

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING
March 6, 2017
Draft Minutes

The Annual Town Meeting was held at the Westford Elementary School on Monday, March 6, 2017. Approximately 76 registered voters were present as well as the news media. Moderator Edward Chase called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He reviewed Roberts Rules of Order procedures, made several announcements and recognized nonresidents. The Town Clerk led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Moderator then read the warning.

Article 1 To act upon the reports of the Town Officers.

David Gauthier made a motion to accept Article 1, seconded by Steven Zeppi.

There was no discussion.

Article 1 was voted in the affirmative as written.

Article 2 Shall the Town of Westford collect its real estate and personal property taxes in four equal installments due on August 15th, November 15th, March 15th and May 15th, commencing with the fiscal year that begins on July 1, 2017, with postmarks being acceptable?

David Gauthier made a motion to accept Article 2, seconded by Martha Heath.

There was no discussion.

Article 2 was voted in the affirmative as written.

Article 3 Shall the Town of Westford establish a reserve fund to be called the Conservation Commission Reserve Fund to be used for Conservation Commission expenses in accordance with 24 V.S.A. 284 and to be funded with budgeted funds not expensed during any fiscal year commencing with the 2016-2017 fiscal year?

Sheila Franz made a motion to accept Article 3, seconded by Suzanne Blanchard.

Shelia Franz asked how funds are currently handled if unspent. Dave Adams advised that they are left in the general fund. If the Town has a surplus, then some or all of those funds are used to reduce the amount to be raised by taxes.

There was no more discussion.

Article 3 was voted in the affirmative as written.

Article 4 Shall the Town of Westford establish a reserve fund to be called the Recreation Reserve Fund to be used for Recreation expenses in accordance with 24 V.S.A. 284 and to be funded with budgeted funds not expensed during any fiscal year commencing with the 2016-2017 fiscal year?

Steve Zeppi made a motion to accept Article 4, seconded by Martha Heath.

There was no discussion.

Article 4 was voted in the affirmative as written.

Article 5 Discussion of other nonbinding business.

Ira Allen asked for information regarding the property along the south side of Common Road being town property, which has an easement, potentially becoming private property. Dave Adams explained that the Town recently put the Spiller lot up for sale. The Town received and accepted an offer for the full asking price. The buyer would like to build a store/deli however given the composition of the Spiller lot, he will not be able to construct the building close to Common Road as he wants.

The front part of the Spiller lot, as well as the other lots located to the east, are part of the town common and have a public use easement. It was discovered that the church owns a small piece on the west side of the Spiller lot as well. The Town is looking into conveying the front piece of the property that has the easement to the buyer along with the remainder of the Spiller lot which is also owned by the Town. If this is done, the Town will also convey the pieces in front of the other properties located on the south side of Common Road and to the east of the Spiller lot to be equitable. However, this will not be done if the public use easement cannot be removed.

Ira disagrees with shedding town owned common property. He feels the town common is a rare situation and people enjoy it. He objects to the other lots being affected based on the sale of the Spiller lot. Ira stated that when the Historical Society sold the property to the town, it was the thought the lot would serve as a location for a new town office. He proposes to move forward with that reasoning and make the current town office commercial property.

Trish Indoe, a member of the Historical Society, noted that the Town purchased the Spiller lot for \$140,000. The property is now being sold for \$115,000 with the addition of the front portion. Dave Adams confirmed the figures adding that the price was based upon a market analysis conducted by the realtor.

Dick Lavalley is against selling town common property. He feels if an exception is given to the lots south of the common, then the same exception needs to be provided to the lots north of the common.

Michael Kirick asked about the wastewater system on the Spiller lot. Dave Adams advised that there is septic and will be used for the development of that property.

Dan Strobridge asked what the Town will do if the Spiller lot is sold and the wastewater system at the town office fails and/or there is a need for a larger town office. Dave Adams advised that an addition can be added to the current structure by putting on another floor. As for the wastewater system, the Town has determined there is capacity on the White Church lot therefore the Town did not feel the need to retain the Spiller lot and can put it back on the tax rolls.

Martha Heath inquired about the condition of the house adding that she heard there is asbestos in it. Dave Adams advised that the house is not livable and confirmed the presence of asbestos. He advised that the buyer will bear the cost of tearing down the structure.

Pat Haller stated that the Town voted to sell the Spiller property. He is encouraged with the fact that the buyer wants to open a store. Selling the property and developing the lot will put it back on the tax rolls. Pat feels the Town should do what it can to accommodate the buyer at the same time being fair to the other property owners.

Barb Peck stated she was on the Westford Historical Society (WHS) when the property was sold to the Town. The WHS was aware of the asbestos. The reason why the house was not torn down is because per State regulations, the septic system is grandfathered in as long as something is connected to the system. At the time of the sale no one knew where the front boundary line was. Barb feels selling and developing the property will benefit the Town.

Dave Gauthier stated that people knew where the boundary was because Dan Jackson who was the former owner, knew where the line was. Dave asked who has been maintaining the front yards of those properties on the southern side of the common. If the property owner has been maintaining, does this mean the property gets turned over to them?

Barb Peck advised that per state law if someone has been maintaining property as their own for a certain period of time, that person can take it.

Dick Lavallee stated when he mowed the town common in the 1980s, part of the Spiller lot and Fleury lot were included with the common. He asked if the residents get a say in selling the front lot. Dave Adams advised that there are two ways the Town can sell the lot. The Town can put it to a vote or the Town can propose the sale by posting a notice. If no petition is received, then the sale can proceed.

Nanette Rogers thanked Dave Adams for his three years serving on the Selectboard.

Town Meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

The Public Hearing for Australian ballot articles was called to order at 7:43 p.m.

Article 6 Shall the voters of the Town of Westford accept the Selectboard's budget of \$1,829,346 to defray the expenses for the ensuing year?

Selectboard Chair, Dave Adams, gave a presentation the proposed budget. The proposed tax rate is increasing by approximately \$0.0037 or \$7.40 more in property taxes for property valued at \$200,000 or \$14.80 for property valued at \$400,000.

The highway budget is increasing by approximately 5%. Factors driving the increase include contracting services for ditching, tires and a fire/security system. The ditching will be done as part of a long term project to comply with the Clean Water Act.

The administration budget is decreasing by approximately 6%. This is primarily due to the purchase of a new fire truck included in the FY'17.

Another factor driving the increase in property taxes is less revenue being anticipated. To help reduce the amount to be raised by taxes, the Selectboard is proposing to apply

\$67,500 from the FY'16 surplus, to the FY'18 budget. The remainder of the FY'16 surplus, which is approximately \$30,000 will be added to the Contingency Fund.

There was no discussion.

Dave Gauthier made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Henry Tarrier.

The public hearing adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

**Results of Australian Ballot Articles
Voted on March 7, 2017**

Article 6 Approved the Selectboard's budget of \$1,829,346 for FY'18.

Total ballots cast: 305

235 Yes

58 No

12 Blanks

Article 7 To elect all officers required by law.

Town Moderator - one year – Edward Chase

Selectboard - three years – Allison Weinhagen

Library Trustee - five years – Allison Weinhagen

Library Trustee – four years remaining – Patricia Hechmer

Library Trustee – one year remaining – Meghan Fryberg