

2024 TOWN MEETING MINUTES

The Meeting comes to order at 9:00 AM, March 16, 2024
At the Groton Town Hall Community Room
754 North Groton Rd., Groton, NH.

Moderator: Amy Prive-Hardy

Select Board Members: Ron Madan, John Rescigno, Tony Albert.
Supervisors of the Checklist: Pamela Hamel, Virginia Parker, Gina Rescigno
Administrative Assistant: Sara Smith
Town Clerk/Tax Collector: Ruth Millett
Deputy Town Clerk/Tax Collector: Hilary Coles
Groton Police Chief: Michael Bagan

119 registered voters in attendance.
There were 94 registered voters who voted in the 2024 Groton Town elections on March 12, 2024.

The Moderator calls the meeting to order and leads with the Pledge to the American flag. Moderator then goes over the rules of the meeting found in the 2023 annual report pages 2-3.

Ballot Article 1

To choose all necessary Town Officers for the ensuing year:
The Moderator introduces the new Town Officials who were elected to office on March 12, 2024

Select Board Member for 3 years: John Rescigno
Town Clerk/Tax Collector for 3 years: Ruth Millett
Supervisor of the Checklist for 3 years: Pamela Hamel
Town Auditor for 1 year: Ann Joyce
Planning Board Members for 3 years: Forrest (Ray) Blake, David Labar
Moderator: Amy Prive-Hardy

Thank you all for your willingness to serve the Community.

Moderator reads the Warrant Article as written:

Warrant Article 2

Article 2: Shall the Town of Groton adopt the provisions of House Bill 349 (2023) to withdraw from the Newfound Area School District/SAU #4 on June 30, 2025, and effective July 1, 2025, form a separate cooperative school district and single district SAU, called the Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton Special Purpose School District, in accordance with the provisions of House Bill 349 (2023) and where applicable, RSA 195 and RSA 194-C, and further, shall the Town of Groton adopt the proposed Articles of Agreement for the Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton Special Purpose School District.

The Select Board Recommends This Article 3-0

Ron Madan moves the Article; Tony Albert seconds; and John Rescigno speaks to the Article:

John Rescigno:

When created, HB 349 was a very unique bill custom tailored to the Towns of Groton, Bridgewater and Hebron. It is a one-time-only bill and can never be put forth again. The idea of it came out of the Article 5 committee. Warrant Article 5 would have altered the tax formula greatly for the Town of Groton's Taxes. The idea is to stabilize your school tax rate while providing your children with the best education available including school choice. What you are voting on today is that the Town of Groton is in favor of exiting SAU4. That is it. This must pass in all 3 towns in order for this to go through. It already passed in the Town of Bridgewater. The HB 349 Steering Committee worked tirelessly to create a "pro forma budget" by using budget information supplied by SAU4 and budget information like the SAU that will be created. They were able to create a budget. The steering committee held countless hearings throughout the process including meetings with the staff members of the Bridgewater/Hebron Village School District. The Town of Groton also held several meetings with its residents including public hearings and as recently as 48 hours ago we held a meeting in Town. What you're voting on today is if you agree to exit SAU 4. All contracts and negotiations will be performed by the school board once the exit is complete.

Moderator opens for discussion on article 2:

Bill Jolly:

I am your representative-elect to the SAU 4 School Board. I want to speak in favor of exiting for a couple of reasons. There is an effort to change the way in which taxes are created that has been abandoned for the time being, but it is proved viable, and if that comes back, we will end up being a donor town along with the other two towns to the larger SAU. We don't have the voters in our three towns to resist the voters in the other four towns that's the financial situation. The other piece has to do with curriculum and methodology for education that are questionable at best I would consider downright scary. I'll try to keep it clean here, but just think of the most vulgar thing you can think of from a sexual point of view and that's the content that's available in the library at the SAU, some of it was read to us the other night. I see us separating ourselves from that with smaller three towns and with intelligent people in our boards, setting strong policies that will protect the kids from bad methodology. At the same time, we can better control the taxes because we are three smaller towns instead of seven. We can come up with a method of assessing taxes that we can actually afford going forward. I am here for you. If you have further questions, please come to me. Please vote in favor of removing from the district.

