

The legal voters of the Town of Ripton met at the Community House in Ripton on Monday, March 5, 2001 at 8:10 p.m. (following the Annual School Meeting, which began at 7:30 p.m.) to act upon articles one through eight of the 2001 Warning. There were about 75 people in attendance.

Discussion of Town Meeting Articles began at 7:48 p.m. after Ward Mann, State Representative, finished his discussion of legislative issues.

Article 1: Will the Town vote the sum of \$262,446.81 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 2001 Grand List to be determined by the Selectmen, divided as follows:

Roads, including winter work	\$127,300.00
Town share of bridge replacement (Estimated)	\$41,600.00
General Fund costs	\$93,546.81

The article was moved by Richard Kimler, and seconded by Michael Seligmann.

Lauren Cox, Selectman, began with a review of the budget.

- She said that the budget includes a cost of living increase for Town employees, and that the salary of the Clerk of the Selectmen (a position similar to an administrative assistant to the Board) has been increased due to the increasing responsibilities of that office.
- She noted that the Town books are to be audited professionally from now on, and the cost for doing the 2000 audit will be paid out of the 2001 budget. This cost is about \$2,500.00.
- Ms. Cox pointed out that there is no money budgeted for interest on a tax-anticipation loan this year, since we have a budget surplus and did not have to borrow money. Since the Town collects almost all of its funds in the fall at tax time, there is sometimes a need to borrow in the late summer against the time when the taxes start to come in. With the surplus of the last year, this has not been necessary.
- The budget calls for work to be done on the Town Office—primarily the removal of the underground fuel tank that used to supply the building.
- The costs for Zoning expenses are expected to be less this year, mostly because the legal expenses for preparing the new draft Zoning, Tower and Subdivision Regulations were accrued and spent last year.
- Fuel costs have risen this year, and these increases are allowed for in the budget.
- The Board has budgeted for a new roof for the Community House. The old roof started leaking and was repaired, but a new roof is necessary since the old one is nearly 25 years old.

- The costs for recycling are down because we have completed payments for the recycling trailer.

Roads are a big expense this year, and account for the biggest change in the budget.

- The Board plans to do a section of road-side ditching “by the book” this year, since good ditching is essential for roads to stay in good shape. The Board intends to do a section of road this year and see how it goes.
- The Board experimented with crack-sealing last year, and will do some more this year. Once again, the Board will divert paving funds to other road costs such as ditching, adding gravel and applying chloride.
- The Boyle Bridge project has been completed, and what was a one-lane bridge with a wooden deck is now a two-lane bridge with a concrete deck.
- Flood damage was severe in 2000. The Town has to pay 12.5% of the replacement cost of two bridges (Wagon Wheel and Brooks Bridge), and the cost of hauling the snags (fallen trees and stumps) out of the river. FEMA will pay 75% of the cost, and the State usually pays the other 12.5%. The State’s percentage is not guaranteed, but in every flood event we have eventually received the State’s 12.5% share.

Ms. Cox said there were other changes that would affect the budget, but these issues would be taken up under other warned items in the Meeting. At this point the Board asked for questions from the Meeting.

Willem Jewett asked the Board why the amount listed to be spent on the two bridges (\$332,000.00) is not the same as the amount of reimbursement expected (less the Town’s 12.5%). Mr. Ford said that the Town has already received some reimbursement for the bridges in an early payment in 2000, so this of course has been deducted from anticipated receipts for 2001.

Barbara King asked what “proper ditching” means. Mr. Ford said that a typical ditch clean-out involves removing the sand, silt and other debris that accumulates in the ditches. The added money is to ditch a defined area of roadside to the Town’s new specifications—slope, width of the swale, seeding and mulching, and so on. An important aspect of the ditching is to make the banks less steep so they do not slide back into the ditch quickly.

