

TOWN OF HARDWICK

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MARCH 3, 2020 MINUTES

At 10:00 a.m. Orise Ainsworth began the Town Meeting with several announcements. She stated that there were several organizations in the front lobby.

- The Hazen Music Department selling food to help fund their trip to Ireland.
- The Jeudevine Library has a booth with information regarding the proposed Library expansion.
- The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail has information regarding Article 21 and the proposed expansion of the rail trail from St. Johnsbury to Swanton.
- The REACH program was offering information regarding the Afterschool Student Programs that they offer.
- Friends of Hardwick Elementary School were selling tickets for baskets that the students from each grade had created.
- Hardwick Area Community Television was handing out flyers regarding the change of their broadcast channel from Channel 16 to Channel 1080 on the Comcast Network.

Orise then requested that the front table introduce themselves to the audience.

Shaun Fielder, Town Manager; Eric Remick, Select Board Chair; Shari Cornish, Elizabeth Dow, Lucian Avery, Select Board members; Danny Hale, Select Board Vice Chair; Aaron Cochran, Police Chief; Alberta Miller, Town Clerk and Treasurer; Amanda Fecteau, Payroll and Benefits Administrator and Casey Rowell, Business Manager.

Orise then read Roberts Rules of Order that would be used for Town Meeting 2020.

At 10:07 Orise read the Town Meeting 2020 Warning.

The legal voters of the Town of Hardwick, Vermont are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Hardwick Elementary School in said Town of Hardwick on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 10:00 o'clock in the forenoon to act on the following business:

(Election of Town Select Board and Union School District No. 26 Directors shall be voted on by Australian ballot. The polls will be open from 9:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.). If special accommodations are necessary because of physical disabilities, please contact the Town Clerk's Office (472-5971).

Katharine Ingram, Chair of the Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District board, spoke to the audience regarding the open seat for a Hardwick resident on the OSUESD Board. If anyone is interested, please send a letter of interest to the Hardwick Town Manager's Office and they will be presented to the Hardwick Select Board for consideration and appointment to the OSUESD board.

She also informed the audience that in 2021 the OSUESD board will be changing and they will need five members from Hardwick.

Article 1. To elect a Moderator to govern said Town Meeting and for the year ensuing.

David Shepard nominated Orise Ainsworth

Seconded by Raymond Bellavance

Motion passed unanimously

At this time, Orise asked the audience for permission to suspend part of Roberts Rules to allow Shaun Fielder, Amanda Fecteau and Casey Rowell to speak if there are questions that they can offer information on.

Article 2. Shall the Town accept the Town Report, year ending June 30, 2019?

Motion made by Karen Collier

Seconded by Raymond Bellavance

Motion carried

Article 3. To elect all Town Officers and School District No. 26 Directors as required by the public laws of Vermont and the Town Charter. (Select Board and Union School District No. 26 Directors, to be voted by Australian Ballot).

One Lister.....3 year term.....Jan Howard was nominated by Alberta Miller

Karen Collier made the motion for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Jan Howard as Lister.

Seconded by Alberta Miller

Motion carried

One Auditor.....3 year term.....Ivan Menard was nominated by Karen Collier

David Shepard made the motion for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Ivan Menard as Auditor.

Seconded by Dave Gross

Motion carried

First Constable.....1 year term..... Arthur Chase..... nominated by Karen Collier

Second Constable.....1 year term.....Erwin Gilcrisnominated by David Shepard

One Town Agent.....1 year term.....Karen Holmes.....nominated by Tracy Martin

Surveyor of Wood, Bark and Lumber.....1 year term.....Lucian Avery.....nominated by David Shepard

Tree Warden.....1 year term.....Lucian Avery.....nominated by David Shepard

Cemetery Trustees.....1 year term.....(Main Street, Maple Street, Fairview, Sanborn, West Hill Cemetery & Hardwick Center Cemetery) approved as a block.nominated by David Shepard

Fire Dept. Officers (can be voted as one vote).....1 year term.....approved as a block listed on page 3 of the Town Reportnominated by David Shepard.

One Library Trustee.....3 year term..... Ross Connelly.....nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith

One Library Trustee.....3 year term.....Daphne Kalmar..... nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith

One Library Trustee...1 year remaining on a 3-year term

...Elizabeth Rossano... nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith

Grand Juror.....1 year term.....David Shepard.....nominated by David Shepard

Trustee of Public Funds.....1 year term.....Vacant

Trustee of Public Funds.....1 year term.....Mario Fradette.....nominated by David Shepard

Trustee of Public Funds.....1 year term.....Lorraine Hussey.....nominated by David Shepard

Fence Viewers.....1 year term.....Hardwick Town Listers.....nominated by David Shepard

Article 4. Shall the Town have its current taxes collected by the Town Treasurer?

