

Town Meeting Minutes
March 3, 1997

The Meeting was called to order at 7:33. There were approximately 75 people at the beginning of the meeting, and about ten more people came into the Community House during the first part of the Meeting.

Patti Smith, Representative, joined the meeting at about 7:40, and, with the agreement of the meeting, addressed the voters.

She said that she is on the Agriculture Committee, and has been working on issues such as current use. She said that current use has now gone back to the State for regulation and payment—a change from last year. The funding for this program has been set at 100%. Her committee has also dealt with cruelty to animals, lead in maple syrup, and regulation of emus and bison. Her committee has been involved with the Northeast Dairy compact and BST regulation as well as milfoil eradication.

The biggest legislative effort is to try to pass a new school funding bill which will attempt to equalize spending on education in all towns, along with equalizing the fiscal effort each town has to make to pay for education. Governor Dean has come out against increasing the income tax to pay for education, so other means of paying for school are being looked into. It looks like property taxes will still be the primary source of funding, though broad-based taxes like rooms and meals and others are being looked into. No one expects that the bill will offer any relief to towns for this year (96-97), but the hope is that some assistance will be available for next year.

Gracile Lord asked why property owners are once again being targeted. Patti Smith said that the effort is to reduce these taxes in at least 70% of the Towns. She said that because there is no huge industrial base in the State property taxes are fundamental to educational funding.

After this discussion Ms. Smith left the meeting.

Article 1: To act upon the reports of the Town officers.

The question was moved by Warren King, and seconded. There was no discussion. The question was called by Carol Ford and was seconded. The question passed on a voice vote with no “no’s”.

Article 2: *Will the Town vote the sum of \$181,458.35 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 1997 Grand List to be determined by the Selectmen, divided as follows:*

Roads, including winter work	\$110,450.00
General Fund Costs	\$71,008.35

The question was moved by Richard Collitt and seconded. Moderator Freeman Allen opened the floor for discussion of the budget.

Richard Collitt asked about the resurfacing of the Lincoln Road. Mr. Ford, Chair of the Selectmen, explained that all the existing pavement will be redone, but no additional paving was planned. The Town had applied for and received a 2:1 grant from the State of Vermont for this project in 1996, but did not do this work then because of the expense of the washouts. The grant is good for two years, so the work is to be done this year. He said that some culvert work, tree cutting and ditching will be done before the paving commences. He noted that some sections of the road need repaving more than others, so paving dollars will concentrate on those sections of the road.

Mr. Ford noted that the budget is not significantly changed from last year. He pointed out that some of the items in the budget were in italic, which indicated that these items were to be paid for at least in part from the College under the gift-in-kind provisions of the tax agreement.

Kim Kimler asked about accounting for the gift-in-kind portion of the College gift. Clerk/Treasurer Tim Hanson said that accounting for College services is difficult, since cash is not actually paid to the town, nor are the expenditures actually paid for by the Town, yet what the College does directly affect the budget. He pointed out that there is a detailed listing of how all the gift-in-kind funds have been expended in the financial pages of the Town Report, and that, as noted, the items in the budget that are italicized are to be paid for in full or in part by the College. This allows the Town to vote for these items in the same way as it voted on other line items in the budget.

Mr. Ford added that the Town and College were slow to start using the gift-in-kind funds, but a serious effort was made last year to use them. He noted that this is the first year that these items have been included in the Town report for approval of the Town before the fact. Joyce Henderson said that there is a good accounting of these funds in the Town Report.

Gracile Lord asked if the small, single-lane bridge on the North Branch is scheduled to be replaced. Mr. Wimett (Selectman and Road Commissioner) said that the Town had applied for bridge grant funds from the State to widen this bridge and to repair another bridge on the Natural Turnpike, but had not received funds for either of these projects yet. He noted that the wooden planking and some of the steel had been replaced last year because of some deterioration, but widening, which will include extensive concrete work, will have to wait for State funding. Mr. Ford emphasized that even though the Town had not received grant funds for this bridge so far the Selectmen had not given up trying for a grant.

After this discussion the question was called by Kim Kimler, and seconded. The article was voted in the affirmative by voice vote.

