

The legal voters of the Town of Ripton met at the Community House in Ripton on Monday, March 6, 2000 at 8:10 p.m. (following the Annual School Meeting, which began at 7:30 p.m.) to act upon articles one through seven of the 2000 Warning. There were about 75 people in attendance.

Article 1: Will the Town vote the sum of \$210,990.28 to pay General Fund and Road expenses for the ensuing year, and pay outstanding orders or obligations of the Town, with interest, the tax rate on the 1999 Grand List to be determined by the Selectmen, divided as follows:

Roads, including winter work	\$126,650.00
General Fund Costs	\$84,340.28

The article was moved by Richard Kimler, and seconded.

William Ford, Chair of the Selectmen, began with a review of the budget. He reported that last year was relatively uneventful, particularly since there was no flooding of the roads. There have been some changes in the budget, and he reminded the meeting that details of the changes can be found in the Selectmen's report in the Town Report.

Some highlights Mr. Ford reported on:

- The Board adopted a Road Standards policy to make sure that the Town receives Federal Aid if there is flood damage. This policy will also serve to guide the Town's road construction practices. This is a tool that can be used on an ongoing basis.
- The Town received a grant to widen and strengthen the Boyle Bridge on the North Branch. This was a single-lane bridge, and has been widened into a two-lane bridge.
- The town has received a grant to locate all the culverts in Town with a GPS machine so that we can create an inventory of all the culverts in Town. This will enable us to plan for culvert replacement in a systematic way, rather than in an ad hoc way as before. The information gathered will include location, condition, size, and construction material, as well as information about the ditches near the culvert.
- The Town has approximately \$21,000 in surplus this year, due to good luck and planning. The Board has always tried to have a cash cushion at the end of the year, but recently we have had deficits.

Mr. Ford said that the General Fund budget has increased by 4.6%, and the Road budget by 3.9%. The General Fund increases are due to:

- A cost-of-living increase for the Clerk/Treasurer;
- The cost of a professional audit (which the Town tries to do on a three-year cycle);
- The cost of running three election this year compared with the one last year;
- The expected increase in the cost of fuel for the Town buildings
- The cost of buying specialized roller shelving for the Town Office. These are specialized shelves for the Town records that are designed to minimize damage to the books in storage;
- An increase in the line for the Planning Commission. This is because the Commission is reviewing the entire Zoning Regulations, and it needs the assistance of the Town's attorney in this process.

The Road budget has increased this year by about \$8,000, although some of these costs are offset by grants.

At this point Mr. Ford asked for questions from the meeting about the budget.

Mr. Geissler asked where in the Road Budget increases in fuel costs are shown? Mr. Wimett (Road Commissioner and Selectman) said that the costs of fuel are borne by the contractor. Mr. Ford said that Maiden Lane Contractors does all the routine road work, and charges an hourly rate for each piece of equipment he uses. The Town works from a rate sheet that is agreed to before the year begins. The hourly rate includes the machinery, the operator, and all fuel, maintenance and insurance costs. Since the Town owns no equipment we do not see variable costs relating to buying machinery or replacing equipment.

Willem Jewett asked the Board if it was hamstringing the Town by adopting standards—has the town lost its flexibility? Mr. Ford said that the Town took the State model and went through it line by line. The Board eliminated all references to practices that do not occur in Town, curbs, for example, and ended up with a policy of road practices that we should be doing in any case. The standards we have adopted represent good road construction standards, including ditch width, road crown, culvert sizes, etc. Mr. Jewett asked what percentage of the roads was below standard. Mr. Ford said that the Board did not analyze that. The standards are to apply when we do new, significant work to a road. Laureen Cox (Selectman) said that the standards do not apply when we are doing basic maintenance, only when we do a major upgrade. Mr. Ford added that we did not want to adopt standards to create work that we could not accomplish. We put in the standards that the Board would determine what maintenance was and what new work was so that definition was in the Town's control.

The Clerk requested an amendment from the floor to correct the Article 1 of the Warning, which speaks about the 1999 Grand List rather than the 2000 Grand List. The amendment was made by William Pierce and seconded. There was no discussion. The vote to close debate on the amendment was moved by Richard Kimler, and seconded, and the amendment was agreed to on a voice vote.

There being no further discussion, Richard Kimler called the question, and was seconded, and the article passed on a voice vote.

Article 2: Will the Town have current property and personal taxes collected by the Treasurer, taxes due to be paid November 6th, 2000?

Barbara King moved the question, and was seconded.

