MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

FEBRUARY 28, 2005

The legal voters of the Town of Ripton met at the Community House in Ripton on Monday, February 28, 2005 at 7:30 p.m. to act upon articles one through nine of the 2005 Warning. There were approximately 70 people in attendance.

Moderator Joyce Dicianna called the Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. She read a "Town meeting welcome" and a tribute to Jean Todd.

Article 1: **Will the Town vote the sum of $287,847.00 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 2005 Grand List to be determined by the Selectmen, divided as follows:**

Roads, Including Winter Work	**$167,750.00**
General Fund Costs	**$120,097.00**
Total	**$287,847.00**

Article 1 was moved by Tim Hanson and seconded by Richard Kimler.

William Ford, Chair of the Board of Selectmen, referred townspeople to the Selectmen's Report and budget narrative in the Annual Report. He reported that there were no big changes in the budget this year. Some funding for training was included to smooth the transition from Tim Hanson to Sally Hoyler as Town Clerk. Some money for hardware was also included, notably for a new computer and replacement of the photocopier.

Bonnie DeGray asked what would happen budget-wise if the Town voted down any of the funding requests by social service agencies which would appear on the following day's Australian balloting. Bill Ford replied that we would spend less. Laurie Cox pointed out the Road/General Fund Total on page 22 of the Town Report, noting that the mid-page total of $287,847.00 is what Article 1 refers to, and is the amount being voted up or down at this Meeting. Warned items such as the social services' requests follow as separate amounts on page 22.

Barry King inquired about the over-expenditure of $706.43 on the "Town Report Preparation and Printing" item in the 2004 budget. Tim Hanson replied that this would have been incurred in preparing the 2003 Town Report and he could not explain the cost breakdown off the top of his head. Over-expenditure could have been due to a wider circulation requiring a larger print run, a greater number of pages, more staff time for preparation, or any number of factors.

Jerome Shedd referred to page 18 of the Town Report, inquiring how the National Forest Service determines the amount of its funding to Ripton (estimated at $26,000 for 2005). Tim Hanson replied that the number used to be calculated with reference to timber sales, rental by ski areas, and a number of other factors. The Forest Service now uses a straight per acre fee. The amount provided by the Forest Service has risen of late—not too long ago they contributed about $8,000 to the Town. Bill Ford commented that the Selectmen would find out how the amount is now calculated; they did not know off-hand.

Dick Collitt asked for clarification of the "Land Sale Fund" of $64,524 mentioned in Article 2 of the Warning. Bill Ford explained that it derived from the sale of the piece of land the Town had owned on the Lincoln Road, up near the border with the Town of Lincoln.

Ed Sullivan called the question and Richard Ruane seconded.

Article 1 was adopted by a unanimous voice vote.

Article 2: **Will the Town vote the sum of $19,000.00 to Ripton Fire and Rescue to help pay Fire Department and First Response expenses for the year?**

Tim Hanson moved the question and Barry King seconded.

Fire Chief Erik Eriksen was indisposed and could not attend the Meeting. Alison Joseph stated that Fire and Rescue/First Response was requesting level funding. They had done a bit of reallocation of spending among their different budget line items, but not increased the budget.

Richard Kimler called the question and Amanda Lee seconded.

Article 2 was adopted by a unanimous voice vote.

Article 3: **Will the Town authorize the Selectmen to expend the accumulated total of the Land Sale Fund ($64,524.00) and authorize the Selectmen to borrow an additional sum, not to exceed $40,000.00 for a period not to exceed ten (10) years, to finish the construction of the new quarters for the Ripton Volunteer Fire and First Response Department?**

Carol Ford moved the question and Barry King seconded.

Tim Hanson referred townspeople to page 11 of the Town Report where a history of the project is given. He stated that the main problem had been an increase in the cost of the building—after last year's Town Meeting the supplier kept raising the price of the steel building, with its cost reaching a prohibitive $155,000. It was decided to hire Tom Barden as Project Manager. He proposed looking for another builder and found Morton Buildings to carry out the work. The plan is to start building in the second week of April. The FEMA grant for demolition of the existing Fire Station has been extended from June 2005 to June 2006.

