

Wednesday, February 10th, 2016

CALL TO ORDER 6:00

Present: Al Rossetto, Linda Caron, Nancy Merrow, Ron Caron, Ed Robinson, Mark Robinson, Jessica Riendeau, Chief Marcel Platt, Selectman Jim Tierney, Selectman Michael Phillips, Chairman Jim Weagle

OPENED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:01pm

REVIEW OF THE 2016 TOWN BUDGET AND TOWN WARRANT

Selectman Phillips defined what "Selectmen recommended" means. The recommendations are not printed on the warrant yet but the Selectmen will address each as they go. "Selectmen recommended" means that the Selectmen recommend that the article go to warrant; it does not mean that the Selectmen recommend passing the article. It can be a 3-0 or 2-1 recommendation by the Selectmen to go to warrant. Because a petitioned article must go to warrant by statute, the Selectmen could vote 1-2 or 0-3. Having an opposing vote may raise awareness to the article.

The first 4 articles are standard.

Article 5: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate up to \$400,000 dollars to be used as matching funds towards a grant applied for by the Town for Phase II of water/sewer extension on the river side of the former mill site, and to authorize the issuance of no more than \$400,000 of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA 33) and to authorize the Selectmen to issue and negotiate the terms of such bonds or notes and determine the rate of interest thereon; further to authorize the Selectmen to apply for, accept and expend any grant monies that may become available for this purpose. If the grant is not received, the money will not be raised and appropriated. 2/3 vote by ballot is required.*

The Chairman pointed out that the minimum time for the ballot must be open for one hour, but the moderator dictates additional time and can close the voting.

Selectman Tierney explained that the grant being applied for is from EDA. The grant portion is somewhere around \$800,000 and the requisite match for that amount is \$400,000 for a total project amount of 1.2M. The Town applied for this grant last year but was not awarded the grant. EDA stated that one of the reasons for the denial was that the "Town had no skin in the game." For example, the Town not only has no money in the property but also has no money in assisting the property. In the past, the Town has received grants for the property; there was a Brownfield's study and a marketing study conducted for the mill site. GREAT has also received grants that assisted the mill property. Just last year, GREAT was awarded 49K for the Phase I engineering the Town was awarded 250K for Phase I construction. Although the combination of Town and GREAT grants has been in excess of \$750-800K, these monies are not considered Town contribution by EDA. The EDA has stated directly that if the Town does not vote in favor of this matching contribution and invest something as a community, then the Town will not be awarded the grant for the Phase II completion of water and sewer infrastructure installation. The Town can apply for other grants to offset this amount if there is funding availability;

there is at least one opportunity. GREAT is searching for funding opportunities as well. The EDA grant is a grant that the Town has never applied for and therefore has never been subject to that agency's requirement for Town involvement. Chairman Weagle pointed out that, despite the fact that the Town will own the infrastructure, this was not sufficient "skin in the game" because the infrastructure was given to the Town.

Mark Robinson asked if there was an alternative way to meet the match requirements, not through the taxpayers, but through businesses coming into the site. Selectman Tierney explained that the EDA requires a commitment for the match from the Town to be submitted with the grant application. Essentially, we would have nothing to lose with no financial stake in the project. He further explained that this up-front investment is returned at a later date. For instance, if a business were to come into the Campbell building with a current assessment of around \$50K, finishing of the building as proposed by the company that went to Vermont would raise the assessment to a \$500,000 to 1M building. The same scenario applies to the old office building currently assessed around \$40K, which could become a \$500,000 to 1M building upon completion. How you get your money back is through the taxation of the higher assessments related to finished construction of the buildings for full occupancy and operation. Even with one big company, the tax rate will go down. If the LNG project that Evan Coleman proposed had been constructed, the tax rate would have halved.