Hilary Coles:

In the event that some of you haven't heard my story I'm going to share it with you. I, along with my partner PJ have three kids at BHES. We moved from Danbury about a year and a half ago. Newfound has been a wonderful district for us. Danbury was an amazing school and BHES has been an amazing school. I took it for granted how far away we are in Groton from Newfoundland High School. There have been times when my children cannot participate in activities simply because there is no busing from where they are to the high school. Activities happen in the middle of our workday I can't afford to take time off so sometimes I have to tell my kids; sorry you can't join. For a lot of us it's about taxes that's valid I get that, this is also about geographical location it's also as Bill said, we are massively outvoted on a number of things in the wider school district and I think it would be really great if we have a smaller school district where our tax rate would be more controllable. I just want to plead with you as a parent to please give my kids the choice. The nice thing about the situation is you can still choose to send your kids to Newfound if you feel particularly attached to that school. That's wonderful and you can do that. I can choose to send my kids to Plymouth, because it is that much closer. I have to do grocery runs, pharmacy runs, trips to the pet store, doctors, therapist, all of that is in

Plymouth and I would love the opportunity to be able to cut down on my household expenses and be able to drop my kids off and then run errands without having to run back-and-forth between Bristol and Plymouth and then back to Bristol again. I just want to urge you to please put yourself in the parent shoes, and to consider that this choice will make things a lot more affordable.

Britta Matthews:

We are hearing a lot about choice and about taxes and having more control over curriculum but as a reminder when you are tuitioned into a high school you no longer have a seat on the budget committee or the school board so you don't have a choice after that.

Michele Lacroix:

I just have a couple of points. It has been alluded that potentially we would sensor written content. I would hope that would be something that would be very much discouraged because libraries should contain every option available as free speech. Busing, which was mentioned as an issue potentially now, and could still be an issue because we will still have kids that would be going to Newfound or Plymouth, so that could be an issue as well. Regarding the committee that was put in place to look at the funding model, they were disbanded, and they did determine that the current solution was the best solution so they did not look into it any further after that. I urge you to consider all of these things. It seems to me like scare tactics. We need to think more logically, and remember that there is no real answers yet on a lot of things. It reminds me of my oldest daughter, I used to say to her. When are you going to plan what you're doing and she would say, "Mom I don't need to plan. I just go for it and hope for the best." I think this is not really where we should experiment. We should have more things in place to really help us. These are our kids that were putting out there as guinea pigs.

Gary Easson:

Just the tax bill section alone scares me, what might happen to our taxes. What I've been reading about this week, I've been somewhat impressed with this plan. As I understand it, we could revert back to the old system but right now I'm not too crazy about the way things have been going and I see this as a good plan. Also, we were brought up with decent morality and I've seen this for a long while the misuse of the term "freedom of speech ". Some people can't handle it as adults look at people who turn around and become homegrown terrorist, we've seen that.

(Moderator interrupts to help the body stay on topic.)

John Rescigno:

I just want to point out that the tailing-out agreement does state that children can remain in the same school that they are currently in middle school, high school, etc. again this is about stabilizing your taxes. It's about school choice and the right education for your children.

A motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

A petition is presented to request secret ballot.

The moderator gives the petition to the supervisors of the checklist to assure those who signed are in the room and on the checklist. With this done, the moderator reads the warrant article again and instructions are given on the procedure for the secret ballot. Voting commences and takes about 20 minutes.

The result of the vote on Article 2: 109 “yes”, 10 “no”.

A motion is made to restrict future reconsideration of article 2 this is seconded. The motion passes. There will be no further discussion on Article 2.

The Moderator reads Article 3 as written.

Warrant Article 3

Article 3: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **nine hundred twenty thousand four hundred seventy-four dollars** (\$920,474) which represents the operating budget for the ensuing year. Said sum does not include special or individual articles addressed.

Select Board recommends this article 3–0

John motions to except article 3 as written. Tony Albert seconds

Discussion on this took place at the Public Hearing so the floor is open for discussion.

Sherry Nelson:

Back some time ago we had a hearing for this budget. We were talking about the Administrative Assistant versus the Administrator. I got to calling and visiting different towns in the area and found that there were differences according to population. For example, New Hampton has an Administrator, but they have more than 2000 people. Bridgewater has an Administrative Assistant with 2000 people. So, it's a personal choice of the Towns people. Danbury has 1300 people and they have an Administrative Assistant. Alexandria has an Administrative Assistant with 1900 people. Rumney an Administrator with 1500 people. Meanwhile, Groton has 590 people and an Administrative Assistant, and my feeling is that we should stay with an Administrative Assistant with a raise, Sara, with a raise.

Town Administrators are usually found in towns with larger populations than our town and the proposed 2024 budget list \$64,480 as Sara 's wages for an Administrative Assistant/Administrator. I can't tell which.

Moderator:

We're not voting on her job title we're just voting to accept the operating budget for the ensuing year. The discussion should be on the operating budget not job titles, that's not what the article were voting on is. So, you can speak to the budget line item and what your thoughts on that are.

Sara Smith:

Currently, the reason it says Administrator/Assistant is because currently that's what I am but after the meeting the Selectman have the authority to change the position which they have already voted to do after this meeting so I will be the Town Administrator. That part is not up for discussion The part that is, is the pay.

