TOWN OF CASTLETON

INFORMATIONAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES & RESULTS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2023, AT 6:30PM

VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL & PUBLIC MEETING

PRESENT: Michael Finnegan, Moderator; Michael Jones, Town Manager; James Leamy Selectboard Chair; Richard Combs, Selectboard Vice Chair; Robert Spaulding, Selectboard Member; Joseph Mark, Selectboard Parliamentarian; Mary Lee Harris, Selectboard Member; Nedra Boutwell, Town Clerk, Peter Mantello, Police Chief; Silas Loomis, Constable; Jared Sammis, Representative; Perry Ragouzis, Tim Smith, Julie Finnegan, approximately 70 members of the public and zoom participants.

Michael Finnegan called the meeting to order at 6:30pm and asked everyone to join him with the Pledge of Allegiance. The members at the head table introduced themselves and Mr. Finnegan introduced Perry Ragouzis, President of the Castleton University Student Government Association. Perry gave a brief update, explained student involvement and service is up. The SGA has three events every week and has invested in the dining hall and sustainability projects on campus and hybrid projects.

Mr. Finnegan then introduced Jared Sammis, State Representative for Castleton. Jared spoke about the new H30 bill that is going to put a moratorium on herbicide in Lake Bomoseen and thanked everyone that came out to support the bill. Mr. Sammis stated that S5, the Affordable Heat Act, has passed the Senate 19 to 10 and will move to the State House. Jared stated he does not support the bill and will be working with others to try to push that through. There are about 400 bills that are going through various committees, please reach out to Jared for more information. Senator Williams was present tonight in support of our local libraries, he is working to introduce a bill to help save our libraries.

Tim Smith and Julie Finnegan from the Slate Valley Unified Union School District spoke in regards to the school budget. Tim is the board chair and felt the school budget increase warranted an explanation. The budget is just over 28 million dollars, about 1.8 million greater than last year, 6.94% increase. The budget is 75% salary and benefits, raises are a 4.5% increase, health insurance is going up almost 13%. Transportation, fuel, and maintenance costs have also increased. Tim stated there are three things that impact the tax rates, expenditures are first, second is what he calls the political black box in Montpelier where the legislature can decide how to utilize the surplus funds in the education fund and set the yield, that effects our tax rate. The third is the Covid related impact on our property values, it is forcing the CLA, Common Level of Appraisal, down. Julie Finnegan, board member, spoke about the new middle school being moved to the high school, there have been growing pains however things are going well. They are looking to create more space for the middle school.

Mr. Finnegan proceeded to read the following articles to the public for discussion.

**Article 1.** To elect Officers for the following terms: to be voted on March 7, 2023

Two (2) Select Board members for 1 year: Yvonne L DeLance 337

Mary Lee Harris 455

Jim Leamy 437

One (1) Select Board member for 3 years: Richard “Dick” Combs 580

One (1) Library Trustee for 5 years: Susan “Sue” DeCarolis 675

One (1) Constable for 2 years: Silas R Loomis 679

One (1) Town Moderator for 1 year: Michael Finnegan 72

**Article 2**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $28,714 for Legislating? *(Prior* year $26,618)

No discussion **Yes 553** No 190

**Article 3**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $2,224 for Ordinances & Proceedings? (Prior year $1,965) No discussion **Yes 575** No 171

**Article 4**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $192,822 for Managing Municipalities? (Prior year $184,500) No discussion **Yes 563** No 180

**Article 5**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $9,808 for Conducting Elections? *(Prior* year $12,271)

No discussion **Yes 684** No 72

**Article 6**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $46,238 for Collection, Custody & Disbursement of Funds? (Prior year $48,817) No discussion **Yes 645** No 100

**Article 7.** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $115,867 for Accounting? *(Prior* year $111,624) No discussion **Yes 559** No 188

**Article 8.** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of$15,000 for Auditing? *(Prior* year $12,000) No discussion **Yes 538** No 207

**Article 9.** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $38,042 for Tax Listing? *(Prior* year $34,383) No discussion **Yes 511** No 230

**Article 10**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of$41,040 for Tax Collecting? (Prior year $42,592) No discussion **Yes 628** No 109