Moved by David Shepard

Seconded by Dave Gross

Motion carried

Article 5. Shall the Town vote a budget of three million four hundred sixty-five thousand one hundred twenty dollars (\$3,465,120.00) to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town and authorize the Select Board to set a new tax rate sufficient to provide the same?

Moved by Karen Collier

Seconded by Dave Gross

Shaun Fielder, Town Manager then spoke on the year in review for the Town of Hardwick.

Shaun reported to the crowd that on June 30, 2019 we added \$103,664 to the Fund Balance bringing the total to \$515,646. This amounts to 16% of the total Town budget. The recommended standard is 15% so we are right on target. These funds are reserved to cover unexpected expenses in a given budget year.

Several Capital Projects were completed in FY 19.

- Paving was completed on several Hardwick Village Streets (Glenside Ave, Sumner Street, Holton Hill, Dewey Street, Summer Street and portions of Junction Road and Log Yard Drive.)
- Road and ditch improvements were done on portions of Hardwick Farms Road, Hopkins Hill Road, Marsh Road, West Hill Extension, Porterbrook Road and Mackville Road. This ditch work has shown to be very beneficial during the several significant rain events we saw last summer.
- Brush work was done this year by a contractor. They were able to make progress on Hardwick Street, Mackville Road, Dutton Road and Nichols Pond Road.
- Water and Sewer Rates received another careful review this year. Rates are set to cover the budget needs and the clean water rules that we are mandated to address each year.
- We developed a Frequently Asked Questions sheet to help customers better understand the Water & Sewer Billing.
- In 2019 we were able to install 19 water meters, which brings us to 87% complete with installation.
- Bridgman Hill Reservoir cover project was completed and was back on line in December. We will be finishing up the financing process by the end of this spring. The bond will be included in next year's rate structure.
- The aeration system at the sewer treatment plant was updated.
- Slip lining was installed on the sewer line on Charlevoix Street.

Moving forward in summer 2020.

- Paving projects planned for Hillside Street, Woodbury Street, Park Street, Prospect Street, Central Street and West Hill Road.
- Several sidewalk improvements are planned for 2020. The Parking & Pedestrian Task Force has been looking for recommendations.
- The Yellow Barn Project has been three years in the making and now we have the final designs in order and commitment letters from both Cabot Creamery and Jasper Hill Cheese. We are waiting for a \$3 million dollar grant award and then we can break ground in summer 2020.
- We have received a grant of \$175,512 to be used to improve the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail that runs from Slapp Hill Road to Pumpkin Lane.
- Governor Scott is seeking funds to improve 60 miles of L.V.R.T from St Johnsbury to Swanton.
- Creamery Road will be getting an upgrade this summer.

Shaun closed with a reminder that the 2020 Census is in progress and that it is very important for residents to fill out the information request sheets, or to check out the online version at 2020Census.org

David Shepard asked if the budget continues to stay the same next year, would you anticipate not adding to the fund balance.

Eric Remick explained that ½ million dollars sounds like a lot of money; however one catastrophic event could take the entire fund balance. Budgets are set to cover costs. Sometimes budgets can be a little above or below the projections, but the goal is always to run an even budget.

David Shepard asked if the 100% meter goal is just for businesses or residences and businesses.

Eric Remick stated that it is both residential and commercial properties. The Town used the grant funds that were available to us to install as many meters as we could. The remaining meter installations will require line upgrades or meter pits so we are working to fix several of them each year until they are all completed.

Brad Ferland questioned if Governor Scott's budget with the \$14 million for the LVRT improvements passes will we be putting local money into projects when we don't need to.

Shaun Fielder explained that the project being done between Slapp Hill and Pumpkin Lane will be using previously received grant funds.

Eric Remick reminded the crowd that there is an article at the end of the warning regarding the support of the Legislature approving those LVRT funds.

Andrea Brightenbach let the crowd know that she has hand outs and website information about LVRT in the front lobby.

Ray Bellavance questioned if the LVRT trails are open to four- wheelers.

Eric Remick explained that the trails are not currently available to four- wheelers.

Orise Ainsworth then asked that any further LVRT questions be held until Article 21.

Eric Remick asked everyone to look at page 8 of the Town Report for the Budget Summary.

- The Highway budget saw an increase due to changes in Health Insurance and Brush Cutting. Several items like fuel, salt and sand were adjusted to last year's actual budget cost.