Use of the Land Sale Fund will soften the impact on taxpayers of the project's increased costs. Some cost-cutting measures may also soften the impact—slab heating will not be needed, and some money may be saved in demolition costs. It is hoped that the money requested in Article 3 will exceed needs, but Fire/First Response does not want to return again to ask for funding from the Town.

Dick Collitt asked if the new building would now be wooden instead of steel. Tim Hanson said it would be a wood frame with steel roof and siding, and described the new building and its improved insulation. Mr. Collitt asked for clarification of the final building cost—Mr. Hanson replied that it was $366,660, offset by $40,000 accruing to the Ripton School and the FEMA demolition grant which will amount to almost $100,000. The cost to the Town will be about $220,000.

Mr. Hanson mentioned that the State building permit arrived Monday, and the project is moving forward.

Richard Kimler moved to close the discussion; Barry King seconded.

Article 3 was passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Article 4: **Will the Town authorize the Selectmen to borrow a sum not to exceed $25,000.00 to meet the federal requirement of a 15% match for the acquisition of the new tanker fire truck?**

Article 4 was moved by Richard Ruane and seconded by Carol Ford.

Ed Sullivan spoke to Article 4. He explained that the current tanker is very antiquated, that it takes four people to run the truck. On the new tanker truck, the suction system can be operated by a single

individual—a great advantage to such a small Fire Department. The new tanker will be more flexible and much safer.

Due to receipt of a federal grant, the Town has the opportunity to obtain a tanker truck worth approximately $165,000 at a cost of $25,000.

Bill Ford inquired how quickly the federal grant money could be obtained. Alison Joseph explained that the grant money will be paid into our account once we present a bill for the truck.

In response to Win Colwell's question about the current tanker's resale value, Ed Sullivan replied that the Department would get something for the truck but couldn't predict an amount. The truck is very difficult to drive (unlike the new truck which is automatic) but there will be someone who will find a use for it.

Tim Hanson mentioned that there could conceivably be savings to townspeople in the area of insurance. The possession of the new tanker truck could result in the Fire Department's rating moving from a #9 to a #8—this in turn could, possibly, result in a lowering of homeowner insurance premiums.

Richard Kimler called the question and Barry King seconded.

Article 4 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 5: **Will the Town vote to have the pay telephone relocated near the Town Office with the understanding that there will be an ongoing annual cost to the Town for having this service? (The cost for 2005 will be $540.00).**

Article 5 was moved by Richard Ruane and seconded by Tim Hanson.

Bill Ford explained that the old Town Office was sold and its new owners do not want the pay telephone sited in front of the building. It is handy, and a public service, to have the pay telephone sited in the center of Town.

Dick Collitt noted that the phone does get a lot of use. He asked if the $540.00 cost for 2005 includes the cost of relocation. Sally Hoyler explained that this was based on a $45/month fee, that there is no cost for the actual relocation.

Andrea Chesman asked who gets the money paid into the telephone and was informed this goes to the phone company.

Bonnie DeGray asked about past cost for the pay telephone and was informed it had cost nothing.

Richard Kimler asked for a breakdown per resident of the annual cost of the pay phone siting. He was informed it would be a fraction of a cent.

Richard Kimler called the question and Bryan Alexander seconded.

Article 5 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

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Willem Jewett, Ripton's State Representative, addressed the Meeting. He distributed a report he had prepared for Town Meeting Day. Mr Jewett praised Ripton's Town Report and commended Tim Hanson for his fine work as Town Clerk for so many years.

Mr. Jewett noted that the legislature had passed a bill making it easier to buy prescription drugs from abroad; he had brought forms enabling people to use this program. He noted that there were now two committees in the Vermont House to address health care, one dealing exclusively with financing issues.

