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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

Meeting Minutes

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Shaftsbury Town Meeting

Date of Meeting: Monday, March 2, 2026, at the Shaftsbury Elementary School and remotely via Zoom

Mr. Thomas Dailey, moderator, apologized for being late then called the meeting to order at approximately 6:25 PM. Mr. Dailey noted that there had been 265 opportunities for Town Meetings in Shaftsbury and most years there was a meeting. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, and a moment of reflection and gratitude taken for those serving in the US Armed Forces. Fire exits were noted, and non-residents reminded that they could not speak unless the assembly voted that they be allowed, and that they could not vote. Mr. Dailey asked for a round of applause for the town staff and volunteers. He then asked Ms. Naomi Miller, Select Board Vice-Chair, to introduce the Select Board.

Ms. Miller introduced Select Board members Mike Chichanowski, Tony Krulikowski, and Brad Peacock. Select Board Chair Zoe Contros Kearl was unable to attend due to a long-standing obligation. Mr. Dailey asked for a motion to dispense with reading the warning. This was moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote. This complete, he continued with a synopsis of the evening's proceedings: the moderator will state the article, ask for a motion and second and then open the floor for discussion, debate etc. on the article. Articles may be amended by vote.

The moderator first asked State Representative David Durfee to speak. Rep. Durfee said that the 3 issues that people have contacted him most about are education and property taxes, PFAS in town residents' wells, and the federal government- most often concerns with ICE or Border Patrol. He noted that the State is reaching a point where he expects that there is going to be a significant increase in education property taxes over the next few years, largely because of increasing property values. He continued that the current formula is complicated, and a new approach would be beneficial, bringing more money into the state, into Shaftsbury, and into Bennington, hopefully without increasing taxes. He said tax increases are a big concern of his. Rep. Durfee then spoke briefly about PFAS, noting that the state has recently lowered the threshold for being eligible for a water treatment system. If Shaftsbury residents are concerned about whether their water might be contaminated with PFAS and you haven't heard from anyone in the state or Town, they can contact him or Town Administrator Paula Iken. He then said that he was not going to spend a lot of time talking about federal issues, other than to say that it's very much a concern of many of his colleagues in the legislature. He continued by saying that he didn't want to take any more of the time for Town business, but residents should feel free to reach out to him at any point.

Mr. Dailey then introduced Article 1: To hear the reports of the town officers and take action thereon. The moderator called for a motion to discuss. This was motioned and seconded. Mr. Dailey

noted that there were some reports of importance that would be highlighted with verbal reports. The first was the Select Board report. Vice-Chair Naomi Miller thanked Tony Krulikowski and Brad Peacock for their service on the Select Board. Neither was running for re-election. She noted the hiring of a new Zoning Administrator, Carlyn Mickle, who had also been appointed as Assistant Town Clerk and that Town Administrator Paula Iken had completed her first year. Ms. Miller mentioned the enormous amount accomplished during the past year by the Town employees: They moved the Town to a new accounting system, completed the reappraisal process, orchestrated the renovation of the new municipal offices and community resource center, developed a plan for dealing with the long-term effects of the emerald ash borer infestation, and more. She then recognized Shaftsbury resident architect Ben Benedict for the many professional hours he donated designing, redesigning, redesigning again, and then overseeing the reconstruction of the new municipal building. Ms. Miller mentioned 2 new annual Town events: the Howl-O-Ween Dog Costume Contest & Parade and the Holiday Lights Tractor Parade. Ms. Miller then discussed the continuing efforts to detect and address PFAS in wells and that the Town has entered a contract with lawyers pursuing litigation against the polluter. She went on to talk about the move to the new building, the focus of the CCDC on the Town Green and asked for volunteers for grant writing, fundraising, and planning. She finished with a request for input from residents on Town Green use. The remaining reports were available for review in the Town of Shaftsbury annual report.

Mr. Dailey then asked Michael Bidy to come forward to discuss a non-binding resolution brought forward as other business by Mr. Bidy at the 2025 Shaftsbury Town Meeting. This resolution was omitted from the 2025 Town Meeting minutes. The resolution stated, "It is the sense of the gathered citizens of Shaftsbury, Vermont at our town floor meeting this March 3, 2025, that all supply and/or funding by the U.S. government of weapons and military and logistical assistance to the regime of Israel must cease as long as Israel is engaged in the genocide of the Palestinian people, especially in the Palestinians' rightful homelands". This resolution passed unanimously by voice vote of 102 residents on March 3, 2025. Mr. Dailey noted that this would be included in the 2026 Town Meeting minutes as an amendment to the 2025 Town Meeting minutes. The moderator then asked if there was any further discussion. Hearing none, Article 1 was voted on by voice and approved.

