

**Annual Town Meeting**  
**Monday, March 4, 2024**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Rochester High School Auditorium**

Dan McKinley called the meeting to order at 7pm. Dan shared the invocation he borrowed from the Town of Danville to bring the community together. He led the assembly to join in the Pledge of Allegiance. He reviewed the governance of the state law in Robert's Rules of Order. Dan noted there were two microphone runners this evening, Caden Ostro and Mariah Swedick. He said the business of tonight's meeting will be conducted from pages 4-6 in the Town Report. He noted there is one typo he wanted to call out in Article 10. The amount in that article is stated 'Voters to appropriate \$20,400'. The real number that is in the budget is \$21,420 and can be found on page 38 of the Town Report. He asked that any non-registered voters to raise their hand. He asked voters if they did not object to allowing them to speak during the meeting. There were no objections.

Dan introduced Senator Ruth Hardy to share some words. Senator Ruth Hardy gave a brief update about what was happening in the legislature. She shared that she serves on the Health and Welfare Committee and how last year passed the large childcare bill, ACT 76. She also chairs the Government Operations Committee where she shared a couple of the updates that the committee has been working on. One, is an update to the open meeting laws. During the pandemic, public bodies are all subject to open meeting laws to allow for the public to attend. The meetings were allowed to meet during the pandemic through ZOOM. That allowance will end on June 30<sup>th</sup> of this year. The committee has updated the open meeting laws to allow for flexibility so any advisory or subcommittee boards, small non taxing or legislative capabilities can still meet through zoom fully or hybrid. All other boards and committees will have to meet in person or if remotely will need an in-person location for them to attend. The other big bill she explained, was the government response to flooding. She said this would update the emergency response system, emergency alert system and state statutes related to storm water districts and utilities. This also updates provisions related to first responders, specifically to public works departments. This also provides a grant program for towns to apply for upgrades to the infrastructure to avoid flooding in the future. She shared that the legislature has been working on housing issues like ACT 250. She said they have also been working closely on school funding issues. She said they did pass a bill known as H850 that did limit some of the tax increases. She encouraged us to talk to school board members and read about the school budget proposal before voting on it.

Representative Kirk White shared his roles in the past year. He shared how they are working on affordable housing and ways to combat the homeless. He works on the Public Safety committee to improve the justice and corrections systems. Working support with working lands, farmers, and loggers. He worked on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee. Commerce is everything that regulates business, such as insurance, consumer protection and economic development. He shared how in the last year his committee spent a lot of time on the work force development piece to upskill programs for better jobs. He said they set up grants for forgivable loans for nurses and teachers that would forgive the loans if they stayed in Vermont after they graduated. He shared how his committee worked on Baby Bonds to help with generational poverty. He shared how he is working on Captive Insurance and Vermont is #1 domicile in the world to have captive insurance. He said they worked on various other programs such as Vt film commissions and data privacy.

**Article 1. To elect a moderator for the ensuing year.**

Martha Slater nominated Dan McKinley, seconded by Judy Jensen. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Dan McKinley.

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

1. Selectboard member~3-year term. Sandy Haas nominated Pat Harvey, seconded by Kathryn Schenkman. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Pat Harvey.
2. Lister~3-year term. Frank Russell nominated Jessica Arsenault, seconded by Pat Harvey. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Jessica Arsenault.
3. Collector of Delinquent Taxes. ~1-year term. Rebecca Klein was nominated by Kristen LaPell and seconded by Judy Jensen. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Rebecca Klein.
4. Library Trustee~5-year term. Frank Russel nominated Kelly Kelly. Kelly Kelly respectfully declined the nomination. Lauren Scogin was nominated by Kelly Kelly and seconded by Richard White. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Lauren Scogin.
5. Trustee of Public Funds~3-year term. Nancy Woolley nominated Barb DeHart and was seconded by Frank Russell. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Barb DeHart.
6. Cemetery Commissioner~5-year term. Tom Paquette nominated Nancy Woolley and was seconded by Frank Russell. No further nominations. The moderator asked the clerk to cast one ballot for Nancy Woolley.

**Article 3. Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes in four (4) installments, with due dates being Thursday, August 15, 2024, Friday, November 15, 2024, Monday, February 17, 2025, and Thursday, May 15, 2025, by physical delivery to tax collector before 4:00 PM on those dates with postmarks not accepted as proof of delivery?**

David Marmor moved the article, seconded by Judy Jensen. No discussion. Ayes have it. Article 3 passes.

