

TOWN OF WESTMINSTER

TOWN, SCHOOL DISTRICT AND TOWN FIRE DISTRICT # 3 2024

At 10:05 AM, Moderator, David Major welcomed all to Annual Town Meeting 2024. He noted that our State Representatives, Michele Bos-Lun and Leslie Goldman, and State Senator, Nader Hashim, were present and asked them to come forward to present reports. They each gave an overview of the various state-wide programs they are focusing on and welcomed contact by email or phone calls for any questions. David thanked the Representatives and Senator for giving of themselves and their time in Montpelier.

At 10:22 AM, David Major opened the Meeting Proper. He then delivered an Invocation, followed by a review of Roberts Rules of Order.

Article 1: To choose all Town Officers, Town School District Officers and Town Fire District Number 3 Officers by Australian ballot, Tuesday, March 5, 2024, from eight o'clock in the forenoon (8:00 A.M.) until seven o'clock in the evening (7:00 P.M.).

As noted in Article 1, David gave a reminder that Town Meeting would adjourn after today to voting on Tuesday, March 5th, from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM at the Westminster Fire Station.

Article 2: *To hear the reports of the Town Officers and to take action thereupon.*

Person of the Year Award: Jason Perry announced that the recipient of this year's award is Patty Mark, in honor of her 19 years of excellent dedication and service, as Assistant Town Clerk.

Article 3: Shall the voters of the Town of Westminster authorize total General Fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$1,278,084, of which \$976,404 shall be raised by taxes, and \$301,680 by estimated revenue for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025.

Jason Perry moved Article 3 as written, David Clark seconded. After questions regarding the increase in the budget amount allotted for the Sheriff and discussion on police presence needed in Westminster West Village, David Major called for a vote on the motion. All voted in favor. Motion passed.

Article 4: Shall the voters of the Town of Westminster authorize total Highway Fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$1,575,215, of which \$1,408,215 shall be raised by taxes, and \$167,000 by other estimated revenue for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025.

Jason Perry so moved Article 4; Martha Mitchell seconded. Road Foreman, Chuck Lawrence was asked to speak. Chuck thanked everyone for their support and noted that the roads will be rough for the next 1-2 weeks, as well as again next year. Stephen Major mentioned that there are plans available at the Town office for paved roads and a schedule is in place. David asked for more discussion and, seeing none, called for a vote. All voted in favor; Article 4 passed.

Article 5: Shall the voters of the Town of Westminster raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,600 in addition to the sum (\$5,400) included in the budget proposed by the Selectboard, making the total \$8,000 for the Westminster Gazette to partially defray costs associated with production and distribution?

Katrina Hamilton moved Article 5; Tim Allen seconded. A question was raised, asking if people are really looking at the Gazette for information. The crowd replied with a resounding, Yes. Noting no further discussion, David called for a vote. All voted in favor; Article 5 passed.

Article 6: Shall the voters of the Town of Westminster vote to adopt the following "Declaration of Inclusion": "The Town of Westminster welcomes all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, differing ability, socio-economic status, and education. The Town of Westminster commits to being a place where individuals may live freely and express their opinions without fear, where kindness and respect are valued, and where all persons feel safe and welcome. As a town, we condemn discrimination in all its forms and will strive to ensure that all our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect this commitment."

Stephen Major read the statement again and moved Article 6. Discussion ensued with most speaking in favor of adopting the Declaration of Inclusion and a few voicing their opposition. After discussing the pros and cons, Barry Shamas called the question; Robert Wickberg Seconded. The Moderator called for a vote and declared the Ayes have it. Motion carried.

Article 7: To transact any other proper business to be brought before the Town of Westminster Annual Meeting.

David Major asked if there was any other business. Elise Manning requested that taxpayers be better notified when taxes are due. There used to be signs in front of Town Hall with posted due dates.

Article 7: (cont'd)

Jason Perry formally introduced the new Town Manager, Lou Bordeaux, and recognized Kevin Hughes, who is not running for Selectboard re-election, and Patty Mark and Pauline O'Brien, who will be leaving the Town Clerk's office. All were thanked for their time and service.

Article 8: *To hear the report of the Westminster School District officers and to take action herein.*

The Moderator invited Cheryl Charles, WNESU Chair, to speak. Cheryl introduced Andy Haas, Superintendent of Schools, Jim Vezina, Director of Finance, and Westminster Board members, Charlie Hutchison, Karen Blanchard, and Tine Biolsi. Cheryl gave an overview of the budget increase (4.2) which is less than many Vermont towns and current projections indicate that the tax rate might actually go down. Tax rates will not be set until mid-April. Cheryl noted that there are flyers available in the front row of Frequently Asked Questions.

Article 9: Shall the voters of the Westminster Town School District authorize and instruct its School Directors and Treasurer to borrow money, if necessary, on the credit of the town school district for its current expenses in anticipation of the collection of taxes and receipt of money due from state aid and other sources.

Tine Biolsi moved Article 9, as written. Katrina Hamilton seconded the motion. David Major asked if there was any discussion and, seeing none, called for a vote. All voted in favor. Motion carried.

Article 10: Shall the voters of the Westminster Town School District apply the sum of \$100,000 (one hundred thousand dollars) from the anticipated fiscal year 2023 surplus of \$265,168 (two hundred sixty-five thousand, one hundred sixty-eight dollars) to create a reserve fund to offset expenditures in the fiscal year 2026.

Karen Blanchard moved Article 10, as written. June Streeter seconded. Since no discussion was presented, David Major called for a vote. All voted Aye, Article 10 passed.