Mr. Dailey introduced Article 2: Shall the Town authorize collection of taxes on real or personal property by its treasurer, which are due in hand on and before Tuesday, November 10th, at 5 p.m. or likewise, postmarked no later than November 10th. The moderator called for a motion to discuss, it was moved and seconded. The floor was opened for discussion and Mr. Dailey asked the Town Treasurer, Melanie Dexter, to address the meeting. Ms. Dexter had three points: First- while postmarks are accepted, the post office does not necessarily cancel a piece of mail on the day it was mailed. The only way to guarantee that a tax payment is postmarked on time is to have it hand canceled at the post office. Second- it's critically important that Homestead Declarations are on time, which is April 15th, or a property owner might pay thousands of dollars more in education taxes. An extension on taxes does not apply to Homestead Declarations. There is a penalty if you file after April 15th. Third- redacted tax bills are now available on the Town of Shaftsbury website: shaftsburyvt.gov. If your property tax bill is missing you or your tax preparer can access it there. The moderator asked if there was any further discussion. Hearing none, Article 2 was voted on by voice and approved.

Mr. Dailey introduced Article 3: Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$3,221,460.25 to defray the town's general and highway expenses for fiscal year 2027, the amount of such sum to be raised by property taxes, and to be reduced by non-tax revenues and reserved funds. The moderator called for a motion to discuss. It was moved and seconded. Ms. Miller opened the discussion by noting that the proposed budget was approximately 9% higher than the previous year due to the rising cost of goods and services and overdue staffing upgrades. A pie chart was displayed with the breakdown of the budget. She said that community appropriations do not appear on the budget because they are on the ballot so do not need to be voted on as part of Article 3. Ms. Miller then highlighted the most significant factors in the 9% budget increase: an addition to the DPW staff, increases to staff HRA accounts, increases in staff hours, and a proposed 5% salary increase for Town employees. Ms. Iken spoke to the need of an additional DPW employee, saying that the DPW Supervisor, Mike Yannotti, has a plow route that is frequently interrupted when he is needed for something that he is responsible for: a truck breaks down, there's a situation in the field etc. He is also doing the administrative tasks for the DPW. Ms. Miller returned to the 5% salary increase, saying that employees were doing more work to keep up with increased State requirements and that the Town could either hire additional staff or increase salaries, that a 3% increase had been considered but the 5% increase would only be 1% of the Town budget. Ms. Miller finished by saying that an estimate of tax increases this year was not provided because the property tax reappraisal was not complete. Ms. Dexter said that estimate would be available at the end of May.

Mr. Dailey asked Mr. Ed Corey to come forward and discuss an error he had found in the proposed budget. \$5,000.00 for Turning Point Center had been omitted from the Community Appropriations. This would change the total on page 36 of the report to \$45,575.00. However, the proposed budget in the warning was correct. Mr. Dailey confirmed that the warned article being voted on was the correct amount. Mr. Corey agreed. It was confirmed that the \$5,000.00 Turning Point Center appropriation was on the ballot for the March 3rd vote.

A question was asked by another resident regarding budget shortfalls on page 35 of the Town Report. She wanted to know how these were covered. Ms. Dexter was asked to explain. She said that in fund accounting, you carry a fund balance, which would be the equivalent of a profit in a for-profit fund company that carries over from year to year. If expenses and revenues are exactly equal, then the fund balance would be unaffected. When expenses are greater than revenues, the fund balance will go down, and vice versa. When the Town spends more money than it budgeted, the fund balance decreases. The resident then asked where the fund balance showed up. Ms. Dexter answered that it is in the financial report from the professional auditors and in the Treasurer's Report, as seen on page 14 of the Town Report.

Another resident asked for clarification on medical benefits for full and part time employees. Ms. Iken answered that full time employees have medical benefits that they pay part of. She went into details of the requirements of a DPW employee, HRAs and medical caps. The resident then asked about the proposed 5% employee pay raise and if it was a merit raise. Ms. Iken said it was not. She continued that giving the DPW crew a 5% raise makes sense because if they aren't compensated fairly in this economic climate, the Town will lose some of them. They have many opportunities in the area to make more money than they are. The Town has invested in their training and certifications, and

appreciates them. Another resident suggested hiring a part-time DPW worker for the winter. Ms. Iken said that it was very difficult because people with the skills required want a full time job.

