**MINUTES**

**Town of Windham, Vermont**

**Annual Town Meeting and Annual School Board Meeting**

**Tuesday, March 4, 2025 ~ 10:17 AM to 3:29 PM**

The legal voters of the Town of Windham meet in the upstairs of the Windham Meeting House to conduct the annual business of the Town and the school, as warned. All in attendance wore name tags to facilitate paper ballot voting, as the tags enabled the election officials to see voters’ names in the noisy room. It also helped everyone present to know each other’s names. There were around 80 voters and 10 nonvoters present.

Before the meeting officially began, local musicians Pete and Diane Newton, Colin Blazej, and Alan Partridge played Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land.” Everyone had received a sheet with the lyrics, and we all raised our voices in song. The music’s message, we are all in this together “you and me,” set the stage for the meeting, the tone of which was cooperative and respectful.

Michael (Mike) McLaine, the 2024 elected moderator, welcomed voters and read instructions regarding Roberts Rules of Order and other proper procedures.

**Annual Windham Town Meeting**

Mike called the meeting to order at 10:17 AM to transact the following business:

**Article 1: To elect a Town Moderator for the year ensuing.**

Michael Pelton moved to pass over this article, as the result would be determined by Australian ballots, as voted at the 2024 Town Meeting, and would not be known until after the polls closed at 7:00 PM. **Michael’s motion passed** by anonymous voice vote. Mike McLaine served as moderator based on his election to this post in 2024.

Before continuing with the agenda, Alice Abraham from The Collaborative, briefly described the organization’s work regarding substance abuse. Mike noted that voting for Town officials by Australian ballot was taking place in the back corner of the room. He also thanked Ellen McDuffie for her work as Town Clerk and Election Officer and Kathy Scott for her work as Town Treasurer. Both women have retired from their posts.

**Article 2: Shall the voters accept the Town Report prepared by the Auditors?**

Alison Trowbridge so moved. Antel Persa asked that it be rejected due to “excess spending.” He said the budget should be one of austerity. **Article 2 passed** by voice vote.

NOTE: As there were often numerous people seconding motions, those who seconded are not listed in these minutes. It is not required by the State to record who seconded motions.

The request was made to interrupt Town Meeting to conduct the School District Meeting, and as required more than two-thirds of those present raised their hands to **agree to move to School District Meeting**. However, Town Meeting continued until School Board Director Dan Roth arrived, as he had been detained at home.

**Article 3:** **Shall the voters authorize the Town Treasurer to collect current taxes?**

Al McLaine so moved. There was no discussion. **Article 3 passed** by unanimous voice vote.

**Article 4:** **Shall the voters set the due date for property taxes as postmarked on or before October 31, 2025?**

Kathy Scott so moved. There was no discussion. **Article 4 passed** by unanimous voice vote.

**Article 5: Shall the voters advise the Selectboard to offer a standard, individual health insurance plan or the Town Clerk position, in order to attract and hold a qualified person in that position?**

Carolyn Partridge so moved. Michael Pelton said this expense would be up to $15,000 to $16,000, depending on the plan chosen, and it would increase the tax rate about 1.5 cents. Comments in opposition were: the Town is not required to offer health insurance to parttime employees (those working less than 24 hours per week); it would be best of provide it after employees’ probationary period; it is too costly. Comments in favor were: this is an incentive to help the Town employee good people; the current candidate for Town Clerk would not be pursuing the job if it did not offer health insurance; the Clerk’s and Treasurer’s jobs are more than 24 hours per week, requiring health insurance; this benefit will encourage younger people to pursue the Clerk’s position; this benefit will help the Town keep good employees. It was noted that this is an advisory motion, for the Selectboard to apply as makes sense. Michael said the Selectboard would work to keep this cost down. **Article 5 passed** by voice vote with a few nays.

**Article 6: Shall the voters advise the Selectboard to offer a standard, individual health insurance plan for the Town Treasurer position, in order to attract and hold a qualified person in that position?**

Carolyn Partridge so moved. It was noted that if this passes along with Article 5, $32,000 will need to be added to the budget. **Article 6 passed** by voice vote with a few nays.

School Director Dan Roth arrived and **Town Meeting was interrupted** to conduct the School District Meeting.

**Annual Windham School District Meeting**

**Article 1: To elect a Moderator for a term of one year.**

Carolyn Partridge nominated Mike McLaine. **Mike McLaine was unanimously elected** by voice vote as Moderator.

