

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

MARCH 6, 2006

The legal voters of the Town of Ripton met at the Community House in Ripton on Monday, March 6, at 8:25 p.m. to act upon articles one through four of the 2006 Town Warning. There were about 65 people in attendance.

Moderator Joyce Dicianna called the meeting to order at 8:25 p.m.

Article 1: Will the Town vote the sum of \$335,328.00 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 2006 Grand List to be determined by the Selectboard, divided as follows:

Roads, Including Winter Work	\$166,000.00
General Fund Costs	<u>\$169,328.00</u>
Total	\$335,328.00

Article 1 was moved by Carol Ford and seconded by Barry King.

Bill Ford highlighted changes in the budget section of the Town Report. Most notable were the increased budget amounts for Board Clerk, Town Clerk, and Treasurer, and a decrease in the amount budgeted for Assistant Clerk. Insurance costs are significantly increased, as Fire Department insurance is included in this line item (it is, however, offset by the "Fire Department Share of Insurance" amount found under Revenues). The other notable increase is found under "Repayment of Loans," where repayment of loans for the Fire Station and tanker truck are shown. The above changes represent the lion's share of budget increases in 2006. Mr. Ford then asked if there were questions from the floor.

Nola Kevra asked whether the workers felling and trimming trees were employed by the Town. Mr. Ford replied that they were not; he believed they were hired by CVPS personnel. He said this work would save us money in the future when clearing along ditch lines.

Richard Kimler called the question and Richard Ruane seconded.

Article 1 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 2: Will the Town vote the sum of \$22,000.00 to Ripton Fire and Rescue to help pay Fire Department and First Response expenses for the year?

Article 2 was moved by Richard Kimler and seconded by Barry King.

Erik Eriksen, Fire Chief, stated that this was a basic, no-frills budget. He mentioned that there was ongoing discussion about future means to finance large expenditures such as pumper truck repairs or replacement vehicles.

Richard Kimler called the question and Ed Sullivan seconded.

Article 2 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 3: Will the Town have current property and personal taxes collected by the Treasurer, with a tax due date of November 6, 2006?

Article 3 was moved by Carol Ford and seconded by Tim Hanson.

It was stated that this is a basic "housekeeping" function; there was no discussion.

Richard Ruane called the question and Richard Kimler seconded.

Article 3 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 4 Will the Town vote to request the Governor and our State Representative and Senators to oppose:

- Any use of the State Education Fund for purposes that are outside the law's original intent to "make payments to school districts and supervisory unions for the support of education";
- the shifting of existing State General Fund expense obligations to the Education Fund; and
- the reduction of any existing State General Fund revenue support to the Education Fund?

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

Bill Ford explained that the Selectboard had warned this article at the suggestion of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and that about half of Vermont's towns had warned the article. The intent is that money allocated for education funding should in fact be used for education and not other areas. Laurie Cox added that there had been proposals to shift payment for some items from the General Fund to the Education Fund.

Ed Sullivan called the question and Joyce Henderson seconded.

Article 4 was overwhelmingly adopted by voice vote.

Article 5: Any other business proper to come before this meeting.

1) Fire Station loan authorization

Tim Hanson noted that the next day's Australian ballot would include an item requesting voter authorization to borrow \$176,500.00 to cover costs of the new Fire Station. This is not new money, but rather refinancing expenditures previously approved by the voters. He said three banks are interested in providing financing, one at a fixed 4.3% over ten years.

Mr. Hanson reviewed the Fire Station costs. The actual costs came in at \$335,000 (\$31,500 less than the "worst case" scenario). The \$335,000 is offset by \$64,500 received from the sale of Town land approved last year, leaving a cost of \$270,500 (plus interest). Of this last amount, \$100,000 was to be covered by FEMA funding. FEMA is now, however, promising only \$65,000. He said the Selectboard don't intend to settle for the \$65,000 but would go after the full \$100,000. Mr. Hanson expected that in the long run we would see all or most of the \$100,000 from FEMA. Bill Ford added that the Town was definitely given to understand we would receive \$100,000, and that the matter would be pursued. Tim Hanson asked that voters approve authorizing the borrowing of \$176,500, and that the matter of discrepancy in FEMA funding (\$35,000) would be sorted out.

