

**TOWN OF CHARLOTTE
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
MARCH 4, 2008**

APPROVED

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS: Charles Russell, Chair; Frank Thornton, Winslow Ladue, Jenny Cole, Ed Stone.

MODERATOR: Jerry Schwarz.

Moderator Schwarz called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. in the Charlotte Central School Multi-purpose Room, and invited Dean Bloch, Selectboard Assistant, to join the Selectboard. The polls were open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

ARTICLE 1: To hear the reports of the Town officers and to act upon the same.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to hear and accept the reports of the Town officers and to act upon the same.

Discussion:

Nancy Wood asked if the new re-appraisal was really a 20 percent increase of the current appraisal and if the Listers would elaborate on variances in value of one part of town versus another. Have the Listers factored in a slow down in home sales, asked Ms. Wood. Heather Manning, Charlotte Lister, explained that the 20 percent increase was related to the CLA. Three years of sales were looked at and sales may have slowed down, but sale prices have not. The state sets the CLA and towns can contest that. It is not necessary to contest the CLA at this time.

Elizabeth Bassett asked for clarification regarding a line item of \$89,865, Patient Billing Expense (page 129) and an equal amount Received from Customers (page 130). Ker Walker explained that it was income to the Fire and Rescue departments. The department cuts a check to the Town and it shows as an amount coming in and going out.

VOTE: passed unanimously by voice vote; motion carried.

ARTICLE 2: Will the Town vote to have Property Taxes payable on or before November 17, 2008 and to have payments made to the Town Treasurer under 32 VSA §4773.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to have Property Taxes payable on or before November 17, 2008 and to have payments made to the Town Treasurer under 32 VSA §4773.

VOTE: passed unanimously by voice vote; motion carried.

ARTICLE 3: Will the Town adopt the Selectboard's budget of \$2,421,700 for the fiscal year July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 less anticipated revenues.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to adopt the Selectboard's budget of \$2,421,700 for the fiscal year July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 less anticipated revenues.

DISCUSSION:

Tina Flood asked why Thompson's Point Rent (page 7) went down by \$5,000. Mr. Russell explained that differences in residential property tax rates versus non-residential tax rates were defined in ACT 68. The non-residential tax rate went down and is tied to 105 percent of appraised value as per the Thompson's Point lease. Thompson's Point was re-appraised every five years and values will go up again.

Ms. Flood asked why dog license revenues were going down. Ms. Manning replied that people were not registering their dogs with the Town.

Ms. Flood asked why Court Fines were higher (page 7). Mr. Russell replied that the Town was anticipating more revenue from budgeting someone for enforcement.

Ms. Flood asked for clarification regarding increases in the maintenance and consultant salaries (page 9). Mr. Russell explained that it was for waste water study in the West Village and the Burns property, and a town wide ground water study.

Ms. Flood asked for clarification regarding \$166,000 in the Highway budget (page 10). Mr. Russell answered that the Highway budget was separated out so that the winter budget and the summer budget would be easier to track.

Ms. Flood asked if the Chittenden County Food Shelf line item was \$250, or zero. Mr. Russell replied zero.

Ms. Flood pointed out an inconsistency in the Recreation budget for the Intramural Sports Director line item (should be an increase change) and Intramural Sports (should be an increase change). Are the Library and Senior Center salaries paid through the Town, asked Ms. Flood. Mr. Russell replied yes, and yes. The Library and Senior Center were Town properties.

In response to a question regarding a decrease in legal expenses, Mr. Russell explained that the VELCO issue and appeals were completed. The Town has gotten wiser regarding the Environmental Court appeal procedure and is staying away from mediation.

AMENDMENT by Dan Rosen, seconded by Dennis Maillon, to delete \$25,000, Expenses, Miscellaneous, Traffic Enforcement, from the proposed Selectboard budget.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Rosen stated that the sheriff hired to enforce Town speed limits was too enthused about his duties. There were two consequences with speed limits – if there was a need for enforcement, and enforcement as an erosion to a way of life in Vermont. People should slow down, or hang up their cell phones. I would argue that a sheriff was not needed, said Mr. Rosen. Mr. Russell explained that a sheriff was hired following a car accident when three kids went off Lake Road and into a large pine tree. The Town would use a different agency next time.