Nancy Merrow emphasized that many taxpayers are concerned that this "investment" being required from the Town is for improvements on private property. The Selectmen stated that EDA denied the Spring 2015 application primarily because we have no local investors from the Town, including the Town; Bob Chapman has in excess of 14M into the project to help the community and he is not from Northumberland. This bond is an example of Northumberland residents trying to themselves. There is a committee dedicated to finding alternatives for the former mill properties; members include Annie Kuster's rep and GREAT rep-Brian Bresnahan, EDA rep-Alan Brigham, CDFA rep-Taylor Caswell, North Country Council rep-Glenn Coppelman, CEDC rep-Bob Deangelis (Bob retired and Mike Scala replaced him in November), NBRC rep-Mark Scarano, NCIC reps-Cathy Conway and Jon Freeman, Kelly Ayotte rep-Mike Scala (now vacant), County Commissioner rep-Rick Samson, USDA rep-Greg McPherson, Northumberland Selectman and GREAT rep-Jim Tierney Jr., DRED rep-Benoit Lamontagne, Northumberland grant writer/administrator-Robin Irving, Barry Normandeau, Bob Chapman, Mike Stirling, and the rep from Jeanne Shaheen's office. Each agency has either a loan, grant or loan/grant program, each with their own eligibility criteria. For example, CDFA has block grants, but defined jobs with a certain pay scale and benefit package must be committed up front. Each job is equivalent to \$20,000 in grant money. EDA does not require jobs up front but requires a stake in the project, hence the bond. Until the water and sewer gets installed on the river side, entities who are interested in the property will not come. Different programs have different match requirements. In this case, the match for the EDA grant is a percentage based on factors including the total cost of the project and the amount being applied for. Following some EDA program changes in the fall 2015, the Town cannot even submit an EDA application for grant monies without submitting the full match commitment prior. The Town can pursue other grants to offset the \$400,000 at a later date but these grants must meet match guidelines (federal grant monies in most cases cannot be matched by other federal grants). This Phase II project is

connecting water and sewer by the end at the Campbell building, following the river and swinging back around to the Mechanic Street tie-in. The new piping put in this year does not reach the Cogen building in which one entity is interested. Another interested facility needs to be on the river side but the existing lines cannot get across the property, so the pipes need to swing around.

Selectman Phillips mentioned that, a few years ago, a suggestion to set up the property as a non-profit business park was put forth. This would have allowed the property owner to apply for grants on their own behalf. Since the park is not non-profit, the applications must be submitted by either a non-profit or municipality. Chapman could declare the property as non-profit, but then the Town does not get property taxes, which is Town's motivation for attracting businesses.

Ed Robinson objected to dumping that kind of money into that property because it will take a long time to get it back. He emphasized that the Town will be approaching the taxpayers again for another bond for the Town's existing system because that is rough shape. Al Rossetto pointed out that the town voted on the bond last year to get into debt for the Brooklyn Street project; that project is Phase I of 5 or 6 totaling \$20M which will never under any condition pay back through water and sewer fees to cover costs. Selectman Tierney said that the bond approved last year will take 28 years to pay off. The half-Hill project is another 17-18 years of payments. The entire mill property is currently worth roughly \$600,000. They are current on their tax bills. It used to be 200M including the meadows. With various businesses coming into the mill site, the value could exceed the 200M and that is a lot of tax revenue coming back. If the Town waits until existing bonds are paid off, no business will locate here. Al Rossetto strongly opposed a raise in the tax rate in order to pass the bond, but agreed that an investment now of \$400K would lower the tax rates as soon as a business was implemented. Selectman Phillips feels that it is tough for taxpayers to do more than two debt payments and increased with the current economic situation. Selectman Tierney reminded everyone that the \$0.40/1000 was for a 10-year bond and could be lowered if the bond term were longer.

Article 6: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$384,616 dollars for the purpose of operating and maintaining the water department. Said funds to be offset by the water user fees. Any shortfalls in the water user fees will be made up from the accumulated surplus in the 'regular water account.'*

The improvements implemented into the water system(s) in 2015, especially those for the Lost Nation station and Crow Hill, saves gallons distributed; the department will not be able to convert the savings to dollars until a few months have passed.