He has hope for progress in this area.

Mr. Jewett stressed the importance of rural economic development, and stated that of the five towns he represents only one, Cornwall, has broadband internet access. He noted that Ripton had applied for but not received a grant for broadband access. He will continue to try to get this service for the Town.

He also stressed the importance of State aid to towns to assist with local transportation, noting that Vermont towns maintain two-thirds of State roads. He will continue pressing for more aid in this area.

Michael Burgess asked if there was any effort in the Legislature to improve cell phone service. Mr. Jewett replied that he was not familiar with the specifics of progress on this front. Paonia Ezrine N'Shaiha reported that people are looking at reforming Act 250 to allow more Internet high speed access and also cell phone towers. There is interest in the area but no short-term solution in sight.

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Article 6: **Will the Town have current property and personal taxes collected by the Treasurer, with a tax due date of November 7, 2005?**

Article 6 was moved by Tim Hanson and seconded by Barry King.

It was noted that this is a "housekeeping" article enabling the collection of taxes and therefore the functioning of the Town.

Richard Ruane called the question and Amanda Lee seconded.

Article 6 was adopted by a unanimous voice vote.

Article 7: **Shall the voters adopt the following Resolution?**
"The Town of Ripton (1) calls on the Legislature to investigate and discuss Vermont's role in the governance of its National Guard, and to set up a commission to study how Guard deployments affect readiness to perform its mission here in Vermont; (2) requests the Congressional Delegation to work to restore a proper balance between the powers of the States and that of the federal government over state National Guard units; and (3) implores the President and the Congress to take steps to withdraw American troops from Iraq, consistent with the mandate of international humanitarian law."

Article 7 was moved by Andrea Chesman and seconded by Win Colwell.

Win Colwell explained that he was primarily responsible for getting this article warned. He then explained that Article 7 and Article 8 are redundant; they are different forms of the same resolution, with Article 7 being a more condensed version. He suggested that the Meeting table Article 7 and move on to discuss and hopefully approve Article 8.

Win Colwell moved to table Article 7 and Tim Hanson seconded.

Article 7 was tabled by a unanimous voice vote.

Article 8: **Shall the voters of the Town of Ripton vote to approve the resolution concerning the war in Iraq and the deployment of members of the Vermont National Guard in that war, as attached to the petition and incorporated herein by reference, and then send a copy of the resolution to Vermont's state and federal office-holders? (A copy of the full resolution can be viewed at iraqresolution.org or at the Town Clerk's office).**

Article 8 was moved by Bryan Alexander and seconded by Joyce Henderson.

Richard Kimler explained that he was primarily responsible for gathering signatures to put Article 8 on the Warning. He inquired whether townspeople had visited the Internet site to read the entire resolution—only one resident had. He had copies of the full text of the resolution, which were distributed.

Dick Collitt asked how the Meeting could be expected to vote on a resolution which only one resident had read on the Internet, the text of which was only now being passed out. He felt it to be ludicrous that the Article was even on the Warning under these circumstances. Bill Ford and Laurie Cox, Selectmen, explained that they were obliged to put any article on the Warning if enough signatures had been collected on a petition—refusal to do so could incur legal costs to the Town.

Bill McKibben proposed that the Meeting table Article 8 and instead revisit Article 7, the condensed version whose text had been warned.

Win Colwell stated that while he thought Article 8 referred to a resolution whose text was a beautiful piece of prose, he could understand if the Town wanted to table Article 8 and return to Article 7.

After some discussion about procedure, Richard Kimler read aloud the entire text of the resolution referred to in Article 8. In response to a question from Alice Clark, he explained that the resolution had been written by the American Friends Service Committee.

Win Colwell felt that Vermont was particularly affected by the war in Iraq, as we have the highest number of combat deaths per capita and the second highest percentage of our National Guardsmen going to Iraq.

