

Annual Town Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 5, 2007
Shaftsbury Elementary School
150 Buck Hill Road, Shaftsbury, Vermont

Select Board Present: Chairman Wynn Metcalfe, Cinda Morse, Jim Mead, 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 109 Shaftsbury residents

Moderator Dailey called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance. He observed that it is a real privilege to come out and meet for political reasons with no worry about lack of rights and liberties.

All observed a moment of silence in honor of our servicemen and servicewomen all over the world, as well as their families.

Moderator Dailey introduced Select Board members, Town Administrator Aaron Chrostowsky, Town Clerk Judy Stratton, and Recording Secretary Susan Swasta.

Miss Eleanor B. Smith presented a motivational essay she had written for Town Meeting. It was allegorical and focused on our potential as human beings.

Moderator Dailey invited Rep. Alice Miller to deliver her legislative report. She stated that she had introduced a resolution honoring the Mt. Anthony wrestling team on its 19th consecutive state championship title. She recognized wrestler Matt McVay, who won his individual weight class, and congratulated his Shaftsbury teammates who could not attend tonight.

Rep. Miller reported that Shaftsbury won nearly one million dollars in funding this year, and thanked the Select Board (especially Bill Pennebaker and Karen Mellinger) and Sen. Dick Sears for their efforts. Grants included \$330,000 to close the landfill, a \$249,000 sidewalk grant, and \$60,000 for a bio-diesel project on the Williamson farm. She reported on a meeting concerning the Route 7 detour that she attended with Selectman Jim Mead and Road Foreman Ron Daniels.

Rep. Miller reminded residents to fill out the Doyle survey, and asked everyone to give their opinion on the proposed Death with Dignity legislation on the back of the form. Anyone wanting legislative updates by email should write their email addresses on the Doyle poll. She also reminded residents to file their Homestead forms by April 15, and noted that there will not be prebate checks next year. Instead, the reduction will be deducted from the tax bill, saving on postage.

Rep. Miller summarized the work of the Appropriations Committee, on which she serves. She has never seen a tighter budget than this year's. A major unexpected expense was the five million dollars necessary to close the Bennington office building. They are trying to restore funding to the state police and to the juvenile restorative program.

Moderator Dailey introduced state senator Bob Hartwell, who delivered a legislative report. Sen. Hartwell is serving his first term and is on the Natural Resources and Energy Committee and the Senate Institutions Committee. He reported on a pending bill to address climate change, and on the situation with the Bennington state office building. They expect to have modulars in place by on the office building site by April so that all employees can return.

Sen. Hartwell described his work with Sen. Dick Sears on a bill offering cash credit to employers who hire

Vermonters. He discussed lack of funding for police and restorative justice programs and urged residents to express their views on the Death with Dignity legislation. He observed that high property taxes are probably the number one concern of Vermont residents. Sen. Hartwell encouraged people to contact him and thanked town residents for allowing him to address them.

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

Ed Colvin made motion and it was duly seconded to dispense with the reading of the Warning. Motion passed by voice vote.

Moderator Dailey went over the rules for Town Meeting, then proceeded to Article 1.

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

Mr. Colvin moved and it was duly seconded to accept the reports as published. Motion carried by voice vote.

Moderator Dailey introduced Select Board Chairman Wynn Metcalfe, who presented the Select Board "state of the town" report, accompanied by Powerpoint slides. Chairman Metcalfe recognized the following Shaftsbury volunteers for their services: Barbara Buxbaum, Florence Beebe, Ernie Harwood, Curt Merrow, all Board and Committee members, and the Shaftsbury Volunteer Fire Department.

Special recognition was given to Town Clerk Judy Stratton for 25 years of service and to Highway Foreman Ron Daniels for 10 years of service.

June White, a volunteer in the Town Office, was recognized for being an outstanding volunteer. June was honored this past year for donating over 4,000 hours of volunteer work in the local area. June received the Kevin Costin Recognition Award as well as the President's Call to Service Award in honor of her over 4,000 volunteer hours.

Chairman Metcalfe gave an overview for 2006-2007, highlighting activities of the Highway and Fire Departments, Policies and Procedures Committee, Economic Development Committee, Sidewalk Committee, and Solid Waste Committee. He noted the purchase of two new trucks and the sale of an old one by the Fire Department, and the implementation of the Fire Reimbursement Ordinance. He described Highway Department work on paving, guard rails, a box culvert, and Shaftsbury Hollow Road reconstruction, and noted truck purchases and contracting out of roadside mowing. A major effort has been the town road inventory, which is now 40% done.

The Policies and Procedures Committee implemented increased health insurance cost sharing and merit based employee evaluation. Chairman Metcalfe summarized the progress on sidewalks. He described the landfill closure and recognized the contributions of Selectman Bill Pennebaker, who saved the town a lot of money on the closure.

Chairman Metcalfe described long range plans that will be put in place for highways, equipment, and facilities. The town will be looking for volunteers to serve on committees in these areas. He outlined 2007-2008 goals and went over the budget, noting that this was the hardest budget he has ever worked on. Mr. Pennebaker reviewed a chart he had prepared on tax rate growth, which is at 3.3%. This will drop after the five year landfill closure loan is paid off.

Chairman Metcalfe went over the reasons for the budget increase. He noted that reserve funds were put in the actual budget to cover the fire truck payment. Lease payments were put in the highway budget, the landfill management fee has increased, postage and mailing costs are up, and money had to be budgeted for sheriffs because federal funding is gone. Because solid waste tonnage has decreased, it may be necessary to decrease the number of days per week that the landfill is open.

Andy Crosier asked why the Grand List only increased by \$20,000. Chairman Metcalfe explained that, due to errors in omissions because of lost buildings that were removed from the tax rolls, the list amount was reduced

by one million dollars. Mr. Crosier asked if all the new construction did not make up for losses, and Chairman Metcalfe replied that it did not.

Mr. Colvin asked what plans are for the town garage, which he called a “monstrosity.” He recommended moving it to the town landfill site. Chairman Metcalfe replied that the Facilities Committee will look at this.

Low Levin asked what the long-range plan is for the town dump. He has heard that it may be closed this summer and thinks residents should vote on any closure. Chairman Metcalfe replied that there is no long-range plan for the landfill and he can’t even suggest where the Select Board is heading on it at this point.

Mr. Crosier asked again about Grand List figures, and Chairman Metcalfe replied that he does not know the exact Grand List numbers but would be happy to research and get back to him. The List is an estimate, and the total amount is not set until August. Mr. Crosier asked if the grand list could go higher, and Chairman Metcalfe replied that he hopes it does.

Mr. Colvin recognized Town Lister Angie Abbatello for placing a historic marker at the Governor Jonas Galusha homestead on Route 7A at no expense to the town. This marker was dedicated by Governor Douglas. She supplied pictures of the event for the front of this year's town report.

Stating that the equipment swap with Bennington for road sweeping was “commendable,” Noel Cardiff asked why there had been no road sweeping in Paran Acres. Chairman Metcalfe replied that most sweeping had been done in intersections, and also in the village to prepare for the parade. He is not sure where the mileage came from. Chairman Metcalfe said most areas were not done, and that they are at the mercy of Bennington’s schedule. He will take Paran Acres under advisement.

Moderator Dailey asked if there were any other comments or corrections. There were none.

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

Article II. To Determine:

- A. Whether Selectboard members receive an annual stipend in the amount of \$1,000?**
- B. Whether Town Treasurer receives an annual stipend in the amount of \$15,000?**
- 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 \$7.53?**
- E. Whether the Board of Auditors receives an hourly rate of \$7.53?**
- F. Whether Ballot Clerks receive an hourly rate of \$7.53?**
- G. What compensation, if any, shall be paid to all other elected Town Officers?**
- H. Whether Planning Commission and Development Review Board members receive an annual stipend in the amount of \$100?**

Moderator Dailey noted that the amounts currently being paid are listed and that no increases are recommended. Under Item G, compensation to all other officers is minimum wage. He stated that they can go down through each item, or vote for all at once.

Mr. Colvin moved and Tyler Resch seconded to vote on all compensation amounts at once.
Motion carried by voice vote.

Mr. Colvin moved and Tyler Resch seconded to pay the amounts as set forth in Article 2. Motion carried by voice vote.

3. To Determine:

- A. Will the Town vote to have taxes collected by the Town Treasurer?**

Nancy Merritt moved and it was duly seconded to have taxes collected by the Town Treasurer. Motion carried by voice vote.

B. Will the Town vote to set the date for payment of taxes as Saturday, November 10th, 2007?

Treasurer Henri Billow stated that some people do not like to work on Saturday, and that Monday, November 12 is Veterans Day. She recommended changing the day to Tuesday, November 12, at midnight to correspond with the same date as Bennington and North Bennington.

Ms. Billow moved and it was duly seconded to amend Article 3, part B, to set the date for payment of taxes as Tuesday, November 13, 2007 by midnight. Amendment carried by voice vote.

Moderator Dailey asked for a vote on the main motion as amended.

Motion carried by voice vote.

4. Shall the Town of Shaftsbury adopt the General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2007-2008?

Ruth Levin moved and Tyler Resch seconded to adopt the General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2007-2008. Motion carried by voice vote.

5. Shall the Town of Shaftsbury adopt its budget by Australian ballot?

Zeke Cross moved and it was duly seconded to have the Town of Shaftsbury adopt its budget by Australian ballot.

David Adams asked if they hadn't just voted on the budget, and Moderator Dailey replied that this would be for next year. Barbara Bacchi stated that it is not worded properly on the ballot and is confusing. Chairman Metcalfe responded that the wording is from the state statute and must be put on the ballot exactly in those words.

Michael Bidy asked where the need for the change came from and stated that he values the institution of town meeting. Chairman Metcalfe replied that this has been discussed "forever," and the biggest issue is the people who can't be here tonight to vote. They can't vote by absentee ballot, so a fairly small group of people decide on a million dollar budget.

Several people stated they would not miss the Town Meeting and arrange their schedules accordingly. Comments centered around stating that many people who could attend the meeting choose not attend. Several people, including Andy Crosier, Ed Colvin, Alice Miller, and Ellen Viereck spoke in favor of keeping town meeting as it is. Mr. Colvin said he had changed his mind on the Australian ballot because he had found out that letters to the editor are edited, and this was to have been the means for people to express their opinions prior to voting.

Chairman Metcalfe noted that there would still be a meeting to explain the budget even if they went to Australian ballot. Jonathon Reese asked what typical turnout is for voting, as opposed to the turnout here. Chairman Metcalfe gave figures, which indicated that many more vote than attend town meeting. Kevin Bubriski stated that he had never seen the gymnasium as empty for town meeting as tonight. Barry Mayer asked if there would be a mechanism for people to hear about the budget, perhaps by mechanical means, if Australian ballot were adopted. People in Florida and Iraq can't be here.

Mr. Cardiff reminded people of the problem last year with not being able to vote on removing reserve funds from the budget because they were on the Australian ballot for the next day's voting. Voting the budget by Australian ballot would solve that problem. It would also mean our troops in Iraq would not be disenfranchised.

John Tiffany said that some people don't know they have to attend the meeting to vote on the budget. He also said that the gymnasium would not hold the crowd, and that people have walked away in the past because of crowding.

Mr. Levin stated that he had been the one who brought this up, and said he had wanted a Saturday town meeting and Australian ballot so that more people could attend. He feels they would be better informed for voting on the

budget. Karen Mellinger agreed with Mr. Levin that there are lots of people who can't be here. She said that 15% of residents vote on the budget, and 30% vote on Tuesday.

The question was moved and duly seconded. Motion to cease debate carried by voice vote.

The original motion to adopt the budget by Australian ballot was defeated by voice vote.

6. To transact any other business found proper when met.

School Board member Fran Kinney read a petition to the Shaftsbury School Board to move the 77 Shaftsbury students that currently go to the North Bennington School to the Shaftsbury School. He said this would increase enrollment in the school and decrease the tax burden for Shaftsbury residents. If the petition passes there will be a full town vote. Mr. Kinney stated that he has petitions if people are interested in signing.

Wendy Woods of Cross Hill Road read a resolution to withdraw the troops from Iraq, give them the care they need, and fully fund veterans' benefits.

Mr. Resch moved and Ellen Vierick seconded to approve the Article 7 resolution.

J.D. Palmer, and Ed Colvin spoke against the resolution, saying it is not an appropriate part of the town business to be discussed and transacted. Moderator Dailey stated that it is appropriate to discuss this issue under other business.

Chris Williams, Andy Schoerke, Andy Crosier, and Lew Levin spoke in favor of the resolution. Mr. Cardiff said that the resolution won't make a difference, and that people should write letters to their representatives. Ms. Woods thanked everyone for allowing her to bring the resolution, and stated that it will send a message to Washington. She said this is grass roots democracy.

Motion to approve the Article 7 resolution carried by voice vote.

Moderator Dailey reminded everyone that this is an advisory resolution only.

Mr. Colvin asked Rep. Miller about the new state septic law. She replied that it is to stop runoff and seepage into wells, but had no information on costs per family. Mr. Colvin described the effects of the law on individuals with septic systems, and said this is a very serious matter for a town with no sewer system.

He asked what is happening with the town sewer study, and whether the law will force the town to put in a sewer. Selectwoman Cinda Morse replied that the sewer study follow-up is expected soon and the report will be made in April. She noted that the Economic Development Committee has been raising the same questions as Mr. Colvin.

Mr. Kinney said that he had forgotten to give school enrollment figures, which he gave. Mr. Crosier asked if North Bennington would also have to approve the school plan, and Mr. Kinney said that they would. He did not agree with Mr. Crosier that North Bennington should be approached first.

Mr. Resch moved, it was duly seconded to adjourn. Motion carried by voice vote.

Meeting adjourned at 9:57PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan M. Swasta, Recording Secretary