**Article 2: Shall the electorate of the Windham School District ratify the District’s long-standing practice of designating the Windham Town Treasurer as the Treasurer of the Windham School District, as is authorized by 16 VSA 426(a), and shall the electorate of the Windham School District recognize, and agree to be bound by, the three-year term of the Windham Town Treasurer, as has been previously established by vote of the electorate of the Town of Windham in accordance with 17 VSA 2646(3)?**

Carolyn Partridge so moved. Comments were made that the Treasurer and School Board are not needed as we no longer have a school. Abby Pelton, School Board chair, said the School Board is needed so Windham has a voice in decisions that impact our students. Making decisions about students’ transportation and the expenses involved is an example. Kathy Scott said the Town Treasurer provides this service at no cost to the school district. **Article 2 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 3: To elect all other officers required by law to be elected at the Windham School:**

* School District Director, 3-year term (ending 2028) – Antje Ruppert nominated Abby Pelton (the incumbent), and Emily Goyette nominated Crystal Corriveau. Abby said she has listened to parents and worked with others to meet the school’s challenges. She offers steady leadership to determine the best path forward for our kids, especially in this time of uncertainty, as changes are being made to education on the state level. Crystal said she was asked to run by people who feel animosity toward the School Board. She said she has collaborated with other parents, and she encouraged parents to attend the West River School Board meetings to know more about the situation for our 7th-12th graders. A request for a paper ballot vote was requested by more than seven people. There were 43 votes for Abby and 33 votes for Crystal with 2 spoiled ballots. **Abby Pelton was elected** to a 3-year term.
* School District Director, 3-year term (ending 2028) – Pat Cherry nominated Kate Quarella. Kathy Scott nominated Howie Ires. Howie withdrew his name, and **Kate Quarella was elected** by unanimous voice vote.
* WRED School District Director, remainder of 3-year term (ending 2028) – Michael Pelton nominated Crystal Corriveau. **Crystal Corriveau was elected** by unanimous voice vote.

Crystal Corriveau asked that the voters next address Article 9, which was agreed to by two-thirds of the voters in a count of raised hands.

**Article 9: Shall the voters of the Windham School District authorize the sale of the School Building to the Town of Windham for $1 (one dollar) on the condition that the School Building be used for community and/or educational purposes for at least five years, and on the further condition that if the Town stops using the School Building during this time for such purposes, the School Building will be sold back to the School District for $1 (one dollar)? If, during the 5-year period following the sale of the School Building to the Town, the School Board believes that the School Building is not being used for community and/or educational purposes, it will so notify the Town Select Board, and in the notification, the School Board shall name an individual to serve as a member of a 3-person panel to adjudicate the issue. Under such circumstances, the Select Board shall promptly name a second individual to the 3-person panel, and the two designated panel members shall name the third member of the panel. If the School Board and Select Board panelists cannot agree on the third member, the third member of the panel shall be chosen by the then-Presiding Judge of the Civil Division of the Windham Unit of the Vermont Superior Court. The decision of a majority of the panel on the issue shall be binding on the parties.**

Bill Casey moved to amend the motion to end in the first sentence after “(one dollar).” He asked that the Town and Selectboard make decisions, as in his opinion the School Board has “poor judgment.” Al McLaine moved to amend Bill’s amendment to add after “(one dollar)” the words “as is,” to ensure that the building is sold in its current condition. In discussion, Abby explained that the wording was drafted by the School Board’s lawyer to make the conditions of the transfer clear. She noted that all of the options being considered thus far for the school building fall under the categories of community and/or educational purposes. She asked if anyone had ideas that would not qualify, and no one responded. However, some voters felt that there should be no restrictions on the Town, especially since the Town is paying to maintain the building. They argued that the conditions set forth in Article 9 created unwanted limitations for the Town.

Dan Roth noted that negotiations between the Selectboard and School Board will be needed. Adding “as is” could hamstring the Town’s ability to have the District pay for repairs to the school building that may be needed. If after the sale of the building to the Town, it is decided that the building doesn’t fit the Town’s needs, the process is in place to return the building to the School District. Howie Ires said that Article 9 as written by the lawyer was the proper way to go.

The value of the building was clarified. It would cost $1,000,000 to replace, but that is not its current market value. The building has not been recently appraised. Michael Pelton noted that any expenses for the building will cost tax payers less if the building is owned by the Town than if it is owned by the School District, due to the Education tax being higher. **Al’s amendment to add “as is” failed** to pass by voice vote. **Bill’s amendment to end after “(one dollar)” failed** to pass by voice vote. **Article 9 passed** as originally written –the ayes had it by voice vote.

