

2018 Sandgate, Vermont Annual Town Meeting Minutes

The legal voters of the Town of Sandgate, Vermont were warned and notified to meet at the Sandgate Town Hall on Monday, March 5th, 2018 at 7:00 PM for the purpose of acting on the following articles, with the exception of Article 1 which will be voted on by Australian Ballot on Tuesday, March 6th, 2018. Absentee and early voting is permitted on all matters to be voted on by Australian ballot. The polls will be open at the Town Hall on March 6th, 2018 between 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM.

Article 1. To vote on the following Town and School Officers using Australian ballot:

**Auditor-three year term
Cemetery Commissioner-one year term
Cemetery Commissioner-three year term
Constable-one year term
Delinquent Tax Collector-one year term
Lister- three year term
School Director-three year term
Selectboard-three year term
Selectboard-one year term
Town Agent-one year term
Town Grand Juror-one year term
Town & School Moderator-one year term
Treasurer-three year term**

Chris Barlow, Town Moderator, brought the meeting to order at 7:04 PM

Australian Ballot will take place March 6, 2018 from 10 AM to 7 PM

There were approximately 50 people present.

The meeting was interrupted so that Representative Cynthia Browning and Representative Brian Keefe could speak about legislative activities.

The meeting resumed at 7:20 PM

Article 2. To hear and act on the reports of the Town Officers.

TOWN CLERK REPORT: Rick Dahm had a question about who appoints the Assistant Town Clerk and Assistant Treasurer. Marge Peff stated it was her understanding that the Town Clerk and the Town Treasurer were responsible for the appointments. Previously, this was done without input from the selectboard. Suzanne dePeyster asked if this was Mr. Dahm's question and he stated that it was his question. Marge Peff stated that there were a number of qualifications when choosing someone for the position which included attention to detail, knowledge of the office paperwork and items in the vault, reliable work attendance, as well as a flexible approach to customers' needs.

ROAD FOREMAN'S REPORT: Rick Dahm had a question about the Road/Ditch Materials & Hauling line on the highway budget (page 32). Why was there a \$10,000 dollar increase? Mike explained it was for ditching and road support during weather created road issues. Rick wanted to know where the gravel was used. Mike stated Beartown, Rupert, and up to Wuerslin Road or the bus run. Rick asked if Crown Maple was contributing to road maintenance. Mike said that they had received help from Crown Maple for 2 road issues, but none recently. Rick Dahm wanted to know when the bridge in front of his home had become the Rick Dahm Bridge.

WUERSLIN-STUECKLEN ARTS GRANT COMMITTEE: Jean Eisenhart noted that Dona McAdams had been left off the membership list.

LISTERS REPORT: Rick Dahm asked about who determines resident and nonresident status. Did the listers make this determination? Sandra Reidy, Sandgate Treasurer stated that the State of Vermont did this through homestead filing. Sheila Kearns stated that filing the Homestead form had to be done yearly to keep the status.

Kathy Wagner asked if reappraising will happen before this year's tax bills come out. Lister Shelli Finn stated that it would not be done before this year's tax bills because Land use chart was not ready in time to do it this year.

TREASURER REPORT: Judy Boehlert wanted it clarified (page 23) that there were 2 CD's and a checking account for the Cemetery Commission. Sandra Reidy stated that there were maturity dates for both. Judy asked that in the future that values and maturity dates be included in the town report. She also had questions about fixed asset values (page 26). Sandra Reidy stated that an actuary might have to be used because there were complicated formulas. Auditor Katie Kenny stated that it would be difficult. Constable Rick Dahm stated that the Constable equipment consisted of a badge and a blue light. Cemetery equipment consisted of a shovel. What kind of assets were these. Auditor Katie Kenny stated real estate had always been on the list when Rick Dahm asked what items were involved. Katie gave an example of the Municipal building, School House, and highway buildings.