John Rescigno:

That's because the job that she does is that of an Administrator.

Sherry Nelson:

No, I don't think it is but it's a good job and I would give her a raise this year. I certainly would, but I don't think the pay of an Administrator should go. I wish to amend article 3 that her

operating budget for the ensuing year be \$55,751.27 (not in writing).

Moderator:

Before I let anyone further speak, I just want to let you know as a Moderator, any changes to specific line items on the operating budget can be done, however, the Selectman do have the authority to spend, according to that operating budget and move funds as they see fit. You, as a governing body can change the line items but they can... (interrupted).

I'm just letting you know about the law regarding the operating budget according to the State of New Hampshire. Again, it is your right to change the line items, however, I just wanted to make sure you understand the role of the Selectman.

Pam Hamel:

I make a motion to amend warrant article 3.

Moderator reads the amendment.

Amendment to Article 3

Amendment to Article 3: "To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **nine hundred nine thousand two hundred eighty two dollars** (\$909,282) which represents the Operating Budget for the ensuing year. Said sum does not include special or individual articles addressed. The intent of this article is to reduce line, 4130-1 from \$64,480 to \$53,288."

Amendment is seconded by Deb Johnson.

Pam Hamel discusses the amendment:

The intent of the amendment is to reduce line 4130.1 from \$64,480 to \$53,288. That is the line for the Administrative Assistant and it does allow for a 3% increase in rate this year. should you guys accept that. I do want to speak to the reason for why I believe that you should reduce the budget on that particular line.

So, Groton is a small town on a hilltop. We have no Main Street we have no store fronts; we have 10 or so miles of town-maintained roads, our population is under 600, and it's made up of a lot of older people and retired people. Small communities in the State of New Hampshire are very unique in that they have all the basic responsibilities of larger communities, but on a much smaller scale.

This is a situation that we have here in Groton. The Town still must file all of the annual filings and all the quarterly filings. We still have a budget and payroll. We still have a welfare department and all the things that larger communities have. Maybe not all of them, but all of the essential ones we also must have. The big difference is the scale of this. We are a very small community. There are no departments that report directly to the Administrative Assistant. The Administrative Assistant does not have hiring authority. They should only be semi-involved in employee review, and that would be in the sense of taking minutes really. They are not involved in employee disciplinary action. At the direction of the Board, they can work on drafting policies and procedures. At the direction of the Board, they can search numerous topics, but the end of all of it is, this Town has always selected a Board of three to run the town with an Administrative Assistant who aids them. Nothing has changed about this. If it has, the Select Board has not sought out the will of the people to see if you want to change that position. They have made this decision that they're going to change it without asking anybody, without getting the input from the Town. As Sherry mentioned, that are towns our size, and even larger, have Administrative

Assistants, and you named a bunch of them. Danbury, Alexandria, Piermont, Bridgewater, Wentworth, Dorchester, Orange, Grafton, Lempster, Hill, they all have Administrative Assistants. They don't have Town Administrators and most of those communities are actually larger than ours. I understand that the Board has an employee that they highly value and guess what, she does a great job, and I'm not here to talk about that. They have an employee they highly value, and they have already done a number of things to boost the overall package for that position, including perpetual three-day weekends, holiday pay that exceeds the holiday pay of any other employee in this Town. Also, they have already done consistent and deserved pay increases of 3% every year with 6% last year. So, it's not like we don't value our employee. She does a great job but this is not the private sector. We don't create positions here to meet company growth. There's no growth here. This is the same tax base we always had so why would we want to increase the salary. It's a \$12,000 increase which is a lot of money and again it's no reflection on the level of work that the employee currently is doing.

In addition, I am very disturbed by the fact that the Select Board did not reach out to the Legislative Body, us, to get our input on this they just made the decision, and I find it very disturbing that they had no job description for this even in February at the budget hearing where we had to request one and then they put one fourth. They probably had started it but we didn't have a completed job description because they had nothing to present to us at that hearing, then when they did leave it out, the date on it was 2023 but I don't believe it was completed until 2024 and I don't like that that happened that way either. Yes, it's a lot of the same work but that's what it's like when you're in a small community and we are in a very small community.

John Rescigno:

So, this is about employee retention and Sara is the root of the tree. Sara does all of the legwork so the Select Board will be able to make the decisions that they make. We don't have the amount of time that Sara puts in funneling/gathering all the information together. Select Boards constantly change and without the root of the tree the change would be very difficult. Are you going to rely on the Select Board to do the work for FEMA? That's a 2-to-3-year learning curve. Then at which point we may no longer be around.

