

RIPTON, VERMONT  
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING 1989  
MARCH 6TH, 1989

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 by Moderator Freeman Allen.

Article 1. To act upon the reports of the Town officers as submitted by the auditors.

Ben Steinzor moved the article, and was seconded. There was no discussion. Jean Todd moved the question, and was seconded. The vote was in the affirmative.

Article 2. Will the Town vote the sum of \$141,540.00, (approximately \$86,000.00 to be raised by taxes) to pay General Fund and Road expenses for the ensuing year, and pay outstanding orders or obligations of the Town, with interest, the rate of the 1989 Grand List to be determined by the Selectmen, and divided as follows?

- a) Roads, including winter work.....\$83,200.00
- b) General Fund costs.....\$58,340.00

The article was moved by Ben Steinzor, and seconded. Mr. Ford, Chair of the Selectboard, asked if there were specific questions on any of the line items. Since there were none, he highlighted some of them as follows:

\$1000 to upgrade the computer and to buy a better, faster printer; \$700 to rebind some of the Town books, as part of the Town plan to systematically rebind a book per year; and \$3000 to build a footbridge over the river near the post office, to allow for safe pedestrian traffic.

At this point Mr. Richard Collitt asked what the status was on the state bridge at that site. Mr. Ford replied that the bridge (along with a small stretch of rte 125 near the Middlebury line) is in the State 5 year plan, specifically in the planning and engineering stage. However, it will take many years for the project to be built. A letter has been sent to the State and the Regional Planning Commission stating that the Town is very interested in upgrading this bridge. Mr. James Blanchette wondered if the footbridge was still be necessary since the new school is in a different location, and there will be fewer children who need to cross it. Mr. Raymond Hathaway pointed out the bridge was hazardous to adults and should still be a concern. Mr. Collitt asked where the bridge would be built and was told by Mr. Ford that it would be attached to the North side of the existing bridge. Mr. Ross Elliot asked if the State would reimburse the Town for the cost of this bridge. Mr. Ford replied that they would not, since they don't recognize the danger, since no one had been hurt there yet. Ms. Jean Ryan wondered if the new State bridge would incorporate a footbridge, making it unnecessary to build a footbridge now. Mr. Ford said that he didn't know, but that the Town would try to make sure that it did. But in the meantime, since

people's lives were at stake now, the footbridge needs to be built. Mr. Ford noted that the bridge, which is approximately 30 feet long, would be moveable, and could be used at another location.

Continuing with his review of the budget, Mr. Ford said that \$1300 had been budgeted to survey the boundaries between the School, Community House and the Church, since the old Town records are fuzzy. Monies have also been budgeted to finish the interior painting and to refinish the floor of the Community House. Mr. Blanchette suggested that it might be prudent to wait to redo the floors until we are sure that the children won't need to use it for gym. Mr. Ford said that that might indeed be a good idea.

Mr. Ford pointed out that the Sheriff patrol budget had been increased because their hourly rate had gone up, and also to pay for a modest increase in patrol hours. Mr. Peter Crone expressed his opinion that running radar was not as important as patrolling, and suggested that the Sheriff be asked to spend more time on the back roads. Mr. Ford said that according to the patrol logs, the deputies spent 40% in Town and 60% patrolling roads. Mrs. Gracille Lord suggested that they ought to spend more time trying to stop snow-mobiles running the roads. Mr. Arthur Lord suggested that at 3 pm, ski traffic is a real problem and some patrol in town is warranted at that time. Mr. William Pierce felt that the patrol hours are usually too late at night, and that the Sheriff should push to get speeders during the day, when children are playing, rather than during night.

Mrs. Lord wondered why the Dugway was slated for upgrading. Mr. Ronald Wimett, Selectman, said that one of the reasons for keeping the road open all winter was to allow the road crew to get to the North Branch more quickly, rather than having to take the long way by Baker Bridge. Mrs. Kathy Caswell pointed out that having the Dugway open would improve fire department response time. Ms. Laureen Cox, member of the Selectboard, said that there are people who are planning to build on the road, and since it is a class 3 road the Town is obligated to keep it open.