**Article 4. Shall the voters authorize total highway and general fund expenditures of \$1,386,286.00 of which \$1,013,384.00 shall be raised by taxes?**

Barbara Shenton moved the article, seconded by Judy Jensen. No discussion. Ayes have it. Article 4 passes.

**Article 5. Shall the voters appropriate \$50,789.48 towards operating expenses of the Rochester Public Library?**

Judy Jensen moved the article, seconded by Barbara Shenton. No discussion. Ayes have it. Article 5 passes.

**Article 6. Shall the voters approve to transfer any remaining FY24 Fire Department budgeted funds to Fire Department Equipment Reserve Fund?**

Sandy Haas moved the article, seconded by Barbara Shenton. No discussion. Ayes have it. Article 6 passes.

**Article 7. Shall the voters approve to transfer any remaining FY24 Recreation Department budgeted funds to the Recreation Reserve Fund?**

Barbara Shenton moved the article, seconded by Frank Russell. No discussion. Ayes have it. Article 7 passes.

**Article 8. Shall the town give the Selectboard general authority to enter into tax stabilization contracts with owners, lessees, bailees, or operators of commercial or industrial property, pursuant to 24 V.S.A §2741(b) (1)?**

Frank Russell moved the motion, seconded by Dick White. Frank Russell looked at this specific statute online and asked if (b) (1) is the wording correct to how we conduct business, asking the selectboard? Doon shared the wording given by legal counsel to be proper on the warning would give the general authority to the selectboard and the opportunity to present any issue to the voters and not so much the

selectboard deciding. Frank asked if that is the authority the board has generally? Doon said this would give the voters a voice to make the decision. Frank asked if it is limited authority for the selectboard. Frank asked if they were expecting a lot of applications for stabilization. Doon said this is one step towards the ability to stimulate economic development and to support it. Rob Meadows asked for an explanation of what the stabilization would mean. Doon said one example of this was when Advanced Illumination moved to the former Oatmeal Studios building, part of the transfer with the help of Vermont Economic Development was an arrangement for a 5-year tax stabilization to allow them time to get back on their feet after Tropical Storm Irene and generate more jobs. Kathryn Schenkman asked if this article had appeared before the voters prior, and asked if this is new and what is the circumstances brought this article to this year's vote. Doon said this is new and looking forward to being supportive to new businesses and economic development in town. Rob Meadows stated to give the selectboard general authority to enter contracts there is nothing in the article that says they will do the prework and then come to the voters, and yes, we will give a tax break. He said it seems vague and that he is not against it, just the wording is giving general authority entering a contract and shouldn't it say general authority to enter a conversation and then bring it to the voters since it has a significant impact on the tax. Doon suggested moving to amend the article. Dane Cooley asked if there is a formula for the stabilization process. Doon said this would be tailored to each specific case. Judy Jenson asked to amend the article to say that they can enter into discussions pursuant to tax stabilization contracts of which will come before the voters, with owners, lessees, bailees, or operators of commercial or industrial property, pursuant to 24 V.S.A § 2741? Doon seconded the motion. Dan reread the amended article. Shall the town give the selectboard general authority to enter discussions pursuant to tax stabilization contracts with owners, lessees, bailees, or operators of commercial or industrial property pursuant to state statute which would then come before voters? Robin Bebo-Long asked if this was for new property owners or existing property owners. Pat shared it is for economic growth for existing or new businesses. Robin Fiske asked how it would come before the voters. Doon said they would call a special public meeting. Mary Fratini said the language needs to be changed to the amendment to include brought before the voters. Carrie Burkhard asked if it is the statutory intent to have a vote, saying pursuant to the statute, if the statute is taking about the selectboard having the power to enter contracts that would be the statutory language not bring it to conversations. She is concerned about the statutory language wording by amending it. Frank Russell said the statutory language is written in (b) (1) perhaps it should be changed to (b) (2) that already gives the proper statutory language and reads provide limited authority to its legislative branch to negotiate contracts, which shall be effective upon ratification by a majority of those present and voting at an annual or special meeting warned for that purpose. Doon amended the amendment scratching the language and substituting the (b) (1) with (b) (2) avid Marmor seconded. No discussion. Dan reread the statute. Shall the town give the Selectboard general authority to enter into tax stabilization contracts with owners, lessees, bailees, or operators of commercial or industrial property, pursuant to 24 V.S.A § 2741 (b) (2)? No discussion. Martha called the question. Debate ended. Ayes have it. Reread the amended article. Voted in the affirmative.