- The Police Department budget saw a decrease this year also due to health insurance changes.

Eric explained that with a budget this size when an employee changes insurance status, it significantly affects the budget.

- The office budget is up due to payroll increases and insurance increases.
- The Payroll and Part Time budget has a decrease in the Listers Salaries as we have moved from listers to a part time Assessor with back up assistance from our listers. The Assessor costs have been moved into the Line Items.
- The Payroll and Part Time did see an increase with the proposed addition of the Community Development Coordinator budgeted for approximately \$30,000. The Town of Hardwick is trying to get significant federal funding for several projects like the Yellow Barn, LVRT and Judevine Library. This is more than the Town Manager's Office can be expected to do. We are also looking into building a new Town Garage and possibly work on the development of the Carey Road land that the Town now owns.
- Finally, we moved the Fire Truck Bond Payments to the Capital Fund and added funds to cover future Fire Truck purchases.

Brad Ferland asked if we were sure that we were going to put aside enough to not need to bond for Fire Trucks in the future.

Eric Remick stated that they have increased the amount enough that they are confident it will cover the next necessary fire truck purchase.

Orise Ainsworth asked if there were any further budget questions for Eric or Shaun.

Motion carried

Article 6. "Shall the Town of Hardwick enter into a Communications Union District (CUD) to be known as NEK Community Broadband, under the provisions of 30 V.S.A. Ch82?"

The towns of the Northeast Kingdom have a chance to benefit from funding available through the State of Vermont and the federal government to develop broadband infrastructure that would offer high speed internet (at least 100 mbps up and down) to every residential and business address in the region. CUD is municipal entity, made up of 2 or more towns, with the specific purpose of bringing high-speed internet access, commonly called "broadband" to every e911 address in the NEK. As stated in Title 30 V.S.A. Chapter 082 § 3053(d), membership in the CUD poses no financial risk to the Town of Hardwick or individual taxpayers within Hardwick. All towns that approve this ballot measure will become members of the CUD and each member town must appoint a representative to the CUD governing board.

Moved by Jake Lester

Seconded by David Shepard

Emily Lanxner asked for an explanation of what CUD is.

Jake Lester explained that CUD is a group of Towns joining together to gain better leverage to work toward faster internet with no cost to the Towns themselves. This will be a board that all the Towns that vote to join will have a representative on. Forming a CUD is the first step in a multi-year process to plan, fund and build a network to deliver high-speed internet across our region.

Rose Friedman questioned if this would be done by fiberoptic towers? Also, what is the process for the community getting information regarding the decisions being made. Finally, how does the representative for Hardwick get chosen?

Jake Lester explained that the CUD board of representatives will be tasked with doing studies of what infrastructure will give the best service.

Joining the CUD is the only way that Towns will get a say in the choice of how the system is created. The NEK Communications Board would work with the Towns.

Eric Remick stated that the Select Board will appoint the representative to the board and that representative will need to report back to the Select Board.

Mike Demarco from East Hardwick questioned if there were Federal funds that will be helping with this program.

Jake Lester explained that there are Federal funds that have been earmarked to help with this.

Emily Lanxner of Hardwick stated that there can be significant danger from 5G for pollinators, birds and people. It would be a good idea to have input on this board.

Rose Friedman from East Hardwick questioned if by voting yes is we are giving the green light to CUD; this makes her very uneasy. Could we find ourselves with no voice down the road with tower placement?

Eric Remick explained that CUD is like a public utility that we can opt to be a part of and get a voice, and potentially benefit from it. Or we can opt out, get no voice and not be offered any benefit from this program.

Dave Gross of East Hardwick questioned if the CUD representative will answer directly to the Select Board or will be like the Hardwick Electric Department board.

Eric Remick explained that the CUD representative will not be a multiyear seat and will report directly back to the Select Board.

Jake Lester explained that the CUD board will have its first meeting in May and their by-laws will be established. They will either be the provider or contract out to other providers. They will also have to go through each individual town permitting process.

Paul Fixx of Hardwick looked up the Statute and the Select Board will need to appoint the CUD representative in April.

Eric Remick stated that all letters of interest for this board seat should be sent to the Town Managers Office as soon as possible.

Brad Ferland of Hardwick supports getting highspeed internet to the rural areas of Hardwick and East Hardwick. We are at a disadvantage by not having high speed internet available.

Gary Michaels of East Hardwick seconded Brad's comments. He also questioned if we could have more than one representative on the board.

Eric explained that we are only allowed 1 representative and 1 alternate.

Dave Cozinski of East Hardwick called the question.

Orise Ainsworth asked for a show of hands for the 2/3 vote needed to call the question.

