

## **Minutes, Landgrove Annual Town Meeting March 4, 2024** **6pm 88 Landgrove Road, Landgrove, Vermont.**

Steve Hall called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm, and Greg Eckhardt led the town in the Pledge of Allegiance. Clerk Chrystal Cleary read the voter checklist.

**Article 1: To elect a Moderator for the ensuing year.** Moved by Jeff Cleary, Seconded by Michael Jeffery. Claudia Harris is nominated by Michael Jeffery, and there is no other candidate, so Steve Hall directs the Clerk to cast one ballot for Claudia Harris to serve as Moderator.

Claudia Harris reminds us all of the process and rules of order, and the body grants several Guests a moment to speak to all.

Representative **Mike Rice:** The state House of Representatives passed a FY24 budget adjustment, to include flood impact funds. With regard to the education funding formula: pandemic funds are disappearing, aging buildings require maintenance/replacement, health care costs for staff, and student support costs are increasing, so the state legislature is discussing how to adjust and improve that formula. Mike believes in supporting our schools, to give our kids the best education possible, but also recognizes that the tax rates proposed are unsustainable. "Your Taconic & Green school district did a phenomenal job creating a responsible budget." The legislature is also working on ACT 250 reform to support housing development, while continuing to protect forests from fragmentation. Mr. Rice's Committee work is largely on agriculture, forestry, food resiliency, including a bill to promote on-farm direct to consumer sales, promote pollinator health, and outdoor recreation.

**Martina Barnes & Stacy Stratton** - USFS rangers- oversee southern section of the GMNF. They left a map of areas for upcoming planned timber harvests, recreation, wildlife and timber management projects. The rangers are working with the folks from the Velomont Trail - a mountain bike trail that colocates in our area with the Catamount XC Trail- to iron out location details for that trail. The Forest Service seeks to create wildlife habitat openings in the forest, exposed to sunlight, including apple tree release via selective cuts, pruning and prescribed fire (but not in Landgrove). The timber sale areas will create more early successional habitat for migrating birds, mostly in the northern part of Landgrove. Up on the Danby - Mt Tabor Road, timber jobs will be happening over the next few years, depending on how good a freeze we get suitable for logging. FR 10 has been repaired from flood damage with new culverts and guardrails.

**Liam Elio** - Mountain Towns Recreation Director - Mr Elio serves all 5 towns, with adult rec/other youth recreation. He has a new website [www.mountaintownsrecreation.org](http://www.mountaintownsrecreation.org) and left a QR code to a survey to find out more.

**Jacob Dombrowski** - Program Assistant with the Collaborative. Mr Dombroski responded to questions about the reasons for the increase in appropriations this year. He described the increase in programming from Fall-Winter only to now also include Spring and Summer programs for kids and the expansion of offerings for the Refuse to Use program.

**Article 2: To elect the following officers as required by law:**

Office	Term length	Candidate	Nominated by
Town Clerk	1 year	Chrystal Cleary	Michael Jeffery
Town Treasurer	1 year	Andrea Ogden	Susan Lenox
Select Board Member 1 (2027)	3 years	Steve Hall	Susan Lenox
Select Board Member 2 (2025)	1 year	Will Reed	Michael Jeffery
Lister	3 years	Blair McCaw	Michael Jeffery
Auditor	3 years	None	
Cemetery Commissioner	5 years	Jillian Joyce	Will Reed
Collector of Delinquent Taxes	1 year	Susan Lenox	Andrea Ogden
Grand Juror	1 year	Claudia Harris	Chrystal Cleary
Constable	1 year	John Wiley, Jr.	Jeff Cleary
Trustee of Public Funds	3 years	Sally Waite	Andrea Ogden

**Article 3: To hear the reports of Town Officers and take action on the Auditors' Report. Moved by Jeff Cleary, Seconded by Michael Jeffery.**

Discussion: Steve Hall related the many ways we are missing John Ogden. Everything he used to do for the community is missed. We also miss Bobby Waite who served the Town for many years. He thanked Will Reed for coming in to serve and getting up to speed quickly.

Permitting for our new town sand shed and site development concepts are moving ahead, starting this spring to restore wetlands where the sandpile used to be.

The Town is purchasing a new plow truck, attempts to purchase a used one were not feasible. Steve encouraged people to report poor road conditions, though mud season is always tough. He invited anyone to come to SB 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 8:00am.

**Michael Jeffery, Select Board** - The sand shed was an unsolvable problem for 40 years, led by John Ogden's tenacity and the commitment of Tom Checchia, and appreciation for Karl Pfister and the Snyders to grant the town a Right of Way for access to the parcel, but we finally got the access road put in. No structure construction will happen this year. It will cost \$500,000- \$600,000 for buildings to house vehicles, so the Select Board is working on grants to find out how much we then need from the state bond bank for the rest. A Bond will require a town vote.

**Andrea Ogden, Treasurer** - We've been going through a professional audit in anticipation of applying to the bond bank, the independent auditor have given a stamp of approval that the past year's books are good, and there should be no problem toward participating in the state bond program.

**Greg Eckhardt** - under "COSTS" p 34 Does the Unallocated Reserve Fund cover the costs of the sand shed?

**Andrea Ogden** - The costs are split by year- some are in 2023, and some in 2024. The site clearing was done in December 2023 but was paid for in January 2024, so you are only seeing 2023 in the Annual Report. The SB will have to decide if the Unallocated Reserve Fund (URF) will be refilled or not when we apply to the bond for actual construction.

**Michael Jeffery** - The URF historically accumulated too much money over many years, the surplus funds were used to complete Stage 1 of the sand relocation site process. When we look at construction, bond financing, and grants, we need to determine how much is needed to bring the URF back to a feeling that is comfortable. There is a cash flow issue between when money is paid out all year, but we don't collect tax revenue until October. Some money in reserve is needed to sustain outflows until taxes are collected.

**Jim Swartzentruber**- Thanks the Road Commissioner and Crew for their work this summer to repair roads and restore ingress/egress for residents during the flooding.

**Ben Freeman- our representative to the Taconic & Green School District:** Education spending at the state level has been quite a mess, but our District (BRSU) may even be looking at a decrease in spending but an increase in the tax level due to Landgrove's Common Level of Appraisal, which is a significant part of the formula to calculate the education tax. Coming through the pandemic all the towns' CLAs went very high due to the high prices of sales that happened, throwing the CLA into disarray because the CLA indicates that all our properties are under-assessed compared to sale prices.

Per pupil spending is very, very conservative in T&G. We have an excellent business manager and superintendent, a new middle school is being discussed. The School District annual report can be viewed online and a few copies are in the Town Office.

**Greg Eckhardt, Cemetery Commission:** Thanks to Dick Adams for holding us together, Jonathan Bigelow has been working hard, thanks to Mat Degan and to Jillian Joyce for stepping in to the Commission. We updated the bylaws- they will be on the website. Please reach out to the Cemetery Commission and ask a ton of questions now so you don't have to later in a difficult time.

Approve: Mary Licata, 2nd Michael Jeffery. Article 3 is approved.

**Article 4 :** To see if the Town shall authorize its Select Board to apply any surplus or unanticipated funds toward the proposed budget? Moved by Jeff Cleary, seconded by Susan Lenox. Motion to approve- Michael Jeffery, seconded by Mary Licata. Article 4 is approved.

**Article 5: Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes on October 1, 2024 by delivery to town hall postmarked on or before that date?** Moved by Jeff Cleary, Seconded by Michael Jeffery.

**Andrea Ogden** - Reminds everyone about paying taxes on time and that it may be helpful to use our online payment which sends you an email confirmation that your payment was made. Please don't

forget if you are not filing taxes on April 15 and get an extension, the Homestead Declaration IS due April 15th anyway. Don't get penalized.

Motion to approve: Jeff Cleary, seconded by Michael Jeffery. Article 5 is passed.

**Article 6: Shall the Town raise the budgeted monies necessary to pay Town expenses and obligations detailed in the Town Report for the 2024 year?** Moved by Susan Lenox, seconded by Jeff Cleary.

Discussion-

**Greg Eckhardt:** Please explain the emergency reserve fund of \$27K- on page 16.

**Andrea Ogden** - This is the seed money that the Select Board has allocated to bridge the money we need to pay for emergency work due to weather events that otherwise eat up the Roads Budget in one swoop. **Michael Jeffery** - This fund will ease cash flow struggles between having to pay for emergency work and the time the grants come in, sometimes a year later.

**Mat Degan** - On page 15, row 77- what is the \$6800 miscellaneous expense?

**Andrea Ogden** - That paid for a consultant for the required Hazard Mitigation Plan, and will be repaid by the grant. You have to have a HMP in order to be eligible for FEMA grants. **Susan Lenox** - the draft HMP is in the office on the counter and on the website.

**Greg Eckhardt:** Please clarify the fire truck fund on pg 24?

**Steve Hall:** Traditionally we make an annual \$3000 appropriation to the Londonderry FD that serves our area. Outside of that regular funding, they ask for \$40K for our share of a fire truck, so we're building a preparatory system to be ready for these fire truck asks, estimating when they will come up based on the typical cycle of fire truck lifespan. Motion to approve: Jeff Cleary, seconded by Michael Jeffery. Article 6 is approved.

**Article 7: Shall the voters of Landgrove approve an increase in the annual community appropriation to The Collaborative from \$750 to \$1,250?** Moved by Jeff Cleary, seconded by Mary Licata

Discussion:

**Michael Jeffery** would like to make a point that while the actual amount is not high he feels concerned that the percent is high, and does not approve of that level of increase. Harry Lux responds that his son has been a participant in the Collaborative's programs and \$500 is a pittance, that the % is just statistics. **Ryan Foster** asks when the last time the Collaborative asked for an increase? Andrea answers not since at least 2019 (\*subsequent deeper research into past Town Reports indicates that the Collaborative has not asked for an increase since 2013). Jeff Cleary moves to approve the Article, Harry Lux seconds. The article carries.

**Article 8: To transact any other non-binding business proper to come before said meeting, not acted upon in the preceding articles?** Moved by Greg Eckhardt, seconded by Will Reed.

**Greg Eckhardt** - Asks what action has been taken since he asked the Select Board in 2022 about hiring an Animal Control Officer?

**Steve Hall** - We met with the local ACO used by other area towns, and evaluated our needs. The

Select Board put into place an in-town animal control process (on the Town Website) and created a Dog Ordinance.

**Susan Lenox** - Described the due diligence pursued and notes that we have a wetlands restoration permit, we have to follow recommendations of project partners Fish & Wildlife and Trout Unlimited.

Moved by Michael Jeffery, seconded by Mary Licata. Article 8 passes.

**Article 9: Shall the Town agree to meet in 2025 on the first Monday before the first Tuesday in March (March 3, 2025) at 6pm for the annual Town Meeting?** Moved by Will Reed, Seconded by Jeff Cleary. Motion to approve: Mary Licata, Michael Jeffery seconded. Article 9 is approved.

Motion to Adjourn: Jeff Cleary, seconded by Mat Degan.

Meeting is adjourned at 7:47 PM

Dated this 4th day of March, 2024  
by Chrystal Cleary, Town Clerk