**Article 4: To compensate the School Directors $1250 each as included in the proposed School Budget for 2025-2026?**

Carolyn so moved. Bill Casey said the compensation was raised last year from $750, and he moved to change the amount back to $750, saying the School Board now “has nothing to do.” Others noted that the School Board pays someone to prepare their meeting minutes, and they have no school to oversee. Others noted that the job remains time-consuming, that the compensation had been $750 since at least 2009, and that the School Board members are the ones who advocate for our kids. If Windham is forced to merge with other districts, we will have one vote on a board of eleven. By voice vote, **Bill’s amendment failed.** By voice vote, **Article 4 passed**.

**Article 5: Shall the voters of the School District approve the School Board to expend $506,398, which is the amount the School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year. The Windham School District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in per pupil education spending of $14,117.28, which is 4.46% higher than per pupil education spending for the current year.**

Kathy Scott so moved. Howie explained that the tuition is higher because that is the amount of tuition we are billed by Townshend and other schools. There were comments about Windham’s CLA (current level of appraisal) and how that might also impact our education expenses. It was also pointed out that health care costs have risen greatly, which impact the per pupil cost. **Article 5 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 6: Shall the voters of the Windham School District authorize the creation of an Operational Reserve Fund?**

Alison Trowbridge so moved. Dan R. explained that Articles 6, 7, and 8 are tied to reserve funds for transportation. This keeps us from losing $105,805 for that purpose, which in now in the Capital Reserve Fund. Our bus is depreciating, and we need to set funds aside for a new one. Kord, the bus driver, said the bus has 110,000 miles on it and needs some repairs. It should be replaced by 2030. Antel P. suggested that funds from the General Fund should be used for this purpose, and we should borrow the money when needed, rather than set it aside now. Dan said if it is in the General Fund, it is not limited to transportation. Others said it is better to save funds and earn interest than to borrow funds and pay interest. **Article 6 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 7: Shall the voters of the Windham School District authorize the moving of the operational surplus, in any, from FY 2025 to the Operational Reserve Fund?**

Carolyn so moved. **Article 7 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 8:** **Shall the voters of the Windham School District authorize the moving of the Capital Reserve Fund in the amount of $105,805.53 to the Operational Reserve Fund?**

Carolyn so moved. Dan said the Supervisory Union made an error, causing the School District to overpay. That error was corrected, providing extra funds. Dan moved to amend the motion to put $85,805.53 into the Operational Reserve Fund and $20,000 in the General Fund. Questions were raised. Dan said funds for a new bus have been set aside the past three years, and there should be enough to purchase a new bus by 2030. Repair costs are in the budget. Antel said we should wait until the bus dies and not put money aside now. **Dan’s amendment to put $20,000 of the total in the General Fund passed** by voice vote. **Article 8 passed** as amended by voice vote.

**Article 10: To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.**

Carolyn moved. Antje asked about the overpayment Dan mentioned. It was $54,000. It occurred due to the state charging us the wrong tax rate.

**Adjournment**

Carolyn moved to adjourn the School District Meeting and return for Town Meeting after lunch. The **Windham School District Annual Meeting was adjourned** by a voice vote with no nays.

**Annual Windham Town Meeting**

Mike immediately called the Town Meeting back to order at 1:42. He introduced Tom Charlton, Windham’s new state representative. Tom said Windham’s Town Meeting was the best meeting he has attended since he took office. He talked briefly about legislative concerns, such as health care, education, and energy. He said his positions are determined after he studies the bills and talks to his constituents. He is on the Housing Committee. He urged voters to contact him.

**Article 7: Shall the voters authorize $390,823 for the General Fund of which $294,823 shall be raised by taxes and $96,000 shall be applied from other FY2025 budget revenues?**

Carolyn so moved. Michael Pelton moved to amend the amount of $390,823 to $422,823 in order to add $32,000 for the provision of health insurance for the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer, as voted in Articles 4 and 5. **Michael’s amendment passed** by unanimous voice vote. **Article 7 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 8**: **Shall the voters authorize Roads Budget expenditures of $584,821 of which $494,821 shall be raised by taxes and $90,000 shall be applied from other FY 2025 budget revenues?**

Al McLaine so moved. Michael Pelton explained that “budget revenue” refers to funds generated from sources other than taxes and “surplus” refers to excess funds we have in the bank. **Article 8 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 9: Shall the voters appropriate $165,000 for the New Road Machinery Fund of which $65,000 shall be raised by taxes and $90,000 will be applied from other FY2024 budget surplus?**