Sara has raised over \$1 million for the Town in grant money. Prior to this it was \$45,000 put forth by Slim.

When we talk about an involved employee, let's talk about recruiting employees. Christina tried to recruit Sara a couple years ago to Bristol. Pam herself tried to recruit Sara by sending her potential benefits along with her pay increase should she leave the Town and go over to the windfarm. Sara is not only a valuable employee to us, she's a valuable employee to you. It's so difficult to find good employees today. Sara not only answers emails when she's on vacation but she came to take care of business for her Town when she had her surgery. You're not going to replace that. That is something of value that cannot be replaced. I know this because I've been running businesses for the last 30 years and you cannot find someone who wants to work. I had to hire my wife because I couldn't find a full-time employee. So this is about employee retention and the quality of work that Sara does that is not replaceable. She does do it for us she does it for you just the work that she put on FEMA (pulls out large FEMA note book and places it on the desk). If you think a Select Board member has time to do this? I work 50 hours a week. There's not a Select Board member in the Town prior or in the future that has the time to do this or to learn what needs to be learned to do this. This is what an Administrator does. It's years of work and learning and a commitment to the Town. That's what we're voting on here, employee retention.

Hilary, Coles:

I just want to share my perspective, being in a similar age group. I have also been going through a job search. I freelance and run my own business of sorts, so I do a lot of budgeting and a lot of work to understand how much I need to charge so I can afford just living. It's very expensive just to go outside and breathe these days. For reference, a living wage, enough money to pay my bills and to put money away for retirement is \$74,600. That's how much I need to make per year in order to keep my house. She's not earning a living wage. I work with her part time and I see the work that she does. She's there 2 to 3 hours before us every morning she does the work of multiple people and to be honest with you if she were to get hit by a bus, God forbid, I wouldn't want to struggle as a Town to find someone else to fill those shoes. And to be honest with you there are a lot of people who couldn't afford to do what she does for how much she makes. They would lose their houses. They would not be able to put away money for retirement. They would not be able to take care of things they need to.

I respectfully disagree with Pam. This is not necessarily the same tax base and our society and our community are going to continue to change and hopefully we'll have more young people moving in too. We really need to consider what we're setting ourselves up for. My mortgage is just under \$1700 a month, it's really unfortunate that I had to move during the pandemic so keep in mind what a living wage actually looks like in 2023 because that is not what she's making now.

The Moderator reminds the body that the amendment just reduces the overall operating budget per the DRA. The Select Board can take that operating budget and move monies around as they see fit.

Tony Albert:

We have done a wage study. It sounds as though many are hung up on the title. We've come up with this Administrator title because her work lines up more as an Administrator than an Administrative Assistant. MRI says her job title is more of an Administrator rather than Administrative Assistant, it's more of a title change, but her duties will mostly remain the same. She still reports to the Selectman what she does. She is our eyes and ears. For us and the other departments highway, police, everybody, the public. She contacts us. People may think she is a Town Manager. A Town Manager is a completely different form of government. The title change matches the duties that she's doing. On the pay part of it, Sara has been here 10 years. With her knowledge and understanding and that she is a resident makes her just invaluable to us. Those around us in the same position are at or above this pay we've requested. We didn't just pick this number out of the air. We did our research. Towns right next to us pay this wage. we don't want to lose her we need to get competitive. We are not going to find someone else with the same abilities. It's invaluable what she does. I'm retired, I'm not going to put the hours in that she does. I don't understand this stuff. If I don't understand people who call me with questions, I tell them to call Sara she's the one who can answer their questions. If she can't, she'll find the answer. She's a very valuable resource and she's very deserving of this pay and the title. MRI says the job she is doing is that of a Town Administrator. She doesn't have any more authority. She still answers to the Select Board.

Bill Jolly:

I have questions for the Board. The budget is 900 and change, (Moderator reads the amount from the Article, \$920,474). I don't think we should be discussing Sara's role. What is the pragmatic impact of this. I hate taxes; however, we also get what we pay for and I don't want to see Sara go somewhere else. I don't always love what Sara does, but you don't always love

what I say or do either. That's part of life. I'm rounding it off, if you took \$12,000 roughly and divide by \$900,000 you get 1.3 cents, think about that, less than pennies, a penny plus, and I don't think it's inappropriate to do this.

