

Town Meeting Day Informational Meeting Minutes

Saturday, February 19, 2022 at 10 am via Zoom + Town Hall

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), John Brabant (Member), Rick Kehne (Member), Marc Mihaly (Member), Gus Seelig (Moderator), Jeremy Weiss (Town Clerk), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer), Barbara Butler (Assistant Town Clerk), Jamie Moorby (Town Hall Host), Clif Emmons (Zoom Host), Rep. Janet Ancel, Carolyn Brennan, Craig Line, Ty Rolland, Chance Payette, Juanita Nunn, Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes), Tina Golon, Jonathan Fitch, ORCA Media, Fletcher Dean, Janice Ohlsson, Jessica Garretson, Betsy Parah, Ann Wheelock, William Powell, Nedene Martin, Jake Aho, Janna Clar, Tim Wheelock, Reenie De Geus, Paul Guare, James Dalley, Rick Winston, David Healy, Brian Basor, Peter Johnke, Sarah Gallagher, Wilson Hughes, Stephanie Kaplan, Anne Winchester, Rose Pelchuck, Margaret Bowen, Marianne Miller, David Schutz, Maggie Thomspson, Judy Fitch Robert, Meg Dawkins, John Rosenblum, Charles Storrow

1. Welcome: Gus Seelig, Moderator, explained that this is an informational meeting ahead of Town Meeting Day. Clif Emmons, Zoom Host, explained the webinar functions and reviewed how to raise your hand, write a question, join by phone if needed, and participate. This is a hybrid meeting, and there are some people attending in person at the Town Hall where Jamie Moorby and Selectboard member John Brabant are hosting. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Moderator and volunteers who have worked on making this hybrid session possible. She appreciated the service and dedication of retiring employees and officials: Treasurer Sandra Ferver, John Simanskas, who served as a cemetery commissioner for 43 years, Wilson Hughes for having served as town constable and animal control officer, Peg Bowen who served on the DRB for 35 years; and Katie Lane-Karnas as recording secretary.

Our new Town Clerk, Jeremy Weiss, welcomed everyone and introduced himself, and thanked Assistant Town Clerk & Treasurer Barbara Butler for her work getting the Town Report created and mailed. The Moderator added a thank you to former Town Clerk Judy Fitch Robert for her work as well.

2. Selectboard Highlights: The Chair discussed Selectboard highlights from the past year which are also further described in the Town Report. There are continuing challenges related to COVID which had the Board running uninterrupted hybrid meetings this past year; work was done to progress town wide installation of fiber optic high-speed internet; and the Board has been managing ARPA funds. As is the case nationwide, recruitment for employees is a challenge. All Board minutes are available on the website for the public to peruse.
3. State Representative Legislative Update: Rep. Janet Ancel thanked the presenters for making this hybrid meeting work as well as possible. She noted legislators are back in the statehouse full time for the first time in two years. All proceedings are also livestreamed and available on

Youtube; pandemic has taken transparency and participation to a new level with the use of technology. Redistricting, as of yesterday, is now at a final proposal stage, which leaves Calais in a district with Marshfield and Plainfield. The property tax rates and the \$100 million surplus in education is also being discussed. Rep. Ancel's committee is looking at what will happen with that money. She has been working on legislation on the child tax credit, which would be \$100 per child per month for 6 and under. This has passed the house and is in the senate and she emphasized the positive impact to children and families.

Regarding the education surplus, the governor made a proposal to make a rebate to individual taxpayers, but Rep. Ancel noted their committee is not interested in pursuing that. It goes to increase the yield, so that property tax rates go down. Rick Kehne commented about being careful not to put an inflated surplus into sources that will need to be funded further in the future; Rep. Ancel noted the Appropriations Committee is very careful not to build demands they cannot accommodate in the future. They are using financial forecasting to consider this to position us positively for when the economy inevitably sags again.

4. Article 1. *To elect a Moderator for the ensuing year.*
Article 2. *To elect the following town officials: Selectboard Member, 3- year term; Selectboard Member, 2-year term; Lister, 3- year term; Trustee of Public Funds, 3-year term; Cemetery Commissioner, 5-year term*
Article 3: *Shall the voters approve total highway and general fund expenditures of \$1,480,473 of which \$1,164,433 shall be raised by taxes and \$316,040 by non-tax revenue?*

Articles 1-3 were not discussed.