Mr. Ladue related a conversation with several CVU students, who told him that they knew they couldn't speed in Shelburne or Hinesburg because those communities have police departments, but Charlotte doesn't. They can speed in Charlotte. I support enforcement, stated Mr. Ladue.

Elizabeth Bassette, Mt Philo Road resident, said that her children ride a school bus and need to cross the road in front of their house. She was almost killed with her children crossing that road. People speed. People need to bear in mind that not every one drives. Some bike, or walk the roads. My high school son was ticketed twice in Hinesburg and that made him a better driver.

Spin Richardson noted that it was a public safety issue and the Town should support enforcement of the Town speed limits.

Larry Hamilton spoke in support of the \$17,000 revenue generated by enforcement. I hope we hire a new sheriff.

Mr. Stone explained that a sheriff was hired at \$48 per hour. The Town receives 80 percent of the fines from the state, which is money coming back to the Town. Enforcement was considered following Selectboard meetings where residents appeared in tears telling how they almost were hit by cars. Mr. Costello may not have had the best attitude, but he did his job. \$25,000 was not enough money really to hire someone. Robert Mesaros asked what the \$25,000 bought. Mr. Russell replied it paid for one person for ten hours per week.

Joan Braun said she was a walker and thanked the Town for enforcing the speed limits. Speeding was terrible.

Mr. Rosen said there was a balance between safety and risk. The government is enacting all levels of solutions that can make us safer. Life always has a risk. Most of the drivers on Ferry Road and Greenbush Road are "us". A question is do we need outside solutions, or can we do this ourselves.

Martha Perkins recalled that a year ago she was driving down Lake Road and a car passed her so she sped up to follow the driver. She quit at 80 mph, but she followed the car into the ball field and talked to the kid. I did get picked up by the sheriff and I wasn't speeding. He followed me through three stop signs and gave me a ticket.

Marty Illick asked if the roads being patrolled were studied by the CCMPO. Mr. Russell said that the speed limits on state roads was 50 mph unless posted. We were focusing on high traffic roads like Mt Philo, Greenbush and Ferry roads.

Tina Flood called the question, which was seconded, to cease debate on the Amendment.

VOTE to call the Question: passed unanimously by voice vote to cease debate;

motion carried.

VOTE on the Amendment: unanimously nay by voice vote; motion failed.

DISCUSSION on the MOTION:

Wadi Sawabini asked where the Town deposits its reserve money. Florida pools money in subprime investments, which is a concern, said Mr. Sawabini. Mr. Russell referred to the Audit (page 27) for investment information. Mary Mead said that the Town deposited its money at the Citizens Bank and invested in CD's. Ellie Russell explained that the Town money was in the bank and not invested in risky ventures. Moe Harvey added that the funds were FDIC insured.

Dan Rosen asked why the Thompson's Point rent was so small. Things sell for big bucks there and it should be a source of revenue for the Town. Mr. Russell explained that the rent was based on the land value. As a non-profit entity the Town "can't" make money. We have looked at changing the Thompson's Point rent recently. Mr. Rosen said it was about fair value; not making money. Is there a legal restriction, asked Mr. Rosen, it is a Town asset that we are not getting a fair return on. Mr. Russell said that the rent was based on the appraised land value plus 105 percent. Leases were on a five year cycle and the rent will go up.

Carl Herzog spoke in support of a unit valued asset. If the Town can't collect revenue then it should sell off the property.

Tina Flood said that given the way property values are going up when the leases come up for renewal the Town should shorten the lease from five years to two years. Mr. Russell clarified that the leases were 20 year leases. Tina Flood said that Thompson's Point is a wonderful asset and if we can't get revenue to offset expenses then we should revisit it to maximize revenue. Moderator Schwarz suggested that Ms. Flood could propose an Advisory Motion under Article 8 for the Selectboard to look at the Thompson's Point rent in more detail.

Marty Illick pointed out that the Selectboard looked at the topic not too long ago. The Town has received an increase in rent revenue over the years and \$425,000 is good revenue.

