

Town of Stratford – Annual Town Meeting 15 March 2025

The Town's Annual Business Meeting to consider Articles 2 through 19 was held on the third Saturday, March 15, 2025. The meeting took place at Fuller Town Hall and was called to order at 10:00 AM by Moderator Timothy Brooks. There were 72 registered voters and 3 non-residents in attendance.

***Article 1:** To choose by non-partisan ballot the following officers: 1 Select Board Member (3 Year Term); 1 Cemetery Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Library Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Trustee of Trust Funds (3 Year term); 2 Supervisors of the Checklist (3 Year Term)(5 Year Term). 1 Town Treasurer (3 Year Term).

Ballot vote held on Tuesday, March 11, 2025.

Election results:

Select Board Member: Ron Scott, 147 – Joshua Philips, 42

Supervisor of Check List: (5years) Molly Carr, 165

Supervisor of Check List: (3years) Sarah Kennett, 172

Cemetery Trustee: (3years) Rose Connary, 170

Library Trustee:(3years) Dana Kassell, 167

Trustee of Trust Funds: (3years) Kathy Labatte, 14 (write-in for uncontested position)

Town Treasurer: (3years) Wendy McMann, 168

Article 2. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$997,174** for the operating budget. This article does not include the cost of any other warrant article.

Motion made to accept article as read: Brian McMann

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: Clayton Macdonald briefly reviewed the budget, noting the cost of ambulance services and increasing road maintenance costs.

Article 2 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 3. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$6,200** 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: Charles Goulet

Seconded by: Chuck Stinson

Discussion: Charles Goulet reported the purpose of the fund and the current balance of \$31 062.

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: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: Harry Juergens gave the current fund balance of \$233 746 and noted a possible project to improve sidewalks and pedestrian safety in the North Stratford village. Clayton Macdonald pointed to a bridge and flooding issue on Old Mill Road and that a qualified professional assessment was needed. Jim Lee said he was not against adding to the fund, but work should address road issues and

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questioned using the fund for sidewalks. John McCarthy suggested making Old Mill Road dead-ends at the bridge rather than expending large amounts to keep the road open.

Article 4 passed as read, by show of hands, 39-17, counted by Supervisors of the Checklist.

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: Charles Goulet

Seconded by: Chuck Stinson

Discussion: Chuck Stinson said that a new fire truck currently costs around \$600 000. Sharon Corbeil asked if it is possible to trade-in the older trucks; Chuck replied, yes, but for low value since insurance and other factors make the trucks obsolete at 25 years old. Amber Rock asked if old trucks can be refurbished. Chuck said yes but the cost would be a few hundred thousand. Mike Lynch made a motion

Motion to amend the appropriation to \$25 000, Mike Lynch. Seconded, Greg Ruch.

Moderator called the motion vote; amendment passed by voice vote.

Motion to amend the appropriation to \$50 000, Jim Lee. Seconded, Harry Juergens.

(Supervisors of the Checklist interrupted proceedings to determine if a voice vote had been made by an unregistered voter. Discussion followed explaining to the voter in question that, despite owning property and paying taxes in the Town, NH RSA prohibits unregistered voters from voting.)

Milan Knowles asked what impact the amendment, if adopted, would have on the tax rate; Suzanne Goulet answered it would be about \$0.50 per thousand. Faith Tucker said the cost of a new truck will continually increase and setting money aside for one now is just taking money from taxpayers. Jim Lee said the Town will need to find additional funding from grants or bonds. Sharon Corbeil explained that the fund deposits earn interest, that the Town can access those deposits by changing the terms of the fund at a Town Meeting.

Amended amendment passed by voice vote.

Article 5 passed as amended, 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: Charles Goulet

Seconded by: Ginnie Routhier

Discussion: Charles Goulet said there is \$7 324 in the fund.