**Article 9. Shall the voters vote to appropriate the following sums as requested by these community agencies:**

<b>Central VT Council on Aging</b>	<b>\$ 3,000.00</b>
<b>Clara Martin Center</b>	<b>\$ 2,066.00</b>
<b>Green Up Vermont</b>	<b>\$ 100.00</b>
<b>Orange County Parent Child Center</b>	<b>\$ 250.00</b>
<b>Quintown Community Center</b>	<b>\$ 9,849.00</b>
<b>Safeline, Inc</b>	<b>\$ 250.00</b>
<b>Tri-Valley Transport</b>	<b>\$ 1,300.00</b>
<b>Vermont Rural Fire Hydrant</b>	<b>\$ 100.00</b>
<b>VNH-Visiting Nurse Association</b>	<b>\$ 4,800.00</b>
<b>White River Partnership</b>	<b>\$ 875.00</b>

**ATRIA f/k/a WomanSafe**

**\$ 250.00**

Martha Slater moved the article, seconded by Sandy Haas. Larry Pleasant asked what SAFELINE Inc is. Pat Harrinton, representative for Safeline spoke and explained they are an organization out of Chelsea that provides services for woman and children of sexual abuse. She said they have a hot line, and she can provide the phone number for that organization. Mary Fratini said Safeline has a report on page 86 in the Town Report. No further discussion. Ayes have it. Article 9 passes.

**Article 10. Shall the voters appropriate \$21,420.00 to continue funding the North Star Rubbish Removal, LLC recycling program from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025?**

Moved by Larry Straus, seconded by Frank Russell. Martha expressed gratitude and kindness for the owners of North Star. Larry Straus amended the article to correct the clerical error to read \$21,420.00 because it was warned incorrectly. Judy Jensen seconded the amendment. Dan reread the amendment. No further discussion. Ayes have it. Dan reread the amended article for vote. Ayes, have it. Article 10 passes.

**Article 11. Shall the voters approve to transfer \$8,000 from the Reappraisal Reserve Fund to the General Fund on July 1, 2024, for the purpose of reducing taxes for the coming fiscal year?**

Kathryn Schenkman moved the article, and Carrie Burkhart seconded the article. Diane White asked when we will have our next reappraisal and why we are moving this money out of the reserve account. Pat Harvey explained last year they thought the reappraisal would be happening soon, so they voted to have \$8,000 moved into the reserve fund to make sure to have sufficient funds to cover the costs. She said since then the state had asked the town to be reappraised. She explained they sent out quotes for reappraisal and will have enough money to cover the costs and asked to return last year's contribution to the general fund. No further discussion. Ayes, have it. Article 11 passes.

**Article 12 Shall the voters approve to transfer \$10,000 from the Cemetery Reserve Account to the General fund to offset cemetery budgeted expenses?**

Barbara Shenton moved the article and Nancy Woolley seconded. Judy Jensen asked if you are transferring \$10,000 out of the account to offset cemetery budgeted expenses, does that mean there is more than they need in there. Doon explained the cemetery expenses lined up for the budget this year, there is a reserve fund for maintenance and such and was generously offered by the cemetery commission to help keep the budget to a moderate increase. Discussion closed. Moved to vote. Ayes, have it. Article 12 passes.

**Article 13. Shall the voters approve to transfer \$8,000 from the Revolving Loan Fund to the General Fund?**

Carrie Burkhart moved the article and Judy Jensen seconded it. Frank Russell asked what is the purpose of the Revolving Loan Fund? Doon shared it was started in the 50's and 60's to pay for various things. Someone asked if the loan still exists, and Doon said this did not close out the fund. Kathryn asked if it was used to help people with issues. Carrie asked how much was in the fund and Kristen shared \$8,008.00. No further discussion. Moved to vote. Ayes, have it. Article 13 passes.