Larry Hamilton asked if the Selectboard had appointed a committee to give advice regarding donations (page 11) as requested via an Advisory Motion last year. Mr. Russell replied no.

Frances Foster asked why the line item for road materials was reduced. Mr. Russell reiterated that the Highway Budget was separated out to reflect winter versus summer line items. Frances Foster asked if the Town would have enough sand to make it through the winter. Charlotte Road Commissioner Lewis replied that he thought he had enough sand. It was salt that was in short supply.

Megan Price said that she was not in support of donations if those organizations had other sources of revenue and weren't tied to the Town. The Town has donated over

\$180,000 over the last ten years. An Advisory Committee was not appointed last year. We are putting additional taxes on working people who are losing their jobs. For example, the Association for the Blind reported a Merrill Lynch portfolio of \$2,696,026.22 in 2005. They don't need our money. The Town should require these organizations to come in with a petition of what they were asking the money for. Giving should be an individual choice versus a Town line item.

Elizabeth Bassett, a Howard Services Board member, pointed out that her organization did send in a letter (page 57 of the Town Report). Howard Services assisted 78 Charlotte individuals this year. Since the state closed its mental health hospital the Howard Center is "it" for services. We have money in the bank for a cushion, but we need to start new services and that takes funding.

Robert Chutter called the question, which was seconded, to cease debate on Article 3.

VOTE to call the Question: passed unanimously by voice vote to cease debate; motion carried.

VOTE on Article 3: passed by a majority of ayes by voice vote, 5 nays; motion carried.

ARTICLE 4: Will the Town vote to authorize the Selectboard to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenues for the next fiscal year.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to authorize the Selectboard to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenues for the next fiscal year.

VOTE on Article 4: passed by a majority of ayes by voice vote, 1 nay; motion carried.

ARTICLE 5: Will the Town vote to authorize the Selectboard to increase the municipal tax rate by two cents for deposit in the Fire and Rescue Capital Reserve Fund in FY08/09.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to authorize the Selectboard to increase the municipal tax rate by two cents for deposit in the Fire and Rescue Capital Reserve Fund in FY08/09.

Following a request by Bucky Bernstein to table the motion, Ms. Flood and Mr. Reynolds withdrew their motion.

MOTION by Bucky Bernstein, seconded by Robert Chutter, to table consideration of Article 5, and to consider Article 6 first, then consider Article 5 afterward.

Moderator Schwarz determined that a motion to switch the order of Article 5 and Article 6 was non-debatable, and must pass by a majority vote.

VOTE to table consideration of Article 5 and consider Article 6 first: passed by a majority of ayes, 8 nays; motion carried.

ARTICLE 6: Will the Town vote to authorize the Selectboard to use \$180,000 from

the Fire and Rescue Capital Reserve Fund for the purpose of purchasing an all-wheel drive mid-size attack pumper truck.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to authorize the Selectboard to use \$180,000 from the Fire and Rescue Capital Reserve Fund for the purpose of purchasing an all-wheel drive mid-size attack pumper truck.

DISCUSSION:

Chris Davis, Charlotte Fire Chief and Richard St George, Charlotte Assistant Fire Chief, explained a proposal to replace a 30-year old brush truck with an all-wheel mid-size pumper truck. The Fire/Rescue departments conducted a town wide driveway-by-driveway survey to determine needs. The replacement truck is small, would carry less water, and would be less expensive than a full-size pumper. It has a 20-year chassis life.

Marty Illick asked if the \$180,000 (page 48) was in the Capital Reserve Fund. Richard St George replied yes. It was in the fund from the previous year. The fund covers the previous bond issues, such as the Fire Station, the 1998 pumper truck, etc. The fund balance includes this year's deposit (Article 5).

Spin Richardson asked if the Town approves the truck purchase, but not Article 5 would that mean a bond. Mr. Russell replied that if the voters did not approve the use of the \$180,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund then the department could borrow and bond (for the purchase). If the voters didn't fund Article 5 then the truck couldn't be purchased.

Walter Gates said that looking at the projection schedule (Town Report, page 48) this year you could just squeeze by without the appropriation.

