

**TOWN OF HARDWICK  
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
MARCH 07, 2023**

Orise Ainsworth, Moderator, called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. The voting audience included approximately 147 people.

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

Orise Ainsworth nominated by Karen Collier

Motion passed unanimously

Orise requested any non-Hardwick voters in the audience raise their hands so she and audience neighbors realize who should not be voting. Two audience members raised hands.

The front table was asked to introduce themselves. The front table included Eric Remick – Select Board chair, Ceilidh Galloway Kane – Select Board Vice Chair, Shari Cornish – Select Board member, Elizabeth Dow – Select Board member, Danny Hale – Select Board member, David Upson – Town Manager and Tom Fadden – Road Foreman and Fire Chief.

David Upson spoke about his day-to-day goals and priorities related to town activities. He stated that the Town currently has a great staff of employees and asked audience to take time out of their day to thank one or more of our town staff as they are all doing a great job.

He then discussed several facilities projects to maintain and upgrade town owned properties. Projects will be carried out with energy efficiency in mind. The Memorial Building will undergo roof repair this summer, paid for by a grant and with the help of the Energy Committee, the windows will be replaced hopefully in the next year or so. The Library will begin their upgrade. The Public Safety building heating system will be looked at soon. The Wastewater Facility will have facelift by the end of summer of 2023. The Town Garage is an outdated facility to be housing our most valuable assets to town operation. Staff are exploring ways to leverage existing tax dollars for grants to fund the planning and construction of a new public works facility. David's opinion is that we are currently on borrowed time with this building.

The downtown received a significant facelift last summer and he would like to expand out to the areas that have had less attention over the years. Last summer, the town crew replaced an original section of sidewalk on the north side of Church Street. We will begin to prioritize the refurbishment of remaining sidewalks in need. Manhole risers and catch basins in need of rehab and/or repair will be done on an as needed basis. David would like to start looking at ways we can fund a rebuild of N. Main Street and West Church in Hardwick Village and Main Street in East Hardwick Village which will include assets below the surface as well. Water & Sewer infrastructure is ongoing.

We continue to bring back roads up to state standards. We are looking for funding sources to refurbish the bridge over the Lamoille River in East Hardwick. The road foreman has provided David with a list of failing and damaged guardrails, will continue to develop plans to repair and/or replace sections of guardrail.

We invested in Cyber-Security hardware for the town computer network and will be working with Champlain Collage's Leahy Center for digital forensics and cyber security to do a no-cost Cyber Security and Network Security assessment of the Town's computer network.

David wants everyone to know he is available, bring him your ideas, complaints, and questions. He is available by email or phone and has an open-door policy at the office.

Orise reminded the audience of what is out in the lobby, there are several groups trying to get information to you. Historical Society has tea and coffee; the Civic Standard has sandwiches, chips, and goodies as well as a bingo game. There is a group looking for your thoughts on the park that will be going in by new swinging bridge; there are flyers on the rail trail, yellow barn, and Woodbury granite shed; there is information on gravel pit bond that is being voted on today; Northeast Kingdom Broadband has info along with window inserts and the Conservation Commission has info. Orise apologizes if she missed anyone but there is plenty of info in lobby.

Orise stated that there is also voting today on the Hazen Budget, Town Budget, Select Board and Hazen School Board members.

She announced that starting at 11:00 at Hazen Union High School, the Red Cross will be doing a blood drive and that they will be available after Town Meeting.

Orise stated we are following Roberts Rules and the most important one is if you want to be recognized raise your hand and she will recognize you. A microphone will be brought to you and then you may make your comments. If you are doing a nomination, just stand and say who you are nominating. Nominations do not need a 2nd.

Orise asked the audience for permission to allow the out-of-town employees to be able to speak. This includes Mike Henry, Police Chief located at front table, Casey Rowell, and Amanda Fecteau. No objections.

Article 2. Shall the Town accept the Town Report, year ending June 30, 2022?

Motion by Dave Shepard

Seconded by Rob Lewis

Discussion: Brad Ferland thinks the report is very informational but recommends next year's report includes the General Fund fund balance. He thinks this information would be helpful to voters going into Town Meeting. No other comments or concerns.

Motion passed unanimously

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. (Selectboard and Union School District No. 26 Directors, to be voted by Australian Ballot).

First Constable	1 year term	No motion or volunteers, office stays open
Second Constable	1 year term	No motion or volunteers, office stays open
Town Agent	1 year term	No motion or volunteers, office stays open
Surveyor of Wood, Bark and Lumber	1 year term	No motion or volunteers, office stays open
Tree Warden	1 year term	Geoffrey Fehrs nominated by Rachel Kane
Cemetery Trustees	1 year term	
Main Street, Maple Street, Fairview, Sanborn, Hardwick Street, West Hill, Hardwick Center		

Motion made by Karen Collier to nominate the Cemetery Trustees as presented on Page 4 of 2022 Town Report

Motion passed unanimously

Fire Dept. Officers (can be voted as one vote) 1 year term  
Motion made by Dave Shepard  
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 3 year term  
Ross Connelly nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith  
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 3 year term  
Daphne Kalmar nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith  
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 2 year remaining on a 3-year term  
Kathleen Sampson nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith  
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 2 year remaining on a 3-year term  
Andrea Brightenbach nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith  
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 2 year remaining on a 3-year term  
Brendan Buckley nominated by Jodi Lew-Smith  
Motion passed unanimously

Grand Juror 1 year term  
Raymond Bellavance nominated by himself  
Motion passed unanimously

Vacant positions will be turned over to the Select Board to try and fill.

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

Motion by Rob Lewis  
Seconded by Dave Mitchell  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 5. Shall the Town vote a budget of three million seven hundred thirty-six thousand twenty-nine dollars (\$3,736,029.00) 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?

Orise stated that this Article was being voted on by Australian Ballot today, she was corrected by several people, Article 5 is voted from the floor. She corrected herself.

Eric Remick began the discussion by asking if everyone could see the budget that Casey Rowell has projected on wall as we will try to use that for walk through in case people have questions. He stated that when the Select Board is preparing budget in the fall for Town Meeting, they try to keep the budget increase roughly inline with inflation and they target to be around 3%. This year and last year inflation was higher which affected the town as well as everything else. The cost for materials is up, especially heating and diesel fuel, salt for the roads and health insurance saw a 20% increase. Employee salaries are increasing in order to keep pace with inflation. All these things increase expenses for the town. Unfortunately, revenues are not increasing at the same pace. Revenues are up 3.78% and the budget is up 4.8%. The net result of this is a proposed tax rate increase of 5.13% to meet the budget.

There were a few things that were moved around, such as lease payments for equipment that we were paying out of equipment capital fund that were moved to line items as suggested by our auditors.

Eric noted that we are voting on a bond for a gravel pit today by Australian ballot. The current budget that we are looking at reflects the bond passing. If the bond doesn't pass that amount in budget will be used to buy gravel and maintain roads, we would just be moving from a bond payment to buying material.

Dave Shepard noticed payroll went up about 15% which is double inflation. He would like to know if that is a multi-year contract or 1 year increase, Eric said it is a one year increase. Partly due to two union contracts which were up for renewal this year. Public Works is a three year contract and police department is a one year contract. David Upson and Eric said we need to be competitive to keep the towns valued workers and pay accordingly so they do not feel underpaid or undervalued and go elsewhere.

Dave Shepard asked what kind of insurance VLCT Insurance is? Eric said that VLCT PACIF is an insurance cooperative that a lot of towns in Vermont pay into that is used to cover property and casualty. It is not health insurance.

Rob Lewis saw that the sand budget has decreased by \$19,000 for coming year and wondered if we are anticipating a free source or a mild winter? Eric said that it is assuming the gravel pit bond passes and we have access to a year's worth of sand at the new gravel pit. If the bond does not pass, we will have to buy sand, but we will not be paying a bond payment.

Brad Ferland questioned the gravel pit and how it impacts this budget. We have a general fund balance as of June 30, 2022 of \$1.2 million, which is an accumulation of surpluses over the years and the highest it has been in a long time. Eric said the target is about \$700,000 range so we are carrying more cash there then we need to or want to. Brad believes town has a policy that says we should maintain 10% balance of what our budget is, and he thinks we have a goal of 20%. Brad says with a budget of \$3.7 million we should have \$370,000 in fund balance. Brad wants to know if access to a portion of fund balance would be better than a bond to reduce bond and reduce interest expense. David Upson said that policy is 15% not 10%, Brad got 10% from auditor's report, if it's 15% than the report is incorrect. Eric said we believes we have committed from \$1.2 million in fund for \$100,000 towards swinging bridge, \$125,000 to offset FY24 property taxes and \$175,000 which was used to offset current taxes in FY23. David Upson said at the end of this fiscal year we expect fund balance to be \$760,000. Brad would like to know where in the budget it is reflected that these payments will be from FY24 budget? Eric informed which pages in town report to find that. Brad feels it needs to be in a better location of the town report, so it is more noticeable to people. He thinks it is misleading where located now.

Steve Fortmann would like to understand the process of where \$500,000 amount was arrived at for the bond. David Upson said the price was a little lower at start of negotiations but a couple of things changed with telecommunications contract and the price went up to \$500,000. There was not a lot of negotiating with that price and he believes there are several other offers pending.

Dave Shepard asked to have the first three items of the police budget explained, specifically why police payroll decreased but overtime and part-time officers increased. David Upson said we have more part-time employees than certified full-time employees and we are relying on more part-time employees to cover shifts. Eric stated there is a cost benefit to the town by doing this because we don't provide insurance for part time employees. David pointed out that finding certified full-time law enforcement officers right now is not an easy task. Eric took a moment to commend Chief Mike Henry for the recruiting and hiring that he has done over the past year. It has been a huge success. Danny said it is a necessity not a choice, we are getting good quality part-time officers right now.

Jennifer Fliegelman inquired why the fireworks were taken out of the budget. Fireworks increased to a \$6,000 minimum show for the upcoming year. However, the \$3,000 that was previously budgeted for fireworks will be committed towards Springfest.

Paul Cillo asked how many full-time and part-time officers we have. Mike Henry said currently there are four full and four part-time, not including himself.

Pollyanna Cooper Levangie asked what the 2<sup>nd</sup> step is if bond does not pass. Eric said the Select Board will reevaluate. Options are to maybe get one more year from current gravel pit or buy material from commercial pits in the area.

Karen Collier said that the Kiwanis have stepped forward and are taking over fireworks along with Springfest. The Town of Hardwick is donating the \$3000 that was in the budget for fireworks, and they will be raising balance. Contact Sherry Lussier if you would like to donate.

Vince Razionale would like to know how many fewer part-time police hours or overtime hours it would take to fund the fireworks show.

Michael Lew-Smith supports the bond but is curious if there is a reason, we shouldn't take some general funds to lower bond amount. Eric said it could be done, the bond wording says, "not to exceed \$500,000" and could be offset with grants and aid. Pollyanna Cooper Levangie asked what kind of interest the excess carried over makes is it comparable to the interest we would pay on the bond? She wants to know if makes sense to use fund money to offset bond if we are not making more money in interest. Eric said we don't want to put ourselves in a position of not having reserve money.

Miles Kamisher-Koch asked that Eric or David elaborate on the telecommunications opportunity effects the purchase of the gravel pit. David said the current owner is researching ways of bringing in revenue so if that happens prior to purchase then we have to deal with that.

Dave Gross asked if we applied for a grant, and it needs a matching portion, does that come from fund balance? Eric said no, fund balance is more of a savings reserve in case of severe overage in budget. Dave asked if legally we can use it for grant matches; Eric said yes, it is town money.

Danny Hale said fund balance is necessary in case of another covid and the government does not give us all that free money. Covid is one of the reasons that our fund balance grew so much.

Brad Ferland questioned fund balance policy again being 10%. He doesn't think Select Board has authority to just spend it. \$750,000 is lot to have sitting around when asking voters to pay increased taxes. He does not think it makes sense to pay interest on a bond.

Ceilidh Galloway-Kane mentioned again that the Select Board is allocating \$125,000 to lowering taxes, and the bond language is to spend "up to \$500,000." We will be trying to get that down from \$500,000.

Nancy Schade thinks the bond is a long-term investment and should be thought of that way.

Brendan Buckley wants to know what the projected life span of the gravel pit is. At current rates of use 4,000 cubic yards of sand and 7,000 cubic yards of gravel, the consultant estimates about 20 years' worth of material that's easily accessible, not including processing ledge.

Lynne Gedanken thinks if the pit is producing for 20 years, then the bond should be for 20 years so that the people benefiting are the people who are paying.

Lucian Avery questioned how much we can discuss bond since it is on Australian ballot. Orise said we can because it is a money item. Lucian looked at the report for gravel pit and talked to people about the Morrisville gravel pit. They did something similar by digging down with an excavator and they thought had 35 years of gravel in there, but it ran out in half that time. Can you bore down to ledge to get a better idea of how much material is in there and you can see how deep the water level is. Is topsoil sold off already? Is some left? Eric said yes, sufficient topsoil is left to reclaim the pit. Lucian asked if pit is currently in compliance of Act 250. Eric said yes.

Polly Cooper Levangie said the report says 14 years projected for the pit to last. Eric said that is correct, the consultant used a higher number for gravel then we will use annually.

Raymond Bellavance is wondering how much gravel is under the solar panels in old pit. Eric said that in part of the pit that was done and reclaimed for solar (which is producing electricity for us) that the town hired someone to drill for water for a possible secondary water source. The report states that right below surface, there is bedrock, not more material. Raymond also asked if the Select Board checked on Willie McAllister's gravel pit, said he has a nice one close to Hardwick. Eric did not know that it was for sale, Tommy said there is not any more gravel there.

Amanda Fecteau asked Orise who made the original motion to pass budget, Town Clerk did not have any notes. Orise stated that motion was made by Dave Shepard. In reviewing Town Meeting footage, it was discovered that a motion was never made. Select Board to consider approval of the Town of Hardwick Budget Vote Resolution (17 V.S.A. § 2662) at the March 16, 2023, Select Board meeting.

Motion passed unanimously

Orise stated appropriations can be voted on as a block if in favor of and then particular appropriations can be pulled separately to be discussed. By a show of hands, the voters approved to vote Articles 6 – 18 as a block. Orise asked if anyone wanted to take out specific appropriation to discuss?

Rob Lewis asked when last time we increased the A.W.A.R.E. appropriation was? Orise stated appropriations come directly from the organizations so that was their request.

Amy Rosenthal would like to discuss Article #16 and #18.

Article 6. 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 7. 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 8. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500.00) for the support of the Lamoille Family Center?

Article 9. 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 10. 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 11. 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?

Article 12. 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 13. 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 14. 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 15. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed four thousand five hundred dollars (\$4,500.00) for the support of the Northeastern Kingdom Council on Aging?

Article 17. 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?

Motion to approve Articles 6 – 15 and Article 17 as a block.

Motion by Dave Shepard  
Seconded by Rob Lewis  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 16. 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?

Motion by Dave Gross  
Seconded by Dave Shepard

Amy Rosenthal thinks the amounts of Article 16 and 18 should be switched. Orise said we need to make an amendment to the article and change the dollar amount.

Amy Rosenthal made a motion to change the dollar amount of Article 16 to \$1,000.

Motion by Amy Rosenthal  
Seconded by Rob Lewis

Sherrie Olmsted said every 3 years she collects NCAL signatures. She thinks Hardwick is fortunate to have NCAL's services. Sherry also shared her feelings regarding Hardwick's dog registration issues.

Dave Gross opposes Amy's amendment since each organization made their request.

Robin Leslie thinks we should vote amendment down. Organizations know what they need.

Lynne Gedanken agrees with Robin, NCAL provides a host of other services than just adoption.

Motion to amend fails

Article 16 passed unanimously

Article 18. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) for the support of Justice For Dogs?

Motion by Dave Shepard  
Seconded by Dave Gross  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 19. 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?

Motion by Rob Lewis  
Seconded by Dave Mitchell  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 20. 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?

