

TOWN OF WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT

SELECT BOARD

Select Board
Weathersfield School
135 Schoolhouse Road
Monday May 20, 2019
7:00 PM
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

MINUTES

Select Board Members Present: N. John Arrison
Daniel Boyer
David Fuller
Kelly Murphy
Michael Todd

Ed Morris, Town Manager

Call to Order

Moderator Cole called the meeting to order at 7:05PM and proceeded to read the warning:

Town of Weathersfield, Vermont
Warning for a Special Town Meeting
Monday, May 20th and Tuesday, May 21st, 2019

The legal voters of the Town of Weathersfield, Vermont, are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Weathersfield School, 135 Schoolhouse Road in Ascutney, in the Town of Weathersfield, Vermont, on Monday, May 20th at 7:00 P.M., to act on the following articles:

Article 1: Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield dissolve the Fire Commission?

Motion: To dissolve the Fire Commission.

Made by: Dave Fuller **Second:** Mr. Todd

Ms. Murphy provided background on the Fire Commission and a brief history of how this article came into being. She opened the floor to questions.

Audrey Harriman asked why the three articles were being voted on in different ways. Mr. Cole explained the reasons.

Ms. Harriman asked how the Board had let people know that volunteers were needed to serve on the Commission. Ms. Murphy and Mr. Arrison explained the numerous ways the Board had employed in seeking volunteers.

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Tyler Harwell asked if Article 1 could be voted on by Australian ballot. Mr. Morris and Mr. Cole explained why it couldn't be.

Tim Austin, citizen member of the Fire Commission, said the Commission was not very effective; that it had not resolved much of anything; and that it lacked authority. He said that meetings with the Town Manager and the chiefs seemed a more productive method. He said he supported dissolving the Commission.

Darrin Spaulding said he found the Commission to be very valuable, citing the work on dry hydrants that had been done. He said the Commission periodically may get into a rut, but he felt it always managed to get through it. He claimed that people didn't show up to the meetings with the manager.

Kate Adams said she was confused. She thought that both chiefs had agreed on this. Ms. Murphy said that she had said that "members" of both departments favor this – that she had not used the word "chiefs".

Sean Whalen asked if the fire commission is dissolved, who will solve the problems? Ms. Murphy said the goal is for the departments to work with the Town Manager. This eliminates the middle man and it has seemed to work in the times it has been tried.

Audrey Harriman said she wanted to hear from both chiefs – what do they think? Mr. Cole said that Chief Spaulding had voiced his opinion already and called on Chief Dauphin to speak. Josh Compo spoke for Chief Dauphin (who was unable to attend the meeting). Mr. Compo said that Chief Dauphin had said at the last Board meeting that he would not attend any more commission meetings and that he supports dissolving the commission.

There was no further discussion. Mr. Cole called for a voice vote on the motion. He declared that the ayes had it. Tyler Harwell contested and asked for a recorded vote.

Motion: To have recorded vote

Made by: Tyler Harwell **Second:** Mike Stankevitch

Vote: Ayes have it

Mr. Cole asked those in favor of the article to stand and count off. 34 people voted in favor of article 1.

Mr. Cole asked those opposed to the article to stand and count off. 23 people voted against the article.

The motion to dissolve the Fire Commission passed by a vote of 34 in favor, 23 opposed.

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Mr. Cole read the next portion of the warning:

Voting by Australian ballot will be conducted in Martin Memorial Hall, at 5259 U.S. Route 5 in Ascutney, on Tuesday, the 21st day of May, 2019. [The polls will open at 10:00 A.M. and close at 7:00 P.M. on that date], to act on the following articles:

Article 2: Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield approve the expenditure of \$171,048 for the support and operation of fire services for the Town, which shall be raised by property taxation, allowing the Select Board to set the appropriate tax rate?

Mr. Arrison spoke to this article. A petition was filed that called for the extraction of the fire services line in the General Fund budget to be voted on as a separate article. The General Fund budget passed and the article to fund the fire department failed, leaving no funds for fire services for the 2020 fiscal year. The Board called this special meeting to give the voters the opportunity to vote on a budget for fire services and urged everyone to pass it. The proposed budget in Article 2 is similar to a budget proposed by the Fire Commission and is similar to what was approved last year.

Kelly O'Brian asked if the budget was for one fire chief or two. Mr. Arrison said the budget funds the status quo - two private nonprofits with no paid chief. Ms. Murphy drew attention to the spread sheet on the reverse side of the warning, which explains the various line items in the proposed budget.

Peter Daniels said he supports the budget without the full-time fire chief. He said people didn't want a municipal department and he felt the Town can't afford a full time chief. He felt sure the departments could continue to work together.

Beth Renaud wanted assurance that this budget leaves things exactly as they are. Mr. Todd said that this budget was to fund the fire departments as we have in past years.

Lisa Slade said she supports this budget, but said she wished the Board had stated in the article that the money was to fund the volunteer departments, the same as the Town has done in the last couple of years. The number looks large when taken out the context of the full budget. She also asked the Board to consider rescinding its vote to create a municipal fire department.

Audrey Harriman asked if the Town takes away a fire station, won't it adversely affect her homeowner's insurance. Mr. Morris and Mr. Arrison said that there was never any intention to close either of the stations.

Kate Adams felt that concerns that had been raised earlier still have not been addressed. She urged everyone to work together to solve the issues.

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There were no other comments or questions.

Mr. Cole read the next article.

Article 3: Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield appropriate the sum of \$17,000, to be deposited into the Fire Equipment and Gear Reserve Fund?

Mr. Boyer spoke to this article. He said this money would be put in the reserve account to be used for nonmotorized equipment such as protective clothing, radios, breathing apparatus, etc. It is intended to help reduce the fundraising pressure on the firefighters.

Debbie Cushman asked for the current balance in the reserve account. Town Accountant Darlene Kelly stated \$17,957 as of the end of FY18.

Charles Horton was not pleased that funds for ppe (personal protective equipment) appear three times in the proposed budget in addition to the funds proposed in Article 3 for more money for ppe. The Board explained once again that the extra funds were in response to frustrations voiced by the fire departments. By putting these funds in the reserve account, the Board maintains control over how they are spent.

Ms. Murphy urged everyone to watch the SAPA TV coverage of the Select Board and Fire Commission meetings going back to last August to get a better understanding of events and discussions that led to this meeting. She also urged everyone to stay after this meeting to attend the Select Board meeting and continue the discussion.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting

Made by: Mr. Arrison **Second:**

Vote: Unanimous in favor

The meeting adjourned at

Respectfully submitted,
deForest Bearse

**TOWN OF WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT
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WEATHERSFIELD SELECTBOARD

N. John Arrison, Selector

Daniel E. Boyer, Selector

David Fuller, Vice-Chairperson

Kelly Murphy, Chairperson

Michael Todd, Clerk

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