Ms. King said that she has been on a committee that is working to improve water quality in Addison County rivers. According to the Better Backroads organization, the best practice is to slow the water down in the ditches, so that fast-moving water does not scour the ditch, which leads to more gravel and sand in the rivers. She asked if the Town’s road standards include this type of practice. Mr. Ford (Chair of the Selectmen) said that the standards that the Town uses are ones that the Vermont Agency of Transportation developed, and that they are usually sensitive to these sorts of environmental issues. He said he believes that the Vermont Agency of Transportation standards overlap with those developed by the Better Backroads organization. He said that some of our ditches are in a “V” shape, so they tend to speed up water flow. He would like to see them wide

enough to allow a flatter bottom. He said if the grade of the ditch is steep enough it needs to be ripped with 12" stone; shallower grades can be grassed. Ms. Cox said that the ditches look raw when they are first done, but once they are seeded or ripped, and once they have some natural growth, they look pretty good, and work well. The large 12" stone in the ditch along the side of Miller Hill on the Lincoln Road seem to function well this way.

Mr. Ford said that the Town has taken advantage of the Better Backroads grant to locate all the culverts in Town. There is now a database and a map with each culvert identified, and listed according to length, width, condition, and so on. This makes it easier to plan which culverts to replace.

Mr. Ford spoke about the two new bridges that are scheduled to be replaced. He said that they both should be out to bid soon for construction in 2001. The Wagon Wheel Bridge will be a concrete arch or metal plate bridge. The Brooks Bridge will either be cast in place or pre-cast concrete. They will be done to the Town's 50-year flood specification (which is higher than the State standard). At some point in the process the temporary bridges will be re-located, which will entail some traffic delays. Once the temporary bridges are re-located, traffic will be allowed to continue while work on the new bridges continues.

Mr. Ford noted that the two bridges on the Goshen Road are also scheduled to be replaced this year. Ms. Cox said that these are a Vermont Agency of Transportation and National Forest Service project, so the Town does not have to pay any of the costs of these bridges. There are few details on these bridges and their construction schedules at this point.

Michael Hussey asked why the Wagon Wheel culvert collapsed so badly during the storm. He said that from the photos in the Town Report it appears as though the culvert never fit within the concrete header that was supposed to protect it, and expressed the hope that the next culvert put in would fit properly, and that the bridges in general would be built to a higher standard. It was pointed out to him that the culvert was never round—that it pulled away from the concrete header and toed in during the storm due to the intense hydraulic pressure on it. Mr. Ford said that the two specified options in the bid documents (metal or concrete arch) would serve the Town well, whichever one is chosen. In either case the hydraulic capacity of the bridge will be significantly greater than that of the old bridge (this will be true of the Brooks Bridge as well). The belief is that with the greater hydraulic area it will be less likely that trees and other debris will be able to accumulate at the mouth of the bridge, damming it up and causing damage. This is what happened during the flood.

Mr. Collitt asked if this was the time to talk about the grant to do work on the center of Town to add green space to the area around the Community House, Church and Town Office. Moderator Freeman Allen, after a brief discussion, agreed to allow this discussion (without dissent from the Meeting).

Mr. Collitt asked if the Board had thought about having more green space around the buildings. Alison Joseph, who has been working on these grants for the Town, explained that there are two grants—one to do some fairly minor landscaping around the buildings, and another to take a deeper look at the future of the Hollow.

Mr. Ford said that the grants are a tease, in a way. The second grant, in particular, is not enough money to get a great deal done—just enough to do planning for major work. The Town does have

to pay a percentage (20%) of the costs of these projects. Mr. Ford said that the smaller grant will be used to define the edges between the lawn and the parking area; cut and grade the parking area and place new material on the surface (not paving); and plantings in the area between the road and the parking area. Ms. Joseph is working on drawings for the project, and these could be revised to include more plantings on the road edge. He said that the Board intends to do some work on the area between the road and the parking area, but this project is complicated because it lies entirely within the State's right-of-way, so everything requires their approval. One of the things they are insisting on is to reduce the width of the entrances to the parking area, which might reduce the number of parking spaces. Less parking is a serious concern for the Selectmen, for Town Meeting, the Coffee House, and the Church's use.

Mr. Collitt said that the area would be much more attractive if it had more grass. He said that even if there was less graveled area to park on, people could park on the grass if necessary.

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 vote the sum of \$17,750 to the Ripton Fire and Rescue to help pay Fire Department and First Response expenses for the year?

The article was moved by Arthur Lord, and was seconded by Barbara King.

Chief Tim Hanson gave a report on the First Response and Fire Department's year. He noted that there was a medical call at 7:28 this evening, just before Town Meeting.

