

TOWN OF HARDWICK
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
MARCH 03, 2026

Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. The voting audience included approximately two hundred and fifty people.

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

Audrey Grant was nominated by Walker Wright
Motion passed unanimously

State Representative Mike Southworth provided a legislative update from Montpelier. He reported that approximately 902 bills have been introduced this session, though historically only a small portion become law.

Representative Southworth discussed several topics currently under consideration, including data privacy, cell tower siting, large-scale renewable energy projects, healthcare, and the state budget. He highlighted proposed land use changes under Act 181, which would divide the state into tiers and affect how land may be used and developed. He also referenced conservation goals established in Act 59 (2023), which aim to conserve 30% of Vermont land by 2030 and 50% by 2050. He noted ongoing discussion regarding whether land enrolled in the Use Value Appraisal (Current Use) program could count toward those conservation targets.

Representative Southworth reported that education funding continues to be a major legislative focus, with multiple proposals under consideration and no final decisions made. The legislative crossover date of March 13 will allow further work on bills moving between the House and Senate.

He provided an update regarding PCB remediation at Hardwick Elementary School, noting that the Department of Environmental Conservation is currently funding six schools through FY26. If funds remain after those projects are addressed, Hardwick may receive partial reimbursement this fiscal year, with the possibility of additional funding in a future state budget.

Representative Southworth also discussed legislation related to large-scale solar development, noting that certain net metering or standard offer projects may contribute to increased electric rates. Legislators are reviewing possible adjustments to balance renewable energy development with ratepayer impacts.

He encouraged municipalities to ensure that town plans and zoning bylaws address the siting of cell towers and large-scale energy infrastructure to avoid potential legal challenges. He also noted that legislators are reviewing potential regulations related to large-scale data centers due to their potential impact on electricity and water usage.

In response to a question regarding large-scale solar projects, Representative Southworth explained that some projects require utilities to purchase power at rates higher than the wholesale market, which can increase costs for ratepayers.

Representative Southworth provided his email address for constituents wishing to contact him: msouthworth2024@gmail.com.

The Select Board and Town staff introduced themselves. Present were Select Board members Eric Remick, Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Danny Hale, Tim Ricciardello and Shari Cornish, Town Manager David Upson Jr., Town Clerk Tonia Chase, Payroll and Benefits Administrator Amanda Fecteau, Finance Director Casey Rowell, Police Chief Mike Henry, and Public Works Foreman Tom Fadden.

Audrey reviewed the rules and procedures for Town Meeting, noting that the meeting would follow Robert's Rules of Order. Guidance was provided on making motions, debate, amendments, reconsideration of articles, and voting procedures, including voice votes, divisions of the house, and paper ballots upon request. The Moderator also reviewed speaking procedures, points of order, and participation by non-voters.

Article 2. Shall the Town accept the Town Report, year ending June 30, 2025?

Motion by Robin Grant
Seconded by Jim Davison

Anne Galloway asked if Select Board would give a summary of the town report and Eric stated it would be when we got to Article 5.

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

First Constable 1-year term
Lindsay O'Steen nominated by Denis Chase
Motion passed unanimously

Second Constable 1-year term
Charlie Bartlett nominated by Denis Chase
Motion passed unanimously

Town Agent 1-year term
Dave Shepard nominated by David Upson Jr.
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
Michael Deering nominated by Michael Deering
Geoffrey Fehrs nominated by David Upson Jr.
Geoffrey Fehrs won by hand count.

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

Fire Dept. Officers (can be voted as one vote) 1-year term
Motion by Denis Chase to nominate as presented in 2025 Town Report
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 3-year term
Beth McIntyre nominated by Daphne Kalmar
Motion passed unanimously

One Library Trustee 1 year remaining on a 3-year term
Myles Tandy nominated by Daphne Kalmar
Motion passed unanimously

Grand Juror 1-year term
Eric Remick nominated by Denis Chase
Motion passed

Before proceeding with Article 4, the Moderator asked if there were any objections to allowing Senator Scott Beck to present a brief legislative report. Hearing none, the Senator was recognized. Senator Beck thanked residents for their engagement and noted he receives significant feedback from Hardwick constituents. He provided updates on legislative priorities including housing affordability, cost of living and taxes, and ongoing discussions about education funding and school district structures. He stated that proposals regarding education governance are still developing.