Dan Rosen said that it was a question about "more". When is enough. In areas of public safety, education, or health care it is a question of fear. It is hard to make an informed decision. In the 14 years that I have lived here there have been very few things that were voted down. It is a local community decision based on levels of income. Some people can afford it, and some can't, but we must consider what it means to all the community.

Bonnie (?) asked if we don't buy this truck what assistance would we expect from surrounding communities. Chris Walker explained that Charlotte does call on the Hinesburg Fire Department. They have this type of smaller vehicle. If the purchase was not approved now we would still like to propose it as an asset for the Town. It is a matter of having it accessible for immediate response in Town versus waiting 15-20 minutes from outside the Town. We do have equipment and we would get as close as we can (to a fire). We can hook up thousands of feet of hose to do the job. We wouldn't ask for something that wouldn't help the Town. We have researched what is the best type of vehicle at the best price. Regarding the Fund, the idea was not to have radical swings placed on the taxpayer to pay for these items. For example, breathing apparatus replacement is built into the schedule. We are obligated to go to the Selectboard and work with them to set a rate and then come to

the taxpayer.

There was discussion regarding the 1973 brush fire truck, which was purchased used from Shelburne. Richard St George explained that the 1973 truck was deemed unsafe and is parked. The proposed new truck would be multi-duty as a first response vehicle for use on back roads where larger fire trucks have a hard time going. It is the right package for the job.

Larry Hamilton said that the Fire Department helps to rescue the trees along Ferry Road.

Mike Yantachka asked what the Fire Department would do with the 1973 truck. Richard St George replied that the department would entertain bids on the vehicle, or sell it to someone mechanically handy.

Robert Mesaros asked if the vehicle purchase was approved what was the lead time to get it in service. Richard St George replied that we would need 6-9 months lead time.

Josh Flore asked what mechanical condition the 1973 truck was in. Richard St George replied that it leaked oil, started when it wanted to, the tires were flat and it needed a brake job. The gas tank was in the cab. It was not reliable.

It was moved and seconded to call the question and cease debate.

VOTE to call the question: passed by a majority of ayes, 3 nays; motion carried.

VOTE on Article 6: passed by a majority of ayes, 2 nays; motion carried.

ARTICLE 5: Will the Town vote to authorize the Selectboard to increase the municipal tax rate by two cents for deposit in the Fire and Rescue Capital Reserve Fund in FY08/09.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to authorize the Selectboard to increase the municipal tax rate by two cents for deposit in the Fire and Rescue Capital Reserve Fund in FY08/09.

DISCUSSION:

There was brief discussion regarding future capital improvement requests that included replacement of an ambulance, and a suggestion by Megan Price to decrease future funding requests to one-cent versus two-cents. Mr. Russell said that it was hard to predict the future. The Fire Department works hard to make equipment last longer than anticipated.

Ellie Russell said that funding the Fund at two cents would not support future requests. Mr. Russell stated that Ms. Russell was correct, and sustainability depended on the Grand List (2008 reappraisal). Ray Curtis pointed out that last year it was funded by two and one-half cents and this year the request was for two cents.

Robert Chutter called the question, which was seconded, to cease debate on Article 5.

VOTE on to call the question: passed by a majority of ayes, 5 nays; motion carried.

VOTE on Article 5: passed by a majority of ayes, 5 nays; motion carried.

ARTICLE 7: Will the Town vote to raise \$12,000 from taxes in FY08/09 for the purpose of purchasing and installing a generator in the Charlotte Senior Center for use during emergencies.

MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to vote to raise \$12,000 from taxes in FY08/09 for the purpose of purchasing and installing a generator in the Charlotte Senior Center for use during emergencies.

DISCUSSION:

Ed Stone reviewed a proposal to purchase a generator to be installed at the Charlotte Senior Center for emergency purposes and to wire the generator as a backup support for the Town sewer pump station on the Burns property with a \$9,000 grant and the remainder to be raised by the Town. Three thousand dollars would pay for a slab for the generator and for wiring.