Karen Mellinger continued the conversation about hiring an additional DPW employee, questioning again whether a part time person could be hired. Ms. Iken reiterated that it is difficult to find a person with the required qualifications to work part time. Ms. Mellinger then opened a discussion of the percentage of budget increase, which was stated as 9% but Ms. Mellinger believed the amount to be raised in taxes was 14.5% more than the previous year and the budget was 11% more. She asked if the Town could afford a 5% pay raise for employees and suggested a 3.5% raise. She went on to ask if there were areas where cuts could be made. Ms. Iken answered that the salary increase amount and an additional DPW employee needed discussion. Ms. Mellinger asked the moderator if a specific amount was needed to make a motion to reduce the budget. Mr. Dailey answered yes, it would be an amendment to the main motion, Article 3.

Next to speak was Bill Sargent. He asked about DPW construction and equipment funding and if projects could be delayed. Ms. Iken noted that paving projects were contingent on grants that were still pending. Then Amy Smith had a follow-up question to Ms. Mellinger's. She asked if, instead of doing an across-the-board 5%, had a more nominal raise and merit bonuses been considered? She said once you bump an entire town's salary at 5%, you're not going down. That's the base rate now. If you do 2% or similar, and then do bonuses as appropriate, you have more control over expenditures from year to year. Ms. Iken said that had not been discussed, but it was a good idea. She noted that she was in the process of writing comprehensive job descriptions, so that the scope of the work of each employee is understandable.

Tim Scoggins spoke next in support of the Select Board's decision to attract and retain the employees that they have, especially on the road crew. He noted that the roads have gotten better in Shaftsbury in the last 5 years and that he would pay extra not to have the roads turned to soup. Mr. Scoggins thought that the way you get competent, trustworthy employees is by compensating them for what they're worth.

Next to speak was John Drake. He asked if it was possible to suggest a motion that the budget increase for next year be limited to 4.5%. Mr. Dailey responded that this would come under other business. He noted that the Article being discussed dealt with a number which is for a set period of time, based on certain, historical expenditures and assumptions. Any direct actions taken would be reflected in the number being voted on during the Town Meeting. Mr. Dailey continued by asking how often the Select board meets. Ms. Miller answered that it meets twice a month, and the agenda is available ahead of time on the website, and the agenda spells out when the Board is discussing budget items, payroll items, etc. There were 3 meetings on the budget. Mr. Dailey suggested that Town residents attend those meetings to provide input to the Select Board.

An unidentified resident offered an amendment to the main motion. He proposed that the budget be reduced by \$50,000.00 to \$3,171,460.25. This was seconded and discussion was opened. Mr. John Ricky said while the idea of making cuts to the budget seems like a good idea, it's a last-ditch opportunity. He continued that if amendments were going to be made to the budget, it should have been done in select board meetings when the budget was being put together and that asking haphazardly for a \$50,000.00 cut didn't seem responsible.

Carlyn Mickle, Shaftsbury Zoning Administrator and Assistant Town Clerk, spoke next. She asked what the final pay increase in terms of people hours was. Ms. Iken said it was \$25,000. Ms. Mickle said this would be divided between 3,400 residents, so it would add \$7.35 per person annually.

Rick Bennett, Chair of the Economic Development Community, spoke next saying that Ms. Miller had made the point that the difference between a 3% increase and a 5% increase overall is a 1% change in the overall budget. He noted that in 2023 approximately 52.5% of Shaftsbury households had an income of greater than \$100,000. He continued that CDL certification for DPW employees is not an easy task, and that it seems appropriate to try to keep these people at any cost.

Mr. Dailey reminded those present that the discussion on the floor was the amendment to the main motion which effectively would reduce the budget by \$50,000. Ron Burke said he opposed the amendment. The question was then called, and the moderator asked for a motion end debate. This was moved and seconded. A voice vote defeated the amendment to reduce the budget.

Mr. Dailey then brought the discussion back to the main motion that had been made and seconded, that the Town would appropriate the sum of \$3,221,460.25 to defray the town's general and highway expenses for fiscal year 2027. There was no further discussion, and a voice vote approved the budget.

Mr. Dailey then introduced Article 4: To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting at this time. He noted that several representatives of groups with community appropriations on the had asked to speak. Karen Rose of Monty's House Wildlife Rehab spoke first, then Cindy Luce, Executive Director of Bennington County Habitat for Humanity, followed by Erin Lebovitz, Director of Lake Paran. Next up was Dylan Johnson, a recovery coach at the Turning Point Center of Bennington County, then Dr. David King for the G. Richard Dundas Free Clinic, aka the Bennington Free Clinic, followed by Gail Tiffany, board member for Sunrise Family Resources, Alan Baker from WBTS, and Martha Cornwell for the North Shaftsbury Community Club. All gave updates on their organizations.

Town Assessor Clerk Gina Jenks gave a brief update on the reappraisal process and encouraged residents to contact her if information about their property is incorrect. There will be a meeting before a grievance period which will be towards the end of June.

Mr. Dailey then brought up generic other business and noted that anything discussed or voted was advisory only and not a binding action. He said that several people came up to him prior to the meeting wanting to speak on the same topic, the Apartheid Free Community Pledge. First to speak were Rich Jorgenson and Grace Winslow. They discussed the purpose and scope of the Apartheid Free Community movement and its brochure. They went on to recount the February 2, 2026, Select Board meeting where they asked the Select Board to support adoption of the pledge, which the Select Board did on February 17, 2026. After reading their brochure, they claimed that Shaftsbury had, in 2024, contributed \$215,000.00 to Israel. There was no supporting documentation of this number provided. Mr. Jorgenson continued that "The Apartheid Free Community Pledge will encourage future ethical decision-making considerations while leaving boards free to make financially realistic choices when necessary." He stressed that adoption would be non-binding and would not create any legal or fiduciary obligations for the Town of Shaftsbury. He then continued "However, the next step will be to identify and implement measures that fulfill the Apartheid Free Community Pledge to end all support

to Israel's apartheid regime.” He asked that the residents affirm the Select Board’s decision by adopting the pledge.

Mr. Dailey asked if, and Mr. Jorgenson confirmed that, the contents of the brochure was what the Select Board adopted on February 17, 2026. (Note: This was corrected later in the meeting.) Mr. Dailey then said that Mr. Jorgenson had made a motion that this be affirmed and asked for a second, which was received. The floor was then opened for discussion. Mr. Carl Corman asked residents to take “with a grain of salt” that Shaftsbury has given Israel over \$200,000. He went on to say that there's nothing in the pledge that says it's non-binding and that the Select Board adopted a major change in the Town's economic policy that is going to alter the way the Town contracts for equipment if it chooses to live up to the pledge. He continued that the Board's decision failed to consider the town's legal exposure or the economic impacts on the Town. Mr. Corman then said the Board’s action was taken without the issuance of an adequate warning. (This was noted as incorrect. The Apartheid Free Community presentation was on the agenda for the February 2, 2026, Select Board meeting and the Follow-up on Apartheid-free Town proposal was on the agenda for the February 17, 2026, Select Board meeting.) Mr. Corman asked for a non-binding vote to rescind the resolution which commits the town to new operating procedures established by an outside political movement. Another resident then spoke on the emotional division caused by the resolution. The next speaker was Tess?. She noted that the actions were warned, and that information was publicly available to everyone It wasn't some quick decision done secretly, it took weeks. Lance Allen Wang then spoke about the reasons for keeping issues that are out of the local government's purview out of town hall, noting again that it pits neighbor against neighbor and “when the political exercise is completed, it has achieved no end since it's out of the town's jurisdiction, but the damage is done to local relationships and dynamics, personally and sometimes professionally.” Next was Peter Bosco who said he was opposed to the resolution saying, “We don't really know the ramifications of what's going to happen.” Naomi Blackman then spoke in support of the resolution saying “I ask those who profess to love Israel to take off your blinders, to recognize the shameful and brutal reality of Israel's war on the Palestinian people, and instead advocate for a truly just and democratic society, as we demand of our own government.” Several non-residents spoke both for and against the resolution. Andrea Bacchi then spoke, saying she would like the Town to have more transparency “so that people in the town can have opinions and learn and grow and have conversations.” There was further discussion on exactly what the Select Board voted on so the exact wording of the pledge was read: “We affirm our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people and all people. We oppose all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and depression, and we declare ourselves an apartheid-free community, and to that end we pledge to join others in working to end all support to Israel's apartheid regime, settlement colonialism, and military occupation.”

The question was then called, and the moderator said that the motion to be voted on has been made and seconded. There was some confusion on whether the vote was for or against affirming the pledge. It was confirmed that an Aye vote would affirm adopting the pledge. A Nay vote would oppose adopting the pledge. There was a motion to table this vote which was seconded and passed. A motion was then made to have the Select Board rescind the pledge. This was seconded and no discussion was wanted so there was a vote. The outcome could not be determined by voice vote. The moderator requested a show of hands. The show of hands was in favor of rescinding the pledge.

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded. The meeting was adjourned around 9:20 PM.