5. Article 4: *Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$42,500 for the operation and maintenance of the cemeteries?*

Fletcher Dean explained the Cemetery Budget request is significantly lower than usual because they may for the first time withdraw funds from their Endowment Fund to use for yearly budget expenses. (This fund reached an amount that now permits yearly withdrawal to save the taxpayers money.) The contractor requested an extra \$2500 for fuel, as gas costs spiked this year. This amount will be reviewed on an annual basis for budget development.

6. Article 5: *Shall the voters appropriate \$29,898 for the Kellogg Hubbard Library?*

Craig Line, KHL Trustee, appreciated the staff and directors of the KHL in rising to the occasion this past year, including home delivery, offsite delivery, Zoom events, and outdoor story times. The library has been level funded for the last four years, and staff salary and healthcare costs are the reason for the increased request this year. Director Carolyn Brennan shared a "year in review" and highlighted that reference questions have skyrocketed, there was a strong roster of programs and attendees, the building is being used as a public space for many reasons, and this spring will bring a strategic planning process. Marc Mihaly congratulated KHL for the way they handled the pandemic and thanked them for the East Calais Store drop off location. Trustee Craig Line explained that availability of COVID money made it a good time to move to a fine-free policy and that has been very enthusiastically

received and strengthens equitability. Rick Kehne echoed Marc Mihaly's full support for this budget and thanked Craig Line for his nine years of service as a trustee.

7. Article 6: *Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$28,444 as requested by the following organizations in the Calais and the Central Vermont area*

The Moderator explained that this was a request of 28 organizations. The Assistant Town Clerk noted this item is down \$1,566 from last year. New organizations were: Calais Historic Society, Community Harvest, and Our House of Central Vermont. Barbara Butler identified newly requesting organizations and increases and decreases in requested amounts.

Rick Winston, Montpelier Senior Center Advisory Council, noted that this organization has dealt with incredible obstacles due to COVID and has come through even stronger. Currently there are 50-60 Calais residents served by the MSAC and the request this year is level funded and is going to support affordable programs and services for central Vermonters.

8. Article 7. *Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Maple Corner Community Center, for a period of five years pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 3840?*
Article 8. *Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Calais Community Recreation Association, also doing business under the name Calais Recreation Association Inc., for a period of 5 years pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 3840?*
Article 9. *Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Aldrich Memorial Association, for a period of five years pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 3840?*
Article 10. *Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of Adamant Community Club Inc, for a period of five years pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 3840?*
Article 11. *Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Adamant Cooperative, Inc., for a period of five years pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 3840?*

There were no questions about articles 7-11.

9. Article 12. *Shall the voters authorize payment of property taxes in two equal installments, with the due date of the first installment on or before 4 pm on a date that falls not less than 30 days after the tax bills are mailed, but not earlier than September 1, 2022, and due date of the second installment shall be on or before 4 pm on Tuesday, November 15, 2022?*
Article 13. *Shall each property tax installment payment be made via one of the following options: 1) by delivery to the Treasurer by 4 pm on or before the due dates as set forth in Article 12; 2) by U.S. Postal Service, with postmark on or before the due dates as set forth in Article 12; or; 3) by credit card payment via www.calaisvermont.gov by 4 pm on or before the due dates as set forth in Article 12?*
Article 14. *Shall interest in the amount of 0.5% per month or any part of a month, be charged on unpaid taxes?*
Article 15. *Shall the Town allow an interest-free grace period of seven (7) calendar days following each due date as set forth in Article 12 during which no interest shall be charged?*
Article 16. *Shall a delinquent tax penalty be set at 3% of the total amount of the 2022 delinquent tax?*

Article 17. *Shall the town allow a penalty-free grace period of seven (7) calendar days after Tuesday, November 15, 2022, during which no delinquent tax penalty shall be charged?*

Article 18. *Shall the voters exempt business personal property from taxation pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §3849?*

The Moderator explained these articles are about how we collect taxes and handle delinquent taxes. Bill Powell asked if Article 18 is new. The Town Clerk explained that this has not appeared before on a warning, but has been in the law for a while. This article allows memorializing the practice that has already been in place in Calais and to make it clear going forward. The issue that arose and caused this article to be included was in looking for exemption for cable. The law goes back to the 1970s or 80s. John Brabant asked if this will allow exemption of school taxes and have a broader effect on reduction of school income. The Town Clerk noted the Town cannot exempt school taxes, so it wouldn't impact the school. He explained business personal property means all the things businesses use, like excavators, equipment, etc. Calais already exempts inventory as of 1982. Janice Ohlsson added that the Listers had a big discussion because they do not want to be the people who have to discover business personal property to keep on the books. The Planning Commission wants to be open to new businesses that occur in the area, and this article is supportive of business in our homes and employment in the area. The Town Attorney has been consulted as well.

