

Town of Monkton Selectboard
Informational Meeting Feb 26, 2022
(Approved 3/8/22)

The Selectboard for the Town of Monkton will hold a public informational hearing by electronic means on February 26, 2022 at 10 a.m. to discuss the Australian ballot articles on the 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

Selectboard Present In Person: Stephen Pilcher, Bill Martin

Selectboard Present Remote: Marikate Kelley, John McNerney, Paul Low

Others Present In Person: Sharon Gomez (Town Clerk), Bill Joos (Treasurer), Jane Lindholm (Moderator), Betsy Brown (Recording Secretary)

Others Present Remote: Deb Gaynor, Laura Farrell, Bob Radler, Candace Polzella, Amy Moody, Bonnie Brennan, Mike New, Callie Brynn, Kathy Nolan, Ann Miller, Cindy Walcott, John Zaikowski, Peter Straube, Jane Low, Jaime Schulte, Robin Hoppes, Christie Sumner, Heather Bessette, Paul Forlenza. Kia Venner, Joan Holloway, and other members of the public

S. Pilcher called the informational meeting to order at 10:00am.

Article 1: To elect all Town Officers by Australian Ballot: There were no questions or discussion.

Article 2: Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes on November 15, 2022 by delivery to town hall by that date or postmarked on or before that date? By Australian Ballot. There were no questions or discussion.

Article 3: Shall the voters appropriate a total of \$27,749.00 to the following social service agencies? By Australian Ballot.

a) Addison County Community Action Group (Hope)	\$1,250.00
b) Addison County Court Diversion & Community Justice	\$550.00
c) Agewell	\$1,500.00
d) Addison County Home, Health & Hospice, Inc.	\$1,946.00
e) Addison County Parent/Child Center	\$1,600.00
f) Addison County Readers	\$450.00
g) Addison County Transit Resources	\$850.00
h) American Red Cross	\$500.00
i) Bristol Family Center	\$250.00
j) Bristol Recreation Department	\$2,000.00
k) Bristol Rescue Squad	\$7,500.00
l) Counseling Services of Addison County	\$1,600.00
m) Elderly Services	\$800.00
n) Green Up Vermont	\$150.00

o) Hlnesburg Food Shelf	\$500.00
p) Homeward Bound (Humane Society)	\$250.00
q) John W. Graham Emergency Shelter	\$1,000.00
r) Lewis Creek Association	\$550.00
s) Monkton Mentors Program	\$500.00
t) Open Door Clinic	\$500.00
u) Otter Creek Natural Resources Conservation District	\$198.00
v) Retired & Senior Volunteer Program	\$460.00
w) Rural Fire Protection Program	\$100.00
x) Vergennes Area Rescue Squad, Inc.	\$600.00
y) Vermont Adult Learning	\$700.00
z) Vermont Center for Independent Living - Addison	\$195.00
aa) Women Safe, Inc.	\$1,250.00

Cindy Walcott noted that other towns vote on these separately and would like to suggest that to the Selectboard in the future. Steve Pilcher noted that during a traditional town meeting it is then decided whether to vote as a block or individually. John McNerney noted that historically Monkton has voted as a block and that is why they put it on the Australian Ballot as a block. Kathy Nolan that she would like to see things separated out on an Australian Ballot in the future.

Article 4: Shall the voters authorize General Fund expenditures for operating expenses of:

a) General Fund Deficit	\$73,023.00
b) Salaries 7 General Expenses	\$491,079.00
c) Monkton Volunteer Fire Dept	\$70,000.00
d) Russell Memorial Library	\$29,170.00
e) Monkton Museum & Historical Society	\$1,500.00
f) Recreation Fund	\$7,500.00
g) Agricultural and Natural Areas Fund	\$65,000.00
h) Highway Capital Equipment Fund	\$30,000.00

For a total of \$767,272.39 of which \$567,378.59 shall be raised by taxes and \$199,893.80 by non-tax revenues? By Australian Ballot.

Kathy Nolan asked if Agricultural & Natural Areas Fund (ANAC) gave any more info on what they might invest in this year? Laura Farrell gave some historical information about ANAC. She noted that they plan 2-3 years out. The past 3 years they have asked for less than this year. Conservation of a forest block is the current project that is nearing the final phases. \$122,606 is the current balance fund and the current project is about 45-50K. A related project collaborating with abutting landowners could be another 50-65K. If these projects go through that will leave them a small balance that would not even be able to fund an appraisal. They like to keep a little money in order to be able to

respond to projects. They are also looking at a potential agricultural project a few years down the road. Jane Lindholm asked if this work is in collaboration with Act 171. Laura noted that the Planning Commission asked them to review the town's zoning regulations with regard to Act 171. She noted that they reviewed town plans and zoning docs and made a recommendation to the Planning Commission. She noted that the Conservation Commission did the same. Laura Farrell also noted that their ability to act fast on projects has been hampered because they don't have the backup funds. Kathy Nolan noted that one of the big issues in the state is affordable housing and noted that if we keep conserving land we're keeping Monkton land off the market. She noted that as a town we need to make a decision as to how much we want to conserve. Laura Farrell noted that conservation is not incompatible with development-she noted that the question is where the placement of the development is.