- The Department was a little quieter than it was in 2000, mostly due to fewer calls to accidents on Route 125. There were a total of 27 responses by Fire and First Response.
- Tim Price has completed and passed the EMT-I class, which means he is able to start IV therapy in the field. This class took a great deal of time and he deserves special thanks.
- The Repeater is installed and works well. It records radio transmissions and rebroadcasts them from a higher point with more power. This has made paging more certain, since volunteers in outlying areas are more likely to get the page, and helps person-to-person communications in Town. He thanked Bud and Jean Todd for hosting the repeater setup on top of Chandler Hill.
- Dorothy Gelinias and William Cole are hosting our new base radio. It is very handy to have someone listening on the radio who is also in a position to make phone calls.
- The Fire Station flooded last summer—photos are in the Town Report. Mr. Hanson reported that the trucks were removed from the Station just before the road became impassable—in another 10-15 minutes it might have been impossible to get the trucks out until work was done on the road. The Fire Station's location has always been of concern, since it is in the flood-plain, but having the building actually flood makes it very clear that the Fire Station needs to be relocated.

Mr. Hanson said that we have recently learned that there is a FEMA grant available to us for about \$97,000.00 to relocate or rebuild the Fire Station. However, the Town needs what is

called an “All hazards mitigation plan” in place before these funds can be allocated. Regional Planning is working on this project, and the hope is that things will be in place later this year so that we can apply for the funds.

We do not have hard figures on the cost of a Fire Station, but clearly it will cost more than \$97,000.00. There are other Federal grant programs that may be able to help, and we will of course look into them. We would like to form a citizens committee to look into the needs of the Fire Department—anyone interested should contact any member of the Fire Department.

Chief Hanson said he would like to thank:

- Erik Eriksen for all his work on vehicle and equipment maintenance during the year—he spends many hours at the Fire Station making sure that things are ready to go.
- Neat Repeats, who bought us a pulse oximeter. He said that Neat Repeats is looking for donations to their resale store so they can continue to raise funds for organizations like ours.
- The Lions Club for helping us purchase a battery-powered suction machine.
- Jim Coons and the Addison County Sheriff’s office for providing dispatch services at a very reasonable cost.
- Tim Bouton, from Regional Planning, who was instrumental in getting two generators for the Town—one at the School, which will allow the School to function as a shelter if we have a long-term power outage, and a portable unit for the Fire Department.
- The volunteers, for their time spent in training, going to meetings, and responding to fires and medical calls.
- The voters for providing the funds to keep everything going.

Willem Jewett asked if the italicized numbers in the budget applied to College-funded projects. Mr. Hanson said that this was so—the College often provided materials or service to the Fire Department.

Willem Jewett said that he would like to see that the minutes of this meeting reflect thanks from the Town to the First Responders for all the time they give to the Town. He said that we should not just thank them by passing the budget. So ordered by the Moderator, after applause.

At this point Richard Kimler called the question and was seconded.

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

Article 3: Will the Town authorize the Selectmen to spend such sums as may be received from time to time from the State of Vermont or other sources in the form of grants for road work or for other projects related to Town business? (See explanation in the Selectmen’s Report).

The Article was moved by Arthur Lord, and seconded by Barbara King.

Mr. Ford said that the elements of the discussion were to be found on page 19 of this year’s Town Report.

There was no further discussion.

At this point Richard Kimler called the question and was seconded.

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

Article 4: Will the Town vote to exempt personal property from assessment and taxation (See explanation in the Lister's Report).

The article was moved by Michael Roosevelt, and seconded by Carol Ford.

Alison Joseph, Chair of the Listers, spoke to this issue. She said that personal property is a small part of the Grand List. Each year companies that have personal properties in Town send inventory forms to the Town. The personal property is supposed to list all personal property in Town, including things like rototillers and lawn mowers used for landscaping businesses, fax machines and computers used for in-home enterprises, and so on. This has not been done, and the Listers would like to do it right—that is, list all personal property—or eliminate the personal property tax entirely. The current listed value of personal property in town is about \$13,000.00. The Listers are not sure what it would be if all property eligible to be listed was listed.

Michael Roosevelt asked what it would cost to produce a complete listing of personal property. Ms. Joseph said that she did not know, but would not be surprised if the cost of listing the property was greater than the taxes realized by the increase in the Grand List.