Antel so moved. He expressed concern that funds like this one are susceptible to misappropriation and “ripe off.” Michael P. explained that road equipment is costly. He said the Selectboard wants to plan ahead, and it is more prudent to save and earn interest than to borrow and pay interest. Antel said interest earned doesn’t keep up with inflation. George Dutton said this isn’t a slush fund, but a monitored account. Michael said we don’t want a surplus. We want to use revenue other than taxes when it comes, in order to reduce taxes. The goal is a balanced budget. After we have a professional audit, we will have exact figures for the current surplus, which we can use or return to the tax payers. The Road Machinery Fund ensures that we can buy the vehicles the road crew needs. Many thanks were given to Richard Paré for the excellent work of the road crew. **Article 9 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 10: Shall the voters appropriate $50,000 for Repaving and $10,000 for Bridges and Large Structures of which $60,000 shall be raised by taxes?**

Cathy Fales so moved. **Article 10 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 11: Shall the voters appropriate $17,500 for the Town Garage Maintenance & Improvement Fund, of which $17,500 shall be raised by taxes?**

Cathy Fales so moved. **Article 11 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 12: Shall the voters appropriate $10,000 for the Town Office Maintenance and Improvement Fund of which $10,000 shall be applied from FY 2024 budget surplus?**

Kathy S. so moved. The question was raised as to what this fund covers. George D. said it was used in 2024 for repairs, new insulation, and new light fixtures, using up all the money that was in this fund. The Town Clerk and Selectboard determines how the funds are spent. **Article 11 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 13: Shall the voters appropriate $10,000 for the Meeting House Maintenance and Improvement Fund of which $10,000 shall be applied from FY2024 budget surplus?**

Kathy S. so moved. Beth McDonald said her family had a gathering in the Meeting House recently, and she recommended it for similar occasions. George D. thanked Cathy Fales for her work in raising grant funds for major upgrades to the building. **Article 13 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 14: Shall the voters appropriate $3,000 for a future Townwide Reappraisal of Properties of which $3,000 shall be applied from FY2024 Budget surplus?**

Kathy S. so moved. Carolyn asked why the Town’s CLA was so high. Russ Cumming said reappraisal numbers were much higher, and we need to look at the three-year average. **Article 14 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 15: Shall the voters appropriate $32,000 for one year’s operational and other associated costs of the Windham Schoolhouse to be used in the event that the Town purchases the Windham Schoolhouse and associated property of which $32,000 shall be applied from FY 2024 budget surplus?**

Kathy S. so moved. Michael P. explained that this dollar figure was based on the recorded actual expenses from 2023 and 2024, minus the cleaning service. He said we do not have a definite cost, as other ongoing expenses are unclear, such as the cost of internet and electrical services, which will change when previous contracts for the school end. Since we don’t know yet how the building will be used, this amount is a best estimate. Antel expressed his concerns that this is an opportunity for embezzlement. Others tried to assure him that the auditors and others prevent embezzlement.

Michael said we do not know when the Town will take over the schoolhouse, as negotiations have to occur and the use of the building needs to be determined. Once known, grants will be sought. The $32,000 will keep the heat on and the building available for use, and it will provide enough to cover any basic repairs that will be required. By voice vote, **Article 15 passed**.

**Article 16: Shall the voters appropriate $8,133 for the following nonprofit organizations, as recommended by the Windham Social Services Committee, to be distributed as indicated of which $8,133 shall be applied from FY2024 budget surplus?**

The Collaborative 350

Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital 700

Green Up Vermont 50

Health Care & Rehab Services 248

Neighbors Pantry (Londonderry Food Shelf) 350

Mountain Valley Medical Clinic 750

Neighborhood Connections 2500

Senior Solutions 250

SEVCA (SE VT Community Action) 325

Townshend Community Food Shelf 350

Vermont Fire Protection 100

Vermont Food Bank 300

Visiting Nurse VT/NH 860

West River Community Project 250

Windham County Humane Society 300

Women’s Freedom Center 450

Antel so moved, saying taxpayers should not be mandated to support charities. Kathy S. moved to amend the article to increase each donation by $100, adding $1600 and bringing the total to be donated to $9733. **Kathy’s amendment to add $100 for each organization passed** by voice vote. Pat Cherry and Pat McLaine, who serve on the Neighborhood Connections’ board, spoke in support of that organization, saying it serves several in Windham. It was clarified that the additional $1600 could come from FY2024 budget surplus. **Article 16 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 17: Shall the voters appropriate $1347 for the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation in recognition of their assistance to the Town of Windham, of which $1347 shall be applied from FY2024 budget surplus?**

