

Pre-Town Meeting

February 24, 2025

Present: Doon Hinderyckx, Pat Harvey, Chad Richardson

Guests: Kristen LaPell, Julie Smith, Vic Ribaldo, Rob and Char Gardner, Michael & Diane Teetsel, Michaela Richardson, Mike McIntyre, Terry Severy, John Lambert, Dan McKinley, Eric and Ginny Bowman, Nancy Woolley, Gary Stanley, Sandy Pierce, Ray Harvey, Walter Golub, Larry Plesent, Orca Media, Larry Straus, Lois Bond, John Lampert, Robert Meagher, Anjanette Lemak, Nancy Martin, Asia Kennett, Caden & Charlotte Ostro, Dawn Ostro, Andrew Hudson, Kathryn Schenkman, Midge Scanlan

Zoom Guests: Orca Media, Martha Slater, Troy LaPell, Louis Donnet, Nancy Vadnais, Drew Hudson, Caroline & Robert Meagher, Henry Garzia, Janice McCann, Laura Sokoloski, Hannah Rice, Burma Cassidy, Janice, The Mitchells, Rob Meadows, Irene Smead, Lizzy Shackelford, Laura Sokoloski, Abe Collins, Lesley Straus, Sara Martire, Bruce & Doreen Jones, Huibertha Sorgi, Fire Tablet, Connie Mendell, Mary Fratini, Mike Van Dusen, Kevin iPad, Terry O'Connor, Jannah Murray, Jammie, Deb More, Tim McDonald, Dane Cooley, Larry & Lynda Creech.

Doon called the Pre-Town/Informational meeting to order at 6:15 pm and confirmed the open meeting law conformity. Doon asked if anyone had questions to the warning for the Town Meeting. All the articles were read. Doon noted he will be stepping down from the selectboard after 18 years, 6-years as chair. Michael Teetsel will be seeking to fulfil his open seat. Michael spoke about his love for Rochester and his professional background as an environmental engineer. He shared that he is slowly retiring and by running it was a way he could give back to the community. Doon noted there will also be a selectboard position for a 1-year term, Chad Richardson was appointed in December and has confirmed he will run to finish Frank Severy's last year of a 3-year term. Town clerk and Treasurer will be up for a 3-year term and Julie agreed to continue with both. Caroline Meagher's position as a Lister will be up and she was not present to confirm running again. The Collector of Delinquent Taxes is currently filled by Rebecca Klein. She will be stepping down and Kristen LaPell would like to run for that position. There will be two open seats as Library Trustees, one for a 3-year term as Tony Goupee will be stepping down and the other is a 1-year term, filled currently by Vincent Gonzales, who will run to complete Sandy Lincoln's final year of a 5-year term. There will be an open set on the Trustees of Public Funds as Sandy Pierce is stepping down after 20+ years. She indicated that Linda Crosby would like to run for the 3-year term. The Cemetery Commission has an open seat as Marvin Harvey is stepping down. Ray Harvey would like to run for the 5-year term.

Articles 3-9 were read and there was no discussion.

Article 10 read "Shall the voters support the White River Headwaters Pilot Project to create and leave our kids a prosperous, deep-topsoil valley that is safe from flooding, led by participating farmers, loggers and other community members, and supported by Land Care Cooperative and LandWEB?" Abe Collins spoke on behalf of the project. He is asking the town to support the project that improves soil health by increase the infiltration of rainfalls, for reduced flood

damage. They work on pastures and grasslands by putting down minerals that are missing and deep routed plant seed by use of a tool called a rip-sower, when used on the contour to double infiltration to cut run off in half. This work would be done in the Brook Street catchment and Marsh Brook area to soak in the water. This support would be the work within the community to secure the watershed and reduce the risk of flooding. Doon made it clear this is not an ask for money but just a vote of support to work.

Doon finished reading articles 11& 12.

Doon opened to questions. John Lambert asked why the appropriations were cut. Doon said the appropriations were cut in half to keep the budget manageable with the significant increase.

John spoke about the school and the costs. He announced a petition he started. He felt that the townspeople didn't have a choice what would be done with the building. Because of the yes vote, he felt the people didn't get a chance to vote on what the next step would be with options. He said the folks voted to purchase it but not to purchase and repurpose.

Anjanette Lemak shared concerns and asked if the school part could be taken out during the town meeting or would it have to be voted on separately. Doon said at the town meeting there could be a motion from the floor to modify the amount.

Robert Meagher noted you can modify the amount that the town can collect but the decision is still up to the selectboard on how that money is spent. He said you can't line item, only take out the amount from the budget. Roberts said a budget is really a best guest of what happens in a fiscal year. It can show surpluses or deficits. The selectboard ultimately makes the final decision on how the budget is spent.

Diane Teetsel asked the board specifically what their plan is. Will they unilaterally decide or will they ask the voters to help with the final solution. She commented that the Rochester 2020 data is 1099 with a median age of 64.6, poverty rate 14.5% higher than the national average of 12.5%. 2023 median household income \$70,244 with total households of 735. Medicaid population 33.1%. She said based on these demographics of the town can the entire community afford this project. She feels this is a good question for the community.

Kathryn said at the November 25th Selectboard meeting when the board decided on the architectural firm that is doing the architectural design engineering, there was a letter read aloud written by Rob Gardner who asked the same question to clarify the yes vote. She said Doon said they would pursuit the repurpose plan that was funded by the Bernie Congressional Grant in the amount of \$2,329,000.00. She said since that time there are 476,000 in donations towards construction and operation and another \$14,797 in rental income for a total \$490,794.00. She spoke of the uncertain times keeping in mind that we need to just make a one-year budget. She said with the upgrade the town will have an improved asset.

Doon said going back to what Diane asked is a good question. Pat said we weren't required to bring it to a vote at all. They, as a board decided years ago they would not make that decision and bring it to a vote. With an overwhelming majority voting yes, going ahead with the community

center and VHI, it was already decided a long time ago. The vote is a unilateral vote to continue with the Repurpose of the high school into a community center. Sandy Pierce asked how absolutely sure are we of receiving the Congressional Grant. Kathryn said she received word a couple weeks ago that the funding freeze would not have any impact on the CDS money.

After long ensued discussion with many comments and concerns about the high school repurposing project and if the funding will come through the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Smith