There was no discussion.

Michael Roosevelt called the question, and was seconded, and the article passed on a voice vote.

Article 4: Will the Town vote the sum of \$18,750 to the Ripton Fire Department to help pay the expenses for the year?

The Article was moved by Michael Roosevelt, and seconded.

Chief Tim Hanson gave a report on the First Response and Fire Department's year. He said that after the Town's "kind" vote last year to increase the budget significantly, the First Response Squad and Fire Department had a very busy year, mostly with medical calls. First response took care of 27 patients with 23 ambulance calls. We have a new EMT-B (Tim Price). We have a new defibrillator, which we have not had to use yet, but it feels good to have it in Town.

With the increase in funding last year we were able to rebuild the pump on the main pumper so it now is working to specification. We were also able to acquire a used pumper from the Town of Starksboro (for a dollar), and were able to do some repairs on it so that now we have two pumpers in Town. This means that if one has to leave Town for mutual aid or for maintenance, there will be another one in Town to take care of our needs.

We have purchased two of the four air packs we need. We are hoping for Federal or State money to buy the other two. If this does not happen we will use Town money to get the two air packs we need. The new ones are a pleasure to use! They are light, much less tiring to carry, and work more easily.

The firehouse continues to generate a great deal of discussion in the department, and the idea of getting a new building is floating around. This would be a big deal, and would cost a lot of money. We do not have active plans to come to the Town for a bond vote in the next year or two. Nevertheless, the building is not adequate for our present, and in particular, our future needs. One of the main problems we have is that we have no bathrooms, nor any running water, so there is nowhere in the building to wash up or decontaminate after a fire or hazardous materials incident. We tried to get the soils around the station to perk, but the perk test failed. There is a possibility of getting an off-site sewage system in place, but this starts to be very expensive as well. We do not know what we will do, but may at some future date be coming to the Town with a proposal. We did replace the firehouse doors—the old ones were nearly falling apart.

Chief Hanson thanked some people who had been helpful this year: The Addison County Sheriff, who provides dispatch service, has been kind to the Department. Mountain Signs did the new fire station sign at cost, which was much appreciated. Mrs. Codding kindly did some sewing on our fire gear. Finally, the Department appreciates the budget allocation at last year's Town Meeting.

Cathy Braun asked what the budget allocation was last year. Mr. Hanson said that it was \$38,000. This year the request has dropped to \$18,750.00, although the Department intends to spend more, since there are some funds in savings that will be used. Cathy Braun asked what the usual amount has been in the past. Mr. Hanson said that we have asked for \$12,000.00 to \$14,000 per year in the past. This year we are asking for more than that (\$18,750), but significantly less what we asked for in 1999.

At this point Richard Kimler called the question, but was not seconded, since there was one person who wanted to have more discussion.

Ms. Slater said that there is useful information about the fire department's request on page 30 of the Town Report.

Michael Roosevelt called the question and was seconded.

The article was voted in the affirmative on a voice vote.

Article 4: Will the Town authorize the Selectmen to negotiate with the National Forest to trade the Town land on the Lincoln Road for a parcel of land owned by the National Forest located closer to the center of town? The land would be for future use by the Town as a site for a recycling center, the sand/salt pile, and a relocated fire station. If a trade cannot be negotiated, will the Town authorize the Selectmen to sell the Town land to the National Forest, with any proceeds of the sale being retained by the Town for disbursement in the future?

The article was moved by Michael Roosevelt, and seconded.

Selectman Lauren Cox said that she had volunteered to try to make this article clear. She said that this issue had been discussed before, and it seemed to be time to bring it up again. This land is at the far (Lincoln) end of the Lincoln Road. The parcel, on both sides of the road, has approximately 90 acres. The land is quite wet, and is adjacent to other National Forest lands with a shared watershed. It has been on the market for at least ten years, and the Town did manage to sell one ten-acre lot several years ago. There is one ten-acre lot that is still on the market as a building lot, though it has not been formally perked. The rest cannot be built on, and there are no eager buyers.

The Board is looking at two options:

- Trading with the National Forest. The National Forest will sometimes trade land they own for land that they want more. They determine what criteria they will use to agree to a trade or not. If the Town did receive a piece of land from the National Forest in trade, this land could be used for a new location for a fire station, sand pile, and so on.
- Selling the land to the National Forest outright. Sometimes the National Forest is not willing to trade, or there are obstacles in the way of a trade that make a sale more practical. It is difficult to come up with a piece that has the exact value of the piece we want to trade with them. The National Forest did buy a piece of land near this site for a pretty good price—they paid more per acre than the Town's asking price when the lot was on the market.