Cathy Fales so moved, saying the BDCC has provided valuable advice and support to Windham, in a similar way that the VLCT does. Barbara Jean Quinn, from the Social Services Committee, explained that BDCC’s donation was added to the list for last year for donations, but it was felt it needed a separate article, as it is not a social service organization. The $1347 figure was the amount the BDCC requested. **Article 17 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 18: Shall the voters appropriate $500 for the Windham Historical Society of which $500 shall be applied from FY2024 budget surplus?**

Kathy Jungermann so moved. Abby applauded this group’s work which helps bring town folks together around our shared history. **Article 18 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 19: Shall the voters appropriate $10,000 for a professional audit of Windham financial accounts, of which $10,000 shall be applied from FY2024 budget surplus funds?**

Pat Mc. so moved, explaining that not enough had been set aside for this purpose, as the bids that were received to conduct the audit were higher than expected. George noted the importance of an audit to ensure there was no embezzlement. He moved to amend the motion to add $5000, making the appropriation $15,000. **George’s amendment to add $5,000 passed** by voice vote.

Auditor Kathy J. said our last professional audit was about 15 years ago, and former Treasurer Kathy S. said we should have an audit every 3 to 5 years. Auditor Becky Phillips said a professional audit cost about $30,000. **Article 19 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 20: Shall the voters close the Dog Fund and transfer the balance of $4,887.20 to the FY2025 General Fund?**

Town Clerk Ellen McDuffie so moved. Ellen said no one knows what this fund is for. License fees are collected with some funds sent to the State. The only expense the Town has is to pay for the dog tags. Michael P. said the auditors found after the Warning for Town Meeting was prepared that there is actually $5268.20 in the Dog Fund. He moved to amend Article 20 to transfer $5268.20 (not $4,887.20) to the General Fund. **Michael’s amendment to change the balance to $5,268.20 passed** by unanimous voice vote.

Kathy S. moved to amend Article 20 to move the Dog Fund balance to the pay for the audit, but Moderator Mike McLaine said that was not possible, as Article 19 about the audit had already passed. **Article 20 passed** by unanimous voice vote.

**Article 21: Shall the voters create an Emergency Communications Fund for a radio system for use in emergency situations?**

Abby so moved. Michael P. said we need to be prepared for a natural disaster when usual communication systems fail. In other areas of the country that have experienced a natural disaster, they have lost telephone service from landlines and cell towers. Ham radio operators provided an essential service. We need to think ahead and prepare Windham for a similar disaster. Tan Bronson, a ham radio operator, explained that the fund would be used to locate a site for a relay tower, run tests, and create a plan. **Article 21 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 22: Shall the voters appropriate $2,000 for the Emergency Communications Fund, of which $2,000 shall be applied from FY2024 budget surplus?**

Abby so moved. Ellen asked if $2,000 was enough. Tan said this was just to explore the possibility and determine if an emergency communication system was viable in Windham. **Article 22 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 23: Shall the Town of Windham, VT advise the Selectboard to develop and publicize a plan and methods for inventorying all public and private culverts in the Town of Windham, VT and to maintain a publicly available and searchable database updated whenever a culvert is repaired or replaced? Data collected for the inventory database shall be compatible with that assembled by the Windham Regional Commission, but should contain data specific to Town needs.**

Tan so moved, saying the database was needed. Kord said this was a great idea. Windham received a grant to hire the Windham Regional Commission to update our current inventory of culverts. That will start this spring and will help identify lower and medium priorities (high priorities are already known). It is unclear what responsibility the Town has to repair driveway culverts. Access permits are required when driveways are installed. The road crew will focus on those with statutory requirements.

Abby moved to amend Article 23 to add after the words “public and private culverts” the words “which are in Town right of ways.” Discussion followed about culverts on private property that might impact Town roads, weighing private property rights alongside the need to protect public Town roads. It was agreed that Article 23 is advisory and will only create an inventory of culverts; the article does not determine who is responsible for repairs of culverts. **Abby’s amendment to add “which are in Town right of ways” passed** by voice vote. **Article 23 passed** by voice vote.

**Article 24: To transact any other nonbinding business that may legally come before this meeting.**

Kord thanked the many residents who give their time to the Town. He said we have a great team with many doing good work. He noted, in particular, the time Michael Pelton spent preparing the budget and articles for this Town Meeting.

**Adjourn Town Meeting**

Antel moved to end Town Meeting. By voice vote, the meeting was adjourned at 3:29 PM. There were about 40 people in the room at the meeting’s conclusion.

Minutes respectfully taken by

Mary McCoy, selectboard clerk

*Town Meeting minutes were approved by that Selectboard on\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*School Meeting minutes were approved by the School Board on\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*