AUDITORS REPORT: Rick Dahm reviewed the changes to dissemination of the Town Report. Article in last year's Town Meeting stated that postcards would be sent, but Rick and several other people never got the postcard stating the report would be available for pick up or online in the Sandgate Town Website. Rick wanted to know what the printing costs were. Auditor Katie Kenny stated it was \$500 for printing and \$30 dollars for mailing the post cards. Rick wanted to know the advantage of saving \$690 on mailing costs when informing the voters was in questions. Had he not gone to pick up the report earlier, he would not have been prepared to ask informed questions, particularly if he had only seen the report when he came to the meeting tonight. Jim Gunn asked what the difference in mailing costs between last year and this year. Katie Kenny stated the difference between \$690 and \$30.00 dollars. Suzanne dePeyster reminded everyone it was online, but Rick has limited internet access so that would not be helpful. It was mentioned that most of the surrounding towns use this method. Kathy Wagner suggested that a sign be put up by the yellow farm house that reports were ready to be picked up at the town office. Pauline Frost asked if it was all right for her to frame the Report cover because she liked the

photograph. Katie Kenny stated that would not be a problem. Someone asked if a voter requested that the report be mailed, would the Auditors accommodate the request. Katie Kenny said they would look into that for next year.

Rick Dahm had another question about the Treasurer's report (page 11). He wanted to know who the Selectboard assistant was in the budget Select Board Salary and Expenses. Suzanne dePeyster stated it was Karen Dzialo. Rick Dahm had another observation that there was an Emergency Co-coordinator Marty Irion and an Emergency Fuel Coordinator Mike Mazzola listed on Page 37. Suzanne dePeyster explained the position held by Marty Irion required extensive education and certification required by the State Of Vermont. Rick Dahm wanted to know if the salary of \$200 (page 26) dollars for the Emergency Coordinator was new this year. Suzanne dePeyster stated that I was also present in the previous year. Sandra Reidy Sandgate Treasurer remarked that she did not recall paying Marty Irions last year and Suzanne dePeyster said we forgot to pay him?

JUDY BOEHLERT MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT ARTICLE 2-TO HEAR AND ACT ON THE REPORTS OF THE TOWN OFFICERS.

RICK DAHM SECONDED THE MOTION.

THE MOTION WAS PASSED AFTER A VERBAL VOTE.

Article 3. Shall current property taxes be paid to the Town Treasurer on or before Act 1, 2018?

Jean Eisenhart moved that current property taxes be paid to the Town Treasurer on or before Oct 1, 2018.

Valerie dePeyster seconded.

Article 3 was passed by a verbal vote.

Article 4. Shall the line item balance for the Office Equipment, Maintenance & Supplies Funds be carried forward in the Office Equipment Fund into the following year?

Suzanne dePeyster moved to accept to have line item balances for the Office Equipment, Maintenance & Supplies Funds carried forward in the Office Equipment Fund into the following year.

Judy Boehlert seconded the motion.

Article 4 was passed by a verbal vote.

Article 5. Will the voters appropriate \$18157 in support of organizations listed in the Appropriations section of the General Budget?

Rick Dahm had a question about the Appropriations Budget on page 30. He stated that there was an appropriation for the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts for \$100 and the Bennington County Conservation District for \$300. He wanted to know what the difference between the two organizations. Suzanne dePeyster explained that the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts helped us with grants for our dry hydrants and the Bennington County Conservation District was the new name for the George Aiken group. The Bennington County Conservation District did more work on local issues and was very involved in a project to control Knot Weed.

Rick Dahm also had questions about the Bennington County Child Advocacy and Pave donations. Katie Kenny read the report of services that Pave provides in domestic assault situations and Tandra Reap stated that it is a first response group primarily for child sexual assault situations as part of a team involving the State Police and County Sheriffs providing counseling for victims and families.

Rick brought up the SWVT Area Council on Aging having gone from \$500 to \$600 asking what the reason for the increase was. Suzanne dePeyster stated that the Agency had requested it. Jean Eisenhart stated that it provided Meals on Wheels and many seniors go to the community lunches in Arlington. Valerie dePeyster stated they also helped with filing taxes. Phil Frost stated he was an old guy and did not favor the increase.

