

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING**  
**March 5, 2018**

The Annual Town Meeting was held at the Westford Elementary School on Monday, March 5, 20178. Approximately 70 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 Paul Birnholz.

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 15<sup>th</sup>, November 15<sup>th</sup>, March 15<sup>th</sup> and May 15<sup>th</sup>, commencing with the fiscal year that begins on July 1, 2018, with postmarks being acceptable?**

David Gauthier made a motion to accept Article 2, seconded by Andre Roy.

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 Westford Public Library Reserve Fund to be used for library 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 2017-2018 fiscal year?**

Suzanne Blanchard made a motion to accept Article 3, seconded by Carol Howrigan.

Becky Roy asked what the funds will be used for and how much will be put in the reserve. Allison Hope advised the creation of the reserve is to keep in compliance now that the Town has moved to a cash basis accounting method. Expenditures incurred toward the end of a fiscal year may not be paid in the same fiscal year. The reserve would allow for funds budgeted in one fiscal year to be carried forward to the next fiscal year to pay those expenses. Allison, who also serves as a Library Trustee, added that any excess funds in the reserve fund would be taken into consideration when preparing future budgets.

Paul Birnholz asked when the Town switched to a cash basis and why. Greg advised that the Town switched beginning with the FY'17 budget. The change was implemented before he took office but believed it was done because the prior Treasurer and auditors felt it was a good move. Greg added that he would like to see the Town go back to the modified accrual method.

Alice Astarita advised that if the Town had not changed the accounting method used, the audits would have cost a lot more.

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 Planning Commission Special Projects Reserve Fund to be used for special projects identified by the Planning Commission and approved by the Selectboard in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §284 and to be funded with budgeted funds from the Special Projects account not expensed during any fiscal year commencing with the 2017-2018 fiscal year?**

David Gauthier made a motion to accept Article 4, seconded by Millie Terrien.

Becky Roy asked what the purpose of the fund is and what the money will be used for. She expressed concern that the money will be set aside for large projects, such as the community wastewater system, rather than keeping the tax base lower. Allison explained that the Planning Commission has projects that carry from one fiscal year to the next therefore it is difficult to budget all the funds in one fiscal year. A benefit of having an annual budgeting cycle enables the Selectboard to determine what funds may not be expended during a fiscal year and then decide if the full amount of what the Planning Commission is requesting for the next budget cycle is approved or not. The amount in the Reserve Fund will be taken into consideration when putting together a budget.

There was no more discussion.

Article 4 was voted in the affirmative as written.

**Article 5 Discussion of other nonbinding business.**

Casey Mathieu advised that the Town has filed a legal action with the court to remove the public use easement on a portion of the Spiller lot, now owned by the Town, and the Fleury lot. In addition to formally laying out Common Road, removing this easement is part of the process of what needs to be completed before the Spiller lot can be conveyed.

Seth Jensen added that the land between Common Road and the Spiller and Fleury lots is owned by the Town however has been used functionally as the front yards of the Spiller and Fleury lots for many years. Seth added that the deed research and survey to formally lay out Common Road was funded through the Planning Commission's Special Project Fund.

Paul Birnholz asked how much it is costing the Town to complete the process in order to sell the Spiller lot. He pointed out that this is the same property purchased a couple of years ago because the Town needed the lot for future septic needs of the town office and library. The Selectboard did not have the cost available.

Andre Roy asked if there are other properties along common road that don't actually own their front yards, and if the Town is selling the Spiller lot at a loss. Casey advised that the Spiller and Fleury lots are the only lots where the front part is not their yard. As for the Spiller lot being sold at a loss, it is. The loss is primarily due to the house containing asbestos and being in disrepair, therefore it needs to be demolished. The Town worked with a realtor to determine a listing price based on comparisons and was able to get the full asking price.

Paul Birnholz stated he is confused. When the Town bought the property, the Town really had to have it and now it is being sold at a loss. He's not understanding what the thought process is/was. Casey advised that the primary purpose for purchasing the Spiller lot was to secure future septic needs for the town office and library. Since then, the Town has found suitable soils behind the white church for a system, therefore the Spiller lot is no longer needed. The Town did not tear down the house on the Spiller lot because it would trigger a time line for connecting to the existing septic system. Part of the foundation has caved in, the roof is in terrible condition and the inside of the building unsafe. The Board decided to board up the building rather than tear it down to preserve the ability to connect to the septic system.

Becky Roy stated that the new Road Foreman is doing a good job and the roads look good. With that said, Becky expressed how upset she is with the Selectboard, past and present, for not having more oversight of the previous Road Foreman and for not addressing problems sooner. The highway department's budget is indicative of the lack of oversight. She is disappointed that the Board did not heed the concerns expressed by her and other residents at meetings and in letters.

Nanette Rogers thanked Casey Mathieu and Dave Tilton for the years they served on the Selectboard.

There was no more discussion.

Town Meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

The Public Hearing for Australian ballot articles was called to order at 7:31 p.m.

### **Article 6 Shall the voters of the Town of Westford accept the Selectboard's budget of \$1,920,105 to defray the expenses for the ensuing year?**

Selectboard Chair, Casey Mathieu, gave a presentation on the proposed budget. The proposed tax rate is increasing by approximately \$0.0334 or \$66.80 more in property taxes for property valued at \$200,000 or \$133.60 for property valued at \$400,000.

The highway budget is increasing by approximately 5%. Factors driving the increase include two truck payments, one of which should have been in the current budget, the purchase of a wood chipper and making improvements to the building, such as replacing windows.

The administration budget is increasing by approximately 5%. This is primarily due to the purchase of the Jackson Farm (Forest), legal fees and loan payment for the new fire truck.

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.

Becky Roy asked why the amount for law enforcement is being reduced. Casey explained that the Town purchased a solar operated speed limit sign to alert motorists to the speed

they are traveling at. The Board felt this was an area that could be reduced to help keep the tax from increasing significantly.

Michael Hechmer stated that he is pleased with the improvements of Westford roads however the improvements seem to be focused on vehicular use when in fact the roads are multi use, such as horseback riding, bicycling, walking and running. He would like to see the Town be more proactive by installing warning signs to bring awareness to motorists of the other uses. Allison Hope thanked Mr. Hechmer for his suggestion and made note. She stated that she's not sure the all of that can be resolved from a signage perspective noting that sometimes the more signs there are the less people pay attention, therefore the Town will need to figure out how to accomplish that.

Andre Roy asked what the year to date actuals are for the highway budget. It is his understanding that the budget was in trouble and wanted to know where things stand now. Greg Barrows advised that the budget is in better shape now. This is in part to the new Road Foreman better managing expenses, conducting an inventory and returning items not needed for refunds. In addition, the Town received the FEMA funds for the Seymour Road bridge grant which helps offset some of the overages in the highway budget. Mr. Roy asked if the highway budget will be in a deficit at the end of FY'18. Greg advised that it's hard to say with certainty. He pointed out that the Town is two thirds through the fiscal budget. Grant funds are expected to offset some of the expenses. Greg doesn't think the budget will be as grim as it looked the first half of the fiscal year.

Mark Drapa asked about salaries and benefits. The increase is in the 8-9% range. He asked if that is reflective of the same positions or are there additional employees, hours, responsibilities, etc. Greg advised that some of the increase is due to a turnover in personnel. Regarding benefits, premiums for health care are increasing.

Upon request of Dick Lavallee Julia Andrews and Grant Thomas, Selectboard candidates, introduced themselves.

Marilyn Thomas made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by David Gauthier.

The public hearing adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

### **Results of Australian Ballot Articles Voted on March 6, 2018**

**Article 6 Approved the Selectboard's budget of \$1,920,105 for FY'18.**

Total ballots cast: 276  
214 Yes  
57 No  
5 Blanks

**Article 7 To elect all officers required by law.**

Town Moderator - one year – Edward Chase  
Selectboard - three years – Julia Andrews  
Selectboard - three years (one year remaining) – Grant Thomas  
Library Trustee - five years – Laurie Wight