Robert Mesaros asked if the Town has an emergency plan. We could use a generator at the Charlotte Central School, which would be better as an emergency shelter. Mr. Stone replied that there was an Emergency Plan at the Town Hall. Robert Mesaros pointed out that there were more expenses than just the cost of a generator. There was fuel, wiring, etc. My home generator costs \$750 to run. Plus it was noisy, said Mr. Mesaros. Mr. Stone said that the proposed generator runs on propane and was quiet. The Town would have to budget the cost of running the generator in future budgets.

Mr. Mesaros asked how many people could be accommodated at the Senior Center. Mr. Stone replied about 30. The Fire Department has a generator and people could go there as well. It would cost \$250,000 to purchase a generator large enough to run the school, which would take the entire state grant funding, which needs to be divided by 33 towns.

Marty Illick stated that she didn't know enough about the request to make a decision today.

Jill Abiloff said if the Senior Center could only take 30 people, then that would cover only five houses from Ferry Road. Does the Charlotte Emergency Plan include a plan to get people to the Senior Center, asked Ms. Abiloff. Mr. Stone replied that the Senior Center is a full service facility where people could cook meals, take a shower and was for people who can't do for themselves.

Spin Richardson said it appeared a total of \$22,000 was needed. Would the generator run air conditioning. What was the size of the unit, asked Mr. Richardson. Mr. Stone replied that the unit could run air conditioning. Three estimates were received and the Vermont Emergency Management team

recommended the firms. A study was done on the Senior Center building including the septic system (Burns property). The generator would be placed behind the Center.

Robert Mesaros expressed concern that the generator would disturb neighbors and should be placed on the north side in the back.

Tina Flood said that we are responding to the amount available via a grant versus what was needed by the Town Emergency Plan. We need a true understanding of the true costs.

Robert Mesaros stated that it is a theme of more; more for safety, more for schools, etc. we must be realistic that for a small town all these things add up. The Senior Center as a shelter doesn't make sense and we should reject it.

Raven Davis said that after the ice storm we listed our resources available within our neighborhood. It is an effective approach.

Robert Mesaros said that when we set up our home generator we took an option not to power the entire house. We could do that at the school, for example, selectively power a bathroom and this multi-purpose room. A \$200,000 option is optimistic. I support the school as a shelter, but not at \$200,000.

Jim Donovan asked how the purchase related to the Emergency Plan. A generator was not included in the plan currently. Mr. Stone noted that the Red Cross had suggested the Senior Center as an emergency shelter, with the Fire/Rescue building as back up. Dan Cole is the Charlotte Emergency Director, said Mr. Stone. Chris Walker pointed out that the Congregational Church, the Fire Station, were identified as shelters in the Emergency Plan.

In response to a question Mr. Stone said that the generator could be in place by the end of August.

VOTE on Article 7: unanimously nay; motion failed.

ARTICLE 8: To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting. MOTION by Tina Flood, seconded by Greg Reynolds, to consider any Advisory motions brought before the Town.

MOTION by Dr. Lee Weisman to recognize Hugh Lewis Sr for his love and commitment to the Town of Charlotte.

MOTION by Josh Flore, seconded by Megan Price, for the Charlotte Highway Department to use salt on the roads at the discretion of the Road Commissioner.

VOTE: ayes; motion carried.

Virginia Keyser asked if the Selectboard had appointed an Advisory Committee to review community funding of gifts/contributions to non-profit organizations. What investments

did the Town make and were those investments FDIC insured.

MOTION by Virginia Keyser, seconded by Jim Donavan, to establish an Investment Policy for Town funds.

VOTE: unanimously aye; motion carried.

In response to a question, Moderator Schwarz reiterated that binding action could not be taken on motions that were not warned as per state statutes.

MOTION by Megan Price, seconded by Dan Rosen, that going forward the Selectboard should require non-profit organization that request funding to present the Town of Charlotte with tax returns and current 990/financial reports, and a petition from an organization for those funds.

AMENDED to delete a petition, but that an organization would need to document how town support of an organization would benefit the Town of Charlotte.

VOTE by written ballot as amended: 67 ayes, 56 nays; motion carried.

Robert Aldrich thanked the Charlotte Road Commissioner and road crew for a great job this winter.

The 2008 Annual Town Meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted: Kathlyn Furr, Recording Secretary