

Pre-Town Meeting

February 23, 2026

Present: Pat Harvey, Chad Richardson & Mike Teetsel

Guests: Kristen LaPell, Julie Smith, Vic Ribaldo, Rob Gardner, Nancy Woolley, Orca Media, Steve Cummins, Asia Kennett, Mickaela Richardson, Larry Straus, & Tara Murray

Microsoft Teams Attendees: Burma Cassidy Wissner, Becky Donnet, Deb M, Martha Slater, Orca Media, and Sara Martire

Pat called the 2026 Pre-Town meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Pat confirmed the meeting met Vermont Open Meeting Laws.

Pat read the opening for the warning for the 2026 Town Meeting, sharing the annual town meeting will be held in the Rochester Hub Auditorium on Monday, March 2, 2026, at 7 p.m.

She shared there is a handout for Article 5, and the selectboard will amend that article with an explanation for a correction at tonight's meeting and at Town Meeting.

She read all 14 of the articles listed in the Town Report.

She explained there would be an open seat on the selectboard. Chad spoke and said this was his last term and will not be running for another term.

Pat read Article 5- "Shall the voters authorize a total highway and general fund expenditures of \$1,577,803 of which \$1,230,490 shall be raised by taxes?". Pat explaining the amendment would need to read "Shall the voters authorize a total highway and general fund expenditures of \$1,578,303 of which \$ 1,230,990 shall be raised by taxes." Larry Straus asked if they were expecting to amend that amendment from the floor? Pat answered that they would. She will be providing handouts at Town Meeting as well. Vic Ribaldo asked if the new number would support tax support for the HUB budget? Pat answered that they would.

Pat opened the floor for discussion on any of the Articles. Mike read an explanation for Article 5. "The Budget and Finance Committee operates under the direction of the Selectboard used a budget variance spreadsheet tool to develop the annual budget and track year over year variances in the following categories: General Fund, Highway Fund, Appropriations and Articles. The tool also includes a tax calculation tab that estimates the tax rate based on budgets submissions and provides a year over year comparison of the projected tax rate impact. During this budget cycle a decision was made to create a separate tab within the tool to track the HUB's revenue and expenses. This was done to better understand the financial impact of the HUB project and overall budget tax rate and to provide greater transparency. The Selectboard relies on this budget tool when voting on the final budget and determining the amount to be raised by taxes for presentation to the voters at Town Meeting. When the total expenditure budget and the amount to be raised by taxes were presented to the Selectboard at their warned meeting for approval, the HUB revenue and expenses, although they were tracked separately, were inadvertently not

included in the final totals that the selectboard approved. Mike shared its importance to note the projected tax rate increase on which the board based their approval on the overall budget did include the HUB revenue and expenses. The tax increase previously spoken of 3.27% is unchanged. As Pat indicated in order to correct the statement of Article 5, it would need to be amended from the floor, at Town meeting specifically the Town and Highway fund expenditures to be increased by 106,6098. And the amount to be raised by taxes would need to be increased by \$43,516.

Kristen pointed out Article 4, explaining the change made in that article. The time of day the taxes are due has been changed from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. She said it will be better for all moving forward.

Rob Gardner wanted to discuss the HUB budget amount of \$43,516 coming up for the town's support. He felt the \$96,000 for the two years asking coming out of taxpayers' pockets was a big ask. He feels there are big risks. He is concerned about the money raised to meet the 5.2 million for the project and his second concern is the HUB fulfilling the rents to pay for the town's share of the operating costs. He is hoping someone has a Plan B if this project doesn't succeed. He would like to see the hard painful information to be seen and discussed since it didn't make an article. He asked the following questions. Why wasn't the Hub budget an article? Does VHI expect to come back next year for additional funds? Is there a Plan B and if not, don't you think we should have one? Vic shared the feasibility study done a few years ago, which was estimated to be low on income and high on expense was budgeted then for \$160,000 a year. Vic said all of the revenue would be coming from the 10,000 square feet of rental income. Vic said it turns out there are items in that budget that are not part of the current expenses. He shared specifically there was \$50k set aside each year for Capital Improvements, which is not necessary right now, but should consider overtime to contribute towards a Capital Fund. There was another \$10,000 to \$12,000 for paid staff. He said they do have paid staff, but the town is not paying for that. On the Revenue side it was estimated about \$16/square foot for 10,000 to give you an income of \$160,000. He said VHI can collect \$100,000 roughly without the 10,000 sq./ft rental space. He said with other user fees of the building who do not have annual leases such as Suzuki Week, Players and Summer Music For Kids, and various other things to build the income revenues. He said the RSUD will be included in collecting revenue from. The other part is the donations which lessen the burden on the taxpayers as well. Vic said if they can rent out 6,000-7,000 sq/ft it could cover the operational costs the taxpayers are contributing to currently. Vic said he would be happy to explain as well at Town Meeting. He said in comparison to the feasibility study, he feels they are doing very well. He said that it was "meant to be pessimistic view of the future". He said Plan B for the building, the VHI board has discussed and will have to fit the renovation plan to the money available. Vic said for example one of the costliest parts of their building plan is completely new HVA system. Replacing the oil-fired boiler system in that part of the building with a heat pump is expensive but will save money over the long run not running fossil fuels. He said the big expenses would have to come out. He said they would also need to go back to the grant source for approval for any changes to the plan. Vic said as to the Article question about the HUB budget, that is a selectboard question. Pat answered it was a budgeted item and didn't discuss making it an Article. She said the budget was separated because it was just line items within the budget before and now it just has its own category, which created figures not adding up. Rob said his biggest concern is that it doesn't leave the budget up for discussion. Mickaela

said you don't discuss the budget for the Town Office building either. Pat said any item from the budget can be discussed while we have the article for the budget on the floor to vote on, as well as a proposal to amend.

Mike made a final comment to give some perspective on the \$43,516. He shared the town is paying to maintain the building. It's a town asset and we are paying the same for all town owned buildings. He said the alternative is to let it decay into safety hazard next to the Elementary School. He said further this is the financial obligation the town has always had. It may have come out of the school budget, but we have always had to maintain the building with town taxpayer money. It's not new expenditures to the taxpayer. He also shared it's a 20% reduction in town funding from last year. Things are moving in the right direction to take this off the burden of the taxpayer over the five-year plan. He said this is going in the right direction.

Pat moved to adjourn the Pre-Town Meeting at 6:07 pm. Mike seconded. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Smith