

TOWN of LANDGROVE Minutes 2020 Annual Town Meeting

Call to order at 6:02 PM

Chrystal Cleary read the voter checklist and took the roll.

Lynn Eckhardt led the town in the pledge of allegiance to open Town Meeting, and all were welcomed by Selectboard Chair John Ogden who read the first article. Lynn E. thanked Chrystal and Jeff Cleary for designing a beautiful town report.

ARTICLE 1: To elect a Moderator for the ensuing year. Claudia Harris was nominated by John Ogden, and approved by the voters. Claudia went over rules, and asked non-voters to introduce themselves.

Lucy Bolognese from the Collaborative spoke about the collaborative mission, then our state senator Brian Champion highlighted issues in the senate, including bills about the minimum wage, Act 250 revisions, a bill to encourage consolidation in downtowns to combat sprawl. There's also an agriculture bill, Bennington County as a Food Hub, carbon sequestration, transition farmers, prescription drug costs, maximizing out of pocket costs for insulin. Firearm regulations are being resubmitted after the Governor's veto.

A motion to table **ARTICLES 2, 3 & 4** and hear the Officers' reports (**ARTICLE 5**) was moved and advanced. Selectboard member Michael Jeffery presented findings on Town Financials and handed out a packet of revised accounting tables, since the Town Report was published.

ARTICLE 5: To hear the reports of Town Officers and take proper action on the Auditors' report. Moved by Lynn Eckhardt. Selectboard member Michael Jeffery reported that the Town collected just over \$74K more in taxes than budgeted, because the tax rate numbers applied by the treasurer were incorrect: the roads budget portion was assessed at .2455 instead of .1739. The overage has been rolled into the next year's budget and was an error of transposition of numbers.

The next issue was one of presentation, but did not affect the taxes collected or budget. Balance sheet had not been reconciled to the income statement. The correction is reflected in the handout.

The last finding under review was that the Town's account has been accumulating a surplus over at least the last 8 years and multiple treasurers of more than \$250,000 in the operating account, which has been moved to the unallocated reserve fund. The Selectboard proposes using some of this toward the sand shed and vehicle purchases coming up soon. Future surpluses will be rolled into the next year's budget and tax rates will be adjusted for any surplus.

Remedial steps: The Selectboard is considering hiring a professional auditor to review all financials, the annual report, and tax rate at intervals going forward, as well as an annual cash flow statement reflecting town spend against revenue and quarterly reconciliation of the balance sheet and income statement. The Board also recommends the appointment of an Assistant Town Treasurer/Assistant Clerk who can be trained and available for election someday into either office. (Assistant Treasurer/Clerks are appointed by the Treasurer and Clerk.)

Discussion:

Mary English- asks for clarification on the \$250,000 fund. The Selectboard replies that this is the excess amount. Over the years, any surplus was just left to build up in that account. (underspend or overtax.) A rainy day fund is a good idea, many towns have them, but this (12%) is too much. 6 or 7% is more appropriate for other towns' best practices. SB will keep that at 6-7% and sweep the extra into reducing the next year's burden. This overage was showing in the operating account each year's Town Report, but it can be hard to see or understand. Virginia LaPrade asked if saving the excess is needed in case a family with lots of kids moved in and we owed more to the education budget? Selectboard Chair John Ogden replies that we aren't affected by that any more since we joined the merged School District.

Greg Eckhardt asked if it is the SB positions that the way we are doing this now is the right way, or are there other programs, such as NEMRC, that would prevent this? Michael says Quickbooks is fine, it was a manual error, and training must be emphasized for Treasurers going forward.

School Director Ben Freeman thanked previous School Director Jeff Cleary for his service last year. At the District meeting in Dorset last week, he learned that the school district budget will increase 4% due to an increase in high school enrollment and health care costs.

Road Commissioner Steve Hall reports that repairs have been done to 90% of the damage from the April 15th storm. Some resurfacing will take place in the spring. Roads budget overages are expected to be covered by FEMA grants, just not in this fiscal year. Cody Road was resurfaced last summer to help with Mud Season. Tarpley got ditched and resurfaced. Nichols Road received ditching & resurfacing, noting that it does help with potholes and mud season if the roads drain well. Plowing snow is a lot easier for Jay to keep up with, vs the ice events we are having lately. Cameron has been helping get to smaller back roads sooner, as well as in times when our town truck goes down with repairs. Road restrictions are posted and in effect now until April 15th- trucking companies have been notified that they are not allowed. Passage of ARTICLE 5 is moved by Jay Snyder, and the article passes.

Johnathan Bigelow moved to consider **ARTICLE 8**, seconded by Chuck Sweetman

ARTICLE 8: To see if the Town will vote to enter into a communications union district (CUD) to be known as Southern Vermont Communications Union District, under the provisions of 30 VSA Ch 82? The Article is moved by Mary English

Discussion: Mr. Eric Hatch described how a communication union district allows towns to group together to arrange internet service. This has worked before in Vermont. 27 towns got together, hired an ISP and a construction company to provide fiber optic service to their towns and become self-funding. Step 1 is for towns to decide to join up to investigate first. Then a representative from each town will be appointed to the board, which will organize a feasibility study and a business plan to determine what it costs and how to raise it. Tax revenues are not allowed to go into the CUD, so it costs the town nothing, it is funded by State and USDA grants. As a municipal entity, the CUD could also raise bonds for the upfront costs for infrastructure. As it progresses and matures, there will be a monthly revenue stream from subscribers. Rather than pay, for example, Comcast, you would pay the CUD, which is local.

The CUD would be looking for 5-6 customers per mile on average vs the big companies who require 20+ customers per mile. World class fiber, speed 100's of gigabits per minute up- and down-loaded. Kimberly Eckhardt asked: Would this guarantee every home would be eligible for service? Eventually, yes. Your representative will advocate for that. Will Reed calls the question to end debate, which is upheld by the voters, and *ARTICLE 8 passes*.

ARTICLE 2, "Shall the term of the office of Town Clerk be changed from 1 year to 3 years?" is opened for discussion. Mary English asked: where did this come from? Articles 2, 3 and 7 originated from citizen petitions. Chuck Sweetman states that we have 3 year terms for Listers, Selectboard, etc. and recommends a Yes vote. John Ogden reminds the voters that there are no other controls over these positions, you can only vote them out next time. Chuck states that he believes the voters can recall them. Priscilla Grayson says that the Clerk and Treasurer tend to hold office for a long time, regardless of term.

Will article three pass Clerk to 3 years? Voice vote is unclear, so paper ballots are called for: Ayes- 19 Nays- 21 *Article 2 does not pass*.

ARTICLE 3 – To extend the Term of the office of the Treasurer from 1 to 3 years. Sally moves to discuss. Michael Jeffery offers that this role is even more important than Clerk with regard to expertise to do the job. The number of years could tie the hands of the Town, putting the Town at risk. John Ogden says it's not

onerous to vote every year and it's a good safeguard. Harry Lux stated that with controls, oversight and support, the right person could grow into a long term Treasurer. Michael Jeffery reminded the meeting that this Article is not about individuals, it's the office. Greg calls the question, 2/3 vote to end debate and vote. Debate closes. John Ogden moved to vote- *Article 3 does not pass.*

ARTICLE 4: To elect town officers as required by law. (See table below)

officer	term	candidate	Nominated by
Town Clerk	1 year	Chrystal Cleary	Greg Eckhardt, Michael
Town Treasurer	1 year	Kimberly Eckhardt	Greg Eckhardt, Chuck Sweetmabn
	1 year	Andrea Ogden * voted in	Sally Waite, Bobby Waite
Selectboard Member	3 years	Michael Jeffery	Sally Waite, Kathy Snyder
Auditor	3 years	Tove Stigum	Mary English, Ben Freeman
Lister	3 years	Kimberly Eckhardt	Chuck Sweetman, Kathy Snyder
Cemetery Commissioner	5 year	Richard Adams	Clarence Nichols, Lynn Eckhardt
Collector of Delinquent Taxes	1 year	Kimberly Eckhardt	Michael Jeffery, (missing)
Grand Juror	1 year	Claudia Harris	Lynn Eckhardt, Michael Jeffery
Town Agent	1 year	John Hadden	John Ogden, Dana McNair
Constable	1 year	John Wiley, Jr.	Kathy Snyder, Dana McNair
Trustee of Public Funds	3 years	Andrea Ogden	Lynn Eckhardt, Peter Thompson

ARTICLE 6: To see if the Town will authorize its Selectboard to apply any surplus or unanticipated funds toward the proposed budget. Moved: Jay Snyder. No discussion. Motion to Approve: Sally Waite. *Article 6 passes.*

ARTICLE 7: To see whether the Town will appropriate \$7,000 one time funding to the Cemetery Commission to clear the trees, brush and stumps from outside the walls of the Old Cemetery (leaving the old maples) and seed the ground.

Moved: John Bigelow. Discussion: It cleans up and improves visibility (view of Leurich Field) Lynn Eckhardt states that we've done a lot of work straightening the stones and are proud of our cemeteries, time to make the old one wonderful too. Motion to Approve: Sally Waite. *Article 7 passes*

ARTICLE 9: To see if the Town will vote to pay its taxes on real and personal property on or before October 1, 2019. Moved: Kathy Snyder, there is no discussion. Motion to Approve: Will Reed, and *Article 9 Passes.*

ARTICLE 10: To see if the Town will vote to raise the budgeted monies necessary to pay Town expenses and obligations for the 2020 year. Moved: John Bigelow. Discussion: Greg Eckhardt- Why does the Town charge the historical society \$701 in rent? John Ogden: we charge them \$1 in rent and \$700 is a share of utilities. Jay

Snyder: What's the increase in insurance? It covers the 4th of July picnic so the Community Club doesn't have to. Motion to Approve: Jay Snyder moves it. *Article 10 passes.*

ARTICLE 11: To transact any other non-binding business proper to come before said meeting, not acted upon in the preceding articles. Moved: Peter Thompson. John Ogden describes a request for funding that came late, he would like to get a sense of the town's feeling on a request by the Northshire Area Trails System for \$1500 of a total of \$15,000 to rebuild a mountain bike trail bridge on the Stone Place Trail in Peru. Will Reed voices support. Someone asked if this is a GMNF road. No, it's a Town of Peru Class 4 road. Greg Eckhardt states he is not interested in paying our tax money for a bridge in Peru. Motion to approve Article 11. Kathy Snyder. *Article 11 passes.*

ARTICLE 12: To see if the Town will agree to meet in 2021 on the first Monday before the first Tuesday in March (March 1st) at 6pm for the annual Town Meeting. Moved: Will Reed. Discussion: Mary English moves to amend the article to change the time to 5pm Seconded by Tove Stigum, Harry Lux points out that working people can't make it for 5. Keep it six. Mary withdraws the amendment Motion to Approve: Mary Licata, *ARTICLE 12 passes.*

Motion to Adjourn- Claudia Harris, ayes have it. Meeting is adjourned at 8:38 pm

Respectfully Submitted by
Chrystal Cleary, Town Clerk