

Shaftsbury Public Informational Hearing re Town Meeting items

Sunday, February 27, 2022

Call to order

The meeting, held remotely via the platform Zoom, was called to order at 3 p.m. by town moderator Tom Daly. Mr. Daly read the hearing warning. (This and other documents, including the texts of ballot articles 1-5 and the list of community appropriations requests, are contained in the Town of Shaftsbury Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30, 2021 and are incorporated by reference into these minutes.)

He noted the meeting was informational only, and that voting would take place on Tuesday March 1 at the Town Garage. He said the meeting was being broadcast live on CAT-TV on channel 1085. Mr. Daly explained how citizens could join the meeting and/or submit questions or comments.

Mr. Daly introduced the selectmen present.

Changes to agenda

No changes to the agenda were suggested.

Reports of Town Officers

Select Board chair Art Whitman summarized the board's activities in FY 2021. He said the year was a good one both fiscally and operationally. He highlighted staying within budget, road improvements, new highway equipment, a new contract with Casella and greater control over the transfer station as a result, a contract to investigate sidewalks for the Grandview neighborhood, and the taking over of Grandview Cemetery. All of this required a team effort. Mr. Whitman suggested that citizens plan on attending Select Board meetings in future to discuss how to spend ARPA funds.

Review and discussion of Article 1: Shall taxes be due Thursday, November 10, 2022.

Town administrator David Kiernan reported that Jodie Coon had submitted a comment and asked her to share it publicly. When she was unable to speak, Mr. Kiernan said she'd texted him: "Who is responsible for illegally posting land for tax sales and what the Town is doing to correct it." Mr. Daly called the question out of order in the context of the article.

Review and discussion of Article 2: Shall the town raise by taxes and other revenues \$2,301,468 to defray general and highway expenses for FY 2023?

Mr. Whitman noted that the budget is up, about 5%, compared to 1% last fiscal year for an average of about 3% annually.

Mr. Whitman and Mr. Kiernan described how the budget funds are to be allocated. The 39% to DPW represents the largest part of the budget, with general government, transfer to reserve, public safety, and debt service representing the bulk of the remainder. In the DPW budget, most of the funds are dedicated to wages, benefits and administration.

The budget increase would mean an increase of \$22.80 per \$100,000 valuation.

Lon McClintock asked if there are any plans for the Cole Hall surroundings, e.g. where the former garage was located. Mr. Kiernan said funding is being sought from several sources, including ARPA funds, to improve ADA access to the building, expand and improve the Veteran's Park, and create more green space. The Veteran's Park fund now has about \$50,000.

Review and discussion of Article 3: Shall the voters authorize the elimination of the office of listers and its replacement with a paid assessor.

Mr. Whitman said that, for many years, the state has mandated that each town have a professional appraiser. He said Shaftsbury has been through several assessors (nearly all left for another job at more money), and most recently has contracted with NEMRC (New England Municipal Resources Center). The listers do not assess values, but now do only data entry. The Town would like to replace those two individuals with an assessor's assistant, and would like to employ the present Assistant Town Clerk (Mrs. Jenks) in that capacity. He noted that the ballot also includes electing a third lister, in case the elimination of the listers office is voted down.

Cinda Morse asked whether the new plan is different in costs from the old one, and whether NEMRC would do the town-wide assessment when it is due. Mr. Whitman said NEMRC would probably be hired to do the assessment, though it is not due for some time. Mr. Kiernan said the proposed budget line for NEMRC in FY 23 is identical to that for FY 22.

Mr. Spurr asked Mr. Kiernan to expand on "professional assessor." Mr. Keirnan said such a person is licensed by the state, that NEMRC has a large crew of assessors.

Mr. McLintock said that he has some experience with listers as chair of the Board of Civil Authority and a former selectman. He said one of the difficulties of the lister system is that they are three independent and equally powerful elected officials with no office system or structure to organize them as would be common in most offices. He said he is very glad the selectmen are taking this on this year because it makes a lot of sense for the town.

Review and discuss Article 4: Shall voters authorize changes to zoning bylaws?

Mr. Whitman described the several changes: regulations regarding grandfathering; helipads; boundary line adjustments; dog boarding kennels; and section 8.7 pools. Chris Williams, chair of the Planning Commission, reported that the changes represent about two years of work. The boundary line adjustments were requested by the Development Review Board (DRB). Mike Day, vice-chair of the Development Review Board, thanked the Planning Commission for making the DRB's jobs easier. Mr. Spurr asked for more information on the grandfathering section. Mr. Williams described the motivation for the change, that it could be hard to sell a business in one year, but that a two year window would make it easier to effect the sale. Mr. McClintock concurred that, recently, commercial uses have sold only slowly.

Review and discuss Article 5: Community Appropriations

Mr. Whitman noted that requests have grown by 7% over last year and now reflect 4% of the annual budget. At present, the town doesn't have a clear policy in place as to who can seek a community appropriation or for what. The selectmen are working on coming up with a policy that is fair and brings the requests under control. Vermont League of Cities and Towns has made recommendations. Mr. Whitman noted that the proposed budget already includes all the community appropriations and that, therefore, any "no" vote would slightly reduce the tax burden.

A representative of Sunrise Family Resource Center spoke in support of his organization. Mr. Kiernan said the organization has been level-funded for three or four years.

Other non-binding business

Mr. Daly asked Ms. Coon to repeat her question. Mr. Kiernan repeated it. Mr. Daly deemed the question inappropriate for this forum. Jenny Rozycki of the McCullough Library spoke about the library's successes in the last year. Jason Lillie spoke in support of WBTN. Naomi Miller suggested we recognize entities located out of town but who serve Shaftsbury residents as part of our community. Andrea Bacchi spoke in support of those seeking community appropriations regardless of their location.

Representative David Durfee spoke on activities at the legislature.

The state's financial picture is very good, by virtue of Covid, ARPA and infrastructure bill funding and unusually high sales tax and property tax receipts. As a result, the legislature is considering a tax reduction using various means. Even with tax cuts, there will be money left over for housing and other state-wide needs.

The 2020 census requires Vermont to redistrict. In the latest redistricting proposal, Shaftsbury will remain as a single legislation district which will also include Glastenbury and parts of Sunderland.

Two constitutional amendments will be proposed this year, one stating that no one may impose slavery or indentured servitude in the state, and one to establish reproductive liberty. The latter amendment won't change anything now in place in Vermont.

Mr. Durfee said if anyone wanted to contact him that person should Google "Vermont legislature" for his email address, or come knock on his door at the red house opposite the cemetery on 7A.

Dave Mance asked who would oversee the assessor. Mr. Whitman said the Select Board will be responsible for hiring and supervising a certified assessor, and would be responsible for hiring the assessor's assistant. There would be no more public voting on listers.

Adjournment

Mr. Daly adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m. until 7 a.m. on March 2 at the Town garage on North Road, at which time and place voting by Australian ballot will proceed.