Article 6 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 7. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$5,000 to be added to the previously established Land Purchase/ Building Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Maryann Lister

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: Clayton Macdonald said the Town authorized the purchase of property by the Town should a property useful to the Town become available and that a fund was necessary to enable such a purchase should that time come. James Kennett asked who made the decision to buy. Jim Lee asked why buy more property when the Town already owns property. Greg Ruch asked how it benefits the

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Town to take property off the tax list. Clayton Macdonald said having the option to buy a property when it benefits the Town is a good option to have. Brian McMann said the Town woodlot is of no benefit to the Town anymore and there are other scattered lots in the middle of nowhere not making us a dime.

Article 7 did not pass as read, by show of hands, 23-31, counted by the Supervisors of the Checklist.

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: Dawn Hall

Discussion: Harry Juergens said the current balance is \$28 128. Robin Heinrichs asked if a list of the Town's buildings is available; Suzanne noted they are listed in the Town Report.

Article 8 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 9. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$500** to be added to the previously established Municipal Solar Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Jenny Caron

Seconded by: Harry Juergens

Discussion: Jim Lee asked if a cost analysis has been performed on the entire cost of the Town's solar arrays. Suzanne Goulet explained that although the arrays have not been in production long enough to give accurate numbers, the Town is above water on the initial cost of the array and 100% of the electricity produced has gone to reduce the cost of the Town's electricity bill. She noted the link on the Town's website where daily production can be viewed. Regarding maintenance costs, Clayton Macdonald said the panels are guaranteed for 20 years, but the useful lifespan of panels is yet to be determined, the panels themselves require no regular maintenance, but inverters may need replacement after 10-15 years, for which 10-15 000 of today's dollars should be expected. Chelsea Petereit said she has had solar panels for many years with no maintenance cost. Suzanne Goulet explained the vendor cost of electricity versus the credit for electricity as appearing in the Town Report and said the arrays are insured against damage.

Article 9 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 10. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$5,000 to be added to the previously established Recreation Revolving Fund. These funds will be specific to upgrading the Hollow Recreational Park. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: James Kennett

Seconded by: Molly Carr

Discussion: None.

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: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Ron Scott

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Discussion: Harry Juergens reported the fund balance at \$16 365 and noted the risk of erosion due to the stream next to the Baldwin Cemetary.

Article 11 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 12. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,925 to resurface the Hollow basketball court.

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Jenny Caron

Discussion: Harry said the existing surface needed to be replaced. Chuck Stinson asked about court use. Robin Heinrichs said she has not seen use recently. Suzanne Goulet said it might then be better to remove the court. Bryan McMann agreed.

Article 12 did not pass as read, by voice vote.

Article 13. To see if the Town will vote to authorize reducing 100% to 15% of the Land Use Change Tax collected pursuant to RSA 79-A:25 to be deposited into the existing Conservation Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Jenny Caron

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: Clayton Macdonald said the purpose for the 100% rate was to finance the cost of performing the State mandated obligation to perform a Natural Resource Inventory, that sufficient funds for that had been now been set aside, and a reduction to 15% would continue to fund the Conservation Commission adequately. Wendy McMann said the Conservation Commission fund now holds \$56 357. Suzanne explained that the LUCT would again go into the Town's general fund to reduce the amount of taxes to be raised.

Article 13 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 14. To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$60,860 for Bog Road Infrastructure and Roadway improvements and authorize the withdrawal of Highway and Bridges Capital reserve Fund created for that purpose. The balance of \$30,430 is to come from general taxation. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: Harry Juergens described the problems that the improvements would address. Clayton noted that Bog Road is a major corridor and the only exit route for many residences. Bryan McMann said the section in question wasn't that bad. Mike Lynch said work was needed to get drainage off the pavement. James Kennett moved to vote.

Article 14 passed as read, by voice vote.

Article 15. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$100** 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.

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Motion made to accept article as read: Vicki DeLalla

Seconded by: Wendy McMann

Motion to amend the appropriation to \$250, Ginny Routier. Seconded, Jenny Caron.

Discussion: Wendy McMann said, speaking for the Society, if the Town wishes to give more money they would accept it, but the purpose of the appropriation was just to show Town support for grant applications. Moderator noted that an amendment to increase the amount placed emphasis on the level of Town support. Motion to amend passed, by voice vote.