Article 11: Shall the voters apply the sum of \$165,168 (one hundred sixty-five thousand, one hundred sixty-eight dollars) from the anticipated Westminster Town School District 2023 surplus and \$292,552 (two hundred ninety-two thousand, five hundred fifty-two dollars) from the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU) 2023 assessment surplus to a reserve fund for repairs or improvements to buildings and grounds, including although not limited to enhanced security and energy efficiencies, and to authorize the Board to expend such funds.

Cheryl Charles moved Article 11. Ron Bos-Lun seconded. Cheryl made the motion to amend the Article with new, corrected figures. June Streeter seconded. The new anticipated 2023 surplus figure should read \$215,859 (two hundred fifteen thousand eight hundred fifty-nine dollars). Cheryl was questioned why the figures changed and she explained that the finance officer predicted the original figures early. During the Audit adjustments were made and the surplus was reduced. David called for a vote for the Amendment. All voted in favor.

Stephen Major asked for an explanation of enhanced security and energy efficiencies. Cheryl replied that said anticipated expenses include a solar array, roof repair, and enhancing bathrooms. David re-read Article 11 with the amended figures and called for a vote. All voted in favor. Article 11 with the Amended figures passed.

Article 12: Shall the voters of the Westminster Town School District approve the school board to expend the sum of \$5,366,000 (five million, three hundred sixty-six thousand dollars) which is the amount the Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing year?

Charlie Hutchison moved Article 12 as written. Marian Major seconded. A comment was made about the expectation of the budget being voted down, due to the need for more information to make an informed vote, and a better explanation of the increase. Further discussion included comments about the school budget being an important part of Town Meeting, and an offer of support for the Board's work, as education of children is most important. Several people thanked the Board for their hard work and hours of time. The Moderator asked for a vote on Article 12. All but one person voted in favor; motion carried.

Article 13: Shall the voters approve an annual compensation to school directions in the amount of \$800 to each director, and an additional \$200 to the director who serves as board chair.

Tine Biolsi so moved Article 13; Peter Stamm seconded. No discussion was presented, and David Major called for a vote. All voted in favor; Motion carried.

Article 14: To transact any other proper business to be brought before the Town School District meeting.

David Clark, High School Budget Committee Chair, addressed the Moderator and gave his report on the High School Board, and their committee work on the budget. The budget has shown a 3 ½% increase year after year. This budget proposal will be voted on next Tuesday, March 5. The proposal includes the cut of 1 Full Time Equivalent (FTE), which will affect several programs. A question was raised on the reason that Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) were not made available before today. Regularly, an effort is made to get them out and posted on websites. A Board member replied that there had been a meeting at the school on the budget and materials were available then. The suggestion was made to have future budget meetings available by Zoom.

Article 15: *To hear the reports of the Town Fire District Number 3 and to take action thereupon.*

Katie Dearborn addressed the Moderator, as Chair of the Prudential Committee. Katie works with Chris Harlow and Dan Green on the committee. They meet regularly on Sunday mornings to discuss equipment needs. There is a new rescue truck and Katie thanked Cole Streeter for making that happen. The budget being presented are the funds needed for the operation of the Fire House. There will be the need for a new engine within the next 5 -7 years, with a cost of \$800,000. Funding is being set aside and will come from the Restricted Capital Reserve. The amount projected in the budget for insurance this year is not valid and will need to be addressed. Katie asked if there were any questions and said she would be happy to answer any.

Article 16: To see whether Town Fire District Number 3 shall authorize and instruct its Prudential Committee and Treasurer to borrow money, if necessary, to meet current expenses, on the credit of the District, in anticipation of the collection of taxes and/or the receipt of any State or Federal Funds.

Chris Harlow moved Article 16 as printed. June Streeter seconded. After no discussion, the Moderator asked for a vote. All voted in favor. Article 16 passed.

Article 17: To see if the voters of the Town Fire District Number 3 will raise and appropriate the sum of \$321,400.00 to pay the indebtedness and other general expenses of the District for the Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2025.

Katie Dearborn moved Article 17 as written; Ian Proctor seconded. Katie reminded taxpayers that the Fire District is able to collect funds directly from the state. Line 3 (Hold Harmless & PILOT) is the revenue received in lieu of taxes for properties in Current Use or that are state owned. If the revenue is eliminated, it puts less in Capital Reserve for equipment. Projects this year included paving the driveway and the new Rescue Truck. Katie asked Cole Streeter to report on the numbers of calls this year. Cole replied that there were 430 calls last fiscal year and this fiscal year the number increased to 540. David Major asked for a vote on Article 17. All voted in favor; Motion carried.

Article 18: To transact any other business proper to be brought before the Town Fire District Number 3 meeting.

Paul Harlow asked if there were any candidates present who would like to speak. Jason Perry said he was running again for the Selectboard three-year term and asked for the voter's support.

David Major stated that we live in a less stable world than one or two decades ago. It is harder to be a Community Leader on the Selectboard, School Board, and Committees; it is not easy. There are open positions for volunteers. The Town would appreciate the help and would welcome new Community Leaders.

Recess: David recessed the meeting at 12:14 PM, until Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at 8:00 AM for voting at the Westminster Fire House.

Please note: A full recorded session of this meeting is available on the Town of Westminster website, under the Selectboard tab, FactTV Video Sessions.

Respectfully submitted,



Pauline Blake O'Brien, Town Clerk



Katie Dearborn, Prudential Committee Chair



David Major, Town Moderator



Cheryl Charles, School District Chair