Article 7: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$351,342 dollars for the purpose of operating and maintaining the sewer department. Said funds to be offset by the sewer user fees. Any shortfall in the sewer user fees will be made up from the accumulated surplus in the 'regular sewer account.'*

When the sewer account doesn't have enough money, some department has to make up the debt, therefore the departmental debt just gets bigger. Ron Caron stated that the raising of the rates is

supposed to slowly eliminate the departmental debt and cover the operating budget. Selectman Tierney noted that a heavy consumer on the system could also straighten out

Article 8: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,050,309 dollars which represents the operating budget of the Town, said sum exclusive of special and individual articles addressed.*

Nancy Merrow asked what amount would be added to the budget and tax rate if all of the articles passed. Selectman Tierney stated that the budget would increase by \$80K and the tax rate would go up about \$0.72/1000.

Ron Caron wanted to know what the transfer station brought in for revenues. Selectman Tierney stated that the only real revenue maker is from metals. Waste is weighed; the Town brought 12,000 pounds of TV sets, 19,000 pounds of tires to AVRDD. AVRDD charges the Town about a dollar for a regular tire which we charge about three dollars. The station is losing money, especially on TV sets because we are not charging enough. AVRDD recently notified the office that the charges will be increased. Any money collected is deposited into the general fund.

Ron Caron asked the Board to outline the status of the police department. The rumor in town is that all of the police officers left. Chief Platt announced that there were no more full-time officers; the only remaining officer was him at part-time status. Ron Caron expressed concern over how the Board planned to handle redevelopment of the department. Selectman Tierney explained that the proposed budget is based on having 3 full-time officers and 1 part-time chief. Responses to the advertisements in the paper and on indeed.com were from about 10 people with only one certified for full-time service. In the meantime, coverage is accomplished by part-time officers. Ed Robinson wanted to know if the Board intended to hire only certified officers or are they going to pay for someone to go to school. Selectman Tierney stated that the tuition is paid by the academy, so the costs for the Town are payroll and travel. The advertisement did specify "full-time certified." Nancy Merrow asked if the department could eliminate the part-time chief and start over with a full-time chief and 2 full-time officers? The consensus is that voters are frustrated with and embarrassed of the department. The Board indicated that they are focusing on rebuilding the department.

Ron Caron asked what the Board intended to do with the upstairs of the Town Office building because it is finished. His concern revolved around the expense of rent and utilities at 10 Station Square (\$12,000/yr in rent (no taxes), \$4600 in electricity, \$4000 in oil, water/sewer costs and renters insurance all split between the police department (50%), ambulance (40%) and town office (10%)). There is also the cost of running water to avoid freezing pipes. Mark Robinson suggested that the ambulance could go into the town offices as previously planned and the police could buy the old building and the building behind it for a lower price than paying these bills in a rented property. Ed Robinson suggested placing the department in the train station but Selectman Tierney stated that GREAT owns the train station and they are in the process of selling it. Ron Caron suggested that the Board consult with the school because the SAU could easily move to Stratford and that building could be available. Linda Caron reminded everyone that the school is not using the trailer and that building could

be used. Selectman Phillips mentioned that, in addition to needed space for the ambulance and police departments, there is a need for a meeting room which could go to the library if necessary and a possible addition to the fire lot for emergency services.