Jeremy Grip asked if the tax applied to all businesses. Ms. Joseph said that certain business properties were exempt—carpenters and plumbers tools, and farm equipment.

Lawrence Miller said that the issue is very complicated. He spoke about the difficulty he has with his business in Middlebury relating to issues of depreciation—there are apparently at least two different ways to depreciate personal property. He also said that since the tax decreases businesses' marginal return on the investment, it can delay investment.

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

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

Article 5: Will the Town authorize the Selectmen to create a special account to set aside funds for a future property reappraisal, the payment into this fund for 2001 being \$5,000.00, said funds to come from the 2000 surplus?

The article was moved by Barbara King, and seconded by Leonard Tiedemann.

Alison Joseph, Chair of the Listers, spoke to this issue. She said that it has been ten years since the Town was reappraised, and a reappraisal is very expensive. A full reappraisal cost for Ripton would approach \$40,000.00. She noted that the relationship between the Town's appraised values on property and the price property actually sells for is still pretty close. This ratio of sales to valuation is looked at very closely by the State. However, some of our values, particularly land values, are not very accurate, and as time goes by the Listers are afraid the discrepancies will get worse. If the Town sets some money aside now, when it comes time to do a reappraisal at least some of the funds will be there.

At this point Mr. Kimler called the question, and was seconded by Diane Dunsmore.

The article passed on a voice vote.

Article 6: Will the Town have current property and personal taxes collected by the Treasurer, taxes due to be paid November 5th, 2001?

Mr. Tiedemann moved the article, and was seconded by Mr. Seligmann.

There was no discussion.

Mr. Tiedemann called the question, and was seconded.

The article passed on a voice vote.

Article 7: There has been a considerable increase in traffic on the Dugway, and some sections of this road are extremely narrow. In an engineering study authorized by the Selectmen, remedies are proposed that include widening portions of this road, and installing some larger culverts. The estimated cost to do all the work identified in this study is \$285,000 in 2001 dollars. What is the sense of the meeting regarding action on this project?

A motion to discuss the article was made by Mr. Tiedemann and seconded.

Steven Zwicky began the discussion by saying that he lives on the North Branch Road and drives the Dugway Road at least four times a day. He said that although he appreciates the work of the Selectmen in this matter, from discussions he has had with other people in Town there does not seem to be very much support for a massive reconstruction project. He acknowledged that the road is very narrow, and at times a driver has to back up to allow another car to pass.

He said that he had spoken with Selectman Laurie Cox about why this project was being warned. She told him that safety is the Selectmen's primary concern. Mr. Zwicky said that the road may not be very safe, but it is not a lot less safe than other gravel roads in Town. He said that to be safe on the Dugway one has to drive slowly, and most people who use the road are conscious of this, though he admitted that there are those who do drive it too fast. He said if the project is done it will not create a real two-lane road, and it may just encourage people to drive faster. The other unsafe elements--the steepness of the road and the sheer drop-offs--will remain. He did acknowledge that this road becomes a serious problem when Route 125 is closed and traffic is diverted.

Mr. Zwicky asked that the real dangers of the road be researched before the Town spends the hundreds of thousands of dollars on a rebuilding project. Perhaps more warning signs and a decreased speed limit would be as useful to increase safety. He said that a major reconstruction would alter the aesthetics of the road as well—it is a very beautiful road to drive if you are not sliding backwards. He said that some guardrails on the river side of the road might be helpful, although the trees do some of the work of guardrails. Finally, he said that if we build a bigger and better road, we might encourage more development on the North Branch, which may not be part of the Town Plan.

Brad Braun spoke briefly about the gabion project on the Lincoln Road. He said that the retaining wall is failing, and it looks like it will be a total loss. The erosion cannot be prevented, and we will have to spend a lot of money to fix the problems. He said that we will probably end up in court.

Gracile Lord said that there ought to be a stop sign at the North Branch end of the Dugway instead of a yield sign, since drivers often shoot out of the Dugway into the North Branch without looking to see if cars are coming.

Arthur Lord said that the road should be defined, as in “One way road—use pull-outs. Speed limit 25 mph” and so on. He said that in the wintertime the most dangerous places are at either end of the road—it is hard to stop once you have the momentum to get up the grade.

