

TOWN OF HARDWICK  
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
MARCH 04, 2025

Orise Ainsworth, Moderator, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The voting audience included approximately one hundred and seventy-three people.

Article 1. To elect a moderator to govern said Town Meeting and for the year ensuing.  
Orise Ainsworth nominated by Dave Shepard  
Motion passed unanimously

At 10:03 a.m. our State Representative, Mike Southworth, took to the floor and gave some updates coming out of Montpelier. He stated that right now there are over 450 house bills that have been introduced and that very few have made it out of committee and have been voted on at this point. He discussed a few of these bills including one bill with an extreme amount of support, a bill to exempt state income tax on veteran and survivor retirement benefits. He also brought up education funding and public safety. He stated that there is part of a bill to repeal the raise the age law; a housing proposal for rental housing, global warming standards act, and PCB remediation.

Dave Shepard asked if funding comes from the state for PCB and if the bond vote passes how will that affect Hardwick. Mike said that if the bond passes that the state has informed the school board that has been working on this that they will reimburse the money as soon as they can. However, he does not know when that would be.

Beth Lecours wanted to inform everyone that the Vermont Art Educators Association put up the show yesterday at the State House and encourages them to attend during the month of March.

Paul Fixx wanted to go back to the PCB question. He believes the governor budgeted nine million dollars for PCB remediation which won't be enough to cover Hardwick. Mike said that it is not budgeted for this current fiscal year; it is for next year.

Orise asked if there were any objections to having employees that do not live in Hardwick to speak, there were no objections.

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, Tim Ricciardello – Select Board member, Danny Hale – Select Board member, David Upson – Town Manager, Tom Fadden – Road Foreman and Mike Henry – Police Chief.

Orise read Robert's Rules.

A brief break was taken to set up more chairs. Orise gave a run-down of the organizations that are out in the lobby.

Article 2. Shall the Town accept the Town Report, year ending June 30, 2024?  
Motion by Jean Hackett  
Seconded by Deborah Hartt  
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. (Select Board, Town Clerk & Treasurer and Union School District No. 26 Directors, to be voted by Australian Ballot).

First Constable 1-year term  
Larry Hamel nominated by Dave Shepard  
Motion passed unanimously

Second Constable 1-year term  
Lindsay O'Steen nominated by David Upson  
Motion passed unanimously

Town Agent 1-year term  
Dave Shepard volunteered  
Dave Shepard nominated by David O'Brien  
Motion passed unanimously

Surveyor of Wood, Bark and Lumber 1-year term  
Levi Chase nominated by Ben Nottermann  
Motion passed unanimously

Tree Warden 1-year term  
Geoffrey Fehrs nominated by Rachel Kane  
Motion passed unanimously

Cemetery Trustees 1-year term  
Main Street, Maple Street, Fairview, Sanborn, Hardwick Street, West Hill, Hardwick Center  
Motion made by Dave Shepard to nominate the Select Board  
Motion passed unanimously

Fire Dept. Officers (can be voted as one vote) 1-year term  
Paul Fixx called Point of Order, he asked if everyone on list are officers? He wanted to note that Lamoille County Sheriff are not residents, does there need to be a special motion to allow that? Orise stated that in the past we have always accepted the list, and they hire Lamoille County Sheriff as dispatch. Orise asked if there were any objections, no objections were made.  
Motion made by Dave Shepard to nominate as presented in 2024 Town Report  
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 3-year term  
Vince Rationale nominated by Daphne Kalmar  
Motion passed unanimously

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

One Library Trustee 3-year term  
Mary Meyer nominated by Daphne Kalmar  
Motion passed unanimously

Grand Juror 1-year term  
Raymond Bellavance nominated by Dave Shepard  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 4. Shall the Town have its current taxes collected by the Town Treasurer?  
Motion by Dave Shepard  
Motion passed unanimously

Deborah Hartt asked how she would request to change an article later, she is interested in reallocating appropriation requested monies. Orise explained how to make an amendment.

Another audience member asked how taxes were collected. Orise explained that they are currently collected by the Town Treasurer.

Article 5. Shall the Town vote a budget of four million four hundred seventeen thousand seven hundred fifty-two dollars (\$4,417,752) 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?

Motion by Ron Wiesen  
Seconded by Dave Shepard

David Upson, Town Manager, came up to the podium and gave an uplifting intro about our Town and its residents and community that received applause.

Eric Remick started the discussion on the budget. He started by talking about what the estimated impact the proposed budget would have on tax rate. He explained the grand list and how it is estimated in the Town Report. Hardwick is currently in the process of a town wide reappraisal and that the values have gone up, so we are expecting a larger grand list total because of value increases estimated.

He then discussed the budget summary (located on page 11 of Town Report at bottom of page). He stated this is the largest increase proposed since he has been on the Select Board. He then explained the main drivers of the \$400,000 increase. Approximately half is an increase in expenses in the cost of doing business as we use today and the cost of health insurance and vehicle purchases. The other \$200,000 is driven by 2 new employees. A brand-new position of Public Works Director, who will focus on projects like bridges and roads and culverts, many due to the flooding. The other position will be bringing back a full-time police officer. The Police force has been a little short staffed and bringing back this position would help reduce reliance on part-time officers.

Anne Galloway asked if President Trump stops all federal funding on town projects how this would affect the public works director position? Eric said he wonders too but doesn't know but as Opie reminds us, we can't plan by planning for the worst, we need to plan as if we are moving forward full steam.

PollyAnna Cooper-Levangie asked for some help in understanding the math, if the budget is going up but grand list tax liability is going down, is it because the assessment property getting valued at higher values? Eric explained how setting tax rate is done.

David Upson gave information regarding the question on federal funding, he said in numerous meetings he has attended regarding funding there has been no indication that federal funding for town and state infrastructure will be compromised.

Lynne Gedanken asked if assessed values go up the average amount and if the budget increases 10% does that mean taxes go up 10%? Eric said that it is a great way to look at it but also to keep in mind that when you receive your tax bill a portion is municipal, but the other portion is

education and that each year properties are added to grand list, which increases the grand list and therefore spreads the load out a little more.

Carol Schminke wants to call attention to employee health insurance. She feels like she is paying double tax by paying her own insurance and the employees' insurance in her taxes and that taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for employees' health insurance. She feels the employees make "lovely amounts of money" and should be penalized like everyone else and be paying for their own health insurance. Eric commented that like most employers the town offers health insurance as a benefit but that the employees do pay a portion of that out of their paycheck.

Dave Shepard wondered what other staff in the Town Manager's office do, he said that there had been an explosion of office expenses in that office. He also wondered if the new Director of Public Works could be part-time. Eric said the part-time was discussed but the consensus was that there is work for a full-time person and the Town would have an easier time hiring for a full-time position. Casey Rowell, Business Manager, stated the 57% increase last year was due to moving the Zoning Administrator and Community Development Coordinator positions from their own separate line to the Town Manager line in budget since they report to the Town Manager.

Griffin Schneider asked how the new Director of Public Works position would be appointed. Eric explained how the hiring process works.

Rachel Kane asked to be reminded what the Community Development Coordinator does and if some of that work could be taken over by the new Director of Public Works? David Upson explained that the part-time community development position is mainly for grant writing and seeking funding for projects. He said that one of the tasks that the Director of Public Works would do administratively is capital planning.

Anne Galloway asked how much was spent on the new library building. Daphne Kalmar answered that the building was funded by a bond approved by voters, donations and grants. She does not know the total yet but stated it is over \$3,000,000. Ann then asked what level of oversight the Select Board has on the library. Eric stated the library is a town building, and the entity is run by a board of trustees who are voted on at Town Meeting. Anne then asked if the payroll for the library comes out of the town, Eric stated it mostly does along with some grants. She then asked if there were any fundraising plans in future to fund the operating budget. Daphne Kalmar stated that it would be ideal but would take several years to establish that.

Meredith Holch said that most town libraries are funded by towns including all the staff in every state in the United States and is wondering why people have problems with that.

Dave Gross, a past library trustee, wanted to clarify that the library is a separate entity from the Select Board and town budget.

Danny Hale wanted to let people know that those questioning the library doesn't mean they don't care, he said it's also about money. He pointed out that we fund our fire department for under \$90,000 of taxpayer dollars, including capital equipment, and we fund the library \$200,000. He said it's not a matter of what we like or dislike but rather what can be afforded.

Rachel Jacobson sees the benefit of having both a Public Works Director and Community Developer Coordinator.

David Upson explained about different projects and infrastructure and the difference in jobs of road crew and projects that had to be put aside. The Town needs someone that can look ahead and plan for projects. This position is long overdue, the two positions would work together to implement projects.

Eric added that part of the discussion has been around project management and, since the 2023 flood, the Town has had a lot of projects to be implemented and we have received funding and have reason to believe we will continue to receive funding, but someone needs to manage those projects.

An audience member called for vote.

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. Orise asked if there was any objection to putting appropriations as a group. There were two objections. Deborah Hartt wants to discuss Article 8 and 22 individually. Orise read the remaining articles to be voted as a block.

Motion made by Dave Shepard

Seconded by Ann Gilcris

Motion passed unanimously for Articles 6,7, and 9 – 21

Article 6. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand five hundred dollars (\$3,500.00) for the support of AWARE?

Article 7. 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 8. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed four thousand dollars (\$4,000.00) for the support of Center for an Agricultural Economy?

Debroah Hartt asked what the \$4,000 appropriation request from Center for an Agricultural Economy was for.

Orise asked for motion to move the article to start discussion.

Motion made to approve Article 8 by Dave Shepard

Seconded by Ron Wiesen

Dave Shepard stated that he supports this article.

Deborah Hartt moved to make an amendment to the motion to decrease Article 8 to \$2,000. Seconded by Justin Lander

Rachel Kane hoped that Deborah could give background on why she would like this.

Paul Fixx stated he heard Deborah Hartt say that the CAE built a building, and he believes that the Town owns that building and would like some clarification. Eric stated that the Yellow Barn and new accelerator building next to it are owned by the Town of Hardwick and leased to a non-profit called Northeast Kingdom Development Corporation which in turn leases to Cabot Creamery, Center for an Agricultural Economy, and Jasper Hill Farms.

Nancy Nottermann wondered if anyone from CAE could speak on their role, she also thinks that CAE has done amazing things for this town.

Helen Beattie spoke for CAE, she believes that their role in this community is invaluable, and that they have been at the forefront of every single emergency. Helen thinks we should keep it at \$4000.

Several other audience members seconded Helen's opinion.

David Upson explained what the \$4000 will probably cover expenses associated with the Atkins Field pavilion. Michael Dimarco requested clarification on how CAE and Salvation Farms relate to each other.

Erin Rosenthal asked if it is possible to increase an appropriation amount on one article without reducing another. Orise answered yes.

Lynne Gedanken wants to point out that funding does not need to be reduced for CAE to increase for Salvation Farms.

Paul Fixx learned during a tour that there is some sort of relationship between CAE and Salvation Farms. Danny Smith, who used to work for Salvation Farms, stated there is a strong relationship between the two and that they are not competitors.

Deborah Hartt stated she has no dispute about CAE, she is simply trying to give more to Salvation Farms.

Paul Fixx suggested motion be withdrawn, Orise said it is easier to vote on it.

Michael Lew-Smith called to vote on amendment. Motion denied.

Motion made for \$4000. Motion approved.

Article 9. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500.00) for the support of Craftsbury Community Care Center?

Article 10. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) for the support of Greensboro Nursing Home?

Article 11. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) for the support of Hardwick Area Food Pantry?

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

Article 13. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand eight hundred dollars (\$2,800.00) for the support of Hardwick Downtown Partnership, Inc.?

Article 14. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed three thousand dollars (\$3,000.00) for the support of Hardwick Historical Society?

Article 15. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) for the support of Justice For Dogs?

Article 16. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500.00) for the support of Lamoille Family Center?

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, Inc. (NEKarts)?

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 Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging?

Article 19. 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 Northeast Kingdom Human Services?

Article 20. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) for the support of Northeast Kingdom Learning Services?

Article 21. 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, Inc.?

Article 22. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500.00) for the support of Salvation Farms, Inc.?

Motion by Robin Leslie  
Seconded by Dave Shepard

Deborah Hartt made a motion to increase to \$3500.00  
Seconded by Griffin Schneider

Nancy Nottermann suggests people look at page 10 of the Town Report to see the total requests.

Dave Gross thinks the dollar amount they originally requested should be respected.

Nancy Nottermann suspects we are going to have more hungry people in the coming year and agrees with the increase.

Motion passed unanimously

Article 23. 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 made by Dave Gross  
Seconded by Norma Wiesen  
Motion passed unanimously

Article 24. 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 made by Norma Wiesen

Seconded by Dave Shepard

Motion passed unanimously

Article 25. To transact any other nonbinding business proper to be brought before said meeting.

The legal voters of the Town of Hardwick are further notified that voter qualifications, registration, and absentee voting relative to said Annual Town Meeting shall be as provided in Chapters 43, 51 and 55 of Title 17, Vermont Statutes Annotated.

Orise said this will be her last town meeting and received a standing ovation for her years as moderator.

Neal Yurick discussed his opinion on moving Pre-K to Lakeview and to not close Lakeview.

Paul Fixx mentioned that with the recent misappropriation of funds from a bookkeeper, as was reported in Gazette, he would like to ask the Select Board in the future when receiving appropriation requests to require a statement that those organizations are conforming with accepted accounting principles.

Jan Mueller gave an update on the upcoming Springfest and the change to the street fair in downtown.

Tracy Martin said that on March 12<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm that there is going to be a community gathering on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Memorial Building about the Better Connections grant for East Hardwick.

Brendan Buckley would like the Select Board to consider having Town Meeting not be in the middle of the workday so more people could attend.

Lesa Cathcart discussed a silt issue at Jackson Dam.

Nancy Nottermann asked Helen to address the local emergency management plan. Helen Beattie from Neighbor-to-Neighbor explained the plan.

Alana Considine proposed a non-binding resolution. "We the residents of Hardwick resolve to formally request that our Governor, Phil Scott, publicly reaffirm his commitment to uphold the rule of law protecting the rights of Vermonters and the Vermont Constitution amidst federal overreach, even if confronted with federal threats related to funding or other matters. Furthermore, we encourage him to proactively leverage his authority and engage with his colleagues nationwide to advocate for the protection of the rights of government personnel, immigrants and individuals belonging to the LGBTQIA plus disabled and BIPOC communities. Additionally, we call on you to work with his colleagues to be the state and federal level to safeguard federal services such as Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security which are essential to the wellbeing of all Vermonters.

Orise stated the Town is not able to legally do anything with a resolution since the matter is federal and is not something the Select Board can control.



Ross Connolly thinks this does pertain to Hardwick and is a local issue.

Orise polled the audience to see if this is something the Town should be involved in and motion carried to accept the non-binding resolution.

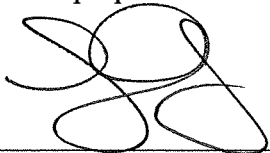
Dave Shepard echoed support for all of Orise's years as moderator and wanted to recognize Tom Fadden for his years of service.

Carol Gosselin asked for an update on the swinging bridge.

Eric came to the podium to respond to three comments. Paul Fixx regarding the handling of funds inappropriately. He is not sure that the town offices can put restrictions on appropriations that were voted by the Town. He said that the swinging bridge project is scheduled, it has gone out to bid and the town is about \$200,000 shy but has a grant application submitted and are hopeful that the project will be under construction this summer. The third update is that they have been working on getting the fire department out of the flood zone and will shortly be sharing draft plans for a new fire station, rescue, and town highway garage on Creamery Road.

Motion to adjourn made by Robin Leslie  
Seconded by Lesa Cathcart  
Meeting adjourned at 12:13 pm

Minutes prepared and submitted by:



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Tonia Chase, Town Clerk

Approved by:

