

Town of Stratford – Annual Town Meeting 16 March 2024

The Town's Annual Business Meeting to consider Articles 2 through 21 was held on the third Saturday, March 16, 2024. The meeting took place at the Fuller Town Hall and was called to order at 10:00 AM by Moderator Jamie Sayen. There were approximately 50 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 (2 Year Term); 1 Cemetery Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Library Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Trustee of Trust Funds (3 Year term); 2 Supervisor of the Checklist (4 Year Term)(6 Year Term); 1 Moderator (2 Year Term).

Ballot vote - took place on Tuesday, March 12, 2024.

Election results:

Select Board Member: Harry Juergens - 63, Mario Audit - 39

Town Clerk/Tax Collector: Maryann Lister - 98

Town Moderator: James Sayen - 95

Supervisor of Check List: (6 years) Chase Cavazos -90 (4 years) Lorraine Bacon - 95

Cemetery Trustee: Ron Connary - 98

Library Trustee: Dawn Hall - 96

Trustee of Trust Funds: Dawn Hall - 94

Article 2. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$962,352 for the operating budget. This article does not include the cost of any other warrant article.

Motion made to accept article as read: James Kennett

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: James Lee asked if the Town employees pay raises are based on performance or COL? Suzanne Goulet replied the employees are evaluated on performance and COL is also considered. Wendy McMann speaks to town as town treasurer, stating tax anticipation loan (TAN Loan) as there is a deficiency in tax revenue and taxes are not being paid as they should. The interest on the \$200,000 loan @ 6% will be \$6166 if needed for the full six months, not including the Attorney fees for the opinion letter and other required documents. Clayton Macdonald also speaks to town, stating unpaid taxes, costs the town interest & lawyer fees, not foreseen as part of the operating budget.

Article 2 passed as read by voice vote

Article 3. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$6,000** 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: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

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Discussion: none

Article 3 passed as read by voice vote

Article 4. 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: Wayne Labatte

Discussion: Rae Davenport reports balance in account is 198,057.04. Harry Juergens states damage and aging roads and bridges are the cause, much needed repairs on town roads. Clayton Macdonald states increasing costs are due to economy and material increases.

Article 4 passed as read by voice vote

Article 5. 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: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Wayne Labatte

Discussion: Charles Stinson III discusses life safety.

Article 5 passed as read by voice vote

Article 6. 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: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Harry Juergens

Discussion: Charlie stated the fund balance is \$29,000, and the town will be purchasing a new baler which costs \$20,000 + and in the future we will be needing a compactor.

Article 6 passed as read by voice vote

Article 7. To see if the town will vote to establish a Land Purchase/ Building Capital Reserve Fund under the provisions of RSA 35:1 for purchases and new construction and to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000 to be placed in this fund. Further, to name the Selectboard as agents to expend from said fund. (Board Recommends) (Majority Vote Required)

Motion made to accept article as read: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

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Discussion: Clayton explain we failed to raise a dollar amount last year for this article. Should the opportunity arise to purchase land that would be an interest to the town, this sum will be a start to accumulating monies for purchases.

Article 7 passed as read by voice vote

Article 8. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$5,000 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: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: none

Article 8 passed as read by voice vote

Article 9. 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: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Mark McCulloch

Discussion: James Lee asked what goes into this fund now? We are continuing to add a small amount in this fund for maintenance. Suzanne Goulet explained there is a 30% tax credit available through the IRS for the ground mount solar project.

Article 9 passed as read by voice vote

Article 10. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$25,000 to be added to the previously established Recreation Revolving Fund. These funds will be specific to upgrading recreational parks. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Marie Snedeker

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: Clayton explains matching funds are needed to show support from the town to get the LWCF grant.

Mike Lynch stated the playground is now over 40 years old. Vicki DeLalla stated the town has already spent time and money on surveys, plans and will loose everything already done if they have to start the grant all over for any changes, this process has been going on for 3 years plus. Wayne stated equipment is old and if anyone gets hurt it is the towns responsibility as we know the equipment there now is old and dangerous. The grant request is \$320,000+ and will consist of walking paths, wheelchair and handicap access to the grounds, new basketball and pickle-ball court, and playground equipment. Charlie Goulet stated the need to

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revitalize the town. Charles Stinson III asked why not the Hollow park included in this grant? Suzanne Goulet told him there was other uses of the land other than public noticed when the town had a site visit. This would need to be fixed before moving forward with the LWCF grant. Town will pursue other grant in the future for the Hollow. Rachel O’Meara stated it will be a nice asset to the town.

Article 10 passed as read by voice vote

Article 11. 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: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Harry Juergens

Discussion: Harry Juergens states, the purpose of this fund is to be used for the cemetery erosion on southwest corner, we do not have quotes as of yet. No other discussion.

Article 11 passed as read by voice vote

Article 12. To see if the town will vote to close the existing 250th Celebration Trust Fund and transfer the funds to the Recreation Revolving Fund. (Board Recommends) (2/3 vote required)

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Labatte

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: Clayton MacDonald congratulated the 250th committee for their work and fundraising, leaving a balance in the 250th fund of \$7,674.00 to be transferred to article #10. No other discussion.