Senator Beck encouraged residents to follow his updates on Front Porch Forum and in the Hardwick Gazette, and to contact him with questions.

The Moderator then opened the floor for questions. Harold McCoy of Hardwick asked about Act 181, expressing concern that Tier 2 and Tier 3 land classifications could restrict development in rural areas and potentially trigger Act 250 review for long driveways. Scott Beck expressed concerns regarding Tier 2 and Tier 3 designations, stating they may restrict development in areas where much of the region falls within those tiers. He specifically noted the road rule, explaining that driveways longer than 800 feet can trigger Act 250 jurisdiction. He mentioned that efforts are being made to pursue potential changes to the rule.

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

Motion by Paul Fixx
Seconded by Paul Cillo
Motion passed unanimously

Article 5. Shall the Town vote a budget of four million seven hundred forty one thousand six hundred dollars (\$4,741,600) 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?

Renaud Demers expressed concern that since it cannot be verified who in the audience is a registered voter he would like to make a motion that this goes to paper ballot, six people seconded.

Audrey stated that there was not a motion yet for Article 5.

Motion by Karen Collier

Seconded by unknown member of the audience

Audrey asked for a brief moment to discuss the process going forward with the board. After a brief pause the meeting resumed and Audrey requested the motion be made again and asked for names to be said.

Motion to go to paper ballot was made by Renaud Demers.

After discussion from multiple audience members explaining to Audrey how they think the process should be, the motion for paper ballot was paused so that the discussion should happen first because Harold McCoy stated that there could not be two motions on the table. David Upson then stated that there did not need to be a vote for paper ballot because the motion was made and six people seconded and that is all that is required to have a paper vote.

Audrey restated the question for Article 5 and asked for the motion again.

Motion by Sarah Morgan

Seconded by Ivan Menard

Audrey turned the meeting over to David Upson Jr. and Eric Remick to discuss the budget.

David started by thanking Eric Remick and Danny Hale for all their years on the Select Board. He also wanted to thank Larry Hamel for his time as Constable, Animal Control Officer, and Town Service Officer. After thanking several other people, organizations, staff and residents, David passed the meeting over to Eric Remick to begin the budget discussion.

Eric Remick presented the proposed fiscal year budget of \$4,741,600 and asked attendees to refer to page 11 of the Town Report. It was explained that the Select Board began preparing the budget in November and continued meetings through January to review and finalize the proposal. Town staff, particularly Casey, were acknowledged for their work in assisting with the preparation of the budget. The overall goal in developing the budget was to maintain the town's current services while continuing to plan for necessary projects and future needs.

It was noted that in the projected revenues section there is a line for a local option tax showing anticipated revenue of \$50,000. However, this amount is not included in the budget being voted on. The proposed budget under consideration totals \$4,741,600, and the local option tax will be addressed under the following article on the agenda.

Eric then reviewed the budget summary. The Highway Department and Police Department budgets are both projected to increase approximately four to five percent. These increases are largely attributed to rising salary, benefits, and insurance costs and are slightly above the three percent inflation rate that was used when building the budget.

The Administration budget shows a decrease of \$46,940. This reflects the net effect of salary increases for current employees and the removal of the previously approved but unfilled Director of Public Works position from the budget. Rather than filling that position, the town intends to utilize contractors as needed to assist with project management responsibilities.

Payroll for elected and appointed officials remains nearly unchanged and represents a relatively small portion of the overall budget. The Fire Department budget shows an increase of approximately \$10,000. While this represents roughly a twenty-one percent increase, it is a relatively small dollar amount and reflects modest increases for volunteer firefighters and the continued maintenance of equipment to ensure it remains in proper working condition.

The buildings' budget is projected to increase by approximately four percent.

Attention was then directed to the line items on page 17 of the Town Report. The Professional Project Services line has been increased by \$25,000. This funding is intended to allow the town to hire project management or engineering consultants when needed for specific projects.

A new line item has also been included for Spring Fest in the amount of \$10,000. It was noted that the total cost of last year's Spring Fest exceeded that amount, and it is anticipated that additional costs will be supported through private contributions.

The Capital General Fund contribution is proposed to increase by \$107,000. This increase is primarily intended to allow the town to set aside funds needed to match FEMA funding for major infrastructure projects related to recovery from the floods of 2023 and 2024. FEMA is expected to cover ninety percent of the costs of eligible projects, while the State will contribute an additional five percent, leaving the town responsible for the remaining five percent. These projects are expected to include significant infrastructure work, particularly bridges, that will take place over the coming years.

The budget also includes a new line item of \$150,000 for a highway garage bond payment. The existing highway garage has reached the end of its useful life. The town has contracted with VIA Architecture to assist in developing conceptual designs for a new facility. Preliminary schematic designs have been displayed for public review, and meetings have been held to discuss the project. The proposed plan would construct a new highway garage and also co-locate the Fire Department and the Hardwick Rescue Squad at the Creamery Road site. The Hardwick Rescue Squad is an independent organization but would be located adjacent to the other facilities.

A bond vote for the project has not yet taken place, but the town anticipates bringing a bond proposal to voters in late spring or early summer. The estimated cost for the highway garage portion of the project is approximately \$6 million. The \$150,000 included in the proposed budget would cover interest-only payments for the first year should the bond vote pass. The town is also actively seeking grant funding that could help reduce the amount that would need to be financed through the bond.

It was also noted that if the bond vote does not pass or the project does not move forward, the funds allocated for the bond payment would likely instead be used for necessary repairs to the existing highway garage, which would require substantial maintenance if it were to continue being used.

In closing, the Select Board summarized that the proposed budget is designed to maintain current town services while addressing anticipated infrastructure needs. The primary factors contributing to the budget increases include the town's match for FEMA-funded infrastructure projects and the anticipated bond payment related to the proposed highway garage project.

The article was then opened for questions, discussion, and comments from those present.

Paul Fixx asked about a reduction of approximately \$60,000 in the Capital Highway Fund and an increase of about \$100,000 in the Capital General Fund and requested clarification on the changes.

Eric explained that the Capital Highway Fund is used primarily to save for paving projects. The largest recent paving project, Center Road, was completed in the previous year and cost less than originally projected. As a result, the town determined it was reasonable to temporarily reduce the amount contributed to that fund, with the expectation that contributions could gradually increase again in future years. Eric further explained that the increase of approximately \$107,000 in the Capital General Fund is intended to provide the town's required match for FEMA-funded infrastructure projects, most of which involve bridge repairs as well as work related to the landslide on School Street. He noted that the town does not have the capacity to complete all of these projects in a single year, and they are expected to take place over approximately three years. The additional \$100,000 contribution is therefore anticipated to remain in the budget for about three years to support the town's share of those projects.

Mike DiMarco asked whether the recent town-wide reassessment should result in a large increase in property tax revenue and asked if such an increase was reflected in the proposed budget.

Eric explained that the reassessment and the municipal budget are separate matters. The article under consideration concerns only the amount of money needed to operate the town. The tax rate itself is not set at Town Meeting but is determined later in the year, typically in late July or August. At that time, the total amount to be raised through taxes is divided by the town's grand list to determine the tax rate. Eric noted that because the total value of the grand list increased significantly following the reassessment, the tax rate generally decreases while property values increase. As a result, the final tax amount paid may remain relatively similar, although it reflects the approved municipal budget. He also noted that page nine of the Town Report contains a projection of how the proposed budget may impact property taxes.

Jon Lussier asked whether the approximately 20 properties reported to be purchased through the FEMA flood buyout program would affect the town's grand list and future tax revenues. Eric explained that the properties enrolled in the FEMA flood buyout program will eventually be removed from the town's grand list and will no longer generate property tax revenue. However, in the short term, the State has committed to providing payments to the town to offset the lost tax revenue for the next ten years. This will provide the town with time to adjust to the eventual loss of those properties from the grand list. Eric also noted that a positive outcome of the properties no longer being in the flood zone and now being owned by the Town is that the Town has the ability, and plans, to lower the elevation of portions of those properties to create additional water storage for floodwaters. He added that this will hopefully have a positive impact on future flooding.

Anne Galloway asked whether the town has plans to develop additional housing within the next ten years and whether all the bridges damaged by flooding, particularly the bridge in Greensboro Bend and Fisher's Folly, would need to be replaced. Eric responded that the town does not

currently have plans to directly develop housing. While the town has taken steps such as modifying zoning bylaws to encourage additional development, there are no plans for the town itself to act as a housing developer. He noted that there may be additional ways the town could encourage housing development in the future. David Upson Jr. added that the town is prepared to partner with developers through programs such as the CHIP program when opportunities arise. He explained that housing projects must be financially viable for developers, landowners, and the town. He also noted that the Regional Planning Commission has established housing goals for the area and that the town is expected to add approximately 230 housing units by 2030. Achieving this goal will require cooperation among developers, property owners, and state programs designed to support housing development. In response to the question about bridge replacement, David stated that the town currently has a FEMA Public Assistance project obligated for engineering and architectural work related to the Greensboro Bend bridge. A community survey regarding the bridge has recently been conducted, and results will be reported publicly. He noted that there was strong support for rebuilding the bridge. FEMA funding is expected to cover the majority of the project cost, with the town responsible for a five percent match. Preliminary estimates place the total cost of the bridge at approximately \$2.5 million. The town will continue moving forward with planning and design until a final decision on construction is made. Anne Galloway asked a follow-up question about whether the town could hold bond votes for individual bridge projects as they arise. David responded that while it would be possible to do so, the town does not currently anticipate the need for bond votes because the projects are expected to be funded primarily through grants rather than long-term borrowing.

Renaud Demers asked whether the Town had any properties available for development. David explained that the Town does not own land available for housing development; however, there may be opportunities to partner with private landowners who have property suitable for housing if they come forward. He noted that these types of projects are large and costly for developers, and many developers are currently focusing their investments in Chittenden County rather than the Northeast Kingdom.

Michael Deering asked whether the Town has a plan to attract businesses to Hardwick. He noted that while there are plans for additional people, housing, and infrastructure, the Town currently lacks the capacity to support more businesses, including available real estate, physical space, and parking. He asked what steps are being taken to address these issues and encourage business development. David agreed that attracting businesses is important and noted that the Yellow Barn Business Accelerator currently houses several businesses. Eric added that the Downtown Partnership works with businesses and property owners to support and strengthen the downtown area. He explained that while the Town does not operate businesses, it aims to be supportive and business-friendly where possible. Eric also noted that the Town has an Economic Development Loan Fund, which allows local businesses to apply for loans at reasonable rates to support their growth.

Patrick Kane stated that Hardwick has the second-highest tax rate in the Northeast Kingdom. He expressed concern that the Town should not be using all of its bonding capacity for public service buildings. He suggested that the Town consider using its bonding capacity to support housing projects that could increase the tax base before committing to significant additional public service infrastructure. Maggie McGuire called for a point of order and asked that the question be repeated. Audrey clarified that Mr. Kane's comment was not a question but a statement encouraging the Town to consider directing bonding capacity toward housing and development projects to help expand the tax base and support future infrastructure needs.

Jim Davison asked about the housing goal mentioned for 2030 and whether there are penalties if the goal is not met. David Upson Jr. explained that while the Regional Planning Commission has established housing targets for towns in the Northeast Kingdom, the goals are not mandatory and there are no penalties for not meeting them. Eric added that the goals are largely aspirational.

Planning Commission Chair Dave Gross explained that the Planning Commission has recently completed revisions to the Town's zoning bylaws aimed at encouraging housing development. These updates include making it easier to create accessory dwelling units, removing the requirement that property owners live in the primary dwelling, increasing allowable accessory dwelling sizes, and reducing minimum lot size requirements in certain districts. He noted that while the Town does not own property for development, these bylaw changes are intended to make it easier for property owners to create additional housing or convert existing spaces into accessory dwellings. He added that the Planning Commission welcomes additional ideas to support housing development.

Paul Fixx stated that the Town has indicated it does not have property for housing development but noted that the Town has given an option on the property at 9 South Main Street next to Tracy's Clip Joint. He said his understanding was that the proposal was for short-term housing, such as a hostel, rather than long-term housing. Eric confirmed that the Town owns a small parcel at that location and has entered into an agreement with Vermont Huts to develop a hostel. He explained that the project is intended primarily for visitors traveling on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail but would be open to anyone. The conceptual design includes hostel-style bunk rooms as well as a couple longer-term apartments on the upper floor. Eric noted that the project had been waiting for environmental review related to the oil spill at 9 South Main Street, which is nearing completion. Jim Davison asked about parking for the project. Eric responded that bicycles would likely be stored inside the building for trail users and noted that additional parking could be available nearby, such as by the Daniels Building, with pedestrian access via the bridge.

Julie Theoret asked what would happen to the current fire station if the Fire Department and Hardwick Rescue were moved. Eric explained that the existing fire station has experienced repeated flooding. He said that elevating the building out of the floodplain would create challenges, including steep access for fire trucks and the displacement of floodwater into nearby areas. He noted that if the Fire Department were relocated, the building could potentially be removed and the site used for parking, which is an allowed use in flood-prone areas and would displace less floodwater. Eric also discussed the condition of the Town Highway Garage, which was built in 1972 as a replacement for the older Quonset hut that still stands on the property. He explained that the building was designed for smaller trucks, and the current equipment barely fits within the bays. The structure is also experiencing significant deterioration, including rusted support posts, water and salt damage, and ongoing roof and wall issues. He stated that the building is nearing the end of its useful life and that constructing a new facility designed for modern equipment would likely be the best long-term investment, though repairs may be necessary if replacement is not immediately possible.

Lucian Avery asked about the cost of replacing the bridge in Greensboro Bend and whether grant funding would cover much of the expense. Eric explained that FEMA would cover approximately 90% of the cost and the State would cover an additional 5%, leaving the Town responsible for about 5%. Lucian expressed concern about the need for the bridge given nearby alternate crossings and questioned whether the investment was justified. David noted that surveys on the issue had received many responses from people outside Hardwick and said the project raises important questions for the community. He added that some Hardwick residents do rely on the bridge and

that additional public engagement will be needed before decisions are made. Eric added that replacement costs are high in part because the bridge would need to be built to withstand future flooding, which would require a longer span than the previous structure.

Lesa Cathcart asked about proposed state legislation, including Act 181 and potential Act 250 requirements related to driveway or road length, and how those rules might affect future housing, infrastructure, and development in Hardwick. She asked whether the Town's bylaws would protect the Town from the impacts of the legislation if it is passed. David Upson Jr. responded that the Town's Zoning Administrator closely monitors changes in state law and that the Town's bylaws are kept up to date with new requirements. Eric added that his understanding is that the legislation applies primarily to future developments, such as projects proposing roads longer than 800 feet in certain districts, which could trigger Act 250 review. Lesa expressed concern that much of the Town's property may fall within districts affected by the legislation and questioned how it could impact the cost and feasibility of building new homes.

John Laggis asked for more details about potential repairs to the Town Highway Garage if the proposed bond does not pass. Eric stated that the funds currently budgeted for bond payments would potentially be redirected toward repairing the existing garage.

There were comments from several audience members regarding the budget being voted by Australian ballot as opposed to from the floor and having Town Meeting on a different day to make more convenience.

Motion by Vanessa Davison to call for vote
Seconded by Larry Fliegelman
Motion passed to vote

After much discussion on the process, it was requested that a new motion for paper ballot be made.

Motion by Karen Collier for paper ballot
Seconded by Harold McCoy, Steve Collier, Kevin Moore, Lori Batchelder, Andrea Brightenbach, Doreen Cota

167 YES
72 NO
1 SPOILED
Budget passed by paper ballot

Article 6. Shall the Town approve a one percent (1%) local option tax on (i) meals and alcoholic beverages pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 138(b)(2) and (ii) rooms pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 138(b)(3) with the Town's share of receipts to be used for municipal, non-education expenditures as identified by the Select Board?

Motion by Karen Collier
Seconded by Larry Fliegelman

Jim Davison asked whether the proposed 1% local option tax would be used for municipal expenditures. Eric referred to the Town Report and explained that the projected revenue from the local option tax, if approved, would be used to offset the amount to be raised by property taxes. Eric explained that Vermont has expanded eligibility for municipalities to adopt a local option tax.

The proposed 1% tax would apply to rooms, meals, and alcohol. Based on state data, the Town estimates the tax could generate approximately \$50,000 annually, which would be used to reduce the amount raised through property taxes. He noted that the tax would be paid by both residents and visitors, including tourists.

Karen Collier asked what portion of the tax revenue the state keeps. Eric explained that the state retains 25% of the revenue and the Town receives 75%, with the state handling the administrative responsibilities.

Margaret Bledsoe noted that the article states the Select Board can determine how the revenue is used and asked how the funds would be allocated. Eric said the intent, as outlined in the Town Report and proposed budget, is to use the revenue to offset property taxes.

Rachel Kane asked what local restaurant owners think about the proposed tax. Several restaurant owners in attendance stated that they do not support the local option tax.

Ceilidh Galloway-Kane pointed out that if this Article passed and it ended up not working for the Town that it could be voted out later on.

Robin Leslie asked when would be instituted if article passes, Eric said that the state needs about a 3 month lead time.

Marc Considine asked where this would affect the budget if passed. Eric said it doesn't affect the budget that you just voted on. If this passed it would be additional revenue to offset that total budget when the rate is set.

Karen Collier stated she was glad to hear it could be reversed, but she feels the problem is that people may not come here as much and if it is reversed, she doesn't believe people would hear about that and start coming to Hardwick again.

Terri Vest asked about the impact on taxes if this passes. Eric responded that based on the appropriation amount, it would be about \$16 for every \$100,000 in property value.

Pollyanna Cooper-Levangie asked if there is a way to apply the tax to rooms only and not to food and alcohol. Eric explained that rooms and meals are currently combined. Joe Nudell noted that Elmore has a room-only tax, so it can be done.

Anne Galloway said the state has already imposed a 1% tax on Airbnb, so this would be in addition to that.

Tyler LeBeau stated he thinks it's a great idea, but just not yet.

Ivan Menard wondered if this would apply to the Farmer's Market, or if it is only for prepared meals. Paul Fixx said he believes food trucks would have to comply, but he is not sure about others. He also asked how well the town understands this tax and wanted to know how the \$50,000 estimate was determined. David said that the state advised looking at another town for comparison.

Mark Rowell asked if there could be a meeting in the future for affected businesses.

Finn Galloway-Kane said it would be helpful to know what percentage of the tax would come from town residents versus tourists.

Motion failed.

Lydia Parker made a motion to modify the rules of the meeting to require a majority vote by hand or voice before proceeding to a paper ballot, stating her intention was to encourage continued participation and discussion during the meeting. The motion was seconded by Tyler Buswell.

Discussion followed regarding the legality of the motion. Audrey referenced *Ruling the Unruly Guide* and noted that Robert's Rules may be amended. She also read from Vermont Statutes Online, Title 17, Chapter 55, Subchapter 2, §2658, regarding town meetings and local elections, stating she was not interpreting the statute but reading it as written unless the town had adopted another procedure.

Myles Kamisher-Koch moved to call the question, seconded by Lori Ferland. A hand vote to call the question passed.

Audrey then restated the motion: to modify Robert's Rules of Order for the remainder of the meeting to require a majority hand or voice vote after a house division is called before moving to a paper ballot.

Motion passed.

Article 7. Shall the Town contribute \$25,000, to be matched by more than \$700,000 of other public and private funds, toward the acquisition of +/- 329 acres of land on Buffalo Mountain to become a Town Forest to protect recreational access, fish and wildlife habitat, forestry, and Lamoille River water quality, and to provide outdoor educational opportunities for schoolchildren?

Motion by Robin Grant
Seconded by Julie Theoret

Rachel Kane made a presentation from the Hardwick Conservation Commission.

Residents discussed the proposal regarding the town's involvement in acquiring the property.

Ben Patoine commented that Rachel had raised interesting points regarding housing and noted there may be value in keeping the property on the Grand List. Tyler noted that the Cherry Street property has been on the market without a buyer and that much of the land is undevelopable.

Jon Lussier asked how quickly the \$25,000 contribution would be returned to the town. Paul Cillo responded that the funds would be reimbursed once the property closing occurs, which is predicted to be by the end of the year. John also asked whether any long-range planning had been done regarding maintenance or improvement costs and asked David Upson Jr. how the property might impact the town's insurance, to which David responded that it would depend on how the property is used. John also questioned whether the timing was appropriate given the number of current town projects.

Anne Galloway reported that Patrick Kane had spoken with individuals involved with the project who indicated it could help with taxes. Peter Moskovitz raised a point of information regarding Ken Davis's estimate of potential timber income from the property.

Sue Rivard expressed concern about the unknown maintenance costs, stating it was difficult to vote without knowing how the land would be used or what the long-term expenses might be.

Matt Renaud acknowledged concerns about high taxes but stated he believed the town needs land for future uses. Dave Gross responded that the property had been on the market and that the group worked together to help the town acquire it to prevent it from going into private ownership.

Renaud Demers commented that recreation use could continue as the land is currently open and not posted. Ross Connelly shared that he recently visited the mountain on snowshoes and felt it was a valuable community asset. He clarified that the town would contribute \$25,000 upfront and receive the funds back after closing, effectively obtaining the property without long-term cost to the town.

Carol Schminke supported the opportunity but asked whether the property could be sold in the future if needed. Paul Cillo explained that the property would have a conservation easement held by the land trust, requiring it to remain a town forest. While the property could technically be sold, the easement would remain with the land and restrict future use.

Cecile Leriche raised questions regarding state laws. Caitlin Strong expressed support for the town forest concept but also shared concerns about additional costs and asked why the associated costs were so high.

Tyler Buswell raised a point of order, noting that a comment did not relate directly to the motion and requested that the question be answered. Paul Cillo then explained the Northern Rivers Land Trust budget related to the project.

Motion to call for vote by Teddy ?
Seconded by Lucy Zendzian

Motion passes by hand vote

Motion by Renaud Demers for paper ballot
Seconded by Ben Patoine, Willie McAllister Jr., Wendy Brochu, Ken Blair, Helen Gates, Ashton Allen

Motion fails by hand count

Motion for Article 7 passes by hand count

Motion by Gary Michaels Articles 8 – 24 be voted on as a block
Seconded by Andrew Gilbert
Motion passes

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 AWARE?

Article 9. 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 10. 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?

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 Craftsbury Community Care Center?

Article 12. 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 13. 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 14. 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 15. 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 16. 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 17. 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 18. 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 19. 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 20. 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 21. 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 22. 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 23. Shall the Town appropriate a sum of money not to exceed six thousand one hundred eight one dollars and fifty cents (\$6,181.50) for the support of Rural Community Transportation, Inc.?

Article 24. 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 Paul Cillo

Seconded by Lesa Cathcart
Motion passes

Article 25. Shall the Town hold the 2027 Town Meeting at the Hardwick Elementary School or the Hardwick Town House?

Motion by Ken Blair
Seconded by Julie Theoret

Tess Martin spoke on behalf of the Town House Board and also noted her role with OSSDU. She thanked attendees for returning to the Town House and stated that the space has improved significantly. She outlined several reasons why she believes the Town House is a good location for town meeting.

Cheryl Michaels expressed appreciation for the building and said she enjoys having the meeting held at the Town House.

Ken Leslie, who is hearing impaired, stated that he was able to hear almost everything during the meeting.

Ann Gilcris said she likes the Town House but raised several concerns, including a cold breeze in the room, limited bathroom space, lack of food this year, fewer information tables in the lobby, and limited space for voting, stating that the space felt crowded.

Tyler Buswell observed that several people in the balcony area left due to space constraints and expressed concern about the building's capacity.

Kelly Notterman said she loves the Town House space and the voting setup, noted that parking was not an issue, and suggested having a runner with a microphone for the balcony.

Matt Renaud asked whether there might be an alternate location other than a school that could accommodate town meeting.

Lesa Cathcart said she likes the space but expressed concern about crowding during paper ballot votes, particularly in the event of a fire or emergency.

Norma Spaulding described the Town House as a beautiful space but said she prefers the school for town meeting because it allows more room to move around. She also said she missed having the budget displayed on a screen and noted the absence of food and informational tables.

Brenda Beaupre stated that she did not believe the Town House is wheelchair accessible.

Motion to call for vote by Lauren Honican
Seconded by Julie Theoret
Motion passes

Motion does not pass to move back to Hardwick Elementary School
Motion passes to keep Town Meeting at the Hardwick Town House

Article 26. Shall the Town exempt the property of the Hardwick Area Rescue Squad from taxation for a period of five (5) years in accordance with section 3840 of Title 32, VSA?

Motion by Robin Grant
Seconded by Ken Leslie
Motion passes unanimously

Article 27. Shall the Town exempt the property of the Caspian Lake Lodge Masonic Temple Association, Inc. from taxation for a period of five (5) years in accordance with section 3840 of Title 32, VSA?

Motion by Lesa Cathcart
Seconded by Paul Cillo
Motion passes

Article 28. Shall the Town exempt the property of the Caledonia Grange from taxation for a period of five (5) years in accordance with section 3840 of Title 32, VSA?

Motion by Robin Grant
Seconded by Walker Wright
Motion passes unanimously

Article 29. 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 Julie Theoret
Seconded by Robin Grant
Motion passed unanimously

Article 30. 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 Walker Wright
Seconded by Robin Grant
Motion passed unanimously

Article 31. To transact any other nonbinding business proper to be brought before said meeting.

Danielle Smith thanked Moderator Audrey Grant for her service in moderating the meeting.

Andrea Brightenback expressed gratitude for the opportunity to see democracy in action at the town meeting.

Harold McCoy applauded the Select Board for the town report and thanked them for mailing it to residents.

Emily Lanxner made a motion for a non-binding resolution stating: "We affirm our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people and for all people, and we oppose all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression. We declare ourselves an apartheid-free community and pledge to join others in working to end all support to Israel's apartheid regime, settler colonialism, and military occupation."

The motion was seconded by Will Fritch.

Karen Gates said she appreciated the discussion but felt that, since many residents had already left the meeting, the issue might be better placed on a future ballot so all voters could participate.

Will Fritch spoke in support of the resolution and offered reasons for its adoption.

Margaret Bledsoe stated that while she personally supports the principles expressed, she was concerned that the resolution could be divisive within the community and potentially alienate residents.

Non-Binding motion passes by hand count
Motion passes

Motion by Harold McCoy to adjourn
Seconded by Ben Notterman
Meeting adjourned at 3:16 pm

Minutes prepared and submitted by:



Tonia Chase, Town Clerk

Approved by:

