

## Town of Stratford – Annual Town Meeting 13 March 2021

The Town's Annual Business Meeting to consider Articles 2 through 16 was moved from the second Tuesday in March to Saturday, March 13, 2021 to ensure safe social distancing, in accordance with the provisions of Emergency Order #83. The meeting took place at the Stratford Public School and was called to order at 10:00 AM by Moderator Jamie Sayen. He briefly thanked the school, select board, and the Town office and election staff for keeping our community safe during the pandemic and also the residents for adhering to changed protocols and showing respect to the community at large. A moment of silence was held in memory of all who died during this pandemic. There were approximately 40 residents in attendance.

**\*Article 1:** To choose by non-partisan ballot the following Officers: 1 Selectman (3 years); 1 Cemetery Trustee (3 years); 1 Library Trustee (3 years); 1 Trustee of Trust Funds (3 years).

**Ballot vote – took place on Tuesday, March 09, 2021.**

### Election results:

**Select Board Member:** Harry Juergens 54; Scott Dissler 8

**Cemetery Trustee:** Ronald Connary 63

**Library Trustee:** Dawn Hall 59

**Trustee of Trust Funds:** Dawn Hall 60

**Article 2:** To see if the town will vote pursuant to RSA 674:43 to authorize the planning board to review and approve or disapprove site plans for the development or change or expansion of use of tracts for nonresidential uses or for multi-family dwelling units. (Planning Board Recommends) (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Charlie Goulet

**Seconded by:** Rachel O'Meara

**Discussion:** Rachel O'Meara as Chair of the Planning Board explained the intent of the article: The last Masterplan survey showed a majority of the respondents (84%) favored having site plan regulations in place. These regulations are meant only for commercial property developments and multi-family dwellings (defined as 3 or more units). Most municipalities in NH have site plan regulations in place. Adopting them is a process: The planning board would develop and propose site plan regulations, the public then has input through public hearings before it is adopted. Article 2 is seeking authorization from the town's voters to start the process of developing site plan regulations. Only then will any detailed parameters, thresholds or exemptions be researched, proposed, and publicly discussed. Several questions from the floor addressed a variety of concerns, such as the danger of additional zoning and possible over-regulation by the town. O'Meara stressed that through public input, a town adopts only those specific site plan regulations that a town wants to have.

Select Board member Clayton Macdonald said that site plan regulations are meant to ensure that the proposed development is safe for residents, neighbors and the surrounding environment (by addressing sewer, water, emergency access, parking, etc.). With this tool, site plan reviews can help to

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protect everyone's property values. He also reminded attendees that the Town has a Zoning Board of Adjustment in place: any decision the Planning Board makes can be appealed, any property owner or abutter can come before the ZBA which will evaluate that decision. So the Planning Board's decisions are not final.

**Article 2 passed as read by a count of raised hands: 24(+) yes votes - 9 no votes.**

**Article 3:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$856,219** for the operating budget. This article does not include the cost of any other warrant article.

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Charlie Goulet

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

**Discussion:** Questions were raised on how much of the appropriations were earmarked for the Eversource pole tax litigation payments (answer: none, they are not part of the operating budget), as well as why we still raise monies for a non-existent police department. Select board member Clayton Macdonald pointed out the town is including this line item to make sure there are funds available should a policing emergency arise and money has to be expended. Does the budget reflect the costs for the new positions created to replace Chester Smart (waste water management) as well as the water manager and a deputy to also cover multiple other roles? Yes, and that is part of why the budget has increased as much. These positions are still open.

**Article 3 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 4:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$4,250** to be added to the previously established Fire Department Expendable Trust Fund, with the full amount to come from the unassigned fund balance. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Charlie Goulet

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

No discussion.

**Article 4 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 5:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$25,000** to be added to the previously established Highway and Bridges Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Clayton Macdonald

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

No discussion.

**Article 5 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 6:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$10,000** to be added to the previously established Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Charlie Goulet

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

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Fire Chief Chuck Stinson remarked that the \$10,000 is not enough, as replacement costs for a fire truck would be much higher than what is currently in the fund. No further discussion.

**Article 6 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 7:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$3,000** to be added to the previously established Recycling Capital Reserve Fund, with the full amount to come from the unassigned fund balance. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Wayne Hall

**Seconded by:** Charlie Goulet

No discussion.

**Article 7 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 8:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$500** to be added to the previously established 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration Expendable Trust Fund for the purpose of funding the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration to be held in 2023. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Wayne Hall

**Seconded by:** Charlie Goulet

**Discussion:** Select Board member Harry Juergens reported the current fund balance is \$5686. The committee disbanded in 2020 and the Town is currently looking for new volunteers to take on planning for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration.