Jessica Riendeau supported the idea of a full-time chief. Groveton is not like Berlin; Berlin has a part-time chief, a deputy chief and 4-5 lieutenants, 4-5 sergeants and 2-3 corporals. Groveton does not have the same population that Berlin has, so comparing Groveton's department to Berlin's department is like comparing apples to oranges. She was also under the impression that the structure of the department was supposed to be a temporary thing until the department transitioned back to having a full-time chief. Selectman Tierney stated that the "temporary" response was from a candidate for selectman and not from this Board; this Board had an agreement to review the part-time versus full-time status as of the end of December. There was no definite decision that the position would go back to full-time. Selectman Phillips expressed his concern that the chief's position is not subject to an employment contract. Further, Selectman Weagle cited an RSA that dictates what the Board can and cannot do with respect to positions in certain departments, particularly police positions. Once a candidate becomes an officer, that officer must be terminated either 1) on their own 2) by the Town for cause. Jessica Riendeau insisted that the Board still has the right to say that the Town wants a full-time chief. Ron Caron asked Chief Platt how he envisioned the department pertaining to manpower, in light of the community's issues and varied personalities. Chief Platt engaged in a long discussion outlining the pros and cons of the current situation versus the ideal situation. He envisions a model similar to other towns of the same size. The escalating drug presence and associated crime is of most importance. Chief Platt is worried that, without incentives like signing bonuses and higher wages, the Town will have a difficult time recruiting qualified officers. As far as the budget goes, the police budget was down last year but it went up this year due to costs that the department does not have any control over. Selectman Phillips pointed out that the Board did alter the budget from the one that Chief Platt had originally submitted. The Board increased the wage line for officers with full-time accreditation to \$19/hr which is not as high as other towns but higher than the \$17/hr in previous years. The Board also increased the wage line for part-time officers from \$13.50/hr to \$15/hr. Selectman Phillips notified any interested parties to contact him to look at a very useful bar graph showing coverage when the department had 4 full-time officers and a 32-hour chief and 2 shifts /week for part-time officers. Nancy Merrow expressed her opposition to the hiring of more than 2 officers. She noted that the Town used to have 2 officers when the population was nearly double what it is now; these officers were walking the streets and taking care of business. Given the size of this town now, it does not make sense to have so many officers. Chief Platt is concerned that, if the Town does not hire 3 officers, the coverage will suffer. Currently, the town has state police backup, but they are not as available as people think and response times are really long.

Al Rossetto had one last question regarding insurance-he wanted to know why the health insurance figures for the police department doubled from 2014 to 2015 but this fluctuation did not occur for the water/sewer or other departments? Selectman Phillips explained that there were different number of 'married' insurance plans at a cost of roughly \$10,000.

Article 9: *To see if the Town will enter into a contract with Earley Rubbish Removal, for the purpose of curbside garbage pickup. The contract is for three years, beginning with Town Meeting 2016 and ending with Town Meeting 2019. The cost of the contract is as follows: 2016-\$54,600; 2017-\$67,600; 2018-\$67,600; 2019-\$13,000. Additionally to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$64,600 for the 2016 budget year.*

Al Rossetto wanted to know if the Earley contract locks the town out of conversion to PAYT? Selectman Tierney stated that the Earley contract does not mention PAYT let alone exclude it. In the contract from about 4 years ago, there was a stipulation in the contract that “if the Town voted for PAYT, Earley’s rate would increase” because he would have to sort and check bags for appropriate content. There is no warrant article for PAYT but the Board could implement the program if necessary and renegotiate the Earley contract. If voters do not pass this article, there will be no curbside pickup after town meeting. Selectman Phillips explained that the Town would not necessarily go to PAYT at that time. Someone could easily make a business and designate routes for pickup.

Article 10: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$80,000 dollars to be placed in the following capital reserve funds at the amounts shown:*

Police Cruiser CRF, established 2001-\$10,000

Highway Equipment CRF, established 1982-\$25,000

Water System CRF, established 2011-\$5,000

Road Maintenance CRF, established 2009-\$40,000

Jessica Riendeau wanted to know if any of the CRFs have enough money in them so that taxpayers could take a year off. Selectman Phillips explained that there is a goal for each CRF. For Road Maintenance, the goal is \$100,000; this amount is a minimum to do any work and has been reached only once in the five-year track. According to the Highway Department, the goal should really be \$400,000, yet the Town cannot even reach the existing goal. For every year, the Board divvies up a total package of \$100,000 into the various CRFs. This is the same amount as last year so it is not an increase in tax impact from last year. As of December 31st, the Road fund had \$95,000. We propose adding \$40,000. All that money will be dedicated to Brooklyn and Roaring Brook paving. For the Police Cruiser CRF, the Board proposes deposit of \$10,000 every year so that a cruiser can be replaced every 3 years. This CRF has roughly \$1000 in it currently. The two cruisers are 2013 and 2015 models with the 2013 having over 100,000 miles on it already. We could skip the Highway Equipment CRF; it has \$3115 in it currently. The Town has upgraded most of our equipment so there is not a plan to spend this money imminently. Amounts of deposits are based on a 10-year projection of equipment life, a standard for the CIP that never materialized. The goal for the Highway Equipment fund should actually be doubled to \$50,000. The concept of saving money for a rainy day or a significant surprise is to the Town’s advantage. Also, not every CRF is listed-the Municipal Building fund which has \$40,000+ in it. Out of that, we will be replacing a 25-30 year-old boiler at the town garage which will cost \$16,000. The Board is also contemplating installing a roof over the backstairs of the town office building. The fund will be depleted if we complete these projects.

Article 11: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$20,000 to be placed in the following expendable trust funds at the amounts shown: Sludge Removal ETF, established 2011-\$15,000; Water Tank ETF, established 2014-\$5,000.*

Chairman Weagle stated that the Sludge Removal is going to cost 1M+, so the Town is putting \$15,000 every year. Ron Caron pointed out that the cost of doing this is why the sewer department loaned from the water department and is still in debt. Selectman Phillips noted that the Water Tank fund was started only 3 years ago and has \$8100 currently. Selectman Tierney stated that this money was used once for cleaning but it is now dedicated to relining or replacement. The relining was quoted at around \$75,000. All in all, the CRF and ETF deposits are part of a frugal plan.

Article 12: *To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,483 dollars to be placed in the Transfer Station Equipment CRF which the Board of Selectmen are agents to expend, established 2009, with \$2,483 dollars to come from fund balance of which \$2,483 is from 2015 metal sale proceeds. No amount to be raised by taxation.*

Chairman Weagle stated that the Board is considering a plan to stockpile metal because metal prices have tanked. All the rest of the fees go into the general fund and are spend on AVRRDD fees. The Board is investigating numbers to see if the department is losing money.

Article 13: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$28,742 to be placed in the Ambulance CRF, established 1990. This sum to come from the surplus fund balance from revenues collected by the Groveton Emergency Medical Services during the 2015 fiscal year.*

This has no Town tax impact; this is the Ambulance Department's profit. Selectman Phillips pointed out that the Town did not deposit anything 5 years ago, \$1,000 in 2013, \$1,000 in 2014, \$12,000 in 2015 and \$28,000 this year. This shows that the ambulance department is starting to pay for itself which is one of the goals that the Board has been working toward. Chairman Weagle emphasized that the bulk of revenues comes from transfers which the department will be able to pick up regularly as of July 1st because there will be an in-house paramedic. According to Chief Gibson's report, the department is down on transfers from last year and these denied transfers equated to a loss of t over \$104,000. This unpaid balance is likely to rollover. There is the potential to increase revenues because the department can guarantee transfer days to Lancaster or Littleton with an available paramedic. Nancy Merrow asked if the problems with the billing process had been worked out. Chairman Weagle explained that the snafu revolved around a false declaration that Director Jim Gibson was dead at which time the billing process was ceased. The Town had to submit paperwork proving that the Director was alive; this process has already taken 6 months. The backlog of billing is in excess of \$70,000. Because of this backlog, the number cited in the article is based on what Comstar provided. The Board may amend this amount on the floor if the situation changes.

Article 14: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$45,301 dollars, to fund the following charitable organization at the amounts shown: Groveton Senior Meals-\$13,500; Child Advocacy Center of Coos County-\$2,438; Northwoods Home Health and Hospice-\$12,759; Northern Human Services-\$3,100; Tri-County Community Action-\$4,225; CASA of New Hampshire-\$500, American Red Cross NH & VT Region-\$2,200; Center for New Beginnings-\$500; Northern Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce-\$1,219, Tri-County CAP Homeless Programs-\$1,260; Caleb Caregivers-\$2,000, St. Paul's Episcopal Church Backpack Program-\$1,600.*