Motion by Ron Wiesen  
Seconded by Rob Lewis  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 21. To transact any other nonbinding business proper to be brought before said meeting.

Paul Fixx from Northeast Kingdom Broadband, who was appointed by the Select Board to be our representative to NEK Broadband, gave an update on what's happening in their organization.

Rose Friedman would like to open a discussion about town meeting growing. What are people's thoughts on moving to a different day; providing childcare; having a meal afterward; fundraisers, etc. Looking for creative ways to get more people to show up.

Rob Lewis asked if Chip Troiano is coming? Orise said he was planning to arrive.

Lucian Avery said the town still has some free 911 signs. Reach out to the Town Manager's Office if you would like to request one.

Brad Ferland noticed last summer driving through the village that a lot of people have trouble trying to navigate leaving the diner parking lot. He has seen close calls. Is there a way we can we direct people to not cross under the blinking light?

Erin Rosenthal thinks the suggestions from Rose about Town Meeting seem great. She mentioned perhaps a mock Town Meeting for school kids, as she thinks it would be a good way to get them interested early.

As a follow up to Brad Ferland's comment, Dave Gross said the Planning Commission has an ongoing project to improve traffic and safety.

Eric Remick said that regarding Brad's comment about people crossing, the road crew did put up a split rail fence at the edge of the village parking lot but it did not seem to deter people as much as thought. Regarding Rose's comment he thinks that it is a great thing for people to think about and that the Select Board picks the date and time of Town Meeting around the first of the year. Shari Cornish asked Eric to remind people that we may be moving Town Meeting back to the Town House next year.

Rob Lewis thanked the Select Board and Highway Department for the work on sidewalks and curbs last summer.

Ann Gilcris wants to know if Town Meeting is moved to Town Hall where are people going to park and walk safely. She thinks the school works best for the community.



Karen Collier agrees with Ann. She loves the Town House and thinks it is a beautiful building; however, she thinks the school is a better place and easier to move around in. The Town House is not conducive to sit down, it is not the place to have Town Meeting.

Orise stated that representative Chip Troiano had arrived and if no one objects to him speaking, since he is not a Hardwick resident, she will allow him to speak.

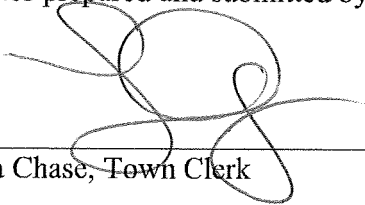
Danny Hale made a motion to adjourn meeting and then have Chip speak.

Motion by Rob Lewis  
Seconded by Danny Hale  
Motion fails

At 11:45 a.m. our State Representative, Chip Troiano, took to the floor and gave an update on what is happening in the State House. He shared some bills that are hot topics right now, including childcare, the Affordable Heat Act, and the family leave bill. He shared about his work on various committees at the State House and gave people an opportunity to ask questions.

Motion to adjourn meeting made by Karen Collier  
Seconded by Robin Leslie  
Meeting adjourned at 12:32 p.m.

Minutes prepared and submitted by:



\_\_\_\_\_  
Tonia Chase, Town Clerk

Approved by:



**RESULTS OF AUSTRALIAN BALLOT VOTE FOR BOND, TOWN & SCHOOL OFFICERS:**

Total Votes Cast: 293

Gravel Pit Bond

214 Yes

70 No

Bond Passed

Select Board- 3-year term:

Ceilidh Galloway-Kane

273 votes (elected)

Select Board – 1 year terms:

Elizabeth Dow

240 votes (elected)

Eric Remick

260 votes (elected)

Hazen Union School Director #26 – 3 year terms:

Rose Friedman

266 votes (elected)

Brett Stanciu

227 votes (elected)

Hazen Union School District # 26 Budget of \$7,356,102

Total Votes Cast: 444 (Greensboro, Hardwick & Woodbury Co-Mingled)

331 Yes

113 No

Budget Passed

Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District Budget of \$7,415,157

Total Votes Cast: 464 (Greensboro, Hardwick, Stannard & Woodbury Co-Mingled)

348 Yes

116 No

Budget Passed