Article 15 passed as amended, by voice vote.

Article 16. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$5,266 in donations to the following groups: \$500, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$1,000, Northern Human Services; \$1,655, Tri-County CAP; \$500, Colebrook Food Pantry; \$500, Helping Hands; \$611, Backpack Program; \$250, CASA; \$250, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc..

Motion made to accept article as read: James Kennett

Seconded by: Charles Goulet

Motion to amend the appropriation for the Backpack Program to \$1000, Jenny Caron; seconded, Clayton Macdonald. Jenny Caron explained the purpose of and the help provided by the Backpack Program. Jim Lee asked when do we start counting our pennies. Moderator called the vote to amend the article to a total of \$5655 with \$1000 for the Backpack Program, passed, by voice vote.

Discussion: No further discussion.

Article 16 passed as amended, by voice vote.

Article 17. Petition to file a Warrant Article for presentation at the March 2025 Town Meeting. The purpose of the article is to discuss and bring to a vote the following:

...any expenditure of \$25,000 or more made by the Town throughout the course of the fiscal year that was not included in the annual budget must be brought before the residents for discussion at a public meeting prior to the expenditure being made (unless needed for urgent safety or emergency reason).

...any piece of equipment to be purchased by the Town with a cost of \$25,000 or more will require an ROI presented to the town residents prior to the purchase. Additionally, any piece of equipment purchased by the Town that meets or exceeds \$25,000 will require a minimum of three (3) written quotes submitted to the Town prior to the purchase.

This article is seeking the vote & approval of Stratford residents on the articles described above.

Motion made to accept article as read: James Kennett

Seconded by: Greg Ruch

Discussion: Jim Lee explained Return On Investment studies. Suzanne Goulet explained that these decisions were now made during public meetings and the differences between public meetings, public hearings, and special Town Meetings. Moderator asked for a determination if a petitioned article can be amended; Suzanne Goulet said no. Clayton Macdonald noted that despite technical challenges to the validity of the article, the intent of the article was clearly to better inform the Town prior to making such purchases and that the Select Board can and should make more efforts to do so in future.

Article 17 passed as read, by voice vote.

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Article 18. Petition to file a Warrant Article for presentation at March 2025 Stratford Town Meeting. The purpose of the article is to discuss and vote on moving the Stratford Selectboard meetings to 6pm on their currently, normally scheduled days. This topic has come up numerous times with no change to the meeting schedule. Maintaining the current scheduled time of 3:30pm prevents many working residents from attending the meetings, being involved, being informed of plans, topics of discussion, current & future needs of the Town, etc.

This article is asking for the vote & approval of Stratford residents on the subject of moving all regularly scheduled Selectboard meetings from 3:30pm to 6pm.

Motion made to accept article as read: Greg Ruch

Seconded by: James Kennett

Discussion: Mick Lynch noted that the Select Board's meeting time is at the Board's convenience to get its business done and some people can't attend at some times and other people can't attend at other times, but the Board should do its best to make its agendas known. Suzanne Goulet said the RSA provide for the Board to decide its meeting times and locations.

Article 18 did not pass, by show of hands, 22-26, counted by the Supervisor of the Checklist.

Article 19. To transact any other business that may legally come before said meeting and to hear reports from any agents or committees heretofore chosen.

Discussion: Chuck Stinson noted that the Fire Department was busier than usual this past year and that there was a great need for more Town resident volunteers to step forward to help the department, that it's a place for everybody. He also noted that if the Department shrank too much it would endanger the mutual aid agreements with other towns.

Suzanne Goulet said that the names of Bennett Brooks, Clayton Macdonald, Sara Kennett, and Wendy McMann would be added to the Town Pavilion Honor Wall to commemorate their community building impacts and services.

Motion to adjourn was made by: Charles Goulet

Seconded by: Maryann Lister

The business meeting was adjourned at 12:10 PM by Moderator Tim Brooks on 3/15/2025.

Respectfully submitted

Maryann Lister

Maryann Lister
Stratford Town Clerk

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