Article 12 passed as read by voice vote with 2/3 cleared vote

Article 13. To see if the Town will vote to rescind the 1977 vote which states “To see if the town will vote to accept a Curfew Ordinance, whereby a youngster 16 year of age or younger be off the streets by 9:00 PM. unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, effective April 1, 1977.” (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Kathy Labatte

Discussion: Charlie Goulet states this was a long time ago, town Attorney at the time questioned the legality and should have been rescinded years ago, Ray Davenport said who would enforce anyway?

Article 13 passed as read by voice vote

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Article 14. To see if the Town will vote to rescind the 1977 vote which states “To see if the town will vote to impose a penalty of \$5.00 on the parent or legal guardian for first offense and \$10.00 for second offense if a youngster is found in violation of the Curfew Ordinance, effective April 1, 1977.” (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Labatte

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: This is also obsolete and since the first one was rescinded, this one must be as well.

Article 14 passed as read by voice vote

Article 15. To see if the Town will vote to rescind the 1977 vote which states “To see if the town wishes to take reference to a “Dog Ordinance.” (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Wayne Labatte

Discussion: Clayton Macdonald stated this is not adequate now for the problems, nor does it site a valid RSA, which makes it not legal as written.

Article 15 passed as read by voice vote

Article 16. To see if the town will vote to adopt a “Dog Ordinance.” (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Labatte

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: Clayton Macdonald states in the past year there have been numerous calls and complaints of vicious & nuisance dogs. Mike Lynch asked who would enforce this new ordinance? Clayton said the Selectboard would be able to enforce laws and fines. Michael Brauer asked are there plans to hire a dog officer? Clayton stated the Selectboard plans to discuss the issue, if the problem calls for a need. Fines can be issued and the funds will go to the town, if needed more steps can be taken from the Selectboard.

Article 16 passed as read by voice vote

Article 17. To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate \$17,919 to be used for the purchase of a new battery powered combi-tool, “Jaws of Life.”

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: Charles Stinson III explained the need for the combi-tool to be on the fire truck located at the North Station to be better equipped. Most Firefighters come from Colebrook area and it will make a difference having this type of tool located at both fire stations.

Article 17 passed as read by voice vote

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Article 18. To see if the Town will vote to adopt the Stratford Community Power plan, to authorize the Selectboard to implement the plan, and to take all action in furtherance thereof, pursuant to RSA 53-E. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: Clayton explained the Community Power Group is non-profit and they would have more flexibility to purchase electricity. The window for purchasing power is year long where Eversource is limited to purchasing times, so this allows electricity to be purchased at better rates. This would provide community with local power and the town has a voice, a level of control. No one is required to do this but it will be an opt out situation. Everyone will have their own choice even if this passes. The Community Power Group has saved rate payers over 9 million to date. Cards will be sent to all residents.

Article 18 passed as read by voice vote

Article 19. 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 grants for the restoration of the Marion Blodgett Museum in Stratford Hollow.

Motion made to accept article as read: James Kennett

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: Wayne Hall ask that the article 19 be amended to read: 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 grants for the restoration of the Marion Blodgett Museum in Stratford Hollow.

Motion made to accept the amended article: Wayne Labatte

Seconded by: James Kennett

Amended Article 19 passed as read by voice vote

Article 20. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$6,239 in donations to the following groups: \$1,500, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$1,000, Northern Human Services; \$1,655, Tri-County CAP; \$1,000, Helping Hands; \$634, Backpack Program; \$250, CASA; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.

Motion made to accept article as read: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Wayne Labatte

Discussion: Wayne Hall ask that the article read as follows: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$6,905.00 in donations to the following groups: \$1,500, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$1,000, Northern Human Services; \$1,655, Tri-County CAP; \$1,000, Helping Hands; \$1,000, Backpack Program; \$250, CASA; \$500, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.

Motion made to accept the amended article: Wayne Labatte

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Amended Article 20 passed as read by voice vote

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Article 21. To transact any other business that may legally come before said meeting and to hear reports from any agents or committees heretofore chosen.

Discussion: Christopher Caron gave information for Conservation Commission: Clean up for the town will be held on April 29 through May 4 and the free day at the transfer day on May 4th, they are looking for volunteers. Also working on National Resources, flyers are posted at the town office and post office, there is a meeting at UNH coop extension in Lancaster on 3/22/2024 at 4:30 PM.

Charles Stinson III is looking for help on the fire department, anyone is welcome to come and talk with him, he will be looking into an article for next year on purchasing a fire engine and ways to help with funding from different fund raisers.

Stratford Grange is having a homesteading meeting the last Wednesday of the month.

Clayton McDonald mentioned having a couple hearings on roads in 2024, on how the Town wants to maintain and budget for roads.

Motion to adjourn was made by: Mark McCulloch
Seconded by: Wayne Hall
The business meeting was adjourned at 12:11PM by Moderator Jamie Sayen on 3/16/2024.

Respectfully submitted



Maryann Lister
Stratford Town Clerk

March 12, 2024