Mr. Wimett, continuing with the Budget discussion, said that the Selectboard proposed to create a new fund to set aside money to pay for large projects that will need to be done in the future. of these projects include upgrading the Dugway and replacing the riprap on the Ripton-Lincoln Road. The proposed set-aside amount for this year is \$6500. Mr. Ford said, by way of an example, that if the riprap on the Ripton-Lincoln road collapsed, the cost would be in the \$15-30 thousand range. If the Town had put aside \$6500 a year for a few years, a significant part of the monies needed would already be in hand. This might help to level out tax increases in the future.

The question was moved by Mr. Blanchette, and seconded. The vote was in the affirmative.

Article 3. Will the Town vote to authorize the Selectmen to prorate monies received in lieu of taxes from Middlebury College in 1989, among the General Fund, Road account, and Town School Accounts?

Mr. Pierce moved the question, and was seconded. Mr. Steinzor began the discussion by asking about how much financial help the College gives the Town. Mr. Ford replied that College gives an annual gift of \$7500, and pays about \$10,000.00 in taxes. He mentioned that the Board was gathering information and laying the

groundwork for renegotiating the agreement between the College and the Town, which expires at the end of 1990. Mr. Blanchette asked if the amount of the gift in the new agreement would be voted on. Ms. Cox said that technically no vote was needed, but the Town would be kept informed. Mr. Coleman mentioned that there was a lot of new development at Breadloaf, to which Mr. Ford added that some of the uses that the facility was put to may have changed, which may change the way the property is valued.

The question was moved by Mr. Steinzor, seconded, and voted in the affirmative.

Article 4. Will the Town vote to have the current property and personal taxes collected by the Town Treasurer?

Ms. Todd moved the question and was seconded. Mr. Ryan asked what the purpose of this article was. Ms. Cox replied that it is a State requirement that the town appoint a tax collector. Mr. Commons moved the question, was seconded, and the vote was in the affirmative.

Article 5. Will the Town authorize the Selectboard to sell at fair market value the parcel of open land the Town owns on the North end of the Ripton-Lincoln road, and use the proceeds to offset the costs of the construction of the new School?

Mary Clark moved the question, and was seconded. There was then a motion by seven voters to decide the question by paper ballot.

Mr. Blanchette offered an amendment as follows: in place of the phrase "offset the costs" he suggested "to reduce the bond." Ms. Cox said that since the land might be sold with the Town holding a mortgage, this amendment would make this type of transaction impossible. Mr. Ryan asked about what kind of land is it. Mr. Wimett described it as somewhat swampy, with some open land, bordering on both sides of the Ripton-Lincoln road. Mr. Ryan wondered about the possibility of holding onto the land, assuming that it might increase in value, which would allow the Town to make more money later. Ms. Cox explained that the bond could not be paid off early, once it was encumbered, which would make getting the money for the land later possibly less useful. Mr. Mark Reynolds suggested we sell school and Community House as soon as the new school is built, to maximize revenues. Mr. Steinzor asked if the motion to amend the article would preclude the mortgage concept discussed earlier. Mr. Pierce expressed his feeling that the Town should not be in the business of financing the property, since there are risks and problems such as non-payment and hassles with timely payment.

Mr. Steinzor called to end debate on the amendment, and was seconded. The meeting voted to close debate, then, on a voice vote, defeated the amendment.

Mr. Ross Elliot then made a motion to amend the article to read that "the sale of the Town land not be used to finance any costs over the projected 1.1 million cost". He was seconded, and the floor was open for discussion. Mr. Crone pointed out that in the event that the costs did go over the projected amount, some other way to pay for it would have to be discovered. Mrs. Gracile Lord asked if the school would have to come back to the Town for authorization to spend more money if there were cost overruns. Ms. Cox said that she understood that the

School Board would have to. Mr. Merrill suggested that the article be worded that the money be used for capital costs, but did not make his suggestion as an amendment. Mr. Reynolds said that since the project was supposed to be a turnkey operation, there would be little chance that extras would be needed. He expressed some confusion over the fact that the construction bid was for approximately \$900,000, but that the total cost was 1.1 million. Ms. Carol Ford, of the School Board, pointed out that there were costs other than the building, including land, clearing, sewer, well, etc, all of which added up to 1.1 million. Mr. Kirchoff said that he felt that the school was a country club school, and that had local contractors been asked to bid, the costs would have been less. The moderator told Mr. Kirchoff that discussion of the bid process was not appropriate at this time, and needed to be discussed at the school meeting later this evening. The question was called, and the meeting voted to end debate, then by voice vote defeated the amendment.