One of the other points of the warning has to do with the way any funds generated from a sale would be dealt with. In a previous vote, the Town said that any money that came from a sale would be used to pay down the bond on the School. With the passage of Act 60, it is actually not to the advantage of the School to have such an influx of money, since we would have to pay a portion of those funds back to the State in the form of reduced State aid to education. The article states that the funds from a sale would be held by the Town until a vote in the future, and the funds would not necessarily go to reduce the School debt.

At this point Ms. Cox asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Geissler asked if, since we will be paying less on the bond as it matures, would we be getting less State Aid anyway? Carol Ford, Chair of the School Board, answered that the School Board has been told that we would lose about 20% of any School surplus in reduced State Aid, but if funds are “spent” by putting them in a capital improvement fund, the funds are not considered a surplus.

Mr. Pierce asked if the issue was an either/or issue. Ms. Cox said no. Mr. Elliott said that he felt that the two issues (of a trade or a sale) should be separate. He said that only the government seems to want the land. He asked if there was any value to the timber on the land. Ms. Cox said that the county forester had looked it over and determined that there was about \$6,000.00 worth of timber on the land.

Mr. Jewett asked if there were any particular parcels of land that the Town was looking at to trade. Ms. Cox said there were two, one on the Natural Turnpike and Chandler Hill Road and one on Maiden Lane. She said that the truth is that in our most recent conversations with the National Forest, they have expressed less eagerness to trade with the Town, and would prefer an outright purchase. A trade is hard for them to pull off, and less likely to happen at all, and more time consuming if it were to happen.

Bonnie DeGray asked what impact the sale would have on what the National Forest pays the Town. Tim Hanson, Town Clerk, said that there would be an increase of a few hundred dollars to the Town annually, plus the up-front money from the sale.

Mr. Collitt asked about the National Forest’s legal right to buy land in Vermont Towns. Ms. Cox said that they now do not have to ask permission of the Towns to buy, but as a courtesy they have been making Towns aware of their plans.

Mary Clark said that the Vermont Land Trust buys wetlands for preservation. If the Town was “giving the land away” it might consider that group. Ms. Cox said that the National Forest had paid pretty good money to a similar lot near this one--\$75,000 to \$85,000 for a parcel of similar acreage.

Mr. Ford said that the National Forest sends an appraiser to value the land, and they set a price on a take it or leave it basis—there is no haggling.

Brad Braun asked what would happen to the money if the land sold. Ms. Cox said that the money would go to the Town, and the voters would decide how it was used at a future Town Meeting.

Mr. Goetteleemann asked who would decide what parcel of land was traded. Mr. Ford said that the article, if passed, would give the authority to the Selectmen. Mary Clark asked if it came to a trade, would the Selectmen warn another meeting to approve the trade? Ms. Cox said, no, the purpose of this warned article was to give the Selectmen the authority to make the trade without a further meeting. Mr. Ford said that the Board would post notices of any proposed land trade so people could be aware of it.

Ann Barker asked if the salt pile was located near private land, and if there was any danger that the salt could contaminate the water? Mr. Ford said that the Town takes reasonable precautions regarding the storage and use of salt. Ms. Barker asked if there was any danger due to the location of the salt and sand pile? Mr. Wimett said that we don't use very much salt anyway—about 30 tons for the 5,000 yards of sand. Salt is used to keep the sand from freezing, not to spread directly on the road. The State uses straight salt on their roads, a practice we do not follow.

Clerk Hanson said that in discussions with the National Forest they are not very happy with the idea of a trade. At the time the Warning was written, they had not made it clear that a trade was less likely—this is new information. They have to get environmental and other studies on the piece of land they would give up, and it would have to go through a public appeals process that could take months or even years.

At this point there began a discussion to amend the article. A proposal was made to make it possible to sell the land to a private party, as well as the National Forest, although it was pointed out that this authority was already in place. Ross Elliott said that the article was somewhat confusing since there were two issues in one article. Ms. Cox said that one of the main purposes of the article was to make sure that the Town received the money (to be held until a vote of the town later), rather than have the money go to the School, as explained earlier.

The amended article reads as follows:

Will the Town authorize the Selectmen to negotiate with the National Forest to trade the Town land on the Lincoln Road for a parcel of land owned by the National Forest located closer to the center of town? The land would be for future use by the Town as a site for a recycling center, the sand/salt pile, and a relocated fire station. ~~If a trade cannot be negotiated, W~~will the Town authorize the Selectmen to sell the Town land ~~to the National Forest~~, with any proceeds of the sale being retained by the Town for disbursement in the future?

