

TOWN OF CASTLETON
Informational Town Meeting Minutes & Results
Herrick Auditorium, Vermont State University at Castleton
Monday, March 4, 2024, at 6:30 pm
VIA Zoom & 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, First Constable; Jared Sammis and Terry Williams, Representatives; Perry Ragouzis, Tim Smith & Julie Finnegan; School Board members, and approximately 80 members of the public and zoom participants.

Mike Finnegan called the meeting to order at 6:30pm and asked Constable Loomis to lead everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Finnegan then introduced Perry Ragouzis, President of the Vermont State University at Castleton Student Government Association. Perry gave a brief update about the different kinds of projects and work students are up to, what student life is looking like, on and around campus, and answer questions. An example of student needs within the community are international students, they cannot drive or leave the campus on breaks and the dining hall closes to any student that is not on a sports team, so they don't have access to meals.

Jarrold Sammis, our State Representative, provided an update from Montpelier and had a handout, Bill Tracker OUT of Committee, to update everyone on the bills they are working on between the House and the Senate. There are currently approximately 1200 bills. Terry Williams, State Senator, also spoke regarding the many bills being worked on. Terry also stated that Castleton University is the backbone of the Vermont State University, he has been working with an ad hoc group of former employees and staff of Castleton and they put together a presentation to bring to the new chancellor and the new president.

Tim Smith and Julie Finnegan, from the Slate Valley Unified Union School District spoke about the school budget and Act 127. Tim explained we will be voting on a budget of \$31,000,000, which is a \$3,000,000 increase from the previous year or just over 10%. The CLA, Common Level of Appraisal, in Castleton is 0.7%, the previous year was 0.8%. It went down another 0.1, so when you take our equalized tax rate and divide it by 0.7, it makes the homestead tax rate go that much higher.

The select board was introduced, then Mr. Finnegan proceeded to read the following articles for public discussion.

Article 1. To elect Officers for the following terms: to be voted on March 5, 2024

Two (2) Select Board members for 1 year:	Mark Brown	646
	Jim Leamy	439
	Rob Steele	508

One (1) Select Board member for 3 years: Mary Lee Harris 784

One (1) Library Trustee for 5 years: Patricia Schroeder 835

One (1) Library Trustee for 3 years remaining of a 5-year term: Holly Hitchcock 815

One (1) Town Moderator for 1 year: Michael Finnegan 813

One (1) Town Clerk for 3 years: Nedra Boutwell 869

One (1) Treasurer for 3 years: Abby Cohen 805

Article 2. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$29,406 for Legislating? - No Discussion **Yes 603** No 315

Article 3. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,224 for Ordinances & Proceedings? No Discussion **Yes 667** No 251

Article 4. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$202,443 for Managing Municipalities? Mary McIntyre asked how much of an increase is this? Jim Leamy replied it is an increase of \$9,623 or 5%. **Yes 626** No 284

Article 5. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$12,929 for Conducting Elections? No discussion **Yes 716** No 211

Article 6. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$47,071 for Collection, Custody & Disbursement of Funds? No discussion **Yes 582** No 304

Article 7. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$121,787 for Accounting? No Discussion **Yes 599** No 295

Article 8. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$18,000 for Auditing? No Discussion **Yes 642** No 251

Article 9. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$40,725 for Tax Listing? No Discussion **Yes 531** No 354

Article 10. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$45,222 for Tax Collecting? No Discussion **Yes 565** No 323

Article 11. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$93,374 for Document Recording/Issue? No Discussion **Yes 536** No 350

Article 12. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$27,000 for Legal Services? No Discussion **Yes 656** No 234

Article 13. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$49,470 for Municipal Planning & Zoning? No Discussion **Yes 565** No 322

Article 14. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,650 for Community Development & Economic Revitalization? No Discussion **Yes 641** No 254

Article 15. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$264,575 for General Government Buildings? (Includes former CVS) Charlie Brown asked if Hubbardton was paying their 11%, Richard Combs replied yes, they are. **Yes 554** No 341

Article 16. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$33,200 for General Government Equipment? No Discussion **Yes 607** No 274

Article 17. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$648,196 for the Police Department? Mark Brown asked what change is, Mr. Combs stated the lion share is a \$39,000 increase in medical insurance and we added \$10,000 to the reserve. **Yes 664** No 241

Article 18. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$43,482 for Emergency Medical Services? (Includes Regional Ambulance Service, Inc. & RAS/Castleton First Responders) Mary McIntyre asked if Regional Ambulance was still in West Rutland, does this help with response time. Mike Finnegan explained it is there, however they do have staffing issues. **Yes 825** No 85

Article 19. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$262,807 for the Fire Department? Robert Spaulding asked what the increase is, Heath Goyette stated money is being put in the reserve funds, Mike Jones explained

\$18,000 is for small tools and equipment, \$24,750 increase in vehicle reserve, and \$10,000 for vehicle maintenance, with smaller amounts from there. **Yes 770 No 137**

Article 20. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$8,250 for Emergency Management? Someone asked what this money goes toward, Mr. Combs explained this is for the emergency management director to use at the Emergency Operations Center in case of a catastrophe, to coordinate any responses, rescue efforts etc. **Yes 722 No 174**

Article 21. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,433,382 for the Highway Department? Robert Spaulding asked what the increase is, Richard Combs said the board decided last year to use one time money of almost 200 k that we could not do this year because those funds are gone. We also had a \$15,000 increase in fuel, payroll is down a little bit because we're missing a position right now. **Yes 646 No 259**