Rick Dahm brought up the Arlington Recreation Park and where the funds went. Chris Barlow stated the funds went to the Town of Arlington, not the old association.

Rick Dahm stated that the reports of all these organizations are online and not written in the town report. If you do not have computer access then they are not available to you as a voter. Sheila Kearns asked that the Selectboard clarify that these reports are sent to the Selectboard for inclusion in the budget. Also, it is the Selectboard that makes the decision to put these organization requests in the budget. Suzanne dePeyster stated the Selectboard makes the inclusion and decisions on the actual amount to be included in the budget. Sheila Kearns asked if the reports were available on paper at the Sandgate Town Hall if someone wanted to review the documents and Suzanne dePeyster stated that the documents were available.

Kathy Wagner wanted further clarification of the Arlington Recreation Park funds regarding whether the money was strictly for the recreation park and do we want to give Arlington Selectman that much money. Suzanne dePeyster stated it was the request and it is based on a per capital use. Dottie Sundquist stated that the availability of the Arlington Recreation Park speaks to the integrity of the community.

Judy Boehlert made a motion to appropriate the sum of \$18,157 in support of the organizations listed in the Appropriations section of the General Budget.

Dottie Sundquist seconded the motion.

Article 5 passed by verbal vote.

Article 6. Shall the town appropriate \$124,961 to defray the general expenses of the Town and, if so voted, authorize the Selectboard to set the tax rate based on the final Grand List?

Jean Eisenhart had a question about BCA Meetings/Poll workers increasing from \$1000 dollars to \$1800 dollars. Marge Peff explained that these costs varied depending on how many elections were held in the year.

Judy Boehlert had questions about the Independent audit. She stated that last year it was voted to put \$2000 into the Independent Audit Fund, but only \$1000 dollars was transferred. She stated that the last audit was done in 2010 and we should be doing another in 2020. Right now there is only \$4000 in the fund and the town will need between \$10,000 and \$15,000 dollars for the audit which is only 1-2 years away. She recommends that we increase the \$2000 dollars budgeted for this year to \$3,000-\$4000 instead as well as make up the extra \$1000 not put into the fund from last year. Sandra Reidy stated since the funds to be raised for taxes included the increase, she could move the remaining allocated money in last year's budget into the independent audit fund.

Judy Boehlert made an amendment to the appropriation to increase the Independent Audit allocation from \$2000 dollars to \$3000.00 for this year.

Suzanne dePeyster seconded the amendment.

The amendment passed by verbal vote.

Rick Dahm had questions on the budget under Salary & Expenses on page 29. The title designations under salaries could be more specific. Using Selectman and did it include all selectman? Suzanne dePeyster stated that on page 26 there was a more specific breakdown. Rick then wanted a more specific designation on expenses, were these Selectman expenses? Sandra Reidy stated that they were lawyer fees, etc. Janice Garrison wanted to know why when only \$269 was spent why it was increasing from \$300 to \$500. Suzanne dePeyster stated that planning in the budget for possible expenses did not mean the money had to be spent or that it went somewhere if it was not spent.

Rick Dahm made an amendment to the Expense line that it be reduced from \$500 to \$300.

Janice Garrison seconded the amendment.

The amendment was defeated by verbal vote.

Valerie dePeyster asked about the Legal & Professional Fees allocation being reduced from \$2500 to \$1000 dollars for this year's budget. Suzanne dePeyster stated that there is also a fund with a balance of \$16,527 listed on page 16 of the report.

Jean Eisenhart asked about the meeting line on page 29. She wanted to know if it included just the Selectboard or did it include other officers going to meetings. Suzanne dePeyster stated it included everyone. Rick Dahm asked why it was in the budget if it was not being used. Suzanne dePeyster stated it may not always be donated time and fees.

Sandra Reidy mentioned that the state asks for increased payments at the end of the year and it is not in the budget for education. It may be less or it may be more. The Town is responsible for these monies and there needs to be flexible money in the budget to meet these additional unanticipated amounts.

Judy Boehlert noted that the delinquent taxes contributed to less money available than the amount to be raised by taxes. The cushion in the budget recognizes the problem. Even though the delinquent taxes do come in eventually, the money may not be available to pay bills during the budget year.