**Article 8 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 9:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$10,000** to be added to the previously established Government Buildings Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. These funds will be specific to the Grange restoration project to help match the LCHIP grant that was received. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Wayne Hall

**Seconded by:** Clayton Macdonald

**Discussion:** Select Board member Clayton Macdonald reported that the fund was created in 2014 with a current balance of \$54,610. The Town wishes to restore the Grange building and secured an LCHIP grant, which pays for half of the restoration costs (\$61,500). The Town will have to put up matching funds, part of which will be covered by additional grants (among them, moose plate grants). The remaining money would come from the Government Buildings Expendable Trust – depending on which grants come through, this would be between \$26,000 and \$46,000. A question was raised how the restored Grange building would be used, and whether there were any town buildings that needed repairs more urgently? Select Board member Clayton Macdonald commented that as the Town's oldest building, the Grange is part of Stratford's heritage with a symbolic value and also a highly visible asset. Its restoration has been on the "to do list" for a long time and has been part of the current Masterplan since 2008. Plans after restoration include using the vestibule as an accessible information point for historical and tourist information. The restoration, which involves having to move the

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building, will also provide safer parking. Completing this project would not take away funds from any other Town buildings that need repair and upkeep. Another remark from the floor addressed the fact that if the Town invested in restoring the Grange now and in the future decided to sell the property, this seems like a sound investment. Finally, the LCHIP grant is specific to the grange restoration – without matching funds, this project could not take place.

**Article 9 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 10:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$20,000** to be added to the previously established Municipal Solar Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Clayton Macdonald

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

**Discussion:** Current fund balance is \$20,752. Select Board member Clayton Macdonald summed up the progress of the Town’s solar project, which will be a 2-step plan. First, to install a solar array on the Town Hall roof to supply electricity to the Town Hall, the fire station, and the transfer station (in part). In a second step, a ground-mounted solar array will be installed behind the transfer station. The installations will be partly covered by USDA grants and will only go ahead once those grants are secured. Since the USDA grants have a cap, it was suggested to realize the overall project in 2 separate steps. The planned setup will not have net-metering (where excess electricity can be saved indefinitely for offsets), but will be a group metering plan where any excess production can be used to cover the power needs of several other town buildings during the year. Further discussion touched on amortization (6-8 years) and the fact that investing in clean, renewable energy will make the town both more resilient and more attractive to younger generations in the future. Voices from the floor and the Select Board called for Stratford to be more pro-active in making the town a more attractive place to live, which includes investing in solar energy, showing the town is a dynamic place, not a dying place.

**Article 10 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 11:** I/We the undersigned agree to the attached ordinance and call on Stratford to pass an ordinance to restrict fireworks to limit the use/user to the attached dates and times. (Insert as Petition)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Sam Cavazos

**Seconded by:** Cindy Juergens

**Discussion:** Several questions arose from the floor concerning the petition’s wording of the proposed time and date limitations, as well enforcement issues and current practice of the fire department in issuing fireworks permits and addressing fire danger. Others mentioned such an ordinance was micromanaging the town and that there is a difference in limiting fireworks “out in the middle of nowhere” versus directly in the village. It was clarified that this article, once adopted, would be considered a directive to the Select Board and the specific details of such an ordinance will be subject to public input. The process includes public hearings and the final ordinance would then need to be approved by voters at next year’s Town Meeting. The petition may act as guidance, but its exact

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wording is not what is voted on today.

**Article 11 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 12:** Shall the Town vote to establish a Cemetery Capital Reserve Fund under RSA 35:1 for the purpose of ground stabilization and major repairs; to appoint the Selectmen as agents to expend; and, to raise and appropriate the sum of **\$5,000.00** for this purpose. (Board Recommends)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Charlie Goulet

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

**Discussion:** Select Board Member Harry Juergens explained the funds were needed to repair erosion damages from the brook at Baldwin Cemetery. The Cemetery Board of Trustees wants to address the situation in time to avoid more damaging and costly issues down the road.

**Article 12 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 13:** To see if the town will vote to change the time of Annual Town Meeting from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM beginning with the March 8, 2022 Annual Town Meeting. The reason for changing the time is to allow the working person to participate in said meeting. (Insert as Petition)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Molly Carr

**Seconded by:** Wayne Hall

**Discussion:** Molly Carr, who initiated the petition, explained the intent was to give the opportunity for working people to attend Town Meetings, which is hard to do on the traditional Tuesday mornings. She was open to entertain other times, as long as it allowed working folks to attend. Others agreed that Saturday mornings seemed like a good compromise, compared to either Tuesday nights or mornings, with the potential for higher attendance. Call to keep Town Meeting consistent if and once changed and do a better job publicizing the new day and time. Suggestions to group Town Meeting with the School Meeting cannot be entertained as the School district governs its own schedule and the Town cannot make any decisions about the School meeting times.

