

POMFRET
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
March 1, 2016

Moderator Kevin Geiger called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He asked for the assembly's consent for the meeting to be digitally recorded. Pomfret School student Cooper Jones was asked to serve as the microphone runner for the meeting.

1. Kevin Geiger was elected Moderator for a one-year term.

At this time Kevin Geiger read the names of the deaths and births in town from 2015, and noted the passing of Daphne Gratiot in February. Joanna Long spoke about Daphne's kind character, friendship, and years of service to the town.

Our State Representative Teo Zagar was granted permission of the assembly to speak about some of the items currently in discussion before the House, including Act 46 (school district unification). Gerry Fields thanked Teo for writing such clear articles on the subject in the Vermont Standard.

2. Rebecca (Becky) Fielder was elected Town Clerk for a one-year term.

3. Norwood Long moved to accept the reports as submitted, seconded by Frank Perron. The motion to accept the reports as submitted passed by unanimous voice vote.

4. Anne Bower moved and Orson St. John seconded the motion to increase the membership of the Select Board from three to five members. Anne noted that the workload of the Select Board has been increasing, and as 2 members discussing anything outside a meeting makes a quorum in violation of open meeting law, that increasing to 5 members would be very helpful. Elaine Chase felt that in a small town with under 1000 residents it is unnecessary to have a larger board. Neil Lamson said he is against the increase for two reasons: 1. The Select Board now has an Administrative Assistant to help with the workload, and he should be given a chance; and 2. The ability for 2 Select Board members to speak outside of a meeting will result in minds being made up before the information has come to the full Board. Gaal Crowl expressed that the town has a lot of talent to offer, and that having more participation is always best, as it offers a wider variety of opinions and experience. Norwood Long noted that two candidates have come forward that would be willing to serve if the Board increases to 5 members. Scott Woodward noted his view that open meeting law is about individual behavior, and that Neil's opinion is certainly possible but is the negative view; a positive view would be that with more people involved in the discussion, that the board would be able to better prepare for the discussion and decisions that need to be made in a meeting. Scott Milne asked what the current Board's opinions were. Eric Chase felt that the inconsistencies should be resolved as the board works with the Administrative Assistant, and that they need time to learn how to function together. Phil Dechert felt that 5 member boards always break down to the same 3-to-2 votes. He agreed that there are inefficiencies, but with 3 members you are forced to work together without factions. He was also concerned that it could be hard to fill offices. Michael Reese thought that having more members tends to result in better decisions, and that more experience and more perspectives is best. Betsy Siebeck noted that there can be factions in any sized board, and that the positives of a larger board include spreading out the workload and being able to get more accomplished. She also pointed out that the decision is not irreversible, and can be revoked in the future if it doesn't work out. Joanna Long expressed that there do not need to be factions if they are people of good will. Nancy Matthews understands the logic of using the Administrative Assistant, but still believes that there are more projects than the AA can do alone. Ron Rhodes relayed that he has served on non-profit boards, and that diversity is always a good thing. Frank Perron, Orson St. John, and Andy Mann spoke in support of the increase. Andy added that the negative examples were of boards behaving badly, and that having teams of 2 within the board that then report back to the full board would allow them to get more done. Bob Coates expressed that there have been great advantages to having the school board increase last year from 3 to 6 members. Valerie Chase asked how much adding 2 more members would cost, and was told by the current board that the stipend is generally \$1000 per year per member, but the current budgeted number could also be revised by vote. Bill Emmons asked if the Administrative Assistant would still be needed. Phil Dechert replied that maybe he would not, but currently he does research that perhaps the new members would not be willing or able to take on – it will depend on the makeup of the new board. Scott Woodward said that if the Administrative Assistant is not needed, that the Town will save a lot of money for more "horsepower" on the board. Following this discussion, the motion passed by a majority voice vote.

