

Town of Stratford – Annual Town Meeting 18 March 2023

The Town's Annual Business Meeting to consider Articles 3 through 16 was held on Saturday, March 18, 2023. The meeting took place at Fuller Town Hall and was called to order at 10:00 AM by Moderator Jamie Sayen. There were approximately 32 residents in attendance.

***Article 1.** To choose by non-partisan ballot the following officers: 1 Selectboard Member (3 Year Term); 1 Town Clerk/Tax Collector (3 Year Term); 1 Cemetery Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Library Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Trustee of Trust Funds (3 Year term); 1 Supervisor of the Checklist (1 Year Term).

Ballot vote – took place on Tuesday, March 14, 2023.

Election results:

Select Board Member: Greg Ruch 21 ; Charles Goulet 127

Town Clerk/Tax Collector: Katrin "Kitty" Kerner 143

Supervisor of Elections: Carlos Cavazos 140

Cemetery Trustee: Charles Goulet 141

Library Trustee: Wayne Hall 132

Trustee of Trust Funds: Sharon Corbeil 141

***Article 2.** To choose by non-partisan ballot: Are you in favor of adoption of the amendment to the Town of Stratford, New Hampshire Land Use Ordinance, as proposed by the Stratford Select Board? (Planning Board recommends)

Ballot vote – took place on Tuesday, March 14, 2023.

Election results:

Yes: 121

No: 25

Article 2 passed as written

Article 3. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$938,365** for the operating budget. This article does not include the cost of any other warrant article.

Motion made to accept article as read: Clayton Macdonald

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: Jim Lee asked why there was a \$60,000 increase in the budget. The select board explained there was an increase in costs, especially the ambulance service, highway repairs, and transfer station costs. There was also discussion about the towns solar array.

Article 3 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 4. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$4,000** 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: James Kennett

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: Charles Goulet, selectman, explained there was \$ 18,776 in the fund currently

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: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Jenny Caron

Discussion: Vicki DeLalla felt the amount should be increased; it hasn't changed in years.

Motion made to amend the article as follows by: Vicki DeLalla. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$26,000** to be added to the previously established Highway and Bridges Capital Reserve Fund.

Seconded by: Wendy McMann

Discussion: Jim Lee wondered if even more funds are needed. Selectman Clayton Macdonald said the board felt \$25,000 was the bare minimum, but it was up to the town. Harry Juergens, selectman, said there is currently \$204,133 in the capital reserve fund. Dan Smith wondered if 4 -wheelers increase road repair costs. Select board answered yes, on class V roads. Rene Routhier thought more consideration should be given in future to the extra expense to roads incurred by 4 wheelers.

The amendment passed by voice vote.

Dan Smith called to move the vote.

Article 5 passed as amended 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: Charles Goulet

Seconded by: Rene Routhier

Discussion: Charles Goulet, selectman: there is \$97,025 in the fund

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: Rene Routhier

Seconded by: Dan Smith

Discussion: Charles Goulet, selectman: there is \$24,995 in the fund. A new baler is needed which will cost between \$21,000 and \$24,000

Article 7 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 8. Shall the town readopt the optional veteran's credit in accordance with RSA 72:28, II, for an annual tax credit on residential property of \$100? (Majority vote required)

Motion made to accept article as read: Clayton Macdonald

Seconded by: Vicki DeLalla

Discussion: There was discussion on the difference between 'optional' and "all" veteran versions of the law.

Motion made to amend the article as follows by: Wayne Hall. Shall the town **adopt** the **all** veterans' credit in accordance with **RSA 72:28-b** for an annual tax credit on residential property of \$100?

(Majority vote required)

Seconded by: Dan Smith

The amendment passed by voice vote.

Wendy McMann called to move the vote .

Article 8 passed as amended 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. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Dan Smith

Discussion: Harry Juergens, selectman: there is \$26, 669 in the fund.

Article 9 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 10. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$1,000** to be added to the previously established Municipal Solar Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Dan Smith

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: per select board, there is \$44,135 in the fund.

Article 10 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 11. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$20,000** to be added to the previously established Recreation Revolving Fund. These funds will be specific to upgrading/replacing park equipment. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Dan Smith

Seconded by: Chris Caron

Discussion:

Article 11 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 12. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$2,000** to be added to the previously established Cemetery Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: re: erosion at Baldwin Cemetery. Chris Caron felt more funds should be allocated.

Motion made to amend the article as follows by: Chris Caron: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$3,000** to be added to the previously established Cemetery Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Seconded by: Dan Smith

Discussion:

The Amendment passed by voice vote.

Article 12 passed as amended by voice vote.

