

MINUTES OF 2023 TOWN MEETING

Weathersfield Town

Annual Meeting

Weathersfield School and Google Meet

March 4, 2023 AT 12:30pm

MINUTES

Moderator John Broker-Campbell called the meeting to order at 12:36 PM and stated: This is the annual meeting of the Town of Weathersfield. Online participants can only observe and cannot participate.

Moderator Broker-Campbell called for introductions of the people gathered at the Town Office.

Select Board Chair Michael Todd introduced:

Brandon Gulnick, Town Manager

Select Board Members: David Fuller, Vice-Chair, Kelly O'Brien, Clerk; Paul Tillman (remote); and Wendy Smith.

The West Weathersfield Fire Department presented a plaque to BJ Esty and Lisa Stapleton for all their work for the auxiliary, which dissolved after 55 years.

Anne-Marie Redmond, School Board Chair, presented a plaque of the Town Seal to outgoing School Board Member Jacqui Antonvich and thanked her for her service to the Town.

Representative John Arrison spoke about the Affordable Green Heat Standard bill. This bill will require fossil fuel dealers to provide or to team with a company that provides weatherization and/or installation of alternate energy source heating. The public utilities commission will be charged with setting up exactly how the system is going to work. The Senate has extended the implementation and rules for two years. Mr. Arrison stated that the program will add an undetermined surcharge to the current fossil fuel price

Moderator Broker-Campbell turned to the articles.

Article 1: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield accept the reports of the Town's officers for the period from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022?*

Motion: Michael Stankevich

Second: John Arrison

NFD. All in favor. Motion Carried.

Article 2: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield in accordance with 17 V.S.A. § 2664 and 22 V.S.A. §, authorize the Proctor Library Trustees to expand such grant monies, gifts, or bequests which may be received by the Proctor Library, in accordance of said grants, gifts, or bequests?*

Motion: Matthew Walasewicz

Second: Lisa Stapleton

NFD. All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 3: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield authorize the Select Board to borrow money, if necessary, to pay current expenses in anticipation of taxes in accordance with the provisions of Title 24, Section 1786 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated?*

Motion: David Fuller

Second: Wendy Smith

NFD. All in favor. Motion Carried.

Article 4: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield increase the existing Business Personal Property Tax exemption from \$10,000 to \$50,000 per 32 V.S.A. 3849?*

Motion: Dave Fuller

Second: Kelly O'Brien

The Town Manager presented that each year, businesses are required to file the Vermont Personal Property form with the listers on or before April 20th, which lists their personal property to generate an appraisal based on its fair market value. Weathersfield voters approved the exemption of the first \$10,000 of assessed business personal property value. The Town is proposing to increase the current Business Personal Property Tax Exemption from \$10,000 to \$50,000, which means that the first \$50,000 of a business personal property will be exempt from taxation.

All in favor. Motion Carried.

Article 5: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield amend the purpose of the Veterans Memorial Reserve Fund to include use for the maintenance and repair of the Veterans Memorial Park and for the costs of events held to honor veterans?*

Motion: Matthew Walasewicz

Second: David Fuller

deForest Bearse spoke on Article 5, stating that the reserve fund that was set up for the creation of the memorial. The funds in this reserve account are not tax dollars, they are monies raised by the committee for the memorial. They were in another line item, but when the Town switched accountants, in order for them to not get lost, they were swept into this reserve fund. Thus, there is a need for the voters to amend the purpose of the reserve fund so the monies can be spent on other purposes.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 6: To transact any other business deemed proper when met.

Motion: Wendy Smith

Second: Kelly O'Brien

Clarification on the Article was given.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Article 7: To elect all town officers as required by law.

Moderator/Town – 1 Year

Cemetery Commissioner – 5 Years

Selectperson – 3 Years

Library Trustee – 3 Years

Selectperson – 2 Years

School Director – 3 Years

Lister – 3 Years

School Director – 1 Year

Lister 3 Years

School Director – 1 Year

Trustee of Public Funds – 3 Years

There were no questions and no discussion on this article.

Article 8: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield approve the expenditure of \$1,621,928 for the support and operation of the Town's General Fund? \$1,307,678 shall be raised by property taxation, allowing the Select Board to set the appropriate tax rate.*

The Town Manager presented the General Fund Proposed Budget and the reasoning for the 5% increase in expenses. In the prior year, the Town had \$45,418 remaining in surplus funds that was applied to the FY2023 budget. In the FY2024 budget, the Town only has \$25,000 to apply, a difference of -\$20,418 in less revenue. Additionally, delinquent taxes have reduced significantly, with an anticipating reduction in revenue of -\$27,750.

The voters of Weathersfield voted to purchase a new fire truck at the Ascutney Fire Department, a new expense addition of \$49,371. The average inflation rate for 2022 was 8% and thus, there were inflationary expenses, such as fuel and maintenance expenses for police and fire, and an 8% increase in employee wages. There was also new costs for dispatching services for police and fire.

The proposed budget does not include Special Article Appropriations (Articles 11 & 13) on the ballot. If these Articles are approved, the FY24 General Fund Budget will increase by \$41,000.

Article 9: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield approve the expenditure of \$1,172,494 for the support and operation of the Town's Highway Fund? \$945,983 shall be raised by property taxation, allowing the Select Board to set the appropriate tax rate.*

Ray Stapleton, Highway Superintendent, presented the Highway Budget. He discussed Act 64, a water quality law and its requirements, as well as grants, employee wage increases, and projects being taken upon by the Highway Department. The Highway Superintendent secured \$558,340 in grant funding, almost 50% of the annual highway operating budget.

Article 10: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield approve the expenditure of \$334,769 for the support and operation of the Town's Solid Waste Management Facility? These monies shall be raised by non-tax revenues.*

The Town Manager presented the Solid Waste Budget. He discussed working with Reading and West Windsor to develop a Tri-Town agreement, which fairly distributes Transfer Station Expenses across all three towns. He discussed the replacement of the trash compactor and concrete pad and how fixed costs are increasing from \$120,775 in FY23 to \$142,671 in FY24, which includes the \$12,257 compactor annual payment.

The Town Manager explained the transfer station's variable costs, which are paid for through punch ticket revenue. The Town received notice that haulers are increasing their tonnage rate by 5.4% because the landfill continues to raise fees and the Town will be paying \$116.99 for trash and the pull charge will increase to \$221.34. The Town pays \$62,195 in recycling related expenses. Before 2017, the Chinese government took in about 70% of the world's plastic and now they take in less than 1%. During this time, the transfer station began cumulating a deficit, which could be connected to the large increase in disposing of recycling.

Due to the cumulative deficit, the Town increased the cost of the punch ticket by \$0.75 per punch, effective April 1st and to be reviewed again after June 30th.

Article 11: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield appropriate the sum of \$40,000 to be deposited into the Fire Apparatus Acquisition Reserve account? [Not in Budget].*

The Town Manager explained that this is the reserve account tried to build up for the replacement of fire department gear, equipment, and trucks, etc so that the Town does not have to borrow as much once the Town has to replace one of these things.

Article 12: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield exempt from Town property taxation the land and building owned by the West Weathersfield Fire Department, Inc., located at Map No. 02, Parcel No. 26.00, for a period of five years in accordance with the provisions of Title 32, Section 3840, of the Vermont Statutes Annotated.*

The Town Manager explained that this exempts the nonprofit fire department from having to pay taxes. The fire departments are contracted and the Town is looking to lower the annual tax payment for these services. Historically, this exemption has happened every five years.

Article 13: *Shall the voters of the Town of Weathersfield appropriate the sum of \$1,000 to support the activities of Volunteers in Action (VIA). [Not in Budget].*

Volunteers in Action Volunteers is a community-based effort that brings together caring volunteers with neighbors in need of a helping hand.

Motion: To adjourn the informational section of the town meeting

Made by: Michael Todd

Second: BJ Esty

Vote: All in favor

The meeting adjourned at 1:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nichole Gagnon

John Broker-Campbell, Moderator