5. Andy Mann moved that the voters authorize the Select Board to appoint a collector of delinquent taxes pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2651d, and Norm Buchanan seconded the motion. Phil Dechert explained that the delinquent tax collector is an important and technical job, and that changing from an elected position to an appointee would allow the board to find someone with the necessary qualifications and training to get the job done more effectively. Norm asked what the pay would be, and Phil stated that currently it is a \$2500/year stipend. Amy Robb asked what qualifications were necessary. Phil noted that there are a lot of inexpensive workshops and training for someone who is interested. Regarding qualifications, he said that one must have the time to commit,

common sense as well as the ability to deal well with people. Gaal Crowl voiced that it has the potential to be an odious job, requiring a thick skin or extraordinary people skills, and that we might want to revisit the incentive to do the job in terms of the compensation. Phil agreed, but said that the Select Board and Auditors would have to revisit the costs to determine whether a portion of the 8% penalty assessed would be more appropriate. Laura Kent relayed that the stipend is in line with what other town officials are paid for their time. She also made note that those who are struggling to pay their taxes do have the opportunity to have their taxes abated if they meet the abatement criteria, an option that is often overlooked. Joanna Long reminded the assembly that ultimately the question before them was just to vote on whether to elect or appoint the delinquent tax collector. Andy Mann noted that if the delinquent tax collector is elected and isn't doing their job, there is nothing that can be done to replace them until the next election, and Bruce Tuthill agreed. Regina Lawrence then made a motion to call the question, and the motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

6. The following officers were elected:

Select Board	3 year term	Frank Perron	Unopposed
Select Board	1 year term	Sheila Hopkins	Unopposed
Select Board	1 year term	Melanie Williams	Unopposed
Treasurer	1 year term	Ellen DesMeules	Unopposed
Cemetery Commissioner	3 year term	Bruce Tuthill	Unopposed
Lister	3 year term	Becky Fielder	Unopposed
Lister	2 year term	no nominations – vacant	
Lister	1 year term	Norm Buchanan	Unopposed
Auditor	3 year term	no nominations - vacant	
Grand Juror	1 year term	Michael Reese	Unopposed
Town Agent	1 year term	John Putnam	Unopposed
Library Trustee	3 year term	Anne Bower	Unopposed
Library Trustee	3 year term	Jean Souther	Unopposed
Trustee of Public Funds	3 year term	Michael Doten	Unopposed

Phil Dechert was nominated to the office of Select Board (3 year term), but politely declined. Michael Reese thanked Phil for all his hard work and the time he has put in for the town. Following the election of the first Lister, there was discussion by Laura Kent (former Lister), Andy Mann, and Phil Dechert regarding the position and whether it is appropriate to seek out potential candidates or bring in an outside assessor to take on the work.

7. Regina Lawrence moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$38,815 for the Abbott Memorial Library. Lydia Spitzer seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.

8. Bill Emmons moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,653 as the town's share of service for the Woodstock Council on Aging to run the Thompson Senior Center. Liz Hatfield seconded the motion. Bill Emmons shared that he is now on the Board of the Center, and is very excited to serve in an organization with so much positivity and support. Melanie Williams relayed an experience she had where she was able to borrow medical supplies necessary for a surgical recovery from the Center. Cathy Hazlett asked why the amount of the request was so specific. Deanna Jones, executive director of the Thompson Senior Center, noted that it is a percentage increase; she also expressed what a pleasure it was to serve in this role and encouraged people to utilize the services they have to offer. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

9. Melanie Williams moved and Laura Kent seconded the motion that the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,500 to support programming of the Ottauquechee Community Partnership (OCP) and OCP's Mentor and Buddy Program. Cathy Hazlett said that she supports programs of this nature but felt that it was a lot of money to ask; she then made a motion to amend the article down to \$1000, which Moderator Kevin Geiger ruled out of order. Michael Reese, Deanna Jones, Joanna Long, and Anne Bower all spoke out in supporting the full amount that OCP has requested. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

10. Laura Kent moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$400 to WISE, whose mission it is to provide free crisis intervention and support services to victims of domestic and sexual violence, training to community members and professionals, and prevention education. Frank Perron seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.

11. Bill Emmons moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$3,950 to help support the home health, maternal and child health, and hospice care provided in patients' homes and in community settings by the Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice for VT and NH. Betsy Siebeck seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.

12. Norwood Long moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$750 to support programming of the Spectrum Teen Center. Terry Kenison seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.

13. Andy Mann moved to ask the Town to authorize the Selectboard to borrow money, if necessary, for the payment of current expenses of the Town pending receipts of payments of taxes. Amy Robb seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.