Selectman Tierney explained that, a few years ago, the Board voted to consolidate all of the charitable into one warrant article rather than have each one submitted as a petition warrant article. Each organization was contacted and told that they just needed to send a letter of request (some will be in the town report) and it would be included. There are some charitable that still submit as petition warrant articles (Articles 15-20). By statute, a petition article that meets the signature criteria cannot be refused going to warrant. Linda Caron asked if the amount could be cut in half. Selectman Tierney felt that it would be double-crossing the applicants if the Board were to arbitrarily cut the amount after being told to do it this way. He also expressed that each applicant would submit a petition article from now on. Voters have complained repeatedly about the number of articles for vote; this would be around 14 additional petition articles. To fairly address the issue, the voters could raise a motion to cut the total. Jessica Riendeau advocated that the Board is not prevented from slashing the numbers to what the Board feels is comfortable at this meeting, then force petitioners to get signatures and submit petition articles next year. Nancy Merrow suggested that the Board insert a caveat in the letters sent applicants to require their presence at the public budget hearings or they will be excluded if they do not participate in this process. Selectman Tierney feels that the caveat is addressed by making the voters consider the article. He also opined that, if it were not a under agreement or petition, none of the charitables would be submitted to the taxpayers; by submitting to the taxpayers, it forces people to contribute to charities—it should be done privately. Mark Robinson feels that someone needs to be the 'bad guy' and make a motion to amend these amounts. Nancy Merrow has moved to amend the charities before and was scorned. Selectman Tierney agreed and said that the last time people tried to cut the amount, it was considered disgraceful because they are charities.

Article 15: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,970 dollars for the Tri-County CAP Inc. North Country Elder Program in support of the Senior Meals Program home delivery (inserted by petition of voters).*

Nancy Merrow wanted to know if the Board was requiring a petitioner to speak on the warrant at town meeting? Selectman Tierney stated that the speaker can be a signed petitioner or a member of the organization.

Article 16: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,000 dollars, to fund Project Homebound, a charitable organization, in support of local home delivery of Thanksgiving Food Baskets (inserted by petition of voters.)*

Chairman Weagle described the project as providing all of the fixings for a Thanksgiving meal to anyone that calls to request. Groveton had the highest number of requests.

Article 17: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,500 for the Groveton Cal Ripken baseball program to be used to cover accident and liability insurance, tournaments and registration fees (inserted by petition of voters).*

Nancy Merrow asked 1) why isn't liability covered under a parent's coverage, 2) why aren't the parents paying the registration fees for the privilege to play, and 3) are they expending the total? Chairman Weagle explained that 1) the insurance had to be purchased by the Cal Ripken organization in order to get coverage, 2) this is a question to ask at town meeting and 3) the total is expended. Linda Caron wanted to know who was in charge of the fund. Chairman Weagle did not know who the current board members were, but they used to be Kari Hickey and Jaycie Whiting.

Article 18: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,500 to support the North Country Transit's Senior Transportation (inserted by petition of voters).*

N/C

Article 19: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$2,500 dollars for the Groveton Community Christmas Organization.*

Nancy Merrow asked whether the organization expends the total. After purchase of food baskets, decorations, the banners, light replacements and the electric bills for the Christmas Tree and the Train (this year the organization did not pay for the lights on the covered bridge), all of this is expended.

Article 20: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,000 dollars for the Groveton Beautification Organization.*

N/C

Article 21: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1500 dollars for the purpose of supporting the Groveton Chem-free Graduation fund. These funds to be used to promote alcohol- and drug-free youth by sponsoring a chemical free graduation celebration (inserted by petition of voters).*

There has been some debate as to whether this warrant article is more appropriate on the school warrant or the Town warrant. Ron Caron opined that it should be on the school warrant because 1) the school gets money through the state and a percentage could be dedicated to this, and 2) taxpayers from Groveton are paying for a benefit to students from Stark and Stratford (adding this cost to the school warrant would be a more accurate reflection of the true cost of a tuitioned student; the higher the cost per student converts to more state aid). Selectman Tierney had suggested the petitioners to bring it to the school but they returned to the Town. The Selectmen's office also suggested that the article regarding the backpack program go before the school rather than the Town.

Article 22: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$4,800 dollars for the purpose of paying for 50% of the cost of perambulation of the town boundary with Stark over a two-year period with \$2,400 dollars allotted for each year. Said funds to come from the Town's Forest Maintenance Fund. This will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the expiration of the two-year contract with the forester or three years from the Town Meeting, whichever come first.*

The towns are supposed to complete perambulations of their boundaries every 7 years. We have not done the Stark town line for 10 years. The North Stratford boundary has not been completed for even longer.

