

Town of Monkton  
Minutes of Annual Town Meeting  
Saturday March 2, 2024 10:00am

Jerry Schwarz, town moderator, called the meeting to order at 10:01AM. There were approximately 80 citizens in attendance. The moderator explained guidelines for how the meeting would be run.

ARTICLE 1: To elect all Town Officers by Australian Ballot.

The moderator stated Article 1 will be voted on Tuesday, March 5, 2024 at the town hall. Polls will be open from 7am to 7pm.

ARTICLE 2: Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes on November 15, 2024 by delivery to town hall by that date or postmarked on or before that date?  
**Wendy Sue Harper moved to authorize payment of property taxes on November 15, 2024. Roger Wallace seconded. The motion was voice voted in the affirmative, and so declared by the moderator.**

ARTICLE 3: Shall the voters appropriate a total of \$30,197.00 to the following social service agencies?

- a) Addison County Community Action Group (Hope) \$1,250.00
- b) Addison County Home, Health & Hospice, Inc \$1946.00
- c) Addison County Restorative Justice Services \$550.00
- d) Addison County Parent/Child Center \$1,600.00
- e) Addison County Readers \$450.00
- f) AgeWell \$1,500.00
- g) Bristol Family Center \$250.00
- h) Bristol Recreation Dept. \$2,000.00
- i) Bristol Rescue Squad \$8,748.00
- j) Counseling Service of Addison County Inc. \$1,600.00
- k) Elderly Services \$800.00
- l) Green Up Vermont \$150.00
- m) Have-A-Heart Food Shelf \$200.00
- n) Hinesburg Food Shelf \$500.00
- o) Homeward Bound (Humane Society) \$250.00
- p) John W. Graham Emergency Shelter \$1,000.00
- q) Lewis Creek Association \$550.00
- r) Monkton Mentors Program \$500.00
- s) Open Door Clinic \$500.00
- t) Otter Creek Natural Resources Conservation District \$198.00
- u) Red Cross \$500.00
- v) Retired & Senior Volunteer Program \$460.00
- w) Rural Fire Protection Program \$100.00
- x) Tri Valley Transit \$850.00
- y) Turning Point Center of Addison County \$1000.00
- z) Vergennes Area Rescue Squad Inc. \$600.00
- aa) Vermont Adult Learning \$700.00
- bb) Vermont Center for Independent Living – Addison \$195.00

cc) Women Safe Inc. \$1,250.00

**Wendy Sue Harper moved to consider the listed social services as a block. Bill Martin seconded. The motion was voice voted in the affirmative, and so declared by the moderator.**

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

- a) General Fund Deficit \$35,016.88
- b) Salaries and General Expenses \$567,380.94
- c) Monkton Volunteer Fire Department \$124,300.00
- d) Russell Memorial Library \$44,721.00
- e) Monkton Museum and Historical Society \$1,500.00
- f) Recreation Fund \$8,500.00
- g) Agricultural and Natural Areas Fund \$50,000.00
- h) Highway Capital Equipment Fund \$70,000.00

for a total of \$901,418.82 of which \$630,258.82 shall be raised by taxes and \$271,160.00 by non-tax revenues?

**Mark Botz Robinson moved to authorize the General Fund expenditures. Bill Martin seconded.**

Wayne Zeno asked about salaries and how many people does it cover. Stephen Pilcher referred to the town report and read off the paid positions. Wayne Zeno asked why we don't hear about the school any more. Marikate Kelley explained how the school became part of a larger district, and the annual report is no longer mailed to all residents. Wayne Zeno expressed concern about the school tax increase of 20%. He used to know what goes on in the school and no longer hears anything. He asked if the voters had any say in the school any longer. Marikate Kelley replied that they could vote on the budget. Barbara Crandall, a school board member for the Mount Abraham Unified School District, explained how to get more information. Wayne Zeno explained that he voted down the school budget last year because he is lacking information on the large expenditure. Jerry Schwarz stated that the discussion was not germane to Article 4. Both Barbara Crandall and John McNerney explained that in order to find information about the school, it needs to be accessed online from the school. Paper copies were available at the meeting. Roger Wallace asked about delinquent taxes. Steve Pilcher explained that taxes are collected in November and any taxes that are not collected by the end of the year contribute to a General Fund revenue shortfall. Article 4 shows a deficit and part of it is delinquent taxes. He said Roger Wallace was correct that a lot of delinquent taxes would be paid in 2024. Stephen Pilcher noted that the Selectboard was working on a tax sale for delinquent taxes. Roger Wallace asked, will the tax rate be set after delinquent taxes are collected? Stephen Pilcher referred to the town report. He explained the tax rate is not moveable. The tax rate is the amount of money that the town said it would raise, divided by the grand list. John McNerney said people pay delinquent taxes, then new people may become delinquent. He explained that it is the difference between the two. Randy Charbonneau asked about whether the highway surplus fund is committed or money not spent. If the money was not spent, why can't it pay off the deficit? He noted a surplus had been running for a few years. Why doesn't it pay off debt? He asked if we are running a deficit, why are we increasing spending instead of eliminating debt. Stephen Pilcher noted that the Town does not carry over either General Fund deficits or Highway surpluses. While the Town does have long term debts, such as the bond for the Town Offices, it does not have debts in the same way as the federal government. The general fund and the highway fund are separate as an informative measure. He explained Article 4 shows some expenses out of the budget so they can be seen and talked

about. Randy Charbonneau noted a deficit in prior years. He thinks it increases taxes. He would like to get rid of the deficit.

