

**Town of Waterbury Select Board
Special Meeting
Tuesday February 23, 2021**

Present: M. Frier, M. Bard, N. Fish, K. Martin and C. Viens, Select Board; W. Shepeluk, Municipal Manager; L. Schlegel and K. Petrovic, Panelists; and C. Lawrence, Town Clerk. The meeting was conducted via a Zoom webinar.

Public: Jan Gendreau, Kalyn Cook, LeeAnne Viens, Lefty Sayah, ORCA Media, William Vigdor, T.G., Amy Scharf, Erin Lander, Tom Scribner, Meg Baldor, Kim Farnham, Fern Blood, Dani Kehlmann, Dana Allen, Tami Bass, Maureen White, Ariel Mondlak, Roger Tubby, Gail Yanowitch, Alyssa Johnson, Laura Putnam, Karl Lander, Linda Gravell, Steve Karcher, Anne Gilbert, Lisa Scagliotti, Christine Wulff, Diane Leavitt, Mike Hedges, Shannon, Sille Larsen, Natalie and 3 by telephone.

The meeting was called to order at 7:04pm

Approve Agenda

M. Bard made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by N. Fish and passed unanimously.

Public

There was no public comment.

Introductory Comments

M. Frier stated that this meeting was in lieu of Town Meeting. L. Schlegel stated that this meeting is an informational meeting and that W. Shepeluk will present information that is contained in the warning. Attendees may ask questions in the Q&A section of the screen. The chat will be open, and people on the phone will also be able to ask questions. The raised hand signal is available as well.

Consider the Reports of Town Officers - Events and Spending of the past year

The Town Report link was placed in the chat. M. Frier stated that with COVID-19, spending was curbed. The proposed tax rate of 55 cents was dropped to 51 cents. The tough decisions made in 2020 to curb spending allowed the Board to set the tax rate level with that of the prior year.

W. Shepeluk stated that the emergency stay-at-home order occurred about a week after Town Meeting 2020. The budget approved at that meeting was robust. The decision was made to reduce spending while still providing services. Almost half of the staff was furloughed; others had dramatic reduction in hours. Personnel expenses are the lion's share of the spending. EFUD eliminated base charges for water & sewer users for a quarter last year. As mentioned earlier, the tax rate remained stable at 51 cents. The penalty for late tax payments was cut in half and interest was waived. All of these actions left money in the pockets of tax and rate payers. W. Shepeluk gave further details on the 2020 budget outcome.

W. Shepeluk shared the delinquent tax report found on page 15 of the annual report. He found a mistake and the screen share showed the correction. The correction is that current year delinquent taxes were \$148,235 and the total delinquent taxes in all prior years was \$187,034, much higher than in prior year. There is currently \$146,612 in outstanding taxes. The budget built for 2021 proposes a 53-cent tax rate.

D. Allen asked if the penalties and interest on late taxes would go back into effect for the coming year. W. Shepeluk stated that the decision to waive interest and cut the penalty to 4% was made after the tax collection date. In 2020, the legislature passed a law that the governing body could change the rates of penalties and interest. The warning for this year's budget contains the 8% penalty and an interest charge not to exceed 1.5%. The articles as printed are being voted upon.

It was asked that with a tax rate increase if the delinquencies would be less. W. Shepeluk stated that the Town will do its best to collect taxes.

D. Allen asked what happens if Article 5 does not pass. W. Shepeluk responded that a special Town Meeting would have to be called to vote on the article again.

Presentation of the Capital Budget of the Town (Article 6 in the warning and on the ballot)

W. Shepeluk screen shared and reviewed the Operating Budget summary located on page 16 of the annual report. Total property taxes to be raised is \$4,039,610. W. Shepeluk reported that the Board approved the continuation of the Vermont State Police resident trooper program at their meeting last evening.

Presentation of the budgets for the Operating Funds, Designated Reserve Funds and Special Purpose Funds of the Town (Article 7)

W. Shepeluk screen shared the general fund budget and reviewed some of the revenues. He stated that the PILOT payment from the State is budgeted conservatively. The Town cannot afford to overestimate revenues.

L. Scagliotti asked questions on the Vermont State Police contract. W. Shepeluk responded that the contract in 2020 was \$365,100 and the proposed contract for 2021 is \$383,400. The contract approved last evening is essentially the same as the initial 3-year contract. It provides for 80 hours of coverage per week.

D. Allen asked if the tax rate takes into consideration the increase in real estate transfers and the fact that home prices are higher. He asked if the Town is adequately addressing maintenance concerns with the relatively conservative tax rate. W. Shepeluk stated that the Town Clerk revenue was significantly higher than budgeted speaking to property transfers and refinancing. W. Shepeluk explained that if the grand list increases, more taxes will be raised. W. Shepeluk stated that the Select Board is trying to do whatever is necessary in terms of the infrastructure, within the budget. C. Viens gave a further explanation of the reasoning of the 53-cent tax rate. W. Shepeluk continued to review the general fund budget expenses.

W. Shepeluk screen shared and reviewed the highway and library fund revenues and expenses.

D. Kehlmann asked if the Town is collecting and using data to measure success of the VSP. K. Martin and C. Lawrence responded that the monthly statistics from the VSP are made into a graph format and posted on the town website under the public safety tab.

W. Shepeluk screen shared the Municipal Building Operating Fund and directed the attendees' attention to the remaining operating and reserve funds on page 39 of the town report.

Presentation of Information or Questions concerning Articles 8-33 (Authorization of Cannabis Retailers & Special Articles)

M. Frier stated that the State has legislated for an opt-in program for the retail of cannabis. The Board had a split vote but decided to put in on the warning for the voters to decide upon. A. Gilbert from Central Vermont New Directions explained that the Town can appoint a local cannabis control commission to develop what retail cannabis will look like if the article passes. A question was asked if the Town knows who has applied for a retail license. M. Frier responded in the negative.

M. Frier read through articles 9 – 33. A question was asked about Article 31, the appropriation to the Senior Center that indicates that funding is also included in the general fund budget. The amount budgeted in the general fund budget is \$12,500, up from \$10,000 last year.

W. Shepeluk realized he neglected to introduce the Capital Improvement funds and screen shared the 2021 budget snapshot. He briefly reviewed the paving projects.

Presentation of Instructions for Australian ballot voting

C. Lawrence explained that absentee voting has been occurring for almost 3 weeks but that the time is narrowing to request that a ballot be mailed. There will be in person voting at Thatcher Brook Primary School on March 2nd from 7:00am to 7:00pm with safety protocols in place.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:52pm

Respectfully submitted,

Carla Lawrence, Town Clerk

Approved on: March 1, 2021