This amended article was moved by Eric Warren, and seconded. The amendment adopted with a voice vote. Discussion on the amended article continued.

Mary Clark asked if the Town wanted to limit its options regarding the use of any land acquired by the Town in a trade with the National Forest. Mr. Jewett spoke in favor of the proposed uses of the land. Ms. King said that as written, the article would not allow the Board to trade for a piece of land not suited to the listed uses (fire station, sand/salt pile, recycling shed). The Selectmen would define the standards, and there would be no more meeting on the trade itself.

Nancy Breiden said that the article is complex. If the land were traded, the land the Town gets would have to be used for the listed purposes. If the Town sells the land, the money could be used for any purpose that the Town votes in favor of. She wondered if the purpose of the article is to get rid of the land or to acquire a spot for the listed uses? Ms. Cox said that the Town currently gets no use from its land. If we acquire a new piece of land the hope is that it would be one that the community could use.

Cathy Braun asked how the Town acquired the land. The Clerk answered that it was acquired in a tax sale. She asked if the Town land was a place where eight houses or some big development could occur. Mr. Hanson said that that was unlikely, since the land is very wet, and should be managed as a wetland. Ms. Braun asked if the land could be developed? Mr. Hanson said that anything is possible, but it would be difficult.

Ross Elliott said that he was in favor of trading the land for a more central lot. Trading for another lot that didn't meet the needs of the Town would not make sense.

Alice Clark said that she is not sure that it makes sense to have all three projects (recycling shed, fire station, sand/salt pile) located on one site. She noted that the way the article is written it seems as though it is a foregone conclusion that this is what would happen. Ms. Cox said that each of these projects would cost money, so the Town could not move ahead without a proper vote of the Town, with hearings and so on. The article would only allow the Selectmen to acquire the land, but would not authorize further projects. She said that the next step to implement such a project would probably involve a Town study committee, similar to the one that was formed to study the needs of the School.

At this point the article (as amended), was moved by Mary Clerk, and seconded.

The article was voted in the affirmative on a voice vote.

Article 5: Will the Town vote the sum of \$250.00 to the Ripton Historical Society to help pay for expenses related to Historical Society activities in 2000?

The article was moved by Mary Clark, and seconded.

Richard (Kim) Kimler began the discussion by say that the Historical Society, after several years of inactivity, has started meeting again on the third Tuesday of each month at the Town Office. He said that the group wanted to do oral histories, research old hom + es and cellar holes, amongst other activities. The Society wants to associate with the Vermont State Historical Society, which involves dues, and also wishes to purchase some books and materials for documenting the Town's past.

Hilda Billings encouraged townspeople to get involved in this project.

Mary Clark asked if there was anyone in Town who could help create a web site

Cathy Braun asked if \$250.00 would be enough. Mr. Kimler said that the amount was adequate for the initial start-up of the Society. He said that the main expense would be for recording equipment.

At this point Mr. Karpak called the question, and was seconded.

The article passes on a voice vote.

Article 6: The citizens of Ripton, Vermont call upon the US government and governments of all nuclear weapons states to secure on an urgent basis a nuclear weapons abolition treaty. The treaty

must include an early timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons in a manner that is mutual and verifiable among all nations. We further urge that the Vermont Congressional Delegation introduce resolutions to this effect and to work for their immediate passage.

Warren King moved the article, and was seconded.

Mr. Ford, Selectman, said that this article was placed on the warning by petition.

Sarah Pounds spoke to the issue. She said that the group that sponsored the petition is called Abolition 2000. This article was passed in 33 towns in 1999, and failed in 4. The group is trying to build a movement to reach the goals stated in the warning. People with questions can contact her for more information.

Mr. Jewett called for a paper ballot, and was supported in his call by at least six other people.

The article passed on a paper ballot 49 to 21.

Article 6: Any other business proper to come before this meeting.

There was a brief discussion about having a PA system for Town Meeting. Mr. Ruane (who chairs the Ripton Coffee House Committee) said he would look into a possible system.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 9:33 on a motion made by Diane Dunsmore and seconded, on a voice vote to adjourn.

Recorded by Timothy Hanson, Town Clerk and Alison Joseph, Assistant Town Clerk

Ronald Wimett

William Ford

Laureen Cox

Selectmen for the Town of Ripton