

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 2, 2009, Shaftsbury Elementary School

Select Board Present: Chairman Lon McClintock, Wynn Metcalfe, Cinda Morse, Karen Mellinger, and Bill Pennebaker.

Moderator: Thomas Dailey

Others Present: Town Administrator Aaron Chrostowsky, Town Clerk Judy Stratton, Meeting Recording Secretary Susan Swasta, and approximately 120 Shaftsbury residents.

Moderator Dailey called the meeting to order at 7:36 PM and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance. He mentioned the difficult times, with troops serving overseas and tough economic conditions around the world. He asked everybody to reflect on how fortunate we are in this country to be able to assemble in this way. A moment of silence was observed for our servicemen and servicewomen, and for those around the world who don't enjoy liberty and freedom.

Moderator Dailey introduced Select Board members, Town Administrator Aarom Chrostowsky, Recording Secretary Susan Swasta, and Town Clerk Judy Stratton. He called Select Board Chairman Lon McClintock to the podium to make special recognitions.

Chairman McClintock thanked the following for special efforts this past year; the Highway Department for doing a great job on a tight budget, the Planning Commission (and especially Norman St.Onge) for the Town Plan revision, the Economic Development Committee for obtaining Shaftsbury's Village Center Designation, Water Department Head Joe Herrmann for the water improvement project, Bill Pennebaker for designing and building a methane remediation system at great savings to the Town, the Street Dance Committee for bringing people together and raising Cleveland Park funds, and Bucky Broomhall for contributions to the sport of cross country skiing.

Moderator Dailey announced that this is Boy Scout Town Meeting day, and asked scouts to stand and be recognized. They were given a round of applause.

Moderator Dailey said that usually State Representative Alice Miller gives a report at this time, but that she had a fall in Montpelier and is home recovering. He said that legislative reports and fliers are on the table by the door.

Moderator Dailey introduced Miss Eleanor B. Smith, who delivered an original essay that asked "where are we going from here?" and acknowledged the Supreme Source that fulfills all of our needs.

Moderator Dailey turned things over to Chairman McClintock for the Select Board presentation, accompanied by Power Point slides and a handout. Chairman McClintock began with a discussion of finances, stating that in preparing the budget the Select Board was committed to no increase or as small an increase as possible without deferring needed fire equipment and road and facilities maintenance. Overall expenditures increased 1.4% and taxes were increased 4.25%.

Fiscal year 2007-08 ended with a \$63,843 deficit. \$45,000 of the deficit was retired through budget adjustments in paving, calcium chloride, and the landfill fund, leaving \$18,843 to be covered by 2009-10 taxes. The Board was faced with a potential \$55,000 deficit for 2008-09 owing to increases in fuel and insurance costs and revenue losses due to state highway money cuts and decreased permit fee income. In response, they cut \$31,500 from the budget in the areas of reappraisal, calcium chloride, the landfill fund, subcontractor costs, and miscellaneous costs. \$23,500 may be needed to finish the year, and if necessary this will be raised next November in taxes. The problem will not be carried forward into future budgets.

Chairman McClintock stated that the decision has been made to change the Town's accounting method effective July 1, 2009, so that everything is accounted for in the correct fiscal year, with nothing carried forward. He reported that they are looking at projects for Federal stimulus grants. These include paving, brush cutting, Cole Hall renovations, water system improvements, and fire department needs.

Chairman McClintock reported that the Town received \$155,510 in grants in 2008-09. Required matches totaled \$37,208. He went over activities and achievements in the areas of solid waste, highways, parks, public safety, and facilities. Goals for 2009-10 include completion of the sidewalk and water improvement projects this summer, paving projects, Cole Hall repairs, a community garden and trail improvements at Howard Park, new playground equipment at Cleveland Park, and a facilities improvement plan.

Chairman McClintock discussed the 2009-10 budget, noting that they expect a 10% decrease in revenues due to cuts in state highway grants and fewer building permits. There will be cost increases in transfer station management, hazardous waste days, and health insurance. The Board has responded by level funding all appropriations and cutting them by 5%, keeping wages at the same level, changing the health insurance plan to limit cost increase, reducing zoning administrator and janitor hours, reducing reserve fund contributions, cutting Select Board stipends by 50%, and cutting \$15,000 in chloride expenditures. They also increased fees for transfer station access stickers and dog licenses, and raised the fees for towns participating in solid waste days.

Chairman McClintock went over the effect of the budget on the taxpayer. A \$150,000 property will see a tax increase from \$764 in 2008-09 to \$788 in 2009-10, at a tax rate of 0.5255. Chairman McClintock noted that many Shaftsbury taxpayers receive help in the form of tax prebates and rebates, and gave the average amounts received.

Moderator Dailey thanked Chairman McClintock for the presentation. He explained the process of discussion and making motions and amendments to motions for the next part of the meeting.

Moderator Dailey asked for a motion to allow him to dispense with reading of the Warning.

It was duly moved and seconded to dispense with the reading of the Warning. Motion passed by voice vote.

He proceeded to the articles.

Article 1. To hear the reports of the Town Officers and take action thereon.

It was duly moved and seconded to accept the reports as published.

Moderator Dailey went over several errors in the Town Report. In the ballot articles on pages 5-12 and 5-13: line #390 (Total Ballot Articles), which reads \$98,258 should be \$109,258; and line #462 (Total Amount To Be Raised By Taxes), which reads \$1,109,762, should be \$1,120,762. The Town Meeting minutes printed in the report are a draft instead of the final approved minutes which are available on the Town web site.

Motion to accept the reports as presented carried by voice vote.

Article 2. To Determine:

- A. Whether Selectboard members receive an annual stipend in the amount of \$500?**
- B. Whether Town Treasurer receives an annual stipend in the amount of \$16,000?**
- C. Whether Town Clerk receives an annual stipend in the amount of \$8,000.**
- D. Whether the Board of Listers receives an hourly rate of \$10.00?**
- E. What compensation, if any, shall be paid to all other elected Town Officers?**

It was duly moved and seconded to pay Selectboard members an annual stipend in the amount of \$500. Motion carried by voice vote.

Ellen Viereck moved and it was duly seconded to pay the Town Treasurer an annual stipend in the amount of \$16,000.

Eric Broderson asked what the salary had been last year, and was told it had been the same.

Motion pay the Town Treasurer an annual stipend in the amount of \$16,000 carried by voice vote.

It was duly moved and seconded to pay the Town Clerk an annual stipend in the amount of \$8,000. Motion carried by voice vote.

It was duly moved and seconded to pay the Board of Listers an hourly rate of \$10.00.

Michael Gardner asked if all the listers positions are filled. Chairman McClintock replied that one position is up for election. David Beech is not on the ballot.

Motion to pay the Board of Listers an hourly rate of \$10.00 carried by voice vote.

With regard to Article 2-E, Moderator Dailey noted that minimum wage is now \$8.06.

It was duly moved and seconded to pay all other elected Town Officers an hourly rate of \$8.06. Motion carried by voice vote.

Article 3. To Determine:

- A. Will the Town vote to have taxes collected by the Town Treasurer?**
- B. Will the Town vote to set the date for payment of taxes as Tuesday, November 10th, 2009, at 5:00 PM?**

It was duly moved and seconded to have taxes collected by the Town Treasurer with payment date of Tuesday, November 10, 2009, at 5:00 PM.

Michael Gardner asked what process would be necessary to hold Town Meeting closer to when people get their tax bills. Chairman McClintock replied that they would have to do their homework and look at statute law, so he cannot speculate at this point.

Motion to have taxes collected as specified carried by voice vote. (One opposed.)

Article 4. Shall the Town of Shaftsbury adopt the General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2009-2010?

It was duly moved and seconded to adopt the General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2009-2010.

Michael Gardner noted that Town employee salaries are frozen, but there is a 5% salary increase and 100% health care increase for Town Administrator. Chairman McClintock replied that they had studied Town Administrator salaries in Vermont and found that Shaftsbury is below the middle range. They want to hire someone capable. It's not certain that they will have to pay that much, but it was necessary to project upwards. The health care increase was made in case the new employee needs a family insurance plan.

A Shaftsbury resident asked if the landfill methane could be used for economic benefit. Mr. Pennebaker replied that the amount is too small by a factor of ten.

Barry Mayer asked about a Town-voted appropriation of \$2,550 on page 7-8. He was told that this is park maintenance, and is part of the general budget, rather than voted on by residents. Mr. Mayer asked about a 50% increase in poll workers' salary on page 5-4, line 14. Ms. Mellinger replied that the numbers for salaries and operating supplies were mistakenly flipped. Mr. Mayer asked why there are no numbers for salt, and Chairman McClintock replied that salt and sand are combined in one figure.

Mr. Mayer asked whether the report is reviewed, and whether there is enough time to do so, noting that some things don't add up. Chairman McClintock replied that it is the Select Board's responsibility to review the report. Moderator Dailey confirmed with Chairman McClintock that the budget process is open to the public, and that anyone may attend and have input. Moderator Dailey noted that it would be useful to have people show up for budget sessions.

Michael Gardner asked about expenditures for professional services on page 5-6, line 114. Chairman McClintock replied that there were consultants on the Town Administrator position and the accounting system. Mr. Gardner asked if the full amount needs to be allocated, and Chairman McClintock replied that it may need to include legal services, and they prefer to keep it at \$8,000.

Mr. Gardner asked about the sheriff's contract, saying that he thought it might support itself, but it shows a shortfall. Chairman McClintock replied that it is on track as budgeted, and that prior Boards did not expect the contract to pay for itself in fines. Ms. Mellinger added that grant funds had ended while costs had risen. Townspeople wanted coverage in rural areas for safety reasons, but this does not bring in revenues.

Mr. Gardner noted the importance of grant-writing ability for the Town Administrator position, and Chairman McClintock agreed. With reference to \$51,000 for nonprofits, Mr. Gardner asked if the Board feels it is appropriate to be compassionate with other people's money. Chairman

McClintock replied that this has been strongly supported by voters in the past. He noted that the Town gave \$400 to the Eakin Fund and got \$7,000 back.

Barbara Miller asked why the dump fee has gone from \$10 to \$20. Chairman McClintock replied that costs have gone up and the Board thought it was fairer to raise the access fee than the Pay As You Throw (PAYT) charge.

Eric Broderson asked about Cole Hall expenses, and how these benefit the taxpayer. Chairman McClintock replied that Cole Hall is the home of the Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Zoning Administrator, listers, and Town records. Mr. Broderson asked why nonprofits were not cut more than 5%, or eliminated entirely. Chairman McClintock replied that this is the first time they have been reduced in his memory. Ms. Morse and Ms. Mellinger stated that they have been reduced in the past. Ms. Mellinger added that townspeople may vote no.

Mr. Broderson asked if the sidewalk project should be postponed, and Ms. Mellinger replied that they have the money for it now. Chairman McClintock added that projects mean work for private contractors, and that the money has been allocated in reserve funds. Ms. Morse said that such projects also allow them to leverage money from the state. Restricted funds cannot be used for General Fund deficit reduction.

Tyler Resch called the question and it was duly seconded. Motion carried by voice vote. (One opposed.)

Motion to adopt the 2009-2010 General Fund budget as presented on Town Report pages 5-4 to 5-13 carried by voice vote. (Several opposed.)

Article 5. To transact any other business found proper when met.

Oliver Durand said that information on late penalties or discount for early payment of taxes was not included. Aaron Chrostowsky replied that the state sets the penalty, so they haven't included that for several years. There is no discount.

Francis Kinney spoke on the need to cut busing expenses, stating that it costs \$116,000 to bus 25% of the Town's students. Alissa Washburn replied that those 25% depend on buses to get their kids to school, and that the 75% should not be able to tell them what to do.

Larry Johnson stated that Wynn Metcalfe had suggested closing the transfer station, and asked if he had an amount of savings in mind. Mr. Metcalfe replied that he does not at this time. Chairman McClintock stated that the Fiscal Year 2008-09 \$44,000 management fee is not covered by access or PAYT fees. Mr. Johnson asked how many residents would be affected by a closing, and Chairman McClintock replied that 550-575 would be affected. Mr. Johnson asked if the Board would go forward with closing the transfer station without major input from residents, and Ms. Morse replied that they would get input. She added that it had been suggested that this be put on the ballot, but there was not enough time.

Mr. Johnson asked how many kids would be affected by ending busing. Mr. Kinney replied that it would be less than fifty. Mr. Johnson asked about future enrollment, and Mr. Kinney stated that it is headed down. There was further discussion of busing. Mr. Kinney asserted that the Central Office would work something out to see that kids get to school if busing were to be ended.

Tyler Resch said that the Town Report is especially nice this year. There was applause for Jim Meskun and the auditors.

Chris Williams spoke on Vermont Yankee power plant, stating that it provides 35% of our energy and that there needs to be a plan, since its license expires in 2012. He sees reasons to close it, but thinks perhaps the license should be extended 3-5 years as a transition. He would like to see more information and planning.

Eric Broderson asked if there is a way to reduce taxes for those who don't use school buses. Moderator Dailey replied that this is part of the general tax burden, not part of the Town's budgetary system.

Bob Sugarman stated that the school is part of Shaftsbury and that the majority should not cut off services to the minority. He spoke in favor of a sense of community.

Merton Snow thanked residents for last year's property tax exemption for the Grange. He asked the Town's support of \$950 for the Grange to deal with a lead paint problem that the state requires be corrected by this summer.

Eric Broderson stated that responsibility to the community also includes the responsibility to be frugal and conservative with money.

Larry Johnson commended Henri Billow's work as Town Treasurer.

Ellen Viereck moved and it was duly seconded to adjourn. Motion carried by voice vote.

Meeting adjourned at 9:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted

Susan M. Swasta, Recording Secretary