Article 23: *To see if the Town will vote to adopt the provisions of RSA 72:76 which would allow the Town to adopt a new property exemption for industrial use. The exemption shall apply only for municipal and local school property taxes assessed by the municipality. The exemption does not apply to that state education property tax nor to the county property tax. The exemption will run for five years and be for 50% of the valuation. If adopted by the local legislative body, the percentage rate and duration of the exemption shall be granted uniformly within the town to all projects for which a proper application is filed. A vote adopting RSA 72:76 shall remain in effect for a maximum of five tax years; provided, however, that for any application which has already been granted prior to expiration of the five year tax period, shall continue to apply at the rate and for the duration in effect at the time it was granted.*

Selectman Tierney pointed out that when Emerson Outfitters got their exemption, the Town had never voted to adopt this exemption, so the exemption was illegal. By passing this article, an exemption can be granted legally. This is an exemption and not an abatement. This exemption is for industrial use only. The applicant must apply PRIOR to the beginning of construction in order to be eligible. The exemption does not take effect until after construction is completed. They get the exemption for UP TO 50 % and UP TO 5 years. That amount and/or duration can be amended at town meeting. Linda Caron was under the impression that this exemption was already voted on. Selectman Tierney explained that the 79-e was voted on and that was an exemption for repurposing of cultural and historic buildings. Ron Caron objected to the article because the Town cannot afford lost revenues. He also felt that there had to be a promise of jobs. Selectman Tierney gave an example: if the Evan Coleman/LNG plant had been constructed at the projected 100M valuation, and the Town granted the 50% tax exemption, the company still would be paying taxes on 50M which is double what the mill ever had. There was a large company interested in the property and they guaranteed jobs, but they went to Vermont because the State of Vermont gave them 1M tax incentive. Ron Caron said to let the State give them money, not the Town because we cannot afford it. Selectman Phillips objected to the condition that the exemption must be granted to all eligible applicants uniformly. He is concerned that an industry that is harmful to the environment would be given a tax break under this provision. Both Selectman Tierney and Chairman Weagle assured that the Planning and Zoning Boards would address these kinds of issues including but not limited to permitting. There was some debate over the definition of "industrial." Chairman Weagle stated that there is a definition within the Planning & Zoning ordinances. Selectman Phillips stated that there are many businesses that can pass the planning and zoning process that are not worth garbage for the goodness and future of the people that live here. Ron Caron feels that the process is risky and there

will be legal battles. Ron wanted to know if the article was being put forth by the Board or on behalf of some other organization like the Chamber of Commerce or NCIC? Selectman Tierney indicated that it was referred to the Board by GREAT. Jessica Riendeau was concerned about the duration of the exemption and wanted to amend it to 3 or 2 years; she wanted to know if 3 years was so significantly less enticing than 5 years and if we were giving them too much? Jessica also felt that it was costing us a lot. Selectman Tierney explained that if a 1M building was constructed, the Town would receive taxes on half of that—and we get zero dollars now, therefore it is a gain and does not create costs to the taxpayers (and they pay for services as well). Ron Caron expressed his frustration with the lack of State contribution for Groveton as opposed to Berlin and Colebrook. Jim Tierney stated that the State does not have a program for this (a tax incentive). Ron Caron pointed out that no big businesses will come here unless we have cell service. Chairman Weagle explained that the Board has no control over the tower. We do not own the land or tower and the grant money was not awarded to the town. The feds, the State, and other entities are involved in the roadblock. Selectman Tierney suggest that if the taxpayers really want to get things moving, get Jim Wemyss to follow through with the JOKE that he would bulldoze the tower because these parties refuse to cooperate. Chairman Weagle pointed out that the Planning Board had spoken with representatives at the beginning of the tower construction; the Planning Board was told at that time that full cell coverage would be on a 15-year plan. It is a bonus that things have been expedited as much as they have. AT&T, Great Northwoods Wireless, Skywire and T-Mobile are on the tower now. There is no timeline for activation.

Jessica revisited the issue over the duration of the exemption and asked for a 3-year term instead of 5-year. Selectman Phillips agree. Chairman Weagle agreed. That is a majority.

Article 24: *To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000 dollars for payment of the tax anticipation note.*

Nancy Merrow stated that she thought that the TAN was paid off. Selectman Phillips explained that the TAN has to be paid off at the end of the year—which it was, but then the Board borrowed \$400,000 at the last meeting. \$625,000 had been paid off, after the Board had already paid off \$175,000. The Town changed banks and is now financing through Union Bank. The Town can borrow a maximum of 1M. Selectman Phillips explained that he asked for this article to be included primarily as an educational warrant for discussion. Aside from the \$700,000 that is perpetual back taxes, another undermining factor is the sale of tax-deeded properties at a loss. During the last round of sales, the Town lost \$100,000 in back taxes. Whether people want to put \$25,000 toward this long term debt is the conversation to be had. Last year the TAN warrant was \$25,000 for principal. Nancy Merrow wanted to know what impact to the tax rate does a \$100,000 loss cause?

There was some discussion over the tax-deeding procedure. The RSA dictates that there must be 3 years of back taxes before the Tax Collector can initiate proceedings to take the property. Those parties that approach the Town can enter into a payment plan during those 3 years, however, at the 3-year mark, the Board can set the terms. There are a couple hundred properties with unpaid back taxes. Of those couple hundred, there are a only 2 that are at or beyond the 3-year mark. Jessica Riendeau felt that the Board is trying to be too sensitive and heartfelt and that they need to become more cold and heartless,

refuse to negotiate and take and flip properties as soon as they are eligible. The Board should not wait so long that the back taxes are so far under that they cannot be reasonably recuperated. Selectman Phillips objected to this approach and stated that making a payment plan is a better scenario for the Town rather than taking the property. When the Town does take a property and takes a hit like this on the resale, the money comes out of unreserved fund balance. The hope is that the Town can sell to people who will improve the properties and pay the taxes. Also, those that are on a payment plan for property taxes must be current with their water and sewer. Selectman Tierney stated that the Town takes an additional hit on the shortfall because the Town has to pay the school on the calculated total of taxes collected and not on the percentage that is actually collected. Ron Caron wanted to know if the interest on unpaid back taxes is collected or written off? Selectman Phillips answered that the payment plan has the interest calculated into the payment but it is case by case on how much interest is accepted/waived by the Board in bids. Ron Caron asked if there is some kind of lien that the Town can record on a back-tax property? The Board was not aware of one since the property tax lien trumps all other liens.

Article 25: *To see if the Town will vote to instruct the Selectmen to appoint all other officers as required by law.*

N/C

Article 26: *To hear reports of agents, auditors, committees or other officers heretofore chosen and pass any vote relating thereto.*

N/C

Article 27: *To transact any other business that may be legally brought before said meeting.*

If you take last year's articles, and take out last year's bond issue and this year's bond issue, and add up those that have tax impact, this year's are about \$80,000 above last year's tax impact amount.

Closed the public hearing and entered into business meeting.

Article 5—Motion to accept by Jim Tierney , seconded by Michael Phillips. Requires 2/3 ballot vote at town meeting. Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 6-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips. Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 7-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips. Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 8-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 9-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 2-1.

Article 10-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 11-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 12-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 13-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 14-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 2-1.

Article 15-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 16-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen did not recommend 1-2.

Article 17-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen did not recommend 1-2. A petition article cannot get knocked out even if the majority vote opposed.

Article 18- Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 19- Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 20- Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 21- Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen did not recommend 0-3.

Article 22-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Article 23- Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 2-1.

Article 24-Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 2-1.

Article 25, 26 and 27- Motion to accept by Jim Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, Selectmen recommended 3-0.

Questions?

The Board did note that 8-10 welfare liens totaling \$1,000 are gone due to foreclosures, deaths, etc. The office has changed some procedures in the office so that notice of foreclosure goes to the welfare administrator so that she can cross-check before it is wiped out. Nancy Merrow notified the Board that the school has lost about \$350,000 in revenues; their increases in conjunction with their cuts, will raise the tax rate at least one dollar.

Final issue: somebody wants to use the meeting room on February 26th from 6-8 for Candidates Night.

Motion to approve and waive \$25 fee by James Tierney, seconded by Michael Phillips, passed 3-0.

Motion to adjourn by Michael Phillips, seconded by Jim Tierney, passed 3-0.