Article 5: Shall the voters authorize Highway fund expenditures for operating expenses of:

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|-------------------------|----------------|
| a) Highway Fund Surplus | \$(229,118.41) |
| b) Highway Expenses | \$1,160,931.98 |

There were no comments or questions.

Article 6: Shall the voters approve a sum not to exceed \$46,790.00 for the purchase of a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton pickup truck with plow and sander? Article to be voted by Australian Ballot

Steve Pilcher noted that the Selectboard may pay part of it out of the Highway Capital Equipment Fund and the rest would be a 5 year loan. The Town currently has a fairly low loan balance/long term debt. Long term debt info can be found on pg 54 of the Town Report. The Fire Station addition has been paid off as have an excavator and Ford F150. Steve Pilcher noted that the grader is up for replacement in the future but is very expensive to do (\$300K). The Road Crew has sent our current grader into a shop to be refurbished to get a few more years out of it. John McNerney wanted to clarify that this is not one of the big plow trucks. This would replace a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton that is pretty much at the end of its life.

Article 7: Shall the Town of Monkton vote to amend the Policy for Payment of Property Taxes to change the 8% late payment penalty to 4%? Article to be voted by Australian Ballot.

Bill Joos noted that in 2021 it was approx \$4,600 in late fees. Steve Pilcher noted that many of the people who are late on their taxes are the people who can least afford to pay a late payment penalty. Jane Low asked where the 4% came from. Steve Pilcher stated that it was a compromise. Bill Joos noted that interest on delinquent payments would still apply. Peter Straube asked if there was any cost to the town to replace the funds not collected. Steve Pilcher noted that there really is no financial burden to the

town. The Town would be forgoing some \$2400 late fees that could have been collected. Kathy Nolan stated that maybe next year we could look at getting rid of it all together. John McNerney stated that 8% is the maximum that the State allows. John McNerney also noted that there are alternatives for those who truly cannot afford to pay their taxes.

Article 8: Shall the Selectboard delay the sale of the 1859 Town Hall building until 9/1/2022 in order to give the Monkton Museum & Historical Society or other community group time to generate an acceptable proposal to take on responsibility for the building? Article to be voted by Australian Ballot.

Kathy Nolan noted that the whole concept when this new building was built that we would be selling the old town hall. She wants to know really what the Historical Society is asking? Do they want to buy the building? Do they want the Town to give the building to the museum? Kristin Farrell from the Historical Society noted that they are just asking for a delay. They would like more time so that the Historical Society has more time to seek out grants to restore, not purchase the building. This building could become a community center of sorts. Kathy Nolan noted that one thing the Town needs to understand is that if we don't sell, then the Town will have to pick up the deficit as selling the building was part of the funding plan for the new town hall. Kristin Farrell noted that yes, and the historical society is asking the Town to see the value in their proposal. Callie Brynn noted that she grew up in Bristol and has a strong connection to Holley Hall and sees the connection to Monkton...an incredible opportunity to preserve the past for our community. Peter Straube noted that this should be part of a larger decision-making process and asked the Selectboard what the approach is to use the ARPA funds (\$600K+). S. Pilcher noted that there have been a lot of proposals re: the ARPA funds. Some have already been dispersed (50K to Maple Broadband, 4K to library for missed fundraising due to COVID). He noted that the ARPA proposal list is on <http://www.monktonvt.com/arpa>. Jane Lindholm asked that if this vote goes down, what is the timeline for the old town hall? Steve Pilcher noted that it needs to be cleaned up. He also noted that the sale would probably be a 3-4 month timeline (sold before Sept 1). Robin Hopps noted that this ask is for a 6 month delay and noted that if the building is sold to a private person...it's gone and there is no getting it back. John McNerney noted that regarding ARPA funds, the Selectboard needs more than ideas. They need people to take the reins and do the research etc as the Historical Society is doing. Kathy Nolan asked if any other group has expressed interest in joining the Historical Society on this potential restoration project. Kristin Farrell noted that people have expressed interest anecdotally. Steve Pilcher noted that his vision of use of ARPA funds is a one time chance to build a future for Monkton. Those monies need to be allocated by 2024 and spent by 2026. Bonnie Brennan suggested that the town of Monkton lease this building to the Historical Society. Kathy Nolan noted that we really don't have a format on how an ARPA proposal needs to come in. Jane Lindholm asked that this be brought up during other business. With the old Town Hall the bigger issue is renovations and their costs. Steve Pilcher noted that interior renovations would be \$100K, outside \$50Kish. He also

noted that the septic system is very small. It would have to be revised for other uses which costs money.