10. Article 22. *Shall the town appropriate the sum of \$17,850 to the Woodbury Volunteer Fire Department for the Department's Truck Replacement Fund, paid July 1, 2022?*

Article 23. *Shall the town appropriate the sum of \$35,370 to fund the operation of Woodbury Volunteer Fire Department, paid in quarterly installments starting July 1, 2022?*

Article 24. *Shall the town appropriate the sum of \$31,000 to the Woodbury Volunteer Fire Department for the Department's Capital Replacement Fund, paid January 1, 2023?*

Woodbury Fire Department (Articles 22-24) were discussed by Fire Chief Chance Payette. Most of these articles have been in the warnings for years; there are two trucks that have three and four payments remaining, respectively. The article in the amount of approx. \$17,000 is going to be a cost savings once these two loans are eliminated. There was a minor increase in appropriations reflecting surging costs during pandemic. Capital replacement fund was created a few years ago as part of a planning process and is currently used for self-contained breathing apparatus and to pay for future trucks. The Chief invited folks to stop by the station to visit any of the equipment. Rick Kehne inquired about how long it will take to get the replacement fund to a stable place. The Chief does expect that once the \$17K loan payments are complete, the capital replacement fund should be how the Dept. moves forward.

Craig Line asks if other communities in addition to Woodbury and Calais fund WVFD. The Chief responded that no, no other towns do fund services. John Brabant pointed out EMFD also has an ambulance service and there are other participating towns for direct funding of the ambulance service (Plainfield and Marshfield). Tim Wheelock asked if any federal funds are available for fire/ambulance, and Chief Payette explained that this is different year to year, as it is very specific to how it can be used. There is nothing available at this time.

11. Article 19. *Shall the town appropriate the sum \$62,837 to fund the operation of the East Montpelier Fire Department, paid in quarterly installments starting July 1, 2022?*

Article 20. *Shall the town appropriate the sum \$121,083 to fund the operation of the East Montpelier Ambulance, paid in quarterly installments starting July 1, 2022?*

Article 21. *Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to borrow an amount not to exceed \$66,667, for a term not to exceed five years, for the purchase of a fire engine truck for the East Montpelier Fire Department?*

Article 19-21 are for East Montpelier Fire Department (EMFD). The Chair thanked EMFD for their work. Chief Ty Rolland explained that this year's fire and ambulance budgets were able to stay close to level-funded, with this being the final of three years' planned increase for staffing. This has been a busy start to the year in terms of calls. Article 21 is to replace an almost 28-year-old fire truck; this is split proportionally by Calais and East Montpelier, with EMFD paying half the total cost out of their capital equipment fund. Unfortunately, there are not grants for paying for trucks. Rick Kehne thanked the EMFD and appreciated the good planning on EMFD's part to be ready to pay for half the cost of the replacement truck.

12. Article 25. *Shall the town appropriate the sum of \$20,000 to replace fencing in the Robinson and Old West Church cemeteries?*

Article 25 asks for funds to replace cemetery fencing. Nick Emlen asked if there is any discussion about removing fencing altogether? Fletcher Dean thanked John Simankas for his work on the Cemetery Commission for so many years. He explained Old West Church and Robinson Cemeteries are both in historic districts. Once you get past the initial expense of fence installation, there is no more maintenance for chain fencing but quite a lot for wood fencing. Wood fencing must be maintained every five years and replaced every ten. We live in different times than when neighbors used to come out and maintain wooden fencing together. The Design Advisory Board met with Cemetery Commission this past fall after Cemetery Commission took the eyesore boards down; the DAB indicated that in historic districts, the exact same materials in the original construction must be used. So, Cemetery Commission decided to ask the Town to make the decision about how to move forward and how to fund it.

John Brabant asked if granite posts could replace any random wood posts, and are pressure treated boards permitted to use; Fletcher Dean couldn't answer that. Juanita Nunn added that DAB requested to keep wood; replacement of wood with granite posts did not come up in conversation at that time. Stephanie Kaplan commented as a member of the Development Review Board, and the Zoning Regulations say specifically that the DAB is advisory to the DRB and doesn't have authority to require anything, unless something doesn't need DRB approval. DRB shall review all landscape alterations, including fencing; this should have gone to DRB with the advice of the DAB. Since we cannot amend the articles, what is the \$25,000 supposed to cover, and what is the plan for future maintenance? Fletcher Dean wasn't sure about the workings of the regulatory boards, and the DAB suggested there may be fund from other sources. He commented that the \$25K is a conservative estimate provided by the sexton for initial replacement only, and does not include maintenance. Craig Line pointed out the DAB must meet the Open Meeting Law requirements in hosting any meeting on this historic district project and outlined that process.

Rose Pelchuck agreed with Craig Line's comments, that there is a procedural issue here and she would be in favor of having the proper procedure gone through with recommendations

from DAB going to DRB with warned public hearings. Juanita Nunn also asked about the procedures, and what the next step for the Cemetery Commission would be. Stephanie Kaplan agreed with Craig Line's outline of the DAB's procedure in discussing cemetery fencing. She provided sections of the Calais Zoning Regulations that specify these details.

13. Article 26. *Shall the Town of Calais inform and provide notice to its residents when sources of radiation, such as, but not limited to, that generated by cell towers/transmitters, WIFI tower transmitters and 5G antennas, are being proposed for licensing and installation within the town limits?*

John Brabant commented that he was the member who brought this initiative to the Selectboard. Radio transmission proposed within our town borders would, if passed, require the town to notice all residents, possibly on Front Porch Forum or the Town website. 5G technology has been a "streamlined process" with no state law notice beyond the Town Clerk's office and the landowner who owns the land where a pole is to be located. This article is advisory in nature, and prompts the Selectboard to provide notice to the Town so folks would know when these projects are being proposed in Town. Hardwick and other towns have similarly warned articles as well. Currently, written notice is given by the developer to the Town Office. Rick Kehne inquired if an appeal process exists. John Brabant noted that the developers of these microcells usually choose the Act 250 process over the public utility process (which would involve neighbor notification). Act 250 results in zero public process because it has zero jurisdiction over poles at this height. John Brabant noted his frustration about this situation and that the article aims to at least notify the public. Rep. Ancel commented that as she understands it, there are obstacles in federal law and limits that Congress has put on state review.

14. Voting Process: The Assistant Town Clerk explained the process for voting and casting ballots. She recommended mailing ballots by Monday, February 21, or deliver your ballots to the secured drop box outside the enclosed mudroom, available 24/7, or, vote in person on Tuesday March 1, 2022 at Calais Elementary School from 7am-7pm.

15. Candidate Forum: Selectboard candidate Tina Golum thanked the group for the informational meeting and introduced herself. Her background is in housing over the last 19 years, and she has lived in Calais almost all of her life. She highlighted affordable housing, internet, and home heating and electric services. Selectboard candidate Jonathan Fitch introduced himself. He grew up in Calais and studied art and design and then worked as an industrial designer in New York. He noted serving on the Selectboard could be a growth opportunity for him, and he is confused about the vision of Town and the decisions we seem to be making. He wondered about cell phone service in Calais and whether the Town is blocking improvements. Incumbent Selectboard candidate John Brabant welcomed the other candidates. He noted that in his role on the Board, he has stepped up to challenges and made his decisions with the Town's best interests in mind. He reminded that fiber optic, superior to all other communications means, is fully supported by the Selectboard who has been working to allocate ARPA funds to the effort as the Town itself is in dire need of high speed internet to improve and allow for full functionality of our Town Office. He thanked the voters for their support.

16. Sharon Winn Fannon thanked the three candidates running for Selectboard. Our small town governments run on volunteers, and the sustainability of our values as small towns relies on people stepping forward. She extended her thanks to all of those volunteering. The Chair thanked everyone running for office and that we really need folks to serve on the various boards and commissions, and there are openings on many groups that are rewarding.

17. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: None.

18. Conclusion: The meeting was concluded at 12:11 pm.

Date: 2/20/2022 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas
Approved by the Selectboard at the DATE meeting