George Phinney commented that the Vermont Air National Guard has always been more nationally than State oriented. Its F-16s can't really be construed as primarily intended for Vermont's security.

Tim Hanson called the question and Richard Ruane seconded.

Article 8 was adopted by a show of hands.

Joyce Dicianna asked if it was the Town's pleasure to leave Article 7 tabled. The answer was affirmative, by voice vote.

Article 9: Any other business proper to come before this meeting.

Laurie Cox reported that the Ripton women's group is compiling a directory of townspeople. She directed those who would like to participate to a sign-up sheet. Paonia Ezrine N'Shaiha asked how the directory would be distributed; Laurie Cox said it remained to be determined.

Ms. Cox, representing the Selectboard, expressed appreciation for Tim Hanson's years of outstanding service as Town Clerk and presented him with a gift. There was applause from the Meeting.

Joyce Dicianna explained that after years of service she would be resigning her position as Union High School Director. She asked that any interested townspeople contact the Selectmen.

Sally Buteau asked if it were possible for Ripton to hire a Zoning and Sewage Administrator who would function as a certified engineer, stating that five years after her septic system was installed the State was not accepting the certificate of completion signed by Ed Hanson. Bill Ford replied that Ed Hanson has done a very good job for us and clarified the function of a civil engineer who designs septic systems and ensures their proper completion, and that of the Town's Administrator, who makes sure the rules are followed and appropriate inspections made by a qualified engineer. Ms. Buteau felt maybe her problem was one of communication, of understanding who performs what function. Mr. Ford reiterated it is not in the Town's interest or purview to be approving technical designs, but rather assuring that State and Town ordinances are complied with.

Ed Sullivan, on behalf of Ripton Fire and First Response, asked townspeople to prominently display their 911 street addresses. Persis Rowe asked where to put signage if one lived off-road; Mr. Sullivan said to display street numbers where driveways meet Town roads. Mr. Sullivan also mentioned his representation of Ripton on the Vermont State Police Advisory Board. They welcome input as to how to improve interaction with, and service to, towns. If anyone has an issue they would like discussed, they should drop a note to Ed via the Town Clerk or contact him directly.

Barry King commended the clarity of the narrative in the Town Report. She reported that the women's group in Ripton is open to all; those interested in participation should contact Laurie Cox. Ms. King also mentioned that Ripton's Conservation Commission is looking for a few new members; anyone interested should contact the Town Clerk.

Bill Ford noted that three positions need to be filled: Alternate Regional Planning Commission Delegate; Town Service Officer, and Dog Warden.

Anjanette Sidaway asked if anyone had considered negotiating as a group with utility companies to obtain a reduced rate for their products. She noted a wide variety of gas prices in the market. Laurie Cox responded that someone could look into this, but it is probably not a Town function. Schools purchase fuel as a district and the Town, along with other non-profits, has a group purchase plan coordinated by ACCAG. George Phinney suggested Ms. Sidaway explore forming a cooperative.

Cindy Seligman spoke against International Paper's proposed test burn of tires. She brought information to the Meeting for distribution.

Sandy Lance commented that the Halloween hay wagon ferrying trick-or-treaters had been missed last year. She had learned that Chris and Wendy Smith were bearing the expense of the hayride. Ms. Lance wondered if the Town could support continuing this tradition—Ms. Cox referred her to the Friends of the Ripton School.

Jeremy Grip gave an update on high-speed Internet access, especially addressing those who had expressed an interest and made deposits last year. He said things are changing and people shouldn't lose hope. He thought all who are interested could form a consumer cooperative. Anyone who is interested should contact him or Paonia Ezrine N'Shaiha.

Tim Hanson moved that the Meeting be adjourned, seconded by Richard Ruane.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Joyce Dicianna announced that the Meeting would be reconvened on Tuesday, March 1, 2005, at the Community House to vote by Australian ballot on election of Town officers and approval of certain allocations from the General Fund.