I want to address another thing. This has happened a couple of times that the Board has done things without effectively communicating with the public. Going forward. I think it would be really good to be more communicative about stuff like this. Get some feedback. Still come to your decisions whatever they are, we elected you, but take the input and consider what people are saying. I don't hear a complaint about Sara, not one, I hear some complaints about job titles so the question for that would be if there's a description in your management books of the new role versus the old role. It would be nice to read that in advance. If the job title changed, but nothing else changed. I don't have a problem with that. There's still a restriction of duties. There's some concern that it might change the pay scale. You are not a Town Manager. Managers have a lot more to do and they also have a staff that works with them to accomplish what needs doing. Sara is doing an Administrator's role whether she's the Administrator or the Administrative Assistant that really shouldn't matter. So, we're talking about pennies to each of us, let's not get too worked up over it.

John Rescigno:

I want to point out two things. That's what Public Hearings are for. That's when we informed the public on what we are doing. There's 119 people here today there may have been 25 there for the hearing so people don't really want to hear what we have to say sometimes. At the follow up meeting, we respond to questions that you asked during the Hearing there were zero people there. I actually sat there and answered all the questions to a crowd of zero. I thought I was going insane. I was speaking to no one. We try to let the public know, but sometimes the public doesn't show up for us to be able to let them know, we've listened to everything the public has to say because we've changed things in the past. We've taken your input and such.

Motion made to move the vote on the amendment and seconded.

Someone from the audience asked that those left to comment should stay on topic and the moderator agrees.

Sara Smith:

I didn't say anything at the public hearing because I didn't think it was my place. Obviously, the Selectman made this decision, but there was a study that went through back in 2015 where it did discuss what the job roles were. They sat with each individual and we went through everything that I did and it was more the role of a Town Administrator. There wasn't at the time a change, and I never once reminded them of that, or said, I was leaving if this doesn't happen. I will say that I not only work my 40 hours, many people here will call me or text me. You call me on my personal phone, Facebook message. I'm available all the time and I do this because I truly care about people and about the town. I have been approached by my past Job to go back and was recently approached by a friend who works for the co-op and to start there is \$57,000 without the supervisor role. The amendment is to make me less than that so I don't want to leave. People are saying it's not personal, it's hard not to take it personally when you put in so much time and take pride in your job and you go above and beyond all the time for a lot of people. There are many here who are going to speak against it or for it. I just want you all to keep that in mind that things have changed. If people want to say, it's the same job as 10 years ago when the previous lady was here, your life isn't the same as it was 10 years ago, and nothing is the same since Covid. All the reporting has changed costs have changed you name it, it's not the same job. So, I think that's not just my job. All positions here in the town are

underpaid. It's sad that you can go work at the McDonald's or Dunkin' Donuts and get paid more per hour than you can get working at the town transfer station. And it's sad that I, after working here for more than 10 years could start out somewhere brand new and make more money than I do here after working for 10 years. You can amend it but to what she says, it's just ridiculous.

Michele Lacroix:

I propose we go even less they can spend it however they want. The actuals were \$100,000 less than the budget.

Moderator:

You would need to put this in writing as a separate amendment. We need to vote on this amendment first.

Ruth Millett:

Most people know I'm a Bible thumper so I want to say this. In the Bible it says that a workman is worthy of his hire. I work in the office with Sara. I see what she does. I see what she's done for the town, and I believe that the amounts that are in the budget right now are appropriate. We can't go back to many years to find out what people did in the past we've got to live in the present and things are changing, they're not the same as they were 10 years ago. I believe the budget that we have is appropriate and I think that we should stick with it.

Moderator: we are going to vote on the proposed amendment. (moderator reads the amendment to article 3 again).

There is a motion to move the vote and seconded.

The amendment to article 3 has been defeated.

Moderator asks for any discussion on article 3 as written, and proceeds to read the article again.

Dave Leone:

We are asked to speak on the money that's being spent, but we're not asked to speak on the people that are doing the job or the job that they're doing while we have been paying for a job. It doesn't matter who the person is that's doing the job we're paying for a job to get done if we're paying a price that's an average price and it works for what's been going on, I think that's good. Speaking to the budget and what really confuses me; the budget and the Select Board, I'd agree with Pam that there are names being put into the budget that aren't the same. Are we voting to pay a Road Agent or are we voting to pay a Highway Superintendent? It's written two different ways and do we have someone filling those two positions presently? I look at the Towns website and if you read what's on the website, we're looking for a Highway Administrator. And I don't believe we have a road agent when you read what we have in the book. There was a great letter, written Bubba, who I assume is our Road Agent, but I don't know that if you read the letter, and it says in the letter that we have to thank people for stepping up to the plate, but it doesn't say why. It says we have to do different things but all the information is not out there to us. Do we have a road agent or don't we? When you go to the Town's website, it says we're looking for a road agent or a Highway Superintendent. Why does it say that if we have one? I don't want to point fingers and say somebody didn't take it away. There's a lot of questions in this book that really aren't answered at all. You read one page it says one thing if you read another page, it says a different title I think somebody's not doing their job.

Sara Smith:

So, when this town report went to print it was December this is the 2023 report so as of December 2023, he was just a part of the Highway Department and not the Road Agent but most recently he's been promoted back to the Road Agent when we posted it, nobody applied. No one was interested. Once he was able to go forward again, he did and he was selected that is why in the budget there is a Road Agent line because we do currently have one. The ad will be taken down on Monday. So, it's not contradicting, that's how it was then, but as of today there is a Road Agent.

There is a motion to amend article 3 as follows:

Amendment to Article 3

Amendment to Article 3: "To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of \$853,935 which represents the operating budget for the ensuing year. Said sum does not include special or individual articles addressed." Submitted by Michele Lacroix.

There is no second to the motion and so the amendment is defeated.

A motion is made to move the vote on article 3 and seconded.

The moderator reads article 3 as written again.

Article 3 passes.

Moderator reads article 4

Warrant Article 4

Article 4: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of **one hundred forty-seven thousand five hundred dollars** (\$147,500) to be added to the previously established capital reserve funds (majority vote required).

- Public Works CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$170,952.23): \$50,000
- Disaster Relief CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$136,936.36): \$50,000.
- Police Cruiser CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$27,064.58): \$10,000
- Townhouse CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$31,678.27): \$10,000
- Truck/Sander CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$22,020.32): \$10,000
- Heavy Equipment CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$11,674.92): \$10,000
- Assessing Reval CR Fund (December 31, 2023 balance: \$18,908.05): \$7500
- Total Capital Reserve Funds \$147,500.

The Select Board recommends this article 3-0

Tony makes a motion to except Article 4 as written and Ron second

Tony Albert:

These are the normal additions to each of the Capital Reserve Funds. The only one we've changed this year we've added \$50,000 to the Public Works Capital Reserve. That is because we've had to do some things for the USDA process to go forward, and we had to wait over a

year to get a bid out for the building so we anticipated some more cost to the building. Other than that, all the other amounts are about the same as last year.

Dave Leone:

You say there are additional cost to the public works building. Can you tell us what costs have been paid as of now? Once again, I have read through the minutes and have seen in the minutes where a motion is made to pay money to someone to do work and it was said that as long as it's under \$10,000, it doesn't have to go out to bid and you can just pay them. Where the minute state that, a committee member motions to bill the Town so they can pay this invoice. They don't have to hurry because it's not in our budget and we don't have to reflect that in budget but we have this money to spend so we can spend the money. I'm trying to add up all the money that we've spent. I read where we paid Mike to do work on the site and it was four days, then I read other minutes that are months later it's almost identical verbiage that says that Mike worked for four days so we're going to pay him more money, but I don't see any totals as to how much we paid on this project and where we are going. I see a lot of people who are apparently making money off this and it's not going out to bid. What are those totals in dollars and cents?

John Rescigno:

So, there were a lot of delays in the building due to the USDA grant. Federal monies are often offered but you have to work for it. So that building is going out for bid now and soon we will be opening up bids and due to the process taking longer than we had anticipated obviously with inflation we are just trying to raise the money so we can move forward.

Dave Leone: My question wasn't answered.

Moderator interrupts and states that she cannot make the Board answer the question.

(Dave leaves the meeting)

John Rescigno:

We have invoices if you would like to see them. There was some site work that was requested by the USDA. This is not something we just did for ourselves or had extra cash in our pockets, we wanted to hand out to a friend. This was stuff that was requested by the USDA in order for us to proceed forward.

Sara Smith:

The Town has a procurement policy that anything \$10,000 or less does not need to go out for bid. The work was hired out. Anything else that was mentioned was under \$10,000 what is going out to bid is the entire building project which is obviously more than \$10,000.

Tony Albert:

Some of the expense on that was for the engineer we had to pay out for the USDA. We had to do all of the plans over and everything. We paid a lot of that out of our funds. That money did not come out of the Warrant Article.

Robert Ellis: I think the money he's talking about was money that was spent even before we voted on the building.

Nick Blodgett:

So, his question was answered.

A Motion is made to move the vote and is seconded.

The moderator reads the article again.

Article 4 for passes.

The moderator reads article 5 as written.

Warrant Article 5

Article 5: To see if the Town will vote to raise in appropriate the sum of **eighty- five thousand dollars** (\$85,000) for the purpose of paving the driveways and parking areas at the Transfer Station and the new Public Works Department with **forty thousand dollars** (\$40,000) to come from the Grafton County ARPA funding and the remainder of **forty-five thousand dollars** (\$45,000) to be raised through taxation.

The Select Board recommends this article 3-0

John makes emotion to except the article 5 as written Tony Albert seconds.

John Rescigno:

The USDA expects the Town garage area to be paved and we want to also pave at the transfer station. We've recently had several cars get stuck in the mud and had to be pushed out. \$45,000 will be raised through taxation then the other \$40,000 from the Grafton County ARPA fund.

Jeremy Elder:

Are you proposing that we will pave this before construction?

Ron Madan:

Part of this, if anyone doesn't think the transfer station needs this, come by on Sunday after it's rained all night. The other half is for once they build to blacktop that area too, so it won't get into the same position that the Transfer Station is in.

A Motion is made to call the vote and seconded.

The moderator reads the article again.

Article 5 passes.

The moderator reads Article 6

Warrant Article 6

Article 6: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of **sixty thousand dollars** (\$60,000) toward the repair of damages caused by the severe storm in December 2022. FEMA

has already awarded the town \$145,394.25 which the Selectman have accepted pursuant to RSA 31:95 – B. These funds will be combined to repair the damage.

The Select Board recommends this article 3–0.

Tony Albert motions to move the article as written, and John seconds.

Sara Smith:

All this is, is the 25% to 75% ratio for FEMA. This is the 25% Town portion.

Bill Jolly:

Has the work been completed?

Sara Smith:

No, the emergency work has been done and we didn't receive the FEMA money until winter time and work cannot be done in winter, so, we put this out for bid and we have somebody ready to do it once the weather allows.

(Slim Spafford speaks about an article in the paper for grants, however, Sara explains that these are not grants that the Town can apply for as they are for the December 2023 storm when the Town did not receive damage. The storm didn't affect us so we are not eligible.)

The moderator ends this discussion as it is not speaking toward the article specifically.

A motion is made to vote and seconded

The moderator read the article again.

Article 6 passes.

The moderator reads article 7:

Warrant Article 7

Article 7: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of \$55,000 for chip sealing. (submitted by the Highway Department).

The Select Board recommend this article 3–0.

Tony motions to accept the articles written John seconded.

Robert Ellis:

Many years after paving, the pavement begins to deteriorate. This chip sealing should put another 5 to 7 years back on. Just a more inexpensive way to preserve the asphalt. We will do a little more than a mile up the other side of Halls Brook. This will probably be an ongoing thing, so will try to do a mile or so every year.

Jeremy Elder:

What is the difference of chip sealing versus doing a top coat? chip seal wears off as you plow. I work in an industry and if I'm able I recommend a 2-inch topcoat. You get a longer life out of it.

Robert Ellis: For the one mile we're looking at \$50,000 versus \$300,000 for asphalt.

A motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

The Moderator reads the article again.

Article 7 passes.

Moderator reads article 8:

Warrant Article 8

Article 8: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of **thirty-six thousand dollars** (\$36,000) for a new compactor and converter for the Transfer Station. (submitted by the Transfer Station)

The Select Board recommends this article 3-0

Ron Madan makes a motion to move the article as written, Tony seconds.

Norm Willey:

As you all know, the compactor is falling apart. We've patched it up for the past five years. It's 23 years old and wasn't meant to do the amount of work that is being made to do now. It has an old-style mechanical system on it and it's having a hard time. Last summer the motor burned out and it took Casella a month to locate one, and the whole thing is starting to fall apart. We looked in the past to replace it, the problem was they don't make compactors that have single-phase power, which is what this one is. We need three-phase power for one of these newer state-of-the-art compactors. That is why we haven't been able to do anything. Last year they came out with this thing called an "inverter". What it does is it takes single-phase and turns it into three-phase power and this compactor we're looking at replacing with has that option on it. Now we can go ahead. We received a quote from the power company of \$180,000 to bring three-phase power up there and that's just to come up from Frank Harris' house. That's the reason we've dealt with the old compactor for the last four or five years. One of the other things with the old one was an influx of new people in Town. It only has 35,000 psi. The new one is 55,000 psi so we won't have to get it emptied as often and we won't be paying as much in transportation costs.

Tony Tavares:

Is this being used more now because there is less recycling?

Norm Willey:

Yes, we also keep track every day how many visitors we get. This is my seventh year since I retired and we've gone from an average of 30 to 40 people per day, to 50 or 70 some days and usually on Sundays we can have as many as 90 people there. The volume of stuff coming in has virtually doubled since I've been here and we use the same equipment to run the place.

(Gary Easson questions whether there is three-phase going directly to the Transfer Station, but the answer is, "no", it stops at Frank Harris' house. Gary also advises as an electrician that the inverter should be overrated by 35% if not it will burn out.)

Norm Willey:

We have to put our trust in Casella. They are the ones who gave us this quote. They are in the business, so I hope they know what they're doing.

A motion is made to take the vote and that is seconded.