Sandra Reidy stated that budget items can be under or overspent during the year. She also noted that Sandgate is on a small list of towns that are not in debt and have not had to borrow money.

Rick Dahm commended everyone who had chosen not to bill the town for travel and meeting expenses. However he states the point was to be more specific in the budget process. For example, travel, meeting fees and not just meetings. Katie Kenny stated the specific titles may have been deleted in the printing process.

Rick Dahm had questions about the Assistant Town Clerk and Assistant Town Treasurer lines. Rick suggested that the appointments for Assistant Town Clerk and Assistant Town Treasurer be reviewed by the Selectboard as a means of checks and balance. Judy Boehlert mentioned that the staffing of the Town municipal office has increased to a 5 half day presence, but the amount of money for these positions has not changed. Suzanne dePeyster stated that the selectboard realized that and had increased the budget to \$1000 dollars. Marge Peff stated that she had requested the amount be raised to \$2200 dollars for each of these positions. She also stated that \$1000 dollars increase would reduce the office availability to 4 half days a week, while the \$2200 dollars for each position would give the town a 5 half day a week presence. The importance of having the vault records available for real estate transactions which increasingly have limited time as well as requiring 40 year searches, and interfacing with state agencies which work on a 40 hour a week schedules, cannot be stressed enough. It also will allow for training in case of either the Town Clerk or Treasurer not being available due to illness.

Rick Dahm made a motion to amend the budget line items for Assistant Town Clerk from \$1000 to \$2200.

Pauline Frost seconded the amendment.

The amendment passed by verbal vote.

Kathy Wagner asked if this would include training and Marge Peff stated it would include training.

Rick Dahm made a motion to amend the budget line item for Assistant Town Treasurer from \$1000 to \$2200.

Judy Boehlert seconded the amendment.

The amendment passed by verbal vote.

Sheila Kearns requested that the names of the assistant Town Clerk and Treasurer be put in the Town Report.

Rick Dahm had questions under supplies regarding postage. He wanted to know if the town report postage was reduced, why we need \$1050. Sandra Reidy stated this was only the postage for the office.

Rick Dahm made an amendment to reduce the postage line from \$1050 to \$550.

Pauline Frost seconded the amendment.

It was passed by verbal vote.

Rick Dahm asked about the budget line for the website which was on the budget for the first time. Katie Kenny stated it was the cost of 10 years of hosting and registration for the website. Suzanne dePeyster stated that going into the future, Katie Kenny would be paid something for maintaining and updating the website.

Recycling costs have gone up because the income from recycling has gone down and the town has to make up the difference.

The sheriff and limited services were discussed. Rick Dahm stated tickets go to the Town and the State. Suzanne dePeyster hopes to have money for the electric speed signs. Timing for the services was discussed. Mike said speed limit signs would be added.

The changes to the Town Budget were as follows: Additional amount of \$1200 for the Assistant Town Clerk, Additional amount of \$1200 for the assistant Town Treasurer, a reduction of \$500 dollars for postage, and increase of \$2000 dollars for the Independent Audit. The total of additions to the budget is \$3900. When \$3900 dollars is added to \$124,961 the total to be raised becomes \$128,861.

Hasso Wuerslin made a motion to appropriate \$128,861 to defray the general expenses of the Town and, if so voted, authorize the Selectboard to set the tax rate based on the final Grand List.

Judy Boehlert seconded the motion.

Article 6 passed by verbal vote.

Article 7. Shall the town appropriate \$354,992 to defray the highway expenses of the Town and, if so voted, authorize the Selectboard to set the tax rate based on the final Grand List?