Bill McKibben inquired why we were voting by Australian ballot tomorrow rather than by voice vote at the Meeting. Tim Hanson replied that if a Town borrows over \$10,000 it must be approved by paper ballot; this is a statutory requirement. Bill McKibben said he asked this question because he sees a move to have more issues decided by Australian ballot rather than voice vote.

Dick Collitt asked what would happen if we don't receive the \$35,000 from FEMA—why should we negotiate a bank loan for \$176,500 when we may in fact need an additional \$35,000? Mr. Hanson replied that banks would finance the additional \$35,000 at an advantageous rate should it prove necessary to indeed borrow that sum. Mr. Collitt asked if voters would vote on the additional \$35,000 should it not be

forthcoming from FEMA. Mr. Hanson said we would borrow the \$176,500 and the Fire Department would return for approval of borrowing \$35,000 next year if it were necessary. He felt reasonably certain that with our good paper trail of FEMA's promises, we will in fact receive the full \$100,000.

Dick Collitt asked if we could make a fuss and go after the \$35,000 from FEMA. Bill Ford said he would hate to see the Town spend \$20,000 on lawyer's fees to attempt to get \$35,000. Tim Hanson said that we need to make political noise about the \$35,000, and we will.

2) Fire Department financing ideas

Ed Sullivan, representing Fire/First Response, thanked the community for their support in financing the new Fire Station. He said that the School's use of a Capital Projects Fund had caused him to think about a similar fund for the Fire Department. He described the Fire Department's truck situation: it is not possible to get parts for one vehicle and another is almost shot. There is concern about future capital expenses, as equipment may die at any time and he doesn't want taxpayers to get hit with a large bill for replacement equipment. Many towns put aside money each year for such eventualities.

Mr. Sullivan proposed a 3 cent increase on every tax dollar to finance a fund for Fire Department capital projects—this amount would result in just under \$15,000 per year which could be set aside.

Sue Collitt asked about the \$22,000 just voted in Article 2—did this not cover any of these projected capital expenses? Mr. Sullivan replied that the \$22,000 was to cover supplies and operating expenses, not capital costs. To finance capital costs, money could be put aside each year, as he was proposing, or the Department could come to the voters with a big bill for equipment. Some members opposed approaching the voters for large capital equipment funding amounts, especially after they had been so supportive in voting monies for the new Station.

Barry King asked about the cost of a new truck. Mr. Sullivan said a new mini truck would cost about \$80,000 to \$90,000, but that the Department would try to purchase a used truck, with luck for something under \$20,000.

Sue Collitt inquired if we could ask Middlebury College for assistance in funding such a purchase. Bill Ford responded that we could, but we don't know what they might provide. We have received such funding assistance in the past, but it was approximately 15 years ago and they might be amenable to assisting us. Ed Sullivan said the issue was an ongoing one and he couldn't see the Town approaching the College every time we need assistance with capital equipment.

Joyce Henderson asked if the proposed 3-cent increase would be a one-time or an annual assessment. Ed Sullivan said it would be an annual assessment resulting in, say, \$150,000 over a ten year period.

There was discussion of the age of various pieces of equipment and college-donated vehicles. Bill Ford indicated the Selectboard's willingness to again approach the College for assistance.

Jerome Shedd asked if donations to the Fire Department are tax deductible. Tim Hanson said that they are not now, but that they ought to be. He believes Willem Jewett is working on the paperwork necessary to effect this.