Article 22. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$24,750 for Town Lands? Mary McIntyre asked what these funds are used for, Joe Mark explained this is for mowing of town lands, Mike Jones stated it was for mowing of Dewey Field, Town Office, Park & Ride, Triangles, Crystal Haven common areas, Hydeville ball field, Public Safety Building, and the Town Green. **Yes 579 No 308**

Article 23. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$5,000 for Historical Cemeteries? No Discussion **Yes 742 No 156**

Article 24. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$31,000 for the Hillside Cemetery? No Discussion **Yes 702 No 196**

Article 25. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,373 for Health Regulating & Inspecting? Joe Mark wanted to let everyone know that Mr. Leamy has been doing this for free for over 50 years, one of these days he will retire, and this article will increase. Thank you Jim! **Yes 688 No 210**

Article 26. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$6,329 for Animal Control? Robert Spaulding asked who our animal control officer is, Chris Forrest. **Yes 665 No 239**

Article 27. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$20,745 for the Constable? Mike Finnegan thanked Constable Loomis for his services! **Yes 705 No 199**

Article 28. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$376,477 for the Transfer Station? Robert Spaulding asked how close are you to making the transfer station cost neutral. Mike Jones said Last year, we were about \$20,000 short of making our revenues versus our expenditures, Recycling is losing money, metals we make a profit on. Tonnage is trending downward. Mr. Spaulding thanked Mike and commended him for doing a good job. **Yes 639 No 266**

Article 29. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$198,464 for Recreation? Joan Brown asked how much do we get back from the Recreation commission? Mr. Spaulding said the proposed revenue is \$64,000, John Alexander is our new recreation director. **Yes 609 No 322**

Article 30. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$14,200 for Memorial Day Decorations/July 4th Parade? Mary McIntyre asked if this includes money for the Fireworks. Mike Jones said yes; however, they would continue looking for sponsors for winter fireworks. **Yes 629 No 296**

Article 31. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$118,186 for Library Administration? Mark Brown encouraged everyone to visit the library to see what they have accomplished. **Yes 652 No 267**

Article 32. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,884 for Prevention/Control of Forest Fires? No Discussion **Yes 749** No 178

Article 33. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$11,130 for Tree Warden? Mike Jones thanked Scott Welch for his work as tree warden, keeping Main Street pruned and looking good. Scott spoke about the Maple bug, about the size of a quarter with 2 prongs on its head, if you see them, please report it to the State. **Yes 615** No 304

Article 34. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$43,000 for Rutland County Tax? Mike Jones asked what this pays for, Robert Spaulding explained it is for the County Court House and the Sheriff's department. **Yes 579** No 331

Article 35. Will the voters approve expenditures totaling \$7,000 to cover the one-time costs of hosting a free-admission public "Ethan Allen in Castleton Day" 250th Anniversary Celebration in Castleton on May 9, 2025? Joe Mark asked if there is a rain date, Tom Hughes said they would use the Federated Church in case of weather. Mary McIntyre asked what kind of celebration this will be, Tom said they want to show people in Castleton and beyond their history, not just write it down on paper, having outdoor dramatizations. **Yes 563** No 357

Article 36. 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 691** No 224

Article 37. 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 743** No 180

Article 38. 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) Joanne Riley thanked everyone for their support over the past 25 years and spoke about the services they provide. Robert Spaulding asked how much money comes from area towns and is it based on population, Joanne said yes, and Fair Haven's support is \$7,500 and Hubbardton is \$1,500. **Yes 764** No 163

Article 39. 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) Julie Finnegan stated that many Castleton students use The Bus to get to college and she is very thankful that it is available to them. **Yes 690** No 238

Article 40. 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 771** No 158

Article 41. 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 689** No 202

Article 42. 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 668** No 216

Article 43. 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 723** No 167

Article 44. 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 726** No 163

Article 45. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate \$2,725 for the support of BROCC-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 662** No 226

Mike Finnegan opened the floor to citizens regarding comments, questions, concerns. Tim Smith asked what the town received for ARPA funds, what has been used and what are the intended uses for any remaining funds. Richard Combs replied we have received \$1,340,000, with \$845,000 obligated so far, 239,000 for sidewalk projects matching funds for grants, \$100,000 to the library, \$135,000 to the Fire Department to replace SCBAs, the self a breathing apparatus, \$104,000 last year for paving, we bought a police car and a small dump truck. There is still \$600,000 left, we are trying to figure out what will do the most good, public infrastructure, perhaps more paving, maybe sewer extensions. Robert Spaulding said they are setting aside \$200,000 for a salt and sand shed, they have not allocated it yet. Mike Jones let everyone know the town was awarded a 1.2-million-dollar grant for main street sidewalks and landscaping, a \$300,000 grant for stormwater mitigation on Staso Road that included the salt and sand shed, and a grant for stormwater mitigation in the village. We continue to try for grants to get work done. Joe Mark commended Mike and his staff for their work on grants for the Town.

Charlie Brown asked how close is the town to sealing a deal with the town of Hubbardton over the Castleton Village school? Mike Jones said we're waiting on our attorneys at this point, to be able to release that to the public. I'm expecting something back in the next couple weeks, from our attorneys, so the Select Board can announce it.

With no other comments or questions, Mike Finnegan adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Nedra Boutwell
Town Clerk

Approved by: _____
Town Moderator

Approved by: _____
Select Board Member