Debate then continued on the unamended article. Mr. Perry Hanson Jr. noted that the article says that the Selectboard will be authorized, not directed to sell the land, which means that if the price offered is too low, the Board could just refuse to sell. Mr. Wimett said that that was why the article was warned "at fair market value". Ms. Rosalyn Haynes asked how many building sites were possible of the land, and was told that according to zoning, four or five.

At this point in the meeting Mr. Robert Oliver, State Representative, entered the meeting, and, since there were no objections from the floor, was given leave to speak. He stated that he would be available by phone at home, or through the sergeant at arms in Montpelier. He was asked questions about State aid to the school, and State funding for state mandated programs, among other things. He said that he probably would not continue meeting at the Ripton store on Saturdays as the previous representative had, but would try to attend Selectboard meetings from time to time. After this brief discussion, he left the meeting.

After he left, Mr. Phillip Coleman called the original question, and was seconded. Paper ballots were used, and the article was adopted 62 yes to 10 no.

Article 6. Will the Town vote the sum of \$7500.00 to the Ripton Volunteer Fire Department to help defray expenses for the year?

The article was moved by Ms. Holsman, and seconded. There was no discussion. Mrs. Clark moved the question, was seconded, and the article was carried in the affirmative by voice vote.

Article 7. Will the Town authorize the Selectboard to contract to have all Town property professionally reappraised for the 1990 Grand list, at a cost not to exceed \$18,000.00?

Ms. Holsman moved the article, and was seconded. Robert Peskin asked if the amount to be spent in the article was an estimate, to which Mr. Ford replied that it represented the high end of the range. Mr. Steinzor asked if the Town was obligated to take the lowest bid. Ms. Cox said no. Mrs. Lord asked why the Town needed to reappraise now. Mr. Ford said that there were several reasons, the most

important one being the need to make sure that people are paying an equitable tax burden. Also, there had been some problems with the reappraisal done in 1984, and some of those problems need to be sorted out. Ms. Cox noted that another reason to reappraise is that the Town Grand List has fallen below 80% of fair market value, to about 75%, and there are some State Aid to education penalties that the Town might be subject to. It was pointed out that since we get such a small amount of State aid, the penalties are quite small.

Mr. Blanchette asked if the Listers could do it themselves. Ms. Cox said that the job is overwhelming, and that it was unlikely that they could. Mr. Merrill asked if there were any temporary solutions, for instance, like raising all assessed values by a fixed amount. Mr. Ford answered that this option had been considered with regards to land values, but that the state had rejected the idea. Mrs. Lord said that it would take many years to repay the cost of reappraisal if the amount of penalties were very small. Mr. Hanson, Town Clerk, noted that it was possible that appraisal might reveal properties, or changes to properties, that are not currently on the tax rolls, and that might increase our tax base with a corresponding increase in tax income. Ms. Joyce Henderson asked if the College land would be appraised, and was told that it would be, along with Silver Towers camp, so that the Board would have some basis for negotiating with the College and the Elks for the gift in lieu of taxes.

Jean Todd moved the question, and was seconded, and the article was passed on a voice vote.

Article 8. Any other business proper to be done at this meeting.

Mr. Ryan asked what the situation was at the Community House with the passage of the anti-drinking ordinance. Mr. Ford reported that there had been no complaints since the ordinance was passed.

Mr. T. Hanson updated the Town on the situation with the Solid Waste District, negotiations with Vicon, and the possibility of using the Salisbury landfill for the next few years.

Jean Todd, Chair of the Planning Commission, spoke briefly in support of the Zoning ordinance to be voted on by Australian Ballot on Tuesday.

The Moderator called for a motion to adjourn, which was made and seconded, and voted in the affirmative at 9:42