Moderator reads article 8 again.

Article 8 passes.

Moderator reads article 9.

Warrant Article 9

Article 9: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of **seventeen thousand five hundred dollars** (\$17,500) for an equipment trailer for the Highway Department. (Submitted by the Highway Department.)

Tony Albert motions to move the amendment as written and John Rescino seconds

John Rescigno motions to amend the article

The moderator reads the amended article.

Amended article 9: To see if the Town will vote to raise in appropriate the sum of **ten thousand eight hundred fifty dollars** (\$10,850) for an equipment trailer for the Highway Department. (Submitted by the Highway Department.)

The Select Board recommend this amended article 3-0

This amendment to article 9 is due to the cost of the trailer changing from when we originally requested the quote until now.

A motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

Amended article 9 passes.

Moderator reads article 10

Warrant Article 10

Article 10: To see if the town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of **eleven thousand five hundred dollars** (\$11,500) for a new mower for the Highway Department. (Submitted by the Highway Department.)

Select Board recommend this article 3-0

John motions to move the article as written, Tony seconds.

Robert Ellis:

The old mower has close to 60,000 hours on it and it's beginning to burn oil. It has been well-used we will continue to use it till it dies to mow the transfer station. The new mower will be at the Town Garage to mow the field.

A motion is made to move this vote and is seconded.

The moderator reads article 10 again.

Article 10 passes.

The Moderator reads article 11:

Warrant Article 11

Article 11: To see if the Town will vote to raise appropriate the sum of **four thousand eight hundred dollars** (\$4800) for a new garage door at the Transfer Station. (Submitted by the Transfer Station.)

Select Board recommend this article 3--0

Ron motions to move the article as written, Tony seconds

Norm Willey:

The reason behind this is with the old-set up 2/3 of the front of the building was originally designed to take a stab at recycling with bins. The eaves are not closed in on the building so when the wind starts blowing it rips those doors and rips hinges off. Every year we have to monkey around with them especially after winter. What we plan to do is to have the doors taken off, frame in a wall and put in a 9 x 7 commercial quality overhead door similar to at the end where we keep tires.

A motion is made to call the vote and is seconded

The moderator reads the article again.

Article 11 passes.

Moderator reads article 12

Warrant Article 12

Article 12: To see if the Town will vote to raise appropriate the sum of **forty-two hundred dollars** (\$4200) for a new security system for the Townhouse.

The Select Board recommends this article 3--0

Tony Albert motions to move the article as written, Ron seconds.

John Rescigno:

The alarm system we currently have in the Townhouse has been here for quite some time and we've had some issues with it. It is becoming difficult to replace parts. It's time to look into a new system.

A motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

Moderator reads article 12 again.

Article 12 passes.

The moderator reads article 13.

Warrant Article 13

Article 13: To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate the sum of **one hundred four dollars** (\$104) for deposit into the Conservation Fund, with set amount to come from the unassigned fund balance. This sum represents 3% of the Timber Tax Revenue received in 2023. (Submitted by the Conservation Commission.) (Majority vote required.)

Tony Albert motions to accept the vote as written, John seconds.

There is no discussion and a motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

Article 13 passes.

A moderator reads article 14

Warrant Article 14

Article 14: To see if the Town will vote to change the name of the Atwell Orange Brook Bridge Replacement Capital Reserve Fund to be named "Town Bridges Capital Reserve Fund, to change the purpose to cover construction, reconstruction replacement, and maintenance of all Town bridges and to raise and appropriate **nineteen thousand three hundred thirty one dollars** (\$19,331) to be placed in the fund which amount is the same as the one-time payment made to the Town of Groton by the State of New Hampshire in 2022. This amount to come from the unexpended fund balance, with no amount to be raised by taxation. further, to keep the Selectman as agents to expend from said fund. (2/3 majority vote required.)

The Selectman recommend this article 3-0

Tony motions to except the article as written and Ron seconds.

John Rescigno:

When we originally created this Capital Reserve Fund, we had only one bridge in the Town. Since then, we've installed box culverts, and those are now considered bridges. When it was originally created, it was stated to replace, and we realize sometimes we need maintenance coverage. We'd like to change it so that it covers those box culverts on Sculptured Rocks Road and also the Atwell Orange Bridge and not just replacement, but also repair and maintenance.

A motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

The moderator reads the article again.

Article 14 passes.


Warrant Article 15

The moderator read the Article and a motion is made to move the vote and seconded.

Article 15: To see if the Town will vote to allow the Selectman to transact any other business that may legally come before the town.

Article 15 passes.

Respectfully Submitted this 26th day of March, 2024

 TC, TC
Ruth Millett, Town Clerk/Tax Collector