Motion carried

At this time Orise welcomed our House Representative Chip Troiano to take the podium and speak to the crowd.

Chip thanked everyone for their support and for letting him speak. He informed the crowd that he has been very busy in Montpelier. Working 10 to 12 hours a day with no staff assistance.

Chip then highlighted the programs he has worked on this past year.

- As a member of the Working Vermonters Caucus, he was a driver of the Family Leave Bill that was vetoed by Governor Scott. The attempt to override the veto failed by 1 vote.
- Chip has asked many young Vermonters what would keep them in the State of Vermont for the future. The top three answers are always better pay, paid family leave and better child care.
- The minimum wage bill was also vetoed by Governor Scott, but the house was able to get the 100 votes needed to override that veto. So Minimum wage will increase to \$12.55 per hour by 2022.
- There is a bill that will put \$10.5 million into child care. We have a large hole in the network of daycare providers. Need to incentivize young people to go into the childcare field. It will also enlarge the eligibility for child care assistance.
- Some other items that Chip has been involved in this year are as follows:
 - o The opioid crisis
 - o The Global Solutions Warming Act.
 - o Streamlined the renter rebate process.
 - o Act 250 Bill revision.
 - o Governor Scott has appropriated \$2.8 million for support of expansion of the rail trail network. This will equal \$11 million when matched with the Federal funds.

Chip asked the crowd for any questions.

- Nancy Schade suggested consideration for opening a state-of-the-art addiction center at the Windsor Farm Prison.
- Heather Bryant questioned if there has been any further improvement in the process of recycling.
- Chip explained that July 1, 2020 does bring into effect the ban of single use plastic bags and Styrofoam take out containers.
- He also suggested that people looking for places to compost. People can reach out to Black Dirt Farm as they are very successful.
- Dave Gross suggested that the Legislature look at setting up financial disincentives for trash dumping.
- Brad Ferland suggested that Chip needs to be a loud voice for us regarding school funding laws. The funding mechanism is flawed.
- Chip stated that he is against Act 46 and is vocal in attempts to get changes.

Ron Wiesen made a motion to move Articles 7-20 as a block this year.

Seconded by Dave Gross

Motion carried

Orise read each Article individually

Article 7. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed four thousand five hundred dollars (\$4,500.00) for the support of the Greensboro Nursing Home?

Article 8. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand five hundred dollars (\$3,500.00) for the support of A.W.A.R.E.?

Article 9. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) for the support of the Lamoille Family Center?

Article 10. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand dollars (\$3,000.00) for the support of the Hardwick Historical Society?

Article 11. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand one hundred sixty-one dollars (\$3,161.00) for the support of the Northeast Kingdom Human Services?

Article 12. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand dollars (\$3,000.00) for the support of Hardwick Area Community Justice Center?

Article 13. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500.00) for the support of Hardwick Area Food Pantry?

Helmut Nottermann made the motion to increase the Hardwick Area Food Pantry appropriation from \$2,500 to \$5,000.

Seconded by Emily Lanxner

Emily Lanxner stated that with the reduction of food stamp benefits more people are in need of assistance from the food shelf.

Brad Ferland questioned if the food shelf needs the extra funds to self-sustain and if there is any confirmation that food stamp benefits were reduced.

Dave Gross confirmed that the State has reduced the SNAP benefits.

Janice Davison offered that the food shelf is opening twice this month to allow for residents to get a second food option if they are in need.

Orise called the question on the amendment to Article 13.

Motion carried and Article 13 was increased to \$5,000.

Article 14. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand six hundred dollars (\$2,600.00) for the support of Caledonia Home Health Care and Hospice?

Article 15. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand dollars (\$3,000.00) for the support of the Hardwick Community Television (Channel 16)?

Article 16. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand four hundred dollars (\$3,400.00) for the support of Rural Community Transportation?

Article 17. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand five hundred dollars (\$3,500.00) for the support of Northeast Kingdom Arts Council (Hardwick Town House)?

Article 18. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed four thousand five hundred dollars (\$4,500.00) for the support of the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging?

Article 19. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand one hundred dollars (\$2,100.00) for the support of the North Country Animal League?

Article 20. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) for the support of the Craftsbury Community Care Center?

Orise called the question on Articles 7-20 with the amendment to Article 13.

Motion carried

Article 21. Shall the Town make the following statement of support: Lamoille Valley Rail Trail resolution request: "We, the citizens of Hardwick, strongly support the completion of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. We urge the Governor and Legislature to jointly develop a plan that will ensure the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail is completed by 2025."