Mr. Shedd asked if the Department was proposing a fund like the Ripton School's Capital Projects Fund. Mr. Sullivan responded it was indeed proposing such a fund, into which they would hope to see deposited some \$15,000 each year. Mr. Shedd asked whether this money would be in the Town or the Fire Department budget. Mr. Sullivan replied that it would be for Fire Department equipment, and could be located wherever the Town sees fit. Mr. Shedd said he thought it was a fine idea, but could equipment simply be funded through a budget item increase? Mr. Sullivan said it could be, but an automatic 3 cents on the tax dollar was the method used by many towns, including Middlebury. Mr. Shedd felt it made sense to be earning interest on such money by having it in a fund.

Responding to a question about the cost to an average homeowner, Tim Hanson replied that someone with a tax bill of \$3,000 would pay an additional \$30.

Alice Clark asked whether the existence of such a capital fund would influence the Department's chances of receiving grant monies. Mr. Sullivan replied that other towns with funds have not been adversely affected, but he couldn't really answer as each agency has different rules.

Jerome Shedd asked how one could donate to the Fire Department, as even if a 3-cent increase were approved it wouldn't take effect this year. Erik Eriksen said one could write a check payable to the Ripton Fire Department and send it to Box 125.

3) Methodist Church building

Bonnie DeGray reported that the Methodist Congregation doesn't want to keep the building. She said the Historic Preservation Trust might provide grant money to restore the building for use, but that a non-profit entity must be involved. What role would townspeople like to have? The building's original deed described it as a "meeting house." If interested in participating in a building maintenance and restoration effort, townspeople should contact Bonnie DeGray and/or Arthur Lord.

Bill McKibben stressed the importance of maintaining the three buildings in the Town center. He and John Elder had held a number of lectures there last year—they had 50 or so attendees, but very few from Ripton. He encouraged people to contact Bonnie about ways to approach the building's future maintenance and use. He stressed its rich past and potential to fill future needs. Nola Kevra said that people involved in church restoration in Lincoln had made supportive noises, though not financial ones.

Bill Ford asked who owns the church, and what would happen were nothing done. Ms. DeGray explained that the Troy Conference of the United Methodist Church owns the building. Barry King asked if the Methodist Church would continue to own the building if a non-profit community group were formed. Bonnie said no, that the Troy Conference no longer wants to own it and that the Historic Preservation Trust would give money to a non-profit owner. Bonnie also said money may be forthcoming from the Freeman Foundation and "Sacred Spaces." Barry King asked if the building could then be used for other than spiritual space, and Bonnie replied that it could be used for other purposes. Jeremy Grip asked if a community group would need to be non-profit to receive funding. Ed Sullivan asked if it would be non-denominational. Bonnie responded to both questions in the affirmative.

4) Conservation Commission

Warren King provided a handout listing upcoming events sponsored by Ripton's Conservation Commission. There will be two informational workshops followed by a third workshop to put together actual projects.

5) Changes in Town staffing

Bill Ford noted that Sally Hoyler has resigned "Clerk of Selectboard" in order to focus on her work as Town Clerk and Treasurer. The Selectboard has hired Ripton resident Deb Karpak as "Board Clerk". She is working 8-12 hours per week, and all is going very well so far.

6) Local food production

Joanna Colwell spoke, representing a group called ACORN which works on food and energy issues. She was advocating local food production.

7) Coyote hunt

Nola Kevra reminded townspeople that they could post their land prior to upcoming coyote hunts.

8) Broadband internet

Jeremy Grip reported that the Broadband Co-op's tower at the Hanson's had been erected that day and that it would be operational by May. He asked interested persons to contact Bryan Alexander, Bill Biederman, or Alison Joseph.

Tim Hanson moved that the Meeting be adjourned, and was seconded by Bryan Alexander.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Joyce Dicianna announced that the Meeting would be reconvened on Tuesday, March 7, 2006, at the Community House to vote by Australian ballot on election of Town officers, approval of certain allocations from the General Fund, and authorization of refinancing the costs of Fire Station construction.