Richard Collitt asked about the stone culvert at the west end of the Dugway. He said that is the most dangerous place on the whole road. He wondered if that culvert would be replaced. Mr. Ford said that that culvert is probably what started the Board on the whole Dugway project, since it is so dangerous. Lauren Cox said that the spot is difficult to work on because there is no place to drive post to hang guardrail on. Mr. Collitt said that he thought that the price was unreasonable. Mr. Ford said it was not unreasonable considering all the work that was planned. One little project can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Mr. Ford said that it is important to look at the road as a whole. It makes sense to look at the road as a single project, and not as a series of piecemeal projects. At least four of the road’s seven culverts are undersized and need to be upgraded to meet fifty-year flood levels.

Willem Jewett asked what the \$285,000 gets us. Ms. Cox said that the road would be widened to a two-lane road where it is now a one-lane road. Mr. Ford said that the survey shows that the road is 12’-20’ wide, with many places where there are no shoulders. The plan would build a 20’ road with shoulders, to be consistent with our class 3 road standards. He said it would not be acceptable to change it to a class 4 road since we already plow it and it is used as a class 3 road. He said that it should be improved so that a fire truck could get through easily.

Mr. Jewett asked if the new road standards are pushing this project. Mr. Ford said that they are not, although they would shape the ultimate specifications of a project, were it to go out to bid. He said that our eligibility for FEMA funding is not an issue, however, and that was the main reason the standards were adopted. Mr. Jewett said that this was not the question, but rather did the standards require that all class 3 roads be 20 feet wide. Mr. Ford said that only when roads are reconstructed do the standards come into effect—we are not required to bring all our roads up to the standard.

Mr. Ford said that based on what the Board has heard at this meeting, the Board will work selectively to fix the most serious danger zones on the road, though he believes that over time this will end up costing the Town more than addressing the road’s improvements as an overarching single project.

Mr. Elliott said that the most dangerous section of the road is the west end around the stone culvert. He said that he thinks that ought to be made safe with guardrail. Mr. Ford said that he is not comfortable just putting guardrail up at that location. He said that if that site is the focus, the stone culvert has an opening about 2’ x 3’, and it really needs to be replaced with at least a 54” culvert. There would be fill added upstream, and the larger culvert placed, allowing guardrail to be installed and a two-lane approach to the road. This would also help with flooding problems, since

that site often backs up, then overtops the road, causing serious washouts. Clerk Hanson said that the Town has applied to the State of Vermont for a grant to do this project, and we have been successful in the past in getting this type of grant. He expressed his opinion that this site is important enough that we may have to do the work without a grant.

Cathy Braun said that she agreed that the road is dangerous and we ought to put up more signage to warn people. She asked how much the project would cost. Clerk Hanson said about \$35,000. She said that she feels the same way that Mr. Lord and Steve Zwicky feel—the road is dangerous, but if we put up signs and other warnings it should be good enough. There are lots of dangerous places on many of the roads in the county.

Ms. Cox reminded the Meeting that the Dugway is an important route to Middlebury when Route 125 is out—which does happen from time to time. Claudia Riley agreed with this comment, saying that although she hates driving the Dugway, she has noted that every time Route 125 is flooded out the Dugway is open. Mr. Hussey said that whether or not Route 125 is passable should be irrelevant to this discussion—people can still go through Lincoln or down the North Branch.

Gracile Lord said that several years ago the school bus had some trouble on the Dugway. She said that the school bus should never be on the Dugway at all—the road should be reserved for small vehicles only. One person said that the bus does not use the Dugway. Christine Mulholland said that she was nearly hit by the bus on the Dugway one time.

Mr. Zwicky said that there seems to be a general agreement that the Dugway is dangerous and that the most dangerous part of the road is the west end near the stone culvert. He asked how much it would cost to upgrade this portion of the road. Mr. Ford said that the Board had not gone into detail about the specific costs of the project, but that the Board wanted a general sense of the Meeting to see whether or not there was enough support to proceed to a bond hearing and a bond vote.

After this discussion Mr. Lord called for an end to debate. There was no objection. Since there was no specific question asked, there was no need to vote. The meeting moved on to the final article.

Article 8: Any other business proper to come before this meeting.

Sara Pounds spoke in favor of the Open Door Clinic.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 9:07 on a motion made by Mr. Tiedemann and seconded by Lawrence Miller.