Moved by Norma Wiesen

Seconded by Dave Gross

Emily Lanxner expressed concerns of snow machines on the rail trail. How will snow machines be regulated.

Eric Remick stated that there is a 10 p.m. curfew and its enforced by VAST.

Mary Gagnon is in favor of the rail trail, but wonders with the current climate concerns if the rail trail improvements will allow for rail travel to be restored should it be necessary in the future.

Eric Remick explained that the rail trail will continue to be owned by the Federal Government and could be returned to rail travel at any time should they want to re-invest in it.

Deborah Hartt lives very close to the rail trail in East Hardwick and uses it often and loves it. However, she feels that there are some people that use the trail inappropriately. She wishes they had more integrity.

Eric Remick stated that only 20% of the year-round use of the rail trail is by snow machines. He hopes that the audience will support this article.

Motion carried

Article 22. Shall the Town authorize the Select Board, for the period of one year, to enter into contracts with new industrial and commercial owners, lessees, bailees, of real property, or with existing or new owners, lessees, bailees or operators who construct, acquire or renovate industrial and/or commercial real property, including additions to existing property for the purpose of fixing and maintaining the municipal rate applicable to such real property or for the purpose of fixing the amount of money which shall be paid as an annual municipal tax upon such real property pursuant to the provision of Title 24, VSA, Section 2741?

Moved by David Shepard

Seconded by Dave Gross

Motion carried

Article 23. Shall the Town authorize the Select Board, for the period of one year, to enter into contracts with operators of agricultural real property, or with existing or new owners, lessees, bailees, or operators who construct acquire or renovate, or who intend to construct, acquire or renovate agricultural real property for the purpose of fixing and maintaining the valuation of such real property in the Grand List for the purpose of fixing and maintaining the municipal

rate applicable to such real property or for the purpose of fixing the amount in money which shall be paid as an annual municipal tax upon such real property pursuant to provisions of Title 24, VSA, Section 2741?

Moved by David Shepard

Seconded by Dave Gross

Motion carried

Article 24. To transact any other nonbinding business proper to be brought before said meeting.

Elizabeth Dow made the announcement in Lorraine Hussey’s absence of the Hardwick Historical Society’s Annual Corned Beef and Cabbage dinner at the American Legion on Saturday, March 14, 2020 from 5 to 7:30 p.m.

Deborah Hartt gave a shout out to the Hardwick Fire Department. They recently had an incident at their home and they were so very grateful for the quick response of the fire department. “Thank you all so much”

The Fire Department received a round of applause.

Katarina Razzionelli asked about the plan for walkability to the Yellow Barn.

Eric Remick explained that all options are still being considered. They are very open to suggestions. The down town parking task force are discussing the walkability to the Yellow Barn along with the parking and sidewalk issues in Hardwick Village.

Dave Gross stated that he is Chair of the Planning Commission and on the downtown task force. The task force is looking into sidewalk proposals and rail trail accessibility to walk to the Yellow Barn.

Motion to adjourn made by Karen Collier

Seconded by David Colburn

Meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

Minutes prepared and submitted by _____ Alberta Miller, Town Clerk

RESULTS OF AUSTRALIAN BALLOT VOTE FOR TOWN & SCHOOL OFFICERS:

Total Votes Cast: 660

Select Board- 3-year term:

Ceilidh Galloway-Kane.....339 (elected)
Danny Hale.....279

Select Board – 1 year terms:

Lucien Avery.....484 (elected)
Shari Cornish443 (elected)

Hazen Union School Director #26 – 3 year terms:

Brett Stanciu.....542 (elected)

Hazen Union School Director #26 – 1 year remaining on a 3 year term:

No one elected....

Hazen Union School District # 26 Budget of \$6,850,674.00

Total Votes 1120 (Greensboro, Hardwick & Woodbury Co-Mingled)

786 Yes (Budget Passed)

321 No

Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District Budget of \$7,110,165.00

Total Votes 1165 (Greensboro, Hardwick, Stannard & Woodbury Co-Mingled)

835 Yes (Budget Passed)

301 No

Presidential Primary Results:

Democrat -

Biden, Joseph..... 91

Bloomberg, Michael42

Buttigieg, Pete12

Castro, Julian0

Gabbard, Tulsi.....2

Klobuchar, Amy.....3

Patrick, Deval.....0

Sanders, Bernie314

Stewart, Mark.....0

Steyer, Tom.....0

Warren, Elizabeth.....58

Williamson, Marianne.....1

Yang, Andrew.....3

Republican -

De La Fuente, Roque.....1

Trump, Donald.....143

Weld, Bill.....19