

Town of Stratford – Annual Town Meeting 12 March 2022

The Town's Annual Business Meeting to consider Articles 3 through 20 was moved from the second Tuesday in March to Saturday, March 12, 2022 to ensure safe social distancing for both the Town Elections and Town Meeting. The meeting took place at the Stratford Public School and was called to order at 10:00 AM by Moderator Jamie Sayen. There were approximately 45 residents in attendance.

***Article 1.** To choose by non-partisan ballot the following officers: 1 Selectman (3 Year Term); 1 Cemetery Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Library Trustee (3 Year Term); 1 Trustee of Trust Funds (3 year term); 1 Treasurer (3 Year Term); 1 Moderator (2 Year Term); 1 Supervisor of the Checklist (6 Year Term).

Ballot vote – took place on Tuesday, March 08, 2022.

Election results:

Select Board Member: Greg Ruch 30; write-ins: Clayton Macdonald 31

(a recount was requested on 3/9/2022 and held on 3/17/2022. See separate recount minutes.)

Town Moderator: James Sayen 63

Town Treasurer: Wendy McMann 66

Supervisor of Elections: Lynette Emerson 66

Cemetery Trustee: Rose Connary 65

Library Trustee: Dana Cassell 67

Trustee of Trust Funds: Kathy Labatte 64

***Article 2.** To choose by non-partisan ballot: Do you approve of having 2 sessions for the annual town meeting in this town, the first session for choice of town officers elected by an official ballot and other action required to be inserted on said official ballot and the second session, on a date set by the selectmen, for transaction of other business? (Insert as Petition)

Ballot vote – took place on Tuesday, March 08, 2022.

Election results:

Yes: 47

No: 22

Article 2 passed as written

Article 3. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$877,330** for the operating budget. This article does not include the cost of any other warrant article.

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

No discussion

Article 3 passed as read by voice vote.

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Article 4. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$8,298** 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: Rene Routhier

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: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

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: Rene Routhier

No 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: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: The question was raised if there were any plans to recycle glass again in the future? Charlie Goulet, Recycling Manager, said the market for recycled glass is still depressed but hoped that would change. The crushed glass on hand could possibly be used in local road maintenance.

Article 7 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 8. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$1,000** to be added to the previously established 250th Celebration Expendable Trust Fund for the purpose of funding the 250th Anniversary Celebration to be held in 2023. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

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Discussion: James Kennett reported on behalf of the Celebration Planning Committee about its activities. Current fund balance is \$6,187. Additional fund raising events are planned for this summer. Residents are welcome to bring their ideas to the committee.

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. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Clayton Macdonald

Seconded by: Wayne Hall

Discussion: Selectboard members Clayton Macdonald and Charlie Goulet reported on the use of the fund. The current fund balance is \$56,149. In 2021, \$8,472 was spent on the Stratford Grange renovation; the project is still ongoing. Additional upgrades to Town buildings in 2021 included installation of spray foam in the Stratford Hollow Fire Station and Fuller Town Hall. For 2022, the Town Garage is in need of renovation in order to make the building more useable again.

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 Municipal Solar Capital Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Clayton Macdonald

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: Selectboard Member Clayton Macdonald reported that the current fund balance is \$29,591. The solar array mounted on the roof of Fuller Town Hall was completed in the fall of 2021. The long-term goal is to add a larger ground-mounted solar array by the salt shed to cover all the Town's electrical needs. The cost estimate for this second stage is about \$120,000. USDA grants would cover up to 75% of that amount. Other grants may be available as well. The anticipated amortization period for the Town's portion of this investment is 5-6 years, as the Town's annual electric bill currently runs about \$12,000. Discussion also touched on the typical lifespan of such a system and expected maintenance cost.

Article 10 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 11. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$10,000** 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: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Clayton Macdonald

Discussion: The playground at the ballfield is in need of upgrade and repair to ensure safety. Residents are reporting that both the Village park playground as well as the one by the Stratford Hollow pavilion are regularly used by families with children. While the appropriated amount is not enough to fund all

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upgrades at once, it is sufficient to get started in repairing and/or replacing equipment where it's needed most.

Article 11 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 12. To see if the Town will vote to restrict the discharge of permissible (consumer) fireworks under RSA 160-B and RSA 160-C by accepting the Fire Works Use Ordinance as proposed in the 2021 Town Report.

Motion made to accept article as read: Harry Juergens

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: A lively discussion ensued over enforcement of the ordinance. Without a police force in town, residents would have to request assistance from State Police to answer a complaint. The Fire Department can only respond when there is either actual damage involved or a resident might fear potential damage. The issue of liability and legality of the ordinance was questioned. Suzanne Goulet responded that this same basic ordinance was used by many towns throughout the State of NH. The ordinance clearly states that if damage occurs, the individual is liable. Selectboard member Clayton Macdonald summed up: even if enforcement may not be effective, such an ordinance would set a standard for what is acceptable in the Town and encourage people to get a permit for their fireworks. Discussion also revolved around who should permit fireworks outside of the prescribed dates, suggesting such permission should come from the Fire Department, not the Selectboard.

Molly Carr made a motion to pass over the Warrant article, so that the ordinance could be clarified. The motion was seconded by Otto Whelan.

Article 12 was passed over after a show of hands: 31 in favor, 9 against.

Article 13. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$5,000** to be added to the previously established Cemetery Reserve Fund. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Harry Juergens

No discussion

Article 13 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 14. To see if the Town will vote to authorize 100% of the Land Use Change Tax collected pursuant to RSA 79-A:25 to be deposited into the existing Conservation Fund in accordance with RSA 36-A:5, III, as authorized by RSA 79-A:25, II. If adopted this article shall take effect April 1, 2022, and shall remain in effect until altered or rescinded by future vote of the town meeting. (Majority Vote Required)

Motion made to accept article as read: Chris Caron

Seconded by: Jenny Caron

Discussion: Residents wanted to know where the funds went in the past. Currently, the funds generated from the Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) are assigned to the general fund. That amount used

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to be around \$7-8,000 annually, but a notable increase in subdivisions lately has brought annual LUCT revenue to around \$20,000. Chris Caron, Chair of the Conservation Commission, explained the RSA's intent for LUCT is the preservation of open spaces (forest and farmland). By passing this article, the funds generated by LUCT are assigned as intended. For example, funds can help the Committee work on the Natural Resources Inventory for the Town.

Wayne Hall called to move the vote: A show of hands resulted in 17 yes and 22 no votes.

Discussion continued: Voters asked for more clarification on what the Conservation Commission does. Chris Caron and other commission members outlined current activities (clean-up week, educational role). The LUCT funds would allow the Commission to fund the Natural Resources Inventory, used as a basis for conservation-based decision making. The Commission's main purpose is an advisory role to the Town to ensure conservation interests are kept in mind and RSAs enforced.

Article 14 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 15. To see if the Town will vote to adopt RSA 41:14-a, to allow the selectmen to acquire or sell land, buildings or both; provided, however, they shall first submit any such proposed acquisition or sale to the Planning Board and to the Conservation Commission for review and recommendation by those bodies. This article will remain in effect until rescinded.

Motion made to accept article as read: Clayton Macdonald

Seconded by: Chris Caron

Discussion: Michael Brauer voiced concern that the Warrant Article did not disclose the full extent of what the RSA in question would allow the Selectboard to do, namely, that it includes "disposal and demolition". The full text of the warrant article was available as a handout. The purpose of adopting the RSA was clarified in a subsequent discussion.

Michael Brauer made a motion to amend the article to read as follows: *To see if the Town will vote to adopt RSA 41:14-a, to allow the selectmen to acquire or sell land, buildings or both; **and to demolish or otherwise dispose of buildings**, provided, however, they shall first submit any such proposed acquisition, sale, **demolition, or disposal** to the Planning Board and to the Conservation Commission for review and recommendation by those bodies. This article will remain in effect until rescinded.* (added language in bold)

Seconded by: Chris Caron

The amendment passed by show of hands: 26 yes, 7 no

After brief further discussion the amended article was put to a vote.

Article 15 passed as amended, by voice vote.

Article 16. 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

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consecutive years. In addition, the taxpayer must have a net income of not more than \$20,000 or, if married, a combined net income of less than \$25,000; and own net assets not in excess of \$40,000, excluding the value of the person's residence. (Majority Vote)

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Harry Juergens

Discussion: Discussion about qualifications, eligibility, and whether the proposed dollar amounts represent a sufficient increase. No alternative suggestions were made.

Article 16 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 17. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$47,090** to be used towards the purchase of new extrication tools, also known as 'jaws of life', with \$23,545 to come from the Fire Department Expendable Trust Fund and \$23,545 to be raised by taxation. (Board Recommends)

Motion made to accept article as read: Charlie Goulet

Seconded by: Otto Whelan

Discussion: Fire Chief Chuck Stinson explained the current tool is 29 years old and spare parts are impossible to get. Examples of the tool were on display.

Article 17 passed as read by voice vote.

Article 18. 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: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Charlie Goulet

Discussion: Tim Brooks proposed an amendment to raise the donation to \$500. Wayne Hall seconded.

The amendment passed by voice vote.

The amended article was then voted on. It reads as follows: *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.*

(change in bold)

Article 18 passed as amended by voice vote.

Article 19. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate **\$5,200** in donations to the following groups: \$500, North Country Home 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; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.; \$200, American Red Cross.

Motion made to accept article as read: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Harry Juergens

Discussion: Several amendments were introduced, the final amended article will appear at the end:

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- Wayne Hall proposed an amendment to raise the donation to the Backpack Program to \$1000. Jenny Caron seconded. **The amendment passed by voice vote.**
- Mark McCulloch proposed an amendment to add a donation to UNICEF to support humanitarian relief efforts in Ukraine. He suggested one (1) dollar for each Stratford resident, which would total \$662. Chelsea Petereit seconded. **The amendment passed by voice vote.**

The twice amended article reads as follows: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$6,362 in donations to the following groups: \$500, North Country Home Health & Hospice; \$200, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital; \$200, Northern Human Services; \$2,500, Tri-County CAP; \$500, Colebrook Food Pantry; \$200, Helping Hands; \$1,000, Backpack Program; \$200, CASA; \$200, Stratford Old Home Day, Inc.; \$200, American Red Cross; \$662 (= \$1 for every resident of Stratford, NH) to be donated to UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, toward humanitarian relief for the children of Ukraine and their families.* (changes in bold)

Article 19 passed as amended by voice vote

Article 20. To transact any other business that may legally come before said meeting and to hear reports from any agents or committees heretofore chosen.

Discussion:

- The Town's new employee, Ryan Yakis, was commended for his outstanding efforts in keeping the Town's grounds and buildings in order.
- The 250th Celebration Committee asked for fundraising ideas using the old siding from the Stratford Grange.
- The question was raised what to do with waste oil, old anti-freeze, paint and other hazardous waste materials. Ted Burns will accept old, clean oil to burn – but a town-wide process for all such materials is lacking. The Conservation Committee reported it is looking into options. Other towns offer Haz-Mat Days, which presently cost about \$6,000. Possibly cooperate with neighboring towns to lower costs?
- The Selectboard noted there will be an increase in the bi-annual Town water base rate from \$60 to \$80. The cost for sewer service will remain the same.

Motion to adjourn was made by: Wayne Hall

Seconded by: Rene Routhier

The business meeting was adjourned at 12:25 PM by Moderator Jamie Sayen on 3/12/2022.

Respectfully submitted



Katrin Kerner
Stratford Town Clerk

March 28, 2022