**Wayne Hall made a motion to amend the Petition** to read as follows (changes in bold): *“To see if the town will vote to change the time of Annual Town Meeting to **the Saturday following the second Tuesday in March** beginning with the March 2022 Annual Town Meeting. The reason for changing the time is to allow the working person to participate in said meeting.”*

**Seconded by:** Chris Caron

**Discussion:** Moderator Jamie Sayen advised that such a petition is not necessarily binding, as the Select Board can set the time and day of the Town Meeting. However, if the voters issue a strong sentiment in favor of a different time from the usual, the Select Board should be taking that into consideration.

**The amendment passed by voice vote.**

No further discussion on the amended article.

**Article 13 passed as amended by voice vote.**

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**\*\*\* UPDATE (after Town Meeting):** It has come to light that a change to Saturdays cannot take effect in 2022 yet, as the Town has not adopted the RSA 39:2-a needed to allow the Town to separate its business meeting from the Town Election day (by law held on the same day, second Tuesday in March). While the Select Board may choose to schedule Town Meeting at any time of day on that second Tuesday, it cannot move the business meeting to another day without an official ballot vote to adopt RSA 39:2-a first. This move was only possible in 2021 because of Emergency Order #83. Thus, Town Meeting will still have to take place on the regular Tuesday in 2022, and RSA 39:2-a will be on the ballot that year. Once adopted, Town Meeting can move to the Saturday time slot as was just approved in the following year.

**Article 14:** To see if the Town will vote to discontinue the Grand Trunk Railroad Station Capital Reserve Fund created in 1998. Said funds, with accumulated interest to date of withdrawal, are to be transferred to the municipality's general fund. (Majority Vote Required)

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Charlie Goulet

**Seconded by:** Wayne Labatte

**Discussion:** Select Board member Charlie Goulet explained that the reserve fund had been all but used up for redoing the library deck in 2020.

**Article 14 passed as read by voice vote.**

**Article 15:** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$4,500** in donations to the following groups: \$200, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$200, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital; \$200, Northern Human Services; \$2,500, Tri-County CAP; \$200, Colebrook Food Pantry; \$200, Helping Hands; \$200, Backpack Program; \$200, CASA; \$200, NH Veterans; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.; \$200, American Red Cross.

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Wayne Hall

**Seconded by:** Wayne Labatte

**Discussion:** Several amendments were introduced consecutively to raise individual amounts (the final amended article will appear at the end):

- Wayne Hall proposed an amendment to raise the donations to the Backpack Program from \$200 to \$500. Dan Smith seconded. **The amendment passed by voice vote.**

- Claire Martineau proposed an amendment to raise the donations to both the North Country Home and Hospice Care and NH Veterans from \$200 to \$500 each. Wayne Hall seconded. **The amendment passed by voice vote.**

- Molly Carr proposed an amendment to raise the donation to the Colebrook Food Pantry from \$200 to \$500. Wayne Hall seconded. **The amendment passed by voice vote.**

The final three-times amended article reads as follows (changes in bold): *"To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$5,700** in donations to the following groups: **\$500**, North Country Home*

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*Health & Hospice; \$200, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital; \$200, Northern Human Services; \$2,500, Tri-County CAP; \$500, Colebrook Food Pantry; \$200, Helping Hands; \$500, Backpack Program; \$200, CASA; \$500, NH Veterans; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.; \$200, American Red Cross.”*

**Article 15 passed as amended by voice vote.**

**Article 16:** To transact any other business that may legally come before said meeting and to hear reports from any agents or committees heretofore chosen.

**Motion made to accept article as read:** Wayne Hall

**Seconded by:** Charlie Goulet

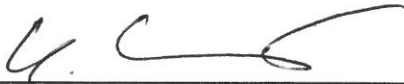
**Discussion:** A request was brought from the floor to take the amended higher donation amounts from the last article and make them permanent, so we don't have to go through these amendments each year. Wendy McMann thanked the town administration and all elected officials for their hard work all year to keep this community safe in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Motion to adjourn was made by:** Wayne Hall

**Seconded by:** Dan Smith

**The business meeting was adjourned at 12:15 PM by Moderator Jamie Sayen on 3/13/2021.**

Respectfully submitted



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Katrin Kerner  
Stratford Town Clerk

March 29, 2021