**Article 11**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $86,602 for Document Recording/Issue? *(Prior* year $83,051) No discussion **Yes 513** No 215

**Article 12.** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $25,000 for Legal Services? *(Prior* year $20,000)

Ken Flowers asked why there is a 20% increase. Mr. Combs stated it is mainly the amount of legal services that the Town has been incurring in the past few years. Mr. Jones stated it was reduced from 30,000 a few years ago. Meredith Fabian asked why the Town was paying for legal services that are countering other legal services the Town paid for. Mr. Combs asked if this was regarding the Developmental Review Board. Mrs. Fabian stated yes as the town hired an attorney to advise the DRB on the proposed Sand Hill Project and now has filed a motion in court to support the developer, this seems counterproductive. Mr. Combs stated 80% of the selectboard did not agree with the DRB’s decision. Mr. Jones stated the town hired M Bent to assist the DRB to write decisions and navigate the process, she then could not represent the Town due to conflict of interest, so we hired another attorney.

**Yes 518** No 216

**Article 13**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of$45,702 for Municipal Planning & Zoning? (Prior year $43,711) No discussion **Yes 523** No 212

**Article 14**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $8,657 for Community Development & Economic Revitalization? *(Prior* year $8,255) No discussion **Yes 590** No 152

**Article 15**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $189,962 for General Government Buildings? *(Prior* year $191,828) Mary McIntyre asked what the General Government buildings are? Mr. Combs replied the lions share are the Town office and the Public Safety building, $115,000 is the bond for the Public Safety Building, this also includes heat, lights, cleaning services. **Yes 625** No 111

**Article 16**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $27,450 for General Government Equipment? (Prior year $27,450) No discussion **Yes 637** No 99

**Article 17**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $584,898 for Police Department? *(Prior* year $531,182) No discussion **Yes 549** No 199

**Article 18**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $38,782 for Emergency Medical Services? (Includes Regional Ambulance Service, Inc. & RAS/Castleton First Responders) (Prior year $36,218) No discussion **Yes 689** No 61

**Article 19**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $194,288 for Fire Department? (Prior year $169,575) Susan DeCarolis asked if the Fire Department was buying new equipment? Heath Goyette stated the lion share of the increase is to go to reserve to purchase new equipment. Mr. Combs stated there is an increase in fire apparatus costs of about $18,000. Mike Jones explained they have added half to this year’s budget and will add half to next year also for reserve, for about $18,750. **Yes 612** No 134

**Article 20**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $8,450 for Emergency Management? (Prior year $8,550) No discussion **Yes 646** No 88

**Article 21**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,176,034 for Highway Department? (Prior year $1,165.292) No discussion **Yes 612** No 133

**Article 22**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $23,517 for Town Lands? (Prior year $3,900) Ken Flowers asked what is involved with Town lands? Mr. Spaulding explained the mowing budget is now included in this line item, to include the Police/Fire Department, Town office, park & ride, Dewey field, t-ball field and the village school, Town Green, the Triangle’s at Pencil Mill Rd, Staso Rd, South St and North Rd and the common area above Crystal beach. **Yes 365** No 358

**Article 23**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $5,000 for Historical Cemeteries? (Prior year $5,000) No discussion **Yes 679** No 63

**Article 24**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $30,000 for the Hillside Cemetery? (Prior year $29,000) No discussion **Yes 646** No 96

**Article 25**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,445 for Health Regulating & Inspecting? (Prior year $1,443) No discussion **Yes 650** No 86

**Article 26**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $5,717 for Animal Control? (Prior year $5,467) No discussion **Yes 591** No 149

**Article 27**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $20,745 for the Constable? (Prior year $20,773) No discussion **Yes 661** No 85

**Article 28**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $377,221 for Transfer Station? (Prior year $341,695) Susan Day asked how the food waste composting is going and is there any other changes? Mr. Mark stated they didn’t anticipate any changes; one ongoing change is the volatility of the recycling markets. Also tipping fees and district surcharge are up. Composting has exceeded the supervisor’s expectation; this is a good thing however also represents an increase in cost. Robert Grace commented that the roustabout, Ryan Denno, does a heck of a job, good guy! Mr. Jones explained that Ryan is no longer working with us. **Yes 564** No 182

