

Town of Shaftsbury Town Floor Meeting

Monday, March 4, 2024

In person at Shaftsbury Elementary School, 150 Buck Hill Road, and remotely via Zoom

Tom Dailey, moderator, introduced himself shortly after 6 p.m.

All present voiced the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Dailey noted the annual report is dedicated to Charlie Becker, Mert Snow, Pauline Knapp, and Tim Kinney. He asked for a moment of silence for those Shaftsbury residents as well as others who have passed recently. He also asked that attendees reflect upon Americans' good fortune to have a system such as is being exercised tonight.

Mr. Dailey introduced the selectpersons: Art Whitman (chair), Tony Krulikowski (vice-chair), Martha Cornwell, Mike Cichanowski, and Naomi Miller. He noted that CAT-TV is broadcasting live and is recording the meeting and thanked Jim Byers from CAT. He noted that Jen Holley is running the Zoom broadcast. He thanked Town Clerk Marlene Hall for being the Town's go-to person. At Mr. Dailey's request, the audience applauded Karen Mellinger for organizing the potluck dinner that preceded the floor meeting.

David Durfee, Shaftsbury state representative, spoke. He noted that pre-Covid, one of the issues he spoke about at Town Meeting was broadband. Now, virtually all of Bennington County except Readsboro and Stamford are well served by high-speed internet. Selling property is now therefore much easier. A second issue previously addressed was affordable child care. Last year, the legislature passed Act 76, opening up more than 7000 new child care slots with more coming on line all the time. Housing remains a focus of the legislature, as is Act 250 reform. He said this year's state budget will be more conservative than those passed during the pandemic.

A citizen moved to dispense with the reading of the official meeting warning. The motion was seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Business to be enacted from the floor

- To hear reports of the Town officers and take action thereon.

Mr. Dailey noted that his name was misspelled in last year's minutes. A motion was made and seconded to accept the reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

- To Determine:

A. Shall Selectboard members each receive an annual stipend of \$750?

A motion was made and seconded to that effect. Karen Mellinger listed a number of responsibilities carried by the selectpersons and moved that the item be amended to "n annual stipend of \$1000." The motion to amend was seconded. The amended article passed unanimously.

B. Shall the Board of Auditors be paid a wage at the rate of \$15.00 per hour?

The motion was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

C. Shall the 1st and 2nd Constable be paid a wage at the rate of \$15.00 per hour?

The motion was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

- Shall the Town authorize collection of taxes on real and or personal property by its Treasurer, which are due in hand on or before Tuesday November 12th at 5:00 P.M. or likewise postmarked no later than November 12th?

A motion was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

- Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,740,081 to defray the Town's general and highway expenses for Fiscal Year 2025, the amount of such sum to be raised by property taxes and to be reduced by non-tax revenues and reserve funds?

Mr. Art Whitman gave the report of the selectpersons. He noted that David Kiernan, town administrator, has retired. The selectboard received more than twenty applications for his position and has hired a town administrator, Paula Iken. He asked all to welcome her with open arms. She will begin work in April.

He said the ARPA (American Rescue Act Plan) committee conducted a survey of citizens, which found that high priorities for the use of ARPA funds were making Cole Hall ADA-compliant, and creating a civic center in town. In response, the Selectboard purchased a property north and east of Cole Hall and is under contract to purchase a one-acre lot north of Cole Hall where those initiatives can be implemented. He asked that citizens consider joining any of several committees dedicated to pursuing these and other projects.

The Selectboard also produced a new speed ordinance and has requested increased funding for sheriff monitoring of speed in Town.

A new firearms ordinance was adopted for South Shaftsbury.

A "host town" agreement has been signed with the solar developer. It includes the following: limitations on which town roads can be used; that primary access be off Route 7; that every year it operates the company will pay to the state Education Fund \$28,000; that every year it operates the company will pay the Town \$123,000 (this is irrespective of school tax); that every year it operates the company will pay Town and School tax; that every year it operates it will donate \$15,000 toward the purchase of a new brush truck; that electric charging stations will be constructed on town property; and that upon ground-breaking, a \$50,000 donation will be made to the Town.

Looking forward, the next big DPW project will be the paving of White Creek Road. Tree work and ditching will continue.

A solar screening ordinance is in the works (it is a result in part of the creation of an Enhanced Energy Plan).

He complemented Town staff on their efforts over the year.

Mr. Dailey read the budget article. A motion was made and seconded to appropriate the sum of \$2,741,331 for fiscal year 2025. Mr. Whitman made a presentation on the budget.