14. Frank Perron moved that the Town approve the budget of \$1,358,491 for town and highway expenses for FY2017, and Orson St. John seconded. Phil Dechert explained that the town budget is up slightly but the highway budget is down slightly from the previous year, and that funding the reserve accounts should smooth out some of the "lumps" from previous years on bigger ticket items. The amount to collect is higher for two reasons: 1. the accountant we are working with advised us to not include delinquent taxes as expected income as it is not guaranteed income; and 2. many landowners have taken advantage of the Current Use Program's Easy-Out option which will reduce the amount being reimbursed to us by the State (those individual landowners are now responsible for that tax burden). He noted that having Eric Chase's expertise on the board and as Road Commissioner has helped to trim down the highway budget. Eric noted that this budget funds a level of service that the residents of Pomfret have come to expect. Michael Reese agreed, and stated that some budget line items have increased to keep the level of service up. Orson St. John requested an explanation of some inconsistencies on the reserve account lines, and the Select Board members clarified that the reserve account expenses are kept separate from the budget, and that grant money is also put into those accounts in addition to voted funding. Andy Mann and Neil Lamson both expressed that the reserve accounts should each have a mini-budget to allow for better reporting, and Neil commended the Auditors and Treasurer for their work in better implementing the capabilities of the NEMRC accounting software. There was discussion of the paving reserve fund and the grants that are being consistently applied for to keep the reserve account at a smooth level. Betsy Rhodes requested that the Select Board move to include a clear picture of what it takes to run the town in a given year. Betsy Siebeck noted that the problems that are being brought out can be solved by creating a balance sheet budget every year, and went on to point out that the current annual report is a good one. Following this discussion, the motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

15. Kevin Rice moved the Article to see what sum the Town will raise in taxes (estimated at \$961,806). Andy Mann seconded, then called on the Auditors, Treasurer and Select Board to have these reports ready right away at the end of the fiscal year. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

16. Anne Bower moved, and Frank Perron seconded, that the voters of the Town of Pomfret require that taxes be paid in two installments, on or before 2:30pm August 19, 2016 and February 10, 2017. Interest on overdue taxes will be charged at 1% per month, and all delinquent taxes will be subject to an 8% penalty after February 11, 2017 in accordance with Vermont Statutes. There was a question raised as to whether the tax collector needs to be specifically named in the article, but was deemed unnecessary as by Statute the Treasurer is automatically the tax collector. The motion then passed by voice vote.

17. Frank Perron moved and Orson St. John seconded the Article to advise the Select Board to create a 3 to 5 person committee with the following responsibilities: A. Develop a combined capital plan for projected expenditures from FY17 through FY24 that includes expenditures for highway, emergency services and town infrastructure & buildings; B. Create a detailed capital funding strategy that relies on a variety of funding sources, e.g., grants, financing and reserve accounts; and C. Recommend to the Select Board the three best options to fund the Town's future capital expenditures on an annual basis. Orson opined the need for a committee to dig deep and look for ways to cut expenditures and get a better plan for upcoming big expenditures. Scott Woodward noted that things are getting more expensive and that the Town of Pomfret is not the only one in the state who are seeing an increase in capital expenses. He felt that a committee would give the Town the opportunity to use the expertise of its citizens to create a comprehensive capital plan. Frank Perron, Melanie Williams, and Kevin Rice all expressed their support for creation of such a committee, and Kevin noted that in the past the Select Board has voted to decrease the money put into reserve funds for future projects in order to cut budget expenses, to their detriment, and highlighted the importance of keeping those reserves level funded. Frank requested that anyone interested in serving on the committee please speak up or contact one of the Select Board members, as they can use any and all help they can get. Sherman Kent urged the proposed committee to pay close attention to line B, regarding other funding options than taxpayer money. Orson St. John mentioned that the Auditors have said that they are fully in support of the creation of this committee. After this discussion, the motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

18. Other proper and necessary business:

Frank Perron reported that the FAST Squad is looking for people interested in joining as their volunteer numbers are down. There is training available and volunteers at all levels, including young people over the age of 16 as cadets, are needed and welcome. He encouraged potential volunteers to speak to him or any other FAST