Article 9: Shall the Town of Monkton ratify the Town of Lincoln's vote of August 24, 2021 to withdraw the Town of Lincoln from the Mount Abraham Unified School District (MAUSD)?

There are some folks who are interested in speaking who are not Monkton residents. Jane Lindholm asked folks by putting a thumbs up if Monkton residents are OK with them speaking. The vote was a resounding yes. Christie Sumner from Lincoln represented Save Community Schools to ask Monkton to vote to let Lincoln leave the district and is happy to answer any questions. Marikate Kelley noted that she saw an estimate that it would not cost anything for Lincoln to leave if 85% of Lincoln students grades 7-12 choose to go Mt. Abe. She asked if any data was collected on this? Christie noted that the numbers came from MAUSD Central Office. She noted that they have not taken a survey to know that is the 85% number is for sure. Paul Forlenza noted that for the coming year the cost to go to Mt. Abe is 19K which is the most expensive in Addison County. He noted a certain amount of taxes is collected from Lincoln and the rest comes from the State Ed Fund. Kristin Farrell asked about special education and Lincoln's ability to pay for all about it. Where is the shortfall that Lincoln will no longer be part of the equation (bussing, food service etc) going to come from? Paul Forlenza noted that if Lincoln leaves they have to join a supervisory union and they are currently speaking with Ripton about going in on one which would cover special ed, food service etc. His understanding that the district has no financial responsibility for busing in Lincoln if they do leave MAUSD. Joan Holloway is having a hard time understanding how this will have no financial impact. Paul Forlenza said that this is outlined in a report by Superintendent Reen. Jane Low asked about busing...who would pay for kids to be bused down to Bristol for middle/high school. Paul Forlenza said Lincoln would. Lia Venner noted that this feels very Brexit and wonders what Lincoln's options are if this vote goes through and they decide to change their mind later? Paul Forlenza noted that one option would be to rejoin MAUSD if MAUSD is open to it.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rep. Caleb Elder gave a report on what is going on at the State House.

Senator Bray also spoke about what is happening in Montpelier.

Laura Farrell announced that Sam Burr has compiled a list of farms in town and is posted on the ANAC page. They are looking for more information on some of these farms so that the info can be made accessible to the broader public. You can find contact info for ANAC on the town's website. She also announced that Eric Sorensen did an ecological assessment of Monkton and there is a video available on the ANAC part of the Town's website. ANAC and the Conservation Commission sponsored a grad

student to do an ecological assessment in parts of town and he will be giving a presentation in early May.

Steve Pilcher noted that there is no one running for Lister. The town is looking for listers. There is money in the budget (20K) in the lister's payroll line to have NEMRC come and do assessing of buildings. There are still a lot of other administrative duties that need to be done. The Town is actively looking for people who are interested in serving as a lister.

Steve Pilcher also wanted to note the passing of John Phillips who was his mentor. John was Chair of the Selectboard for many years. When he stepped off the Board, he became assistant Town Clerk. He will be missed. Sharon Gomez noted that he was a wonderful assistant and will truly be missed and she is sorry that this did not make it into the town report.

Steve Pilcher also noted that there is money allocated for a Town Manager in the town budget. The position of the Selectboard is becoming more and more time consuming and complicated. This position would add as an assistant to the Selectboard. This person would work on grants, administrative duties that the Selectboard Chair and Zoning Administrator currently do.

Bonnie Brennan asked if there was any information on what the potential project regarding the General Store is. Steve Pilcher stated that the owner of the former store sent a letter to the Selectboard that they are considering selling the building and suggested that perhaps the Town would be interested in doing something like Elmore has done (a community supported enterprise). This is where the citizens of the town (not the town govt) put in money to buy the store and then lease it to someone who would be interested in running it as a store, pizza place, etc. Theresa Schwegel and Kevin Lambert are spearheading this. There will be a community meeting in March to start figuring out if this would be a possibility. (Information about the Elmore Store and how it is run as a community supported enterprise can be found here: <https://www.elmorecommunitytrust.org/our-mission>)

Betsy Brown thanked the Selectboard, Clerk, Highway Crew, and all the volunteer committees and boards for all their hard work.

Kristin Farrell announced that the historical society will be hosting a Monkton Ridge historical walk.

Heather Besette as a member of the Grounds committee thanked all for their help on the project.

Robin Hopps also thanked folks for all their work and also noted that John Philips would have loved this new town hall and that he will be missed.

Ann Miller, as a member of the Conservation Commission, noted that on March 10 there will be a presentation by a wetland ecologist for our DEC district on wetlands in Monkton. Information will be forthcoming on social media.

Bill Martin thanked Jane Lindholm for moderating this year. He would like to thank Ken Wheeling for being moderator for 30ish years.

Lauren Parren thanked the Library and Library Board for such a wonderful library in town.

Voting is open 7am to 7pm on Tuesday March 1st at Town Hall.

Meeting adjourned at 12:20pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Betsy Brown