

MINUTES OF TOWN MEETING MARCH 6, 1990

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 by Moderator Freeman Allen. He announced that William Ford, Chair of the Board, would not be present at the meeting since he was with his wife, Carol Ford (who is Chair of the School Board) who had just given birth to a son, Andrew -- mother and child doing well.

The Moderator asked if there was anyone who objected to his not reading the entire Warning. There being none, he dispensed with the reading of the entire Warning, and began with Article 1.

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

Motion to adopt made by David Disque, and seconded. There was no discussion. The article was voted in the affirmative by voice vote.

Article 2. Will the Town vote the sum of \$192,067 (approximately \$99,067 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 tax rate on the 1990 Grand List to be determined by the Selectmen, and divided as follows?

- a) Roads, including winter work....\$132,550
- b) General Fund costs..... \$59,517

Ben Steinzor made a motion to adopt the article, and was seconded.

Laureen Cox reviewed the highlights of the changes in the budget. The major changes in the salary lines are due to the increased amount of time necessary to get the work of the Town done. The Listers' line has increased significantly since they will be participating in the re-appraisal that will start this year, and will be finished for the 1991 Grand List. She pointed out a new category -- Town Administration -- which will pay to have Selectboard administrative work done. Examples of this type of work are paralegal research for the upcoming renegotiations with Middlebury College, and working on drafting ordinances and bylaws. Ms. Cox explained that the Board feels that paying the Clerk or another member of the community can save money compared with having the work done by lawyers.

Ms. Cox continued by explaining that the increase maintenance line is due to the necessity for the Town to maintain the old School building, since the School was no longer dealing with it, and since the Town had voted at Town Meeting 1989 not to sell the building. Other changes include an increase in the legal fees line, to allow for adequate consultation with lawyers during the negotiations with Middlebury College. The Board hopes that the costs will be covered by an increase in the annual gift in lieu of taxes. The Community House maintenance line has decreased significantly, since the building has now been painted inside and out, and the floors have been refinished.

Ms. Cox noted that there is another new line item, which is the assessment that will be paid to the Addison County Regional Solid Waste District, which the Town voted to join last year.

Under roadwork, Ms. Cox pointed out that the main changes are footnoted in the Town report. The main "summer project" is the replacement of the culvert near Freeman Allen's house. The State of Vermont has committed

there someone had expressed interest in buying or renting the building. Mr. Wimett said a change of use zoning permit would be required, but the use of the building as an office would probably be approved. Mr. Bronson asked if the Town might be sorry in a few years if we sold the building and lost control of the space. Mr. Manning asked what the Town could get for rent for the old office instead of selling it. Ms. Cox said that the Board had not considered renting as an option, since there was a need to fund the cost of the renovations, and the overall plan was to use the proceeds from the sale of the building to pay for the renovations.

Hilda Billings noted that the Town office has a memorial plaque on it, in memory of Oris Manning. She wondered how that would be dealt with if the building was sold. Mr. Wimett said that Mrs. Todd had approached the Selectboard a few minutes before Town Meeting to inform the Board that there might be a deed covenant that prevents the land from being sold at all, but the Board had not been aware of this possibility until this evening. Ms. Cox said that if in fact there are restrictions in the deed the Town would have to get the restrictions lifted, if possible, or not sell the building. She suggested that the voters could authorize the sale anyway, with the provision that if a sale cannot be done without violating the conditions of the memorial, it would not be done.

Joyce Henderson said that she felt she did not have enough information as to the costs of the renovations, and the additional costs of having the office in the larger building. Ms. Cox pointed out that the costs of maintaining the building would have to be borne by the Town whether the office was moved or not. Ms. Henderson asked if the School or the Town would have to pay for the maintenance. Ms. Cox explained that the Town and the School bills all are paid out of the same voters' pockets, since the Town and the Elementary School District comprise the same people, but that the Town would pay the bills.

Bob McClaran asked if the vote as worded in the Warning would require the Town to sell the building if the offers for it were less than the fair market value. Ms. Cox said that the vote authorizes, but does not require, a sale.

At this point, Bob Oliver, State Representative, was recognized the Moderator. The Moderator asked if the Town would suspend discussion on Article 7 to allow Mr. Oliver to answer questions from the floor. There were no objections.

Mr. Oliver began by saying that the State aid to education amount was projected to be between \$142 and 149 million, but probably would be somewhere in the middle. This would lead to an increase in Ripton's State aid of \$60,000 to as much as \$75,000.

Arthur Lord asked if there had been any discussion about having education paid for by a graduated income tax, since property tax is regressive and not based on an individual's ability to pay. Mr. Oliver said that there was little support for this idea in Montpelier. Mrs. Clark asked if there was any chance that the homestead exemption would take effect this year. Mr. Oliver said that he didn't think this would pass either. Mrs. Clark asked what the Town could do to help pass this legislation. Mr. Oliver said that the best thing to do would be to write to the education committee. e

Harold Reed said that the State needed to be careful where they cut back the budget. He said that he had been in the regional office of the

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

The Article was moved by Ida Steinzor, and seconded. There was no discussion. The question was called by Elinor Holsman, and seconded. The motion was adopted, and the article was passed by voice vote.

Article 5. Will the Town vote the sum of \$7500 to the Ripton Volunteer Fire Department to help defray expenses for the year?

The Article was moved by Robert McClaran, and seconded.

Peter Manning rose to speak about his concern over the Fire Department's response to a fire that destroyed his house in October 1989. He explained that it took the fire department between 45 minutes to one hour to respond to the fire, and that in fact the Lincoln Fire Department arrived before Ripton. Mr. Wimet, Selectman and a member of the fire department, explained that the reason why the response was so slow was because the dispatcher did not pick up the phone when the calls went in to her. Without the dispatcher paging the volunteer out, there was no way for them to know there was a fire to go to. Sidney Stokes, another member of the Fire Department, reiterated that there had been no radio dispatch. Greg Todd, Chief, rose to explain that it was a very unfortunate incident, and that he and all the members of the department were very sorry that it had happened. He said that the following morning he took steps to change dispatchers, and now the Addison County Sheriff is dispatching for the department.

Mr. Manning continued to express at length his concern over the incident, and his frustration with the department. He said that he felt obligated to bring this up, even though he supports the department and hopes that the Town votes the money. He expressed a sentimental attachment to the building, which he said he built himself, and wondered if it could have been saved had the department been able to respond sooner.

David Meltzer moved the question, and was seconded. The motion was passed, and the article was carried by voice vote.

Article 6. Will the Town authorize the Selectboard to acquire from the Ripton School District the Old School building on the north side of Route 125 in the Village Hollow?

The Article was moved by Joyce DiCianna, and seconded. Ms. Henderson asked if there was any money to be exchanged between the Town and the School. Ms. Cox said that the transaction was so that the school would no longer have to bear responsibility for the building, and was not a way to make money. The costs for any future renovations will be dealt with in the next two articles. Peter Manning asked what the building is being used for now. The Clerk said that it was idle except for its use twice a month as a recycling depot. The question was moved by Eleanor Holsman, seconded, and voted in the affirmative.

Article 7. Will the Town vote to authorize the Selectboard to sell at fair market value the Town Office located on the south side of Route 125 in the Village Hollow?

The question was moved by Joyce DiCianna, and seconded. A question was asked if a value had been placed on the old office. Ms. Cox said that the building had not been appraised yet, since the Board did not want to incur expenses on the project without Town approval. She did say that

to pay \$24,000 of this project. The Town also plans to do two years of resurfacing this year. Last year the resurfacing money was not spent because the flood damage had to be paid for out of Town funds up front, and there was no guarantee that there would be any State or Federal reimbursement. Since much of the damage was paid for by the State and FEMA, the funds to resurface are now available.

Richard Collit asked which roads will be paved. Ronald Wimett, Selectman, replied that the Board will consult with Mr. Wood, the State District Highway Engineer, to get his advice. Mr. Collit wondered if Miller Hill would be done. Mr. Wimett said that that is one of the possible sites, but no firm decision had been made yet.

Timothy Hanson, Town Clerk, noted that there is a discrepancy between the amount warned and the amount in the budget shown on pages 12 and 13 of the Town Report. The mistake came about because the Board made last minute changes in the budget, but the Clerk failed to carry over the changes to the Warning. There was a discussion about how to remedy this. Finally William Pierce made a motion to amend the Warning to match the budget. The amendment was to have the General Fund Budget decrease from \$59,517 to \$58,037, and the Road budget increase from \$132,550 to \$136,150. This motion was seconded. There was no discussion of the amendment, which was passed by a voice vote.

Jean Ryan asked why the line item for election costs had increased by 200%. The Clerk answered that there will be three elections this year, (Town Meeting, Primary and General) compared with one last year, and additionally, the Town usually hires more ballot clerks to deal with the increased numbers of voters in a General Election year.

Mary Clark called the question and was seconded. The question to end debate was voted by voice in the affirmative. The question was then voted by voice 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 1990, among the General Fund, Road account, and Town School Accounts?

The article was moved by Richard Clark, and seconded.

Mr. Lord asked if the reappraisal of the College has been completed. Ms. Cox said that the fieldwork was done, but the Town was waiting for the final report. The report will be available for the negotiations with the College.

Jim Blanchette asked if the cost for reappraisal voted last year had been set aside. The Moderator ruled that that question was not germane to the discussion of proration of the College gift in lieu of taxes. Mr. Blanchette asked when he could ask the question. The Moderator said that since the budget discussion had already taken place, the only other opportunity would be under article 10, "other business". Mr. Blanchette said that he would be satisfied to raise the question then.

Mr. Collitt asked what "prorated" means. Ms. Cox explained that the money were divided between the School, Town and Road fund according to the percentage of the budget each represented.

Hal Reed moved the question, and was seconded. The motion was adopted, and the article was passed by voice vote.

Agency of Natural Resources to find professional hydrogeologists typing their own letters and permits, because the hiring freeze did not allow them to hire secretaries.

Joyce DiCianna said that in order to maintain the current percentage of State aid to the Towns the \$149 million figure is required. To lower the amount, even to \$146 million, while it would help Ripton, would be a step backwards in terms of the State's commitment to education. She asked Mr. Oliver to push for the higher amount. Alan Myers, Assistant Superintendent of Schools for the Middlebury Union District, said that Ripton will benefit if the higher amount is voted in, but that if there is any significant reduction in the \$149 million, Ripton would have a significant decrease in the amount allocated, based on the way the formula works. He suggested that the School Board not plan for a large increase in State aid this year. David Disque said that he believed that if the State does not fund education to at least the levels of 1989-1990 many local school budgets will not pass.

After this discussion, there being no other questions, Mr. Oliver left the meeting with a round of applause. The discussion on Article 7 continued.

John Merrill asked whether the Board would call a special Town meeting if they could not get at least fair market value for the old office. Ms. Cox said that the Board would. Jean Todd said that the land was given to the Town to be used as a park or as an office, and she wasn't sure that the Town was free to sell it. Mary Clark said that a possibility was to contact the family to see if they would agree to have the renovated office rededicated in Mr. Manning's name.

Mr. Lord, Chair of the Planning Commission, said that he spends quite a lot of time in the present office and feels that the space is too small. He said that at least the Planning Commission needs more space for maps, and other planning tools.

Hal Reed asked if the old building could be sold for enough to cover the cost of the renovations. Mr. Cox said that the Board believed that there would be enough money to cover the costs.

Jean Ryan said that she felt that the Town could not make a decision on this issue so long as the issue of whether the Town could sell was unresolved. Ms. Cox said that the Town could authorize the Board to sell the structure if the deed allowed, or if the family agreed. If a sale is technically impossible, the Board would not sell.

Mr. Kimler asked for some specific idea about the proposed structural changes and the anticipated costs. Ms. Cox showed the Town blueprints of proposed changes that would place a new vault in the north-west corner of the first floor, which would be twice the size of the present vault. The two small existing bathrooms would be replaced with one full-sized, handicapped-accessible bathroom. Other than that there would be nothing done. The range of costs for this project were given as \$17,000 to 25,000. The project would be put out to bid.

David Meltzer said that he supports the idea of moving across the street to the old school building, but expressed a concern about the future of the old office. He was worried that the people to whom the Town sold might not put it to good use. Peter Manning agreed, and suggested that

the Town think about it for a while, then have another meeting before deciding. At this point Mr. Meltzer moved the question, which was voted down by a show of hands (37 no, 27 yes).

Article 8. If the answer to Article 6 and Article 7 are both in the affirmative, will the Town authorize the Selectboard to renovate the Old School building to make it suitable for Town Offices, using a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the old Town office to pay for the work?

John Merrill moved the article, and was seconded. He said that he was in favor of moving the office, but wasn't sure if there was any way to consider the article, since the vote on this article was contingent on the previous two articles. He suggested that a lease arrangement could be made for the current Town office which might be possible to consider under the terms of the word "transfer", but did not make that suggestion as an amendment to the main article.

Mr. Pierce asked where the money to renovate the old School would come from. Ms. Cox said that the intention was to pay for it out of the proceeds from the sale of the present office. Mrs. Phinney asked whether the rent from leasing the old office could eventually pay off a loan. Ms. Cox said that this might work out.

Mr. Reed said that there didn't seem to be much to do right now, since both of the previous two articles needed to pass in order for this one to be considered. Mr. Henderson concurred with the assessment. Mr. Blanchette spoke in favor of the renovation project, since, he said, it would take a great deal more money to build a new office that retrofit the old one. Mr. Manning asked how much of the renovation would be covered by the proceeds from the sale of the old building. Ms. Cox said that the Selectmen had had the job costed out at between \$17,000 and \$25,000 by a professional estimator. Mr. Wimett said that the Town had no firm estimate on what the old building would sell for.

Mr. Reed asked if the problem of the defeat of the previous article could be overcome by an amendment. Mr. Merrill proposed a motion to fund the renovation from a lease agreement, or if the Selectmen can find out if the building can be sold. After a long discussion, the motion was withdrawn by Mr. Merrill, and the question was called, and the article was not accepted by voice vote.

Article 9. Shall the voters of the Town of Ripton advise their state legislators to send the following resolution to Vermont's Senators and Congressman, and the President of the United States:

"As Vermonters concerned about the well-being of our communities, nation and planet, we call on our leaders in Washington to work and vote for new national budget priorities in the 1990's. Specifically, we urge congress and the President to:

- 1) Reduce military spending by at least 5% per year. Such reductions would be carried out in conjunction with mutual, verifiable treaties with the Soviet Union to cut nuclear and conventional forces and to halt the development of new weapons systems on earth and in space, and with sufficient planning to convert defense production plants to civilian use.

- 2) Redirect the federal tax dollars saved towards education, environmental protection, housing, drug prevention and treatment, health care and research, farming, elderly care and youth services, job

development and training, federal deficit reduction and other local, national and global needs.

The Article was moved by Ben Steinzor, and seconded.

First to speak was Mrs. Phinney, who stated that the whole issue does not belong in a local Town meeting, since it is a global issue. Mr. Clark said that the issue is more complex than signing a simple petition, and that simplistic solutions are useless. He warned not to expect too much in terms of reduction in taxes even if this 5% reduction is passed. Mr. Pierce agreed that this issue did not belong in a Town meeting.

Mr. Meltzer spoke next in favor of the article. He said that this is the perfect place for this type of discussion, since this is a site of basic democracy. He felt this petition is a sincere way to try to influence our future. Mr. Merrill said that he was pleased to see this article in the warning, and said he was in favor of supporting it. Mr. Reed also spoke for the article, and expressed a wish that tax monies would be used for the basics, rather than for wasteful purposes. He also said that 150 towns had this on the ballot, so it is part of a larger movement. Arthur Lord said that when the Towns voted for the nuclear freeze it had an impact, and expected that this issue would have an effect as well.

The question was called by Joyce DiCianna, and seconded. The article was passed by voice vote.

Article 10. Any other business proper to be done at this meeting.

After several announcements were made, Mr. Merrill Moved that the meeting adjourn, which was so voted at 9:34 pm.