He said the FY 2025 budget is up 8.4% over the FY 2024 budget. Why? Inflation is a contributor. Health insurance and wages are big factors. Truck and equipment maintenance costs have gone out of sight. A summer helper has been added to the DPW (this to avoid pulling a CDL-licensed individual off the road crew to, for example, mow grass). Finally, the sheriff's hours have been doubled.

Mr. Whitman illustrated the proposed budget, the entire budget and the DPW budget, with pie chart slides. (These graphics are included in the Town Report on page 43.) Mr. Whitman noted that all proposed community appropriations are included in the budget total, but whether to approve them is entirely up to the voters.

Mr. Whitman described a newly adopted process for community appropriations: any increased appropriations or new requests must be accompanied by a petition; and existing requestors will have only one chance to notify the Select Board of their request.

Karen Mellinger asked Mr. Whitman to explain the water situation. He said it is a cloudy one. North Bennington made a major upgrade to their system in their Village at a cost of several million dollars. The Village then charged the Town of Shaftsbury for part of that cost. Shaftsbury refused payment, as the improvement did not benefit Shaftsbury water users. After much back and forth and a suit brought by North Bennington, the two entities went to mediation. The mediation resulted in an order that Shaftsbury did not have to pay for any part of the bond issue, but rather should pay the same amount as a North Bennington resident. North Bennington raised the rate of the next water bill by about 60%. The Town has refused to make such payment. Mr. Whitman said he'd been notified by Mr. Durfee that the State might be willing to assist in resolving the matter. Mr. Dailey clarified that there is a state department dealing with community water, but it doesn't touch upon pricing.

Jenifer Hoffman asked for clarity about an inconsistency in the warned appropriation for the Bennington County Conservation District. Mr. Whitman reported the ballot would announce a \$475 appropriation.

Alan Baker noted that loose horses had been captured.

A citizen asked about taxes charged senior citizens. Gina Jenks, assessor's assistant, recommended the citizen contact the Taxpayer's Advocate, or call 211 regarding state programs for low income folks. Ms. Jenks will have the Taxpayer's Advocate phone number placed on the website. Ms. Jenks said she thought there might be fund managed by the Select Board to help older citizens.

The motion regarding the budget passed unanimously.

- To transact any other non-binding business as legally may come before said meeting at this time.

Marlene Hall, Town Clerk, described the voting to be held on March 5, 2024.

Three elections will be held: a presidential primary, a town election, and a school election. Those living in the N. Bennington school district will vote on the school budget there. All other votes will be cast in Shaftsbury. For the presidential primary, each voter will be asked whether they want a Republican or Democrat ballot. This step is required not by the Town or the State but by the national political parties. You may take any ballot you wish. As regards the Town ballot, voters will vote on appropriations, town officers, some zoning bylaw changes, and the CDC/Tech Center budget.

Ms. Hall said the new tabulators are slower than they had been, but the election workers will do their best to move the lines along.

These agenda item will be discussed by not voted on. Voting will be by Australian ballot on Tuesday March 5, 2024.

1. Review and discuss Articles 1, 2, and 3: Shall the voters authorize amendments to the Shaftsbury zoning bylaws?
2. Review and discuss Article 4: Community Appropriations
3. Discussion of other non-binding business

Alan Baker asked a question about the work of the economic development community. Martha Cornwell said the Regional Commission is working with the committee to identify all the possible developable sites in the Village. These would include the Bernstein property and

properties that might now be vacant. She said it would likely take a number of years to achieve success.

Andrea Bacchi, vice-chairperson of the economic development committee, noted that the business climate has changed. Brick-and-mortar is no longer the only model. She herself works from home.

Ms. McEnaney asked that the community support Article C of the school budget, the approval of Spinelli Field. She noted some of the benefits to children who participate in sports. She urged everyone to vote in favor of the Article to voice their support for the town's children.

Karen Rose, a Shaftsbury citizen, spoke on behalf of Monty's House wildlife rehabilitation center and her \$1000 request for funding. She noted the center is described on page 73 of the Town Report.

Jennie Rozycki, director of the John G. McCullough Library, and Gizelle Guyette, Youth Services Librarian at the library, spoke about services offered by the library.

Cynthia Thomayer of Sunrise Family Resource Center spoke on behalf of the Center and thanked the community for its support. The report is on page 79 of the Town Report.

Dr. David King spoke on behalf of GBICS.

Alan Baker spoke on behalf of WBTN and encouraged folks to think about hosting shows on the station.

Art Whitman noted that the Julia Mattison fund, established in 1926, was designed to provide care, comfort, and maintenance of aged women that are residents of Shaftsbury. Interested persons should contact the Trustees of Public Funds.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn at 7:33 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.