**Article 14. Shall general obligation notes or bonds of the Town of Rochester in an amount not to exceed Three Hundred Fifty-Nine Thousand, Two Hundred and Forty-Three Dollars and Zero Cents (\$359,243.00) payable from the Town's general fund, derived from the taxation of real property for a period not to exceed thirty years, and subject to reduction by available grants-in-aid or other funding sources, be issued to finance the cost of removing and replacing the existing West Hill Road (TH-37) bridge with a bridge on a modified alignment, and associated roadway and channel work (together, the "Project")?**

Dan reminded this article can only be discussed and voted by Australian Ballot. Moved by John White, seconded by Nancy Woolley. Martha asked if this work had already been done and if this was the money to pay for it. Kathryn asked if grant money paid for it, and this is the balance left over. Frank shared the

project was started in 2019, going through the pandemic the government had designed the bridge. The government awarded us with a grant. The original cost was \$660,000. We secured \$775,000 in grant funds. The bid finally went out in February 2023. The four bids received the lowest was 1.2 million and we were subject to lose \$775,000 in funds. The board decided to build the bridge with the lowest bidder. The balance was \$359,243. He said we decided to build knowing the cost would not go down. He explained that if the article does not pass the taxpayers will be subject to the costs divided over 4 years. That would be a hard hit to the tax base for the next four years. The funds we received came from the US Forest Service (\$600,000) and VTrans (\$175,000). Frank Russell asked if there are any other funding sources. Frank stated there are no further funding sources. Discussion ended.

**Article 15. Shall the Town adopt the following Declaration of Inclusion?**

**The Town of Rochester condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic status, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community. As a town, we formally condemn all discrimination in all of its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect this commitment. The Town of Rochester has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.**

Barbara Shenton moved the article and was seconded by Dane Cooley. Pat said the selectboard strongly suggests inserting five words in between operating procedures and reflect this commitment to say and operating procedures from this day forward reflect this commitment. She said they do not want to go back and amend old policies. The amendment has been seconded by Dane Cooley. Dan reread the amended article. Mason Wade asked if the delinquencies on page 88, could have the names replaced with account numbers in reference to this article if passed. Doon said it is a good point and could be further discussed if this article passes. Mary Fratini said the current amended article would need to be passed, the specific question of this example of whether posting someone's name for being delinquent of taxes is an example of a policy that would discriminate against them for their socioeconomic status would be something to bring up a subsequent selectboard meeting to be a change in policy moving forward. Dane Cooley how does the inclusion affect the town. Doon said not in any way. Tom called the question. Ayes have it to move to a vote. Dan reread the sentence where the amendment was made. As a town, we formally condemn all discrimination in all its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures from this day forward reflect this commitment. The Town of Rochester has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions. Ayes have it for the amended article. Doon said how did this come across our desk. Doon said it was presented to the board and they wanted to bring it to the community to decide. Kathryn Schenkman shared in the towns past there was a list of people who were listed on the Poor Farm supported by the town and every penny spent on them. She said we do not have the Poor Farm anymore, but we do have a charitable fund. She said we have evolved from that and now more confidential. Lizzy Shackelford shared its very low cost and very low risk. She said it can give grounds for concerns in the future. Rob Gardner felt Mason brings a good point for the Delinquent Tax list. Mary Fratini shared that what she understands is it is a principle the town commits to. Walt Wells called the question. Ayes, have it to end the discussion. Amended article was read. The Town of Rochester condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic status, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community. As a town, we formally condemn all discrimination in all of its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures from this day forward reflect this commitment. The Town of Rochester has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions. Aye, have it. Article 15 passes as amended.

**Article 16. To transact any other legal and proper business to be brought before said meeting.**

Mason spoke about reminding everyone about the climate emergency initiative that was passed and when he read the four-page report from the US Forest Service to the town. He stated this is the biggest issue of our lives right now and to read the report and not see the climate issues in the report and our expectations of what they are doing. The large fires that are migrating. He feels we need more response to the environmental concerns. Kathryn Schenkman asked about the lighting in the parking lot and who is responsible for the lighting. The board shared it was the school's responsibility. Deb Sherer said the electric company must do something about the lights. She asked that we applaud Mariah for running the microphones this evening. Kelly Kelly made a motion to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 8:43 pm  
Respectfully submitted,  
Julie Smith