Article 13. To see if the Town will vote to modify the elderly exemptions from property tax in the Town of Stratford, in accordance with RSA 72:39-b, based on assessed values, for qualified taxpayers, to be as follows: for a person 65 years of age up to 75 years, \$15,000; for a person 75 years of age up to 80 years, \$25,000; for a person 80 years of age or older, \$40,000. To qualify, the person must have been a New Hampshire resident for at least 3 consecutive years, own the real estate individually or jointly, or, if the real estate is owned by such person's spouse, they must have been married for at least 5 consecutive years. In addition, the taxpayer must have a net income of not more than \$25,000 or, if married, a combined net income of less than \$35,000; and own net assets not in excess of \$70,000, excluding the value of the person's residence. (Majority Vote)

Motion made to accept article as read: Dan Smith

Seconded by: Jenny Caron

Discussion: Wayne Hall asked when this law was enacted, and if it has been adjusted for cost-of-living increases. Suzanne Goulet indicated that it came into effect in 2007 and the current figures represent an adjustment. Michael Brauer asked about requirements that establish net worth; Suzanne explained the basic protocol.

Article 13 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 14. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$250** for the Cohos Historical Society in showing support of the Town in helping to match the current LCHIP Grant for the restoration of the Marion Blodgett Museum in Stratford Hollow.

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Charles Goulet

Discussion:

Motion made to amend the article as follows by: Vicki DeLalla: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$250 and any unexpended remaining monies from the town's 250th anniversary celebration fund** for the Cohos Historical Society in showing support of the Town in helping to match the current LCHIP Grant for the restoration of the Marion Blodgett Museum in Stratford Hollow.

Seconded by: Rene Routhier

Discussion: James Kennett pointed out some problems with this possibly impacting the funding for the 250th celebration. Ginny Routhier pointed out that any unexpended funds from the 250th celebration would go back into the capital reserve fund, and perhaps this could be addressed next year.

Motion to amend the article withdrawn by: Vicki Delalla

Seconded withdrawn by: Rene Routhier

Motion to amend the article as follows by: Rae Davenport: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$500** for the Cohos Historical Society in showing support of the Town in helping to match the current LCHIP Grant for the restoration of the Marion Blodgett Museum in Stratford Hollow.

Seconded by: Marie Snedeker

Discussion:

The amendment passed by voice vote.

Wayne Hall called to move the vote.

Article 14 passed as amended by voice vote.

Article 15. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$4,755** in donations to the following groups: \$500, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$500, Northern Human Services; \$1,655, Tri-County CAP; \$500, Colebrook Food Pantry; \$500, Helping Hands; \$500, Backpack Program; \$200, CASA; \$200, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.

Motion made to accept article as read: Dan Smith

Seconded by: Rene Routhier

Discussion: Wayne Hall would like to increase appropriation to the backpack program.

Motion to amend the article as follows by: Wayne Hall: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$5,005** in donations to the following groups: \$500, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$500, Northern Human Services; \$1,655, Tri-County CAP; \$500, Colebrook Food Pantry; \$500, Helping Hands; **\$750**, Backpack Program; \$200, CASA; \$200, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.

Seconded by: Jenny Caron

The amendment passed by voice vote.

Dan Smith called to move the vote.

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.

Discussion: Wayne Hall would like to bring back a \$1,000 yearly appropriation for the town's 275th anniversary celebration. Also, as a Library Trustee, he would like to share that the library received a \$20,000 grant from the Tillotson Foundation for the children's area and programming, and invites citizens to visit the library.

Dan Smith noted he had suggested combining the school and town meetings, when he was at the school meeting earlier this week.

Ginny Routhier thanked the 250th anniversary committee for their work.

Michael Brauer questioned why article 2 was voted on before it could be discussed at town meeting. Selectman Clayton MacDonald explained the law, and why it was important that citizens attend public hearings.

Vicki DeLalla noted there will be a ribbon cutting, lunch, and vendors on June 25th at the Grange. Homesteading events will be hosted throughout the year.

Charles Goulet thanked voters and asked that we recognize Suzanne Goulet, the select board's administrative assistant for her work for the town.

Clayton MacDonald discussed the new Town Website.

Jenny Caron mentioned clean up week this year is April 30-May 6., and that the Conservation Committee has adopted RT 3 from Old Mill Rd north to the Town Line for clean up.

Jim Lee appealed for more volunteer firefighters: six of nine firemen are from out of town at present.

Motion to adjourn was made by: Dan Smith-

Seconded by: Rene Routhier

The business meeting was adjourned at 11:28 AM by Moderator Jamie Sayen on 3/18/2023.

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel O'Meara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.

Rachel O'Meara

Stratford Town Clerk pro tem

March 18, 2023