**Article 29**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $182,336 for Recreation? (Prior year $185,630) No discussion **Yes 631** No 124

**Article 30**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $12,200 for Memorial Day Decorations/July 4th Parade? (Prior year $10,150) No discussion **Yes 525** No 227

**Article 31.** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $116,000 for Library Administration? (Prior year $116,000)

No discussion **Yes 669** No 84

**Article 32**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,884 for Prevention/Control of Forest Fires? (Prior year $1,500) No discussion **Yes 640** No 108

**Article 33**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $10,312 for Tree Warden? *(Prior* year $10,159) No discussion **Yes 559** No 184

**Article 34**. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $43,000 for Rutland County Tax? *(Prior* year $43,000) No discussion **Yes 629** No 111

**Article 35**. Shall the Town establish a Fire Department Reserve (non-vehicle) Fund to be used for the replacement of tools and equipment that meet or exceed the Town's capital expenditure threshold of $5,000? (e.g., Self-contained Breathing Apparatus, Extrication Tools, Air Bottles, Communication Equipment, Ice Water Rescue Equipment, Wildland Fire Equipment, Air Tank Refill Station, etc.) No discussion

**Yes 635** No 118

**Article 36**. Shall the Town appropriate $90,519 for the annual operating costs of the former Castleton Village School so it can be used for Recreation programming? (Not included in the budget) (With the expectation that the Town of Hubbardton pay its contractually mandated 11% share of said expenses). Bo Ramos, New Director of Parks and Recreation, gave an update. Since January they have opened the doors to youth basketball and softball registration, indoor walking, pickleball and other adult pickup sports. Bo expressed appreciation to the Selectboard and the volunteers for all the support. Sue DeCarolis asked about the building being audited. Joe M explained there have been two, one is an appraisal and the other was a lease rate. There was also an assessment of deferred maintenance, the largest of these is roof maintenance. Laurie Kamuda stated she doesn’t have kids or use any town services; however the possibilities are endless for the rec and she supports it. Tim Smith asked about holding on to the building for three years, does the article address this? Joe M stated no, the selectboards from Hubbardton and Castleton would have to meet and vote on it again, the selectboard has asked for a meeting with Hubbardton and have not heard back. Tim also asked where each selectboard member stands on selling the CVS building. Mr. Combs would vote No to selling, same as his last vote. Mr. Leamy supports selling with a lease that would provide adequate space for Rec. Mr. Spaulding would vote to sell the building with a lease for Rec. Mr. Mark stated he had voted to sell the building and would now vote to keep it. Mrs. Harris would now vote to keep the building. Yvonne DeLance, running for a one-year selectboard seat, stated she would support keeping the building. Ted Day asked if anyone has looked into how much space Rec needs and how much space could be leased to generate income? Mr. Mark said there have been discussions and it would vary by the party interested. Mr. Jones stated he has been approached by people interested in renting space in the building. Mr. Spauling asked what the expenses are to date and is there a way to recoup them? Mr. Mark said the expenses are $22,000 and for the fiscal year will be approximately $36,000. We gained many gallons of oil with the building, which helps with the expenses, however about two thousand gallons were water. It has been mentioned that we could use ARPA funds for this. Sue Day mentioned that part of the $200,000 surplus could be used to cover Rec. Jennifer Larson stated she also doesn’t use many town services, however she feels the town needs a rec center for vibrancy. There is an opportunity to raise revenue through rent and will help the town to grow. Mary McIntyre spoke in favor of keeping CVS, approximately 30 people showed up to help clean the building before the Christmas bizarre. The sporting events are well turned out and the socialization is great. We could rent space, have Fiends of Rec; modeled after the Friends of the Library, and we have people willing to help write grants. **Yes 511** No 249

**Article 37**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $3,500 for the support of ARC - Rutland Area, determining that the program serves the residents of the Town with advocacy, resources, and community for citizens with developmental disabilities and their families? (Not included in the budget) No discussion.

**Yes 589** No 136

**Article 38**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $3,600 for administrative support of Castleton Cares, Inc., determining that the program serves the residents of the Town with emergency assistance to local people in need. (Not included in the budget) No discussion **Yes 632** No 101

**Article 39**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $25,000 for the support of Castleton Community Seniors, Inc., determining that the program serves residents of the Town with the operation of the Castleton Community Center (The Old Homestead)? (Not included in the budget) JoAnn Riley would like to thank everyone for their support over the years. They are celebrating their 25 anniversary this year! JoAnn shared information about the center and its programs. **Yes 633** No 100

**Article 40**. Shall the Town of Castleton vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of $3,500 for the support of the partial funding of Marble Valley Regional Transit Districts (The Bus) public transit service to the residents of the Town? (Not included in the budget) No discussion **Yes 579** No 146

**Article 41**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $6,720 to support the Rutland Area Visiting Nurses & Hospice ($550 to support Rutland Area Hospice & $6,170 to support RAVNAH Home and Community Health Services)? (Not included in the budget) No discussion **Yes 630** No 104

**Article 42**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $4,088 for the support of Rutland Mental Health Services, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with counseling, substance abuse and emergency services? (Not included in the budget) No discussion **Yes 601** No 130

**Article 43.** Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $900 for the support of RSVP and the Volunteer Center, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with volunteering opportunities and community services? (Not included in the budget) No discussion **Yes 583** No 148

**Article 44**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $2,000 for the support of Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with elder services? (Not included in the budget) No discussion **Yes 629** No 101

**Article 45**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $1,000 for the support of Vermont Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with services to enable the blind and visually impaired to achieve and maintain independence? (Not included in the budget) No discussion. **Yes 646** No 83

**Article 46**. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $2,725 for the support of BROC-Community Action in Southwestern Vermont, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with weatherization, emergency food and small business development? (Not included in the budget) No discussion.

**Yes 596** No 133

**Article 47**. Shall the Town authorize cannabis retailers in town pursuant to 7 V.S.A. Section 863? Tim Smith asked what does Castleton have to gain or lose, financially, from having a pot shop? Janet Currie stated she is the one that brought the petition for the third time. She currently has a cultivation, wholesale, manufacturing, and processing license and I hope to have a retail license. It’s not pot, it’s cannabis. Janet explained there are shoppers in Castleton from all over the area, Castleton is a hub. How will this raise or change the economics? I have to pay property taxes as a business. The 1% tax would have to be voted on and would affect every retail business in town. There are 12,000 cars that go through the intersection of Route 4 and Route 30, it’s one of the busiest intersections, it would bring people into my shop and that means more people in other shops. Janet stated there is a 20% tax on her product, 6% is sales tax and 14% goes to the state. Mary McIntyre stated Janet has put this on the ballot for the third time, she had talks that were very educational after the first vote and wanted to know if Janet would be doing anymore informational sessions. Janet said she would if there was interest. Janet Stated the State of Vermont brings in $3.1 billion dollars in tourism, that is something to think about. We have Lake Bomoseen, we are near Killington, people can come right of Route 4. Mr. Combs asked if the product sold in her store would be safer than product sold on the street. Janet explained that because she has a license, everything has to be tested, for inorganic materials, pesticides, strength, etc.

**No 402** Yes 335

Mr. Finnegan wanted to share a few comments before we move to adjourn. Last month as most of us know there was a tragic event, the serious fire at Gilmores Home Center. Later in the month we had a breakfast at the Legion and the outpouring of support from this community was overwhelming and heartening. Over $17,000 was raised and the donations that came in from area businesses really make you want to live in this community. 765 breakfasts were served.

Mr. Jones thanked everyone for coming, thanked Castleton University for hosting, MacArthur Stine, and his team for putting everything together, along with Lori Phillips and Liz MacKay for hosting Zoom. Mr. Jones also wanted to give a plug to Bo, as Recreation Director.

Mr. Finnegan called for a motion to adjourn; Silas Loomis made the motion; Heath Goyette seconded. All in favor Meeting adjourned 8:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nedra Boutwell

Town Clerk

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Town Moderator

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Selectboard Member