**The motion was voice voted in the affirmative, and so declared by the moderator.**

ARTICLE 5: Shall the voters authorize Highway Fund expenditures for operating expenses of:

a) Highway Fund Surplus \$(290,286.16)

b) Highway Expenses \$1,101,392.66

for a total of \$811,106.50 of which \$611,062.50 shall be raised by taxes and \$200,044.00 by non-tax revenues?

**Robin Hopps moved to authorize expenditures for the Highway Fund. Bill Martin seconded. The motion was voice voted in the affirmative, and so declared by the moderator.**

Senator Ruth Hardy and Representative Caleb Elder attended the meeting. Senator Hardy spoke about government response to flooding and a bill that has provisions to improve response to natural disasters. She also spoke about open meeting law for public bodies, and a bill that continues to allow meeting in hybrid fashion or fully remotely. She introduced a comic book explaining how democracy works. Caleb Alder said he lives in Starksboro, has served for 6 years, and is stepping down. He explained \$37,000,000 funds all the schools in the 5 town district. He noted that some school funding was going away, Covid funds which were used to reduce taxes. He noted the challenge of school cost, the needs of the schools, and trying to find a more equitable funding provision. He said we know school budget increases are a problem and the legislature is working on it.

ARTICLE 6: Shall the Town of Monkton vote to eliminate the elected office of Lister and instead appoint an Assessor pursuant to 17 V.S.A §2651(c)(b). Article to be voted by Australian Ballot. Steve Pilcher explained that the article was printed differently in the annual report. The moderator read the correct article:

ARTICLE 6: Shall the voters authorize the elimination of the Office of Lister and replace it with an Assessor appointed by the selectboard who shall have the same powers, discharge the same duties, proceed in the discharge thereof in the same manner, and be subject to the same liabilities as are prescribed for listers or the board of listers under the provisions of Title 32?"

Discussion commenced on the difference between the two versions of Article 6. The moderator said Robert's Rules does not allow discussion on articles to be voted by Australian Ballot. Roger Wallace asked for clarification on how it's been done in the past, and how it is being done currently. Jerry Schwarz said he may be more of a stickler on Robert's Rules than prior moderators.

ARTICLE 7: To transact any other business proper to come before this meeting.

Discussion is not binding, noted Jerry Schwarz, it is merely advisory.

Stephen Pilcher said the town has difficulty filling elected positions. He noted that Lisa Burns, who does the heavy lifting for the listers, said it would be better to make the position appointed, and make it an assessor. Therefore the town would hire a professional assessor.

Tom Learmonth asked if it would cost money. SP said it was revenue neutral, mostly.

Jerry Schwarz again noted that matters being voted by Australian ballot may not be discussed during public meetings while he quoted from Robert's Rules.

Kristin Farrell asked if the difference between lister and assessor is electing versus appointing.

Robin Hopps, a new Monkton mentor, noted the positive aspects of becoming a mentor, and said it was very well run. She noted that the Monkton Museum and Historical Society are working on getting a space to display their collections. Robin Hopps said Nina Badger will be opening "It Used To Be Someone's" in the old town hall, and will offer the vault to display some of the historical society's items. She offered a big thank you to Bob Wahl, and Nina Badger for keeping the old town hall locally owned. Robin Hopps noted the work of the MMHS: the East Monkton History book, and scanning old photos so they can be widely accessed. Stephen Pilcher noted that he had a good time on the walk on the ridge led by the MMHS. He asked if there would be a walk in east Monkton? Robin Hopps noted it would be a drive.

Deb Gaynor, Monkton's representative to ACSWMD, thanked Jessica Demeritt for unflinching work coordinating the town drop off, a welcoming and well organized place. Avery Williams and Robin Hopps will be taking over and plan to emphasize the 5 Rs: refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle.

Roger Wallace asked someone to explain the difference between what was printed and what was read regarding Article 6. He also inquired about the assessor's process. Stephen Pilcher said putting together the town report is always an interesting process. He noted that the town meeting warning that was given to the town clerk was not the up to date one. He explained that the wording on Article 6 changed because he found something more specific on the VLCT site. The two are essentially the same. Lisa Burns introduced herself. She explained that it is an 18 month process to do assessment. Assessors go twice to double check their work. A final evaluation comes out about mid-May. Questions and concerns can be answered after that. Tom Learmouth asked if it would affect the CLA this year. Lisa Burns said the CLA would change with the new townwide assessment. The point is to create equity, answered Lisa Burns. Nina Badger asked about the assessor. Stephen Pilcher answered that Monkton's assessor is currently Lisa Burns. NEMRC is the town's professional assessor. They are local.

Jane Low noted the library is currently doing a town wide survey.

S. Pilcher noted it was the last days of Paul Low's service as a Selectboard member. He requested applause for Paul Low as a valuable, engaged member of the Selectboard and liaison to Road Crew.

Jessica Demeritt announced a total solar eclipse viewing party at the town hall on April 8.

Nina Badger wanted to add an omission to last year's minutes: she had wanted the town to sell the old town hall to MMHS for \$1.

Tom Kenyon wanted to know who would be the next liaison to the road crew? Stephen Pilcher answered that it would be determined at the next Selectboard meeting.

**Bill Martin moved to adjourn the meeting. Robin Hopps seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:19AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Demeritt