Rick Dahm brought up the 18% in foreman's salary. Suzanne dePeyster stated it was about \$25.00 per hour. Rick Dahm stated a 3% increase was generally standard. Suzanne dePeyster stated it was making the salary comparable to surrounding towns. Sheila Kearns stated not raising the salary might make the foreman more amenable to working for another town with higher pay. There is more computer work makes the job more difficult. Rick stated Mike was doing a good job, but raise seemed high. Jessica Hill stated there were countless hours spent getting grants, which if you had to hire a grant person would be expensive. Jim Henderson helps with grants. Mike has gotten around \$800,000 in grants over the years. Jeanne mentioned that the salary increase would increase payroll taxes, retirement. Health insurance currently is paid to Mike in a cash payment. Insurance amount has to be maintained even though Mike Hill does not take health insurance. The budgeted amount goes with the Foreman position. The actual expenditure for 16/17 included 2 payments, not just for the one year. It included the year before according to Sandra Reidy. Geanna Trombley asked if it was part of the benefits package. The VEMRS rate for retirement increased mandated by the State of Vermont. Geanna Trombley had questions about overtime being contingent on the weather. There were questions about the Road Worker Pay. Mike stated he was guaranteed 20 hours a week during the winter. Summer it might be different. The budget for the road worker has to include money for weather related increases. If the road worker works more than 20 hours the money needs to be there. If it is not used, it remains in the town accounts.

Rick Dahm asked about the sense of having a part time person when we used to have two full time positions. Mike stated the budget allowed for \$32,000, but it may not be used so it could be less than \$32,000. This year the Road Worker overtime was taken out of the budget. Mike stated road worker did not get insurance, and Suzanne dePeyster stated that more than one person could be hired to do the road worker position.

Rick Dahm made an amendment to the Road Foreman Budget line to allow for a 3% pay increase only.

Geanna Trombley seconded the amendment.

The amendment was defeated by a verbal vote.

Philip Frost had a question about damaged guard rails on Rupert Road. Does the Town have to repair the guard rails, or does the person responsible have to pay to have them repaired. Mike stated he could not get the person responsible for the damage to admit to the damage. The Town would replace the damaged guard rails with used guard rails.

Rick Dahm had questions about mowing budget having no money allotted. Mike said we were no longer subbing out the work because we had our own machine and it would be part of existing worker salaries.

Rick Dahm asked why State aid was decreased. Mike Hill stated it was reduced because roads including parts of West Road and Tate Hill were declassified.

Kathy Wagner had a request on the mowing on Rupert Road. Late mowing had allowed the burdock plants to go to seed. Mike Hill state mowing would be done earlier this year.

Rick Dahm noted that there had been a \$10,000 increase in Materials & Hauling. Mike stated he wanted to put more gravel down. Starting July 1, 2018 every town has to purchase a \$2000.00 permit to work on roads. Ditch work will all have to be approved by the State engineers. If there is a 5% grade ditches must be stone lined. Mike stated that will mean that 90% of Sandgate's ditches will be stone lined.

Kathy Wagner asked if there was any way to reduce the amount of salt. Mike primarily uses sand, but with more liability issues you have to use more salt.

Rick Dahm had a question about the Pavement Maintenance fund. Mike said it is a rollover fund. He takes money out to fix cracks, but primarily it is for big paving projects which are costly. Currently there is about \$70,000 in the pavement fund. Because he was able to get 2 grants he did not have to pay for it out of these funds. Rick had questions about spots in front of William Skidmore. There are two spots near SE Corners and out by Hamilton Hollow Road to be repaved this year and also at the top of the Notch on West Sandgate Road. They are recommending more frequent paving using either 2 inch or 1 inch coatings to maintain paved roads. The top of the Notch will have to be dug out and some additional drainage put in before repaving.

Eleanor LaCross noted that culverts on Southeast Corner Road were squashing down. Mike stated they should come back up after mud season is over.

Rob Viglas made a motion to have the town appropriate \$354,992 to defray the highway expenses of the Town and, if so voted, authorize the Selectboard to set the tax rate based on the final Grand List.

Tambra Reap seconded the motion.

Article 7 passed by verbal vote.

Article 8. To hear and transact such further business as may be lawful and appropriate for the annual meeting.

Phil Frost made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

The motion was seconded.

The motion to adjourn the meeting passed by verbal vote.

Chris Barlow adjourned the meeting at 9:25 PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Marjorie Peff, Sandgate Town Clerk