Article 3: *Will the Town vote the expenditure of \$30,000.00 of State paving funds to pave the Lincoln Road, these State funds to be combined with Town paving funds of \$15,000.00 for a total project cost of \$45,000.00.*

The article was moved by Carol Ford and seconded.

Mr. Ford started the discussion by noting that this road item was listed separately because if it is included in the regular budget, three or four years later is difficult to remember what the sudden increase in road spending is all about—it distorts the historical picture. The State will pay \$30,000 of the cost of paving the Lincoln road, with the Town adding \$15,000 (this amount is included in the regular budget). The work includes some culvert work and ditching in preparation for the paving. The Town put this job out to bid in 1996, but due to the washout work that needed to be done last year the work was delayed. The contractor who won the bid agreed to keep his price the same for this year. The work will be done in June or July, after school is over. The road may have to be closed for a while, although the contractor will try to keep one lane open.

Richard Collitt asked if there was any way to fix the large frost heave that appears every winter at the top of Miller Hill. Mr. Wimet said that when the area was dug up years ago a spring was found, as well as sections of logs that had been part of an old corduroy road. To fix the problem completely would require extensive work beyond the scope of the budget. Mr. Ford said that perhaps some of the ditching and culvert work might alleviate the problem somewhat.

Joyce Dicianna moved the question, and was seconded. The article was voted in the affirmative on a voice vote.

Article 4: *Will the Town have current property and personal taxes collected by the Treasurer, taxes due to be paid November 3rd, 1997*

Warren King moved the question, and was seconded.

There was no discussion.

Kim Kimler called the question, which was voted in the affirmative on a voice vote.

Article 5: *Will the Town vote to increase compensation to Town Officers as follows:*

a) *Auditors' and Listers' hourly pay range to be increased from the current \$5.00 per hour to \$7.00 to \$9.00 per hour, based on experience and training, as determined by the Selectmen.*

b) *The Planning Board members be paid a \$250.00 annual stipend, the Planning Board chair be paid an annual stipend of \$300.00.*

Mr. Ford said that this article was a follow up from last Town Meeting. At that meeting the budget included funds to pay the Planning Commission, but these funds were taken out of the budget by a vote of the Town, with a request that the salary schedule for all Town officers be

reviewed. He asked people to turn to pages 8 & 9 of the Town Report to review the salary report and discussion.

Kim Kimler asked how the amount for the Planning Commissioners was arrived at, since few of the other Towns paid their Commissioners. Mr. Ford agreed that this was one place where there were no comparative numbers to back up the proposal, but he said that the Board felt that this amount was reasonable compensation.

Joyce Henderson pointed out that some other Towns bring in consultants to prepare the Town Plan at great cost, whereas in Ripton the project has been done by the Commission. Their work load has increased in other ways as well.

Alison Joseph, Assistant Town Clerk, who prepared the salary report, said that part of the rationale for the amount is that the Planning Commission spends about half the time the Selectmen spend.

Sue Collitt brought up the issue of whether or not volunteer should be paid at all.

After this discussion, Carol Ford called the question, and was seconded. The article passed on a voice vote with some nays heard.

Article 6: Will the Town vote the sum of \$12,500 to the Ripton Fire Department to help pay the expenses for the year?

Carol Ford moved the question, and was seconded.

Chief Tim Hanson noted that the Ripton First Response is up and running. There have already been 5-6 calls this year so far. The mini-pumper is in service, with all the work being done by Middlebury College under the gift-in-kind program. It is working well, and serves as a First Response vehicle, carrying materials and supplies for first response calls. He pointed out that the budget to be voted on is for both the Fire Department and the First Response. Finally he said that there is still a need for volunteers.

Anza Armstrong, coordinator of the First Response group, said that 7 Townspeople took the First Response classes and they are now certified in CPR, oxygen administration, wound care, splinting, etc., but all transportation to the hospital is done by Middlebury Ambulance.

After this discussion, Sue White called the question, and was seconded. The question was voted in the affirmative.

Article 7: Any other business proper to come before this meeting.

Nola Kevra spoke about the proposed community garden.

After this discussion, Carol Ford moved the meeting adjourn, was seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Tim Hanson, Ripton Town Clerk