PUBLIC HEARING
HIGHWAY GARAGE BOND VOTE
6:00 P.M. THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2026
PARKER LADD COMMUNITY ROOM
193 NORTH MAIN STREET
AND VIA ZOOM

Select Board	**Others Present**	**Others Present**
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Chair	David Upson, Town Manager	See attached list
Shari Cornish, Vice Chair	Casey Rowell, Finance Director	
Tim Ricciardello	Danny Hale - *Zoom*	
Larry Fliegelman		
Derek Richardson -*absent*		

Public Hearing

6:04 P.M. Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Select Board Chair, called the Public Hearing to order.

6:05 P.M. Item #1 Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Select Board Chair, read the warning about the bond vote.

6:06 P.M. – 6:28 P.M. Item #2 Town Manager David Upson and the Select Board to talk about the need for the project, the design, and financial impact

Town Manager David Upson gave opening remarks emphasizing the importance of carefully evaluating proposed projects and making informed decisions that support the Town's long-term needs, future growth, and financial sustainability.

David clarified that the Highway Garage bond question is not included on the ballots mailed to voters by the State. Voters must request a separate absentee ballot from the Town Clerk or vote in person on Election Day. Paul Fixx asked whether voters could pick up a ballot and return it later, and it was confirmed that they could.

Town Manager David Upson reviewed a PowerPoint presentation outlining the proposed Highway Garage replacement project. The presentation included photographs of the existing facilities highlighting structural deterioration, space limitations, and other deficiencies. He reviewed the proposed building layout, site plans, and architectural renderings, including the additional space needed to accommodate equipment, storage, and daily operations. Although the presentation included information on the Fire Department and Hardwick Rescue, those portions were largely skipped to focus on the Highway Garage project being considered by voters. He also reviewed the estimated project costs and funding considerations associated with the proposed facility.

6:28 P.M. Public comment and questions

Paul Fixx asked several questions regarding the proposed project. He asked whether the bond term would be 20 or 30 years and was informed that it would be 30 years. He also asked what percentage of the site work costs Hardwick Rescue would be responsible for. It was explained that this is outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town and Hardwick Rescue, and a copy could be provided upon request.

Paul also asked whether the Town and Hardwick Rescue had considered what sharing operational costs after construction was completed would look like. While this has not been specifically addressed as of now, the MOU could be amended in the future to address ongoing operational expenses. The Town expressed confidence that both parties could reach a fair and mutually beneficial agreement regarding the operational costs of the shared space.

David shared that an informational flyer will be mailed next week ahead of the November 3 bond vote. If the bond does not pass, the Town intends to bring the proposal back to voters at Town Meeting. He explained that the project presents an opportunity for the Town to leverage FEMA funding and contributions from Hardwick Rescue toward the development of the entire Essential Services Complex. However, he emphasized that the upcoming bond vote is strictly for funding the Highway Garage portion of the project.

Denis Chase asked how long FEMA funding would remain available. David explained that the funds have not yet been obligated, but he meets regularly with FEMA regarding the potential relocation of the Fire Station. Once obligated, extensions are available as long as the Town demonstrates continued progress, so timing should not be an issue. FEMA has also requested an evaluation of whether the existing Fire Station can be dry floodproofed, despite the Town's understanding that it is not feasible.

Helen Beattie asked what would happen if the Town did not move forward with the project. David explained that repairs to the existing Highway Garage would likely cost several hundred thousand dollars and require borrowing based on current capital reserves. Alternatively, the Town could continue setting aside $30,000–$40,000 annually and complete repairs in phases as funding allows. However, he emphasized that the building has exceeded its expected useful life and will require significant repairs and ongoing maintenance if it remains in use.

Mary Hall of Hardwick Rescue Squad (HRS) explained that they have been working toward expanding their facility for the past three years, despite an immediate need for additional space. She noted that staff and volunteers currently have limited sleeping quarters with little privacy, and that a more inviting facility is important for recruiting and retaining members. HRS is raising its own funds for its portion of the project.

Paul Fixx added that the Hospital Association recently dissolved and donated its remaining funds to HRS in support of the expansion project, demonstrating community support for the effort.

Holly Williams asked about the use of local contractors for the project. David explained that the Town must follow its procurement policy when selecting contractors, but many contractors utilize local subcontractors. The Town tries to use local businesses whenever possible while remaining compliant with its procurement requirements.

Mary Gagnon expressed appreciation to HCTV, the Select Board, and the *Hardwick Gazette* for keeping residents informed, particularly those unable to attend meetings. She also acknowledged the Town's efforts to share information through platforms such as Front Porch Forum and encouraged residents to help spread the word.

Mary Gagnon also raised concerns about potential landslides and erosion due to the proposed buildings' proximity to a steep bank. David explained that drainage improvements and catch basins are planned, a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment is underway, and geotechnical borings will be conducted to evaluate groundwater conditions and soil composition. He emphasized that extensive due diligence will be completed before construction begins.

Grace Johnstone asked if we could mail the bond ballot to every voter. The Town Manager, along with the Town Clerk, explained that we did not meet the deadline to have it appear on the ballot that was mailed from the State. Voters have to either vote in person or request an absentee ballot specifically for the bond vote.

Rob Alcusky asked if the ballot could be mailed out with the flyer. We have already started receiving some ballots back, so we cannot.

Harry Besett asked about the construction timeline and coordination with Hardwick Rescue Squad (HRS) and the Fire Department. David explained that the new Highway Garage must be constructed before the existing garage can be demolished to make room for the HRS and Fire Department facilities. There is no temporary location available for the Highway Department, and daily operations must continue without interruption.

Finance Director Casey Rowell discussed the timing of the Vermont Bond Bank's financing cycles and explained that the Town's plan is to initially secure a Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) through a local bank, then pursue permanent financing through the Bond Bank when needed. The Town would incur interest expenses on the BAN during the interim period.

Shari Cornish commented that further delays could push construction into another season, potentially resulting in increased costs. She also noted that, similar to HRS, the Town needs to consider employee recruitment and retention, particularly with several Highway Department employees nearing retirement. She emphasized that the condition of the existing facility could make it difficult to attract new employees.

There was discussion regarding voter turnout. Town Clerk Tonia Chase indicated that the Town has approximately 2,300 registered voters, with typical turnout for Australian ballot voting at Town Meeting ranging from 300–400 voters. The importance of encouraging as many registered voters as possible to participate in the upcoming bond vote was emphasized by the Town Manager.

Paulette Brochu-Colburn reminded attendees of the importance of relocating the Fire Station, noting that this essential service becomes inaccessible during flooding events.

Joe Nudell asked whether the Town had considered the risk of locating all essential services in one area, particularly if a future flood or bridge failure made the facilities inaccessible from the other side of the river. Denis Chase explained that the Fire Department typically relocates its trucks to various locations throughout Town in anticipation of flooding to maintain accessibility. David added that the Town also has mutual aid agreements with surrounding communities that could be utilized in such situations.

Town Manager David Upson, with assistance from Finance Director Casey Rowell, discussed the anticipated bond payments and their impact on the Town's budget. The Town had expected the project to be further along in the current fiscal year (FY27) and included $150,000 in the budget for anticipated interest expenses. Since that payment will not be necessary this fiscal year, the funds will be added to the fund balance unless needed to cover other budget overruns.

Casey explained that budgeting for the anticipated debt payments in advance helps phase in the financial impact over multiple fiscal years, rather than having a significant increase in a single year. By including $150,000 in the

FY27 budget, the Town has already accounted for a portion of the future debt expense, resulting in a smaller budget increase to $280,000 in FY28 than if the entire amount had to be added at once.

The anticipated bond payments are as follows:

FY27: $150,000 (budgeted but not needed)
FY28: $280,000
FY29: $475,000 (first full principal and interest payment)
FY30 and beyond: Payments will decrease slightly each year.

Paul Fixx asked about the Town Clerk's office hours on the Monday before Election Day for voters wishing to obtain a ballot. Town Clerk Tonia Chase explained that the office will close at noon on Monday, November 2, to prepare for the election, with polls opening at 7:00 a.m. on Tuesday, November 3. Voters wishing to obtain a ballot in advance should do so before noon on November 2.

Paul also questioned the language in the official warning and why a Town Moderator was not required for the Special Town Meeting. It was explained that the meeting is solely for the purpose of voting by Australian ballot, with no floor discussion, so a Moderator is not necessary.

Town Manager David Upson concluded the discussion by referencing Hardwick's Municipal Plan and its goal "to ensure adequate facilities and services are available to protect and enhance the lives of the residents, visitors, and businesses of Hardwick." He tied this goal to the proposed Highway Garage project, emphasizing the importance of maintaining adequate facilities to support the Town's essential services and long-term needs.

7:17 P.M. With no further comments or questions, Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Select Board Chair, adjourned the public hearing.

Minutes taken by: _____
Casey Rowell, Finance Director

Minutes approved by: _____
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane, Select Board Chair

October 22, 2026 Highway Garage Bond Vote Pubic Hearing Attendees

Sally Anstey
Rob Alcusky
Dave Colburn
Paulette Brochu-Colburn
Michael Brochu
Denis Chase
Tonia Chase
Kris Schmitt
Mary Hall
Harry Besett
Diane Grenkow
Mary Tirpok
Michael Haveson
Norma Spaulding
Paul Fixx
Derek Williams
Mary Gagnon
Helen Beattie
Brendan Buckley
Holly Williams
Michael Lew-Smith
Lucian Avery
Brenda Beaupre
Tyler Molleur
Joe Nudell
Grace Johnstone
Tim Nisbet