noted that over the next two months they will look at all bills which have come over from the other body. The big news was passing the minimum wage, with an override of the Governor's veto. The minimum wage currently at \$10.96 will go to \$11.75 in January 2021 and to \$12.55 on January 21, 2022. Major issues are addressing climate change. The house passed the Global Warming Solutions Act, which will put into statute the carbon reduction goals. Sandy reminded all the importance of completing the Census forthcoming to us in the mail, and noted the importance of an accurate resident count as it affects money that comes to our town from the Federal government. Sandy noted that the Vermont Health Department is really gearing up to address the steps to address the Coronavirus.

Dan asked that he not read the entire warning, but go through it article by article. A voter requested that he read the warning, to which Dan then asked for a second to suspend the rules. Dan would accept a motion to suspend the rules. Motion was made to suspend, and seconded. Dan noted a 2/3 vote to suspend that rule. Vote taken; rule suspended.

Article 1. To elect a Town Moderator for the ensuing year.
Ethan Bowen nominated Dan McKinley, seconded by Martha Slater. Dan asked to close nomination. Clerk cast one vote for Dan McKinley

Article 2. To elect all Town Officers as required by law:

1. Selectboard Member ~ 3-year term (Tom Schnabel) (paper ballot)
2. Town Clerk ~ 1-year term (Julie Smith)
3. Town Treasurer ~ 1-year term (Julie Smith)
4. Lister ~ 3-year term (Louis Donnet) (paper ballot)
5. Collector of Delinquent Taxes ~ 1-year term (Rebecca Klein)
6. Library Trustee ~ 5-year term (Anthony Goupee)
7. Trustee of Public Funds ~ 3-year term (Michael Harvey)
8. Cemetery Commissioner ~ 5-year term (Marvin Harvey)
9. Cemetery Commissioner ~ 4-year term (vacant)
10. Agent to Prosecute and Defend Suits ~ 1-year term (Bill Matthews)
11. Agent to Convey Real Estate ~ 1-year term (Pat Harvey)

Selectboard Member ~ 3-year term:

Nancy Woolley nominated Frank Severy. Harland seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Clerk cast one ballot for Frank Severy.

Doon noted that Frank would be replacing Tom Schnabel and thanked Tom for his contributions and service to the Town.

Town Clerk ~ 1-year term:

Rebecca Klein nominated Julie Smith. Seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Clerk cast one ballot for Julie Smith.

Town Treasurer ~ 1-year term:

Rebecca Klein nominated Julie Smith. Seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Clerk cast one ballot for Julie Smith.

Lister ~ 3-year term:

Louis Donnet was nominated and seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Clerk cast one ballot for Louis Donnet.

Collector of Delinquent Taxes ~ 1-year term:

Julie Smith nominated Rebecca Klein. Seconded. No further nominations. Rebecca Klein elected.

Library Trustee ~ 5-year term:

Diane White nominated Tony Goupee. Jola seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Tony Goupee elected.

Trustees of Public Funds ~ 3-year term:

Barb DeHart nominated Mike Harvey. Rob Meagher seconded. No further nominations. Mike Harvey elected.

Cemetery Commissioner ~ 5-year term:

Tom Paquette nominated Marvin Harvey. Seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Marvin Harvey elected.

Cemetery Commissioner ~ 4-year term:

Tom Paquette nominated Nancy Woolley. Seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Nancy Woolley elected.

Agent to Prosecute and Defend Suits ~ 1-year term:

Diane White nominated Bill Matthews. Seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Bill Matthews elected.

Agent to Convey Real Estate ~ 1-year term:

Dave Harvey nominated Pat Harvey. Seconded. No further nominations. Nominations closed. Pat Harvey elected.

Article 3. To hear and act on the report of the Auditors.

Article moved and seconded. No discussion. Voted in the affirmative. Article 3 passes.

Article 4. To hear and act on the reports of the Town Officers.

Article moved and seconded. No discussion. Voted in the affirmative. Article 4 passes.

Article 5. Shall the voters agree to pay all taxes for fiscal year July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 (FY21) to the Town Treasurer as provided by law?

Article moved and seconded. No discussion. Voted in the affirmative. Article 5 passes.

Article 6. Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes in four (4) installments, with due dates being Friday, August 14, 2020, Monday, November 16, 2020, Tuesday, February 16, 2021 and Monday, May 17, 2021, by delivery to the tax collector before 4:00 PM on those dates. Postmarks are not considered timely payment.

Article moved and seconded. No discussion. Voted in the affirmative. Article 6 passes.

Article 7. Shall the voters authorize total fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$1,088,700.00 of which \$ 780,550.00 shall be raised by taxes.

Article moved and seconded. Louis Donnet noted that in this year's budget, he noticed that reserve accounts were not being funded, and wanted to know what the plan is moving forward. Doon noted it was because of a strain on the budget. Doon noted that in some other years we have faced the same issue, and indicated that this budget is one of them. Discussion ensued about the reserve funds and the budget. Doon noted that there would have been a 22% increase in taxes before reducing items to bring the budget down to just over a 4% increase in the budget. Discussion continued. Martha called the question. Question was called to end debate. End of debate was voted. Moved and seconded to vote on Article 7. Article 7 passes.

Article 8. Shall the voters appropriate \$ 45,625.00 towards operating expenses of the Rochester Public Library.

Article moved and seconded. Walt Wells, a member of a Library Investment Committee appointed by the Trustees, made a statement about the Library and their endowment funds. The Committee proposed moving the endowment funds from the Library's current investment firm to Northfield Savings Bank to better align with the Library needs and thanked the Trustees for seeing that this happened. Becky asked the question of the Library's checking account having \$8,300.00 of unrestricted money to offset any of the expenses after the close of the fiscal year. Jola Labejsza, Chair, noted that restricted funds can only be used on restricted items such as specific books and expenses. The money couldn't be used for other expenses. Becky followed up by asking if the Library could use the remaining checkbook balance to offset the \$45,625.00 budget request. She noted that when the liabilities were paid perhaps the restricted would be as well. Discussion ensued. Diane White called the question. Motion made to end discussion. Motion and second made to vote Article 8. Motion approved. Article 8 passes.

Article 9. Shall the voters appropriate \$ 68,340.00 to provide ambulance service from White River Valley Ambulance (WRVA).

Article moved and seconded. Nancy spoke on behalf of Vic Ribaud, making reference to the WRVA budget summary and comments on page 44 of the Town Report. Noted that WRVA is requesting a reduction per capita from \$63 to \$60 made possible by a slight increase in expected inter-hospital transfers and tight control on expenses including moving the health insurance plan from Blue Cross to MVP. She noted that in 2019 WRVA received 100 calls from Rochester. Discussion ended. Motion and second to move to vote Article 9. Article 8 passes.

Article 10. Shall the voters vote to appropriate \$ 20,400.00 (\$1,700 per month) to continue funding the "Fast Trash" and Recycling program (receipt of recyclables and trash with residents paying for trash per bag) from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021.

Article 10 moved and seconded. Doon noted this was separated out of the budget because of the significant increase. Discussion ensued about services included in the increase, if the recycling was being recycled properly, the positive effects on the environment from littering, and fund-raising opportunities for kids. Chris called the question. Question called and voted. Discussion ended. Motion to move Article 10. Article 10 passes.

Article 11. Shall the voters vote to eliminate the Cruiser Reserve Fund and transfer the remaining balance (\$2,794.31, plus any additional interest) to the General Fund for the purpose of offsetting the Windsor County Sheriff's contract?

Article 11 moved and seconded. Discussion to remove the cruiser fund, and if the cruiser vehicle had sold. Kathryn asked if the fund could fund Tennis Courts and not the Windsor County Sheriff's contract if they were already funding it themselves. Doon noted that contract expenses were not just funded by tickets, and that the logical place to put the money was against the Sheriff's contract. Larry Straus proposed an amendment to the article, to delete all the wording within the parentheses, putting a period at the end of General Fund, and eliminating all wording following General Fund. Larry noted the Article would then read, "Shall the voters vote to eliminate the Cruiser Reserve Fund and transfer the remaining balance to the General Fund." The amendment was seconded. Moderator asked if there was any discussion on the amendment and a question was asked why Larry wanted this amendment. Larry explained that there was a question about whether the dollar amount was correct, and if we voted to eliminate the printed dollar amount and it was incorrect, we could be left with pennies in the Cruiser Fund. He noted that there is no reason to direct where these monies go, as all monies are directed at the discretion of the Selectboard. End of discussion. Vote on the amendment to eliminate the dollar amount and additional interest, as well as wording at the end, "for the purpose of offsetting the Windsor County Sheriff's contract". The article was voted to amend and no further discussion. Question was called to vote on Article 11. Article 11 was voted and passes as amended.

Article 12. Shall the voters vote to exempt Pierce Hall Community Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, from property taxes for a five-year period, (2020 –2025, FY21 – FY25). Article 12 moved and seconded. Discussion opened with a question of what the tax implication is. Lister noted it would be in the grand list, but did not know offhand. Bruce Flewelling spoke in his role as a board member for Pierce Hall Community Center. He thanked the Town for exempting the community hall for the last 16 years, noting it is not a new request, but that every 5 years they have asked the voters for this request. He commented that unpaid volunteers do every part of upkeep for the building. Changes since Pierce Hall's last request include: in 2015 all lower level energy efficient windows were installed and that handicapped accessible restrooms had been constructed and completed; in 2016, the 100th anniversary of Pierce Hall was celebrated, with many cosmetic pieces completed which brightened the auditorium, such as painting walls in the auditorium, painting the ceiling with its years of cigar and cigarette smoke; balcony lights and the beautiful chandelier in the middle of the auditorium were restored. In 2017, the big project was to restore the entire front entrance, which after its completion, the Governor participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony. In 2019, after several years of what started as Michael Crickard's high school senior project, this past July the Pierce Hall Community Fitness Center became a reality. The popularity of the Fitness Center was underestimated, noting that an average of over 10 people a day are using the Center. Bruce further reflected on what an asset Pierce Hall is to our Valley. He noted that all being said the voters would find the value in voting for the article. Nancy Sanz acknowledged Valerie Levitan for her leadership in creating a plan to restore Pierce Hall in 5 different phases, completing each

phase without carrying any debt. Positive discussion ensued. Martha called the question. All in favor to ending the debate. Article 12 voted and passed.

Article 13. To see if the voters will vote to appropriate the following sums as requested by the below listed community agencies:

Central VT Council on Aging	3,000.00
Clara Martin Center	2,066.00
Green Up Vermont	100.00
Quintown Senior Center	9,849.00
Orange County Parent Child Center	250.00
SafeLine, Inc.	250.00
Stagecoach	1,300.00
Vermont Rural Fire Hydrant	100.00
VNH – Visiting Nurse Association	4,800.00
White River Partnership	875.00
WomenSafe	250.00
Total	\$ 22,840.00

Article 13 moved and seconded. Mary Ann noted that each of these have value for all of the community and that they should be funded. Question was called. Debate closed. Article 13 voted and passed.

Article 14. Shall the Town of Rochester adopt the below Climate Emergency Declaration to inform and guide town decision-making?

WHEREAS, global climate is changing at an unprecedented rate due to human activities, driving mass extinction of species and threatening human communities worldwide.

WHEREAS, the United Nations Panel on Climate Change reported in 2018 that we need a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to avoid catastrophic global warning.

WHEREAS, residents of the Town of Rochester have suffered significant losses due to increasingly frequent extreme weather events and that action is required to promote greater resilience.

NOW BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, the Town of Rochester declares that a climate emergency threatens our town, state, region, and entire natural world, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Town of Rochester will make climate change an integral focus for town planning, policy, and decision-making and will work towards a more renewable economy for a more resilient community.

Article 14 moved and seconded. Kathryn Schenkman made a proposal to add an amendment to the article to add some language to the policy in consideration of the town's resources. She noted to add the additional language at the end "To the greatest extent possible according to resources available of the town." She noted that we will do our best, but we can only do what we can do. The amendment was seconded. Rachel Cunningham asked for amending the amendment. She noted to add a coma after Kathryn's verbiage with "in accordance with Vermont Law." Amended amendment was seconded. Moderator read last paragraph "Be it further resolved, the Town of Rochester will make climate change an integral focus for the town planning, policy, and

decision-making and will work towards a more renewable economy for a more resilient community, to the greatest extent possible according to resources available to the town, in accordance with Vermont Law.” Larry Straus made a suggestion to pause to the concern about how the language as originally drafted, would impact actual day to day decision making of the Selectboard and force them to be questioned by any/every decision. He noted that Kathryn with her amendment was trying to correct the wording for that decision. Discussion ensued with comments to leave Article as written and noting key word focus and not mandate. Selectboard was asked their opinion of the article. Doon spoke and expressed his concern to the wording ‘integral focus’ and noted he would prefer the word be ‘consideration.’ He noted that the intention was to not require the Town to do anything, although in the handout, it states ‘take action, consider energy consumption impact in purchasing new equipment, building new facilities, bidding town contracts and how our Town Office runs. Doon noted his concern in this age of being sued, if we don’t set ourselves up for friction on every day to day decision that we may have to make in Town. He noted his opinion of not voting on an amendment because there is already an amendment out there. Pat agreed with Doon and Tom noted for him it was concerning and a little over-reaching. Jeff Gephart noted that he supports the article as written and amendments as proposed are well meaning, but unnecessary. He noted that the Legislature needs to hear from the Vermont towns and they need to get serious in Montpelier and towns need to do the same. He noted that he supports the article as written and he would be happy to work with the energy committee in reviewing these as part of the regular procedure in making Town decisions. Discussion for approval of the article as written ensued. The question was called. Discussion ended. Moderator moved to amend the amendment to the amendment. Moderator read the last paragraph. All in favor of amending the amendment. The house was divided. The second amendment was amended and passed. Question was called. Discussion is closed. Moved to a vote to approve the amendment to the article. Article has been amended. Discussion ended. Moved to a vote on the article as amended. Article was read. All in favor. Article 14 passes.

Article 15. To transact any other legal and proper business to be brought before said meeting.

Ethan spoke of appreciation for all those involved with the Bethel Mountain Project and getting it done and funding for it. Doon noted that the Planning Board with the help of Two Rivers Ottauquechee had done a very thorough job of drafting the next version of the Town Plan, which they presented for a public hearing at the Planning Commission meeting about 2 months ago for public comment that is now submitted to the selectboard. He noted the next step is to present to the Town a Plan draft for public comment. Doon noted to keep in tune with notices for public comment soon. Kathryn announced that the Town of Rochester has joined together with the towns of Randolph, Bethel, Braintree, Brookfield and Chelsea as the White River Valley Consortium on a working community challenge grant program that was awarded an amount of \$15,000 in a planning grant stage from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. She indicated it is a six-month planning grant process having several all-day meetings and that they will meet specifically on 5 main issues that affect all 5 towns in the consortium - housing, stability, education, health and well-being and economic security. She noted that she and Vic Ribaudo will attend these meetings, and anyone else interested is encouraged to contact and attend. John asked if there are plans for fixing Route 100. Doon noted that due to Route 100 being a State highway, that it is VTrans responsibility. Barb spoke as chairman of Trustees of Public Funds commenting on the statement that was made earlier in the meeting about how the Trustees threw up their hands disregarding those who were adamant about the way the funds were invested. Some of the companies in the portfolio were not environmentally friendly and that was an issue for some who

wanted the trustees to remove those companies from the portfolios. She noted that when this issue was presented to the trustees a couple years ago, very concerned citizens spoke out, and in response, the trustees conducted several meetings where the public was invited. During those meetings not only discussed were the philosophies and role of the trustees, but guests and visitors were invited to present their knowledge, their expertise, their positions, and their recommendations and their numbers. Our own investment bank also participated, discussing among other issues, what we as trustees, are allowed to do - we had to do what was best for the Town and get the best return on the investment. In so doing according to the law, the investments enabled the Trustees in five years to distribute about \$500,000 to the Town and school. She noted that they were transparent with the Town and did not "wave off" or disregard the concerns of others. Kathryn thanked and noted appreciation for the Trustees of the Public Funds for giving generously to the Town's needs and causes. She noted that they helped with the Rebuild Rochester non-profit when times were needed most. Cheryl thanked the committee that put the town report together. She noted how the inside covers brought back a lot of memories, especially for those people who have passed, that are remembered from days gone by. The activities and theme of winter really helped to get through this winter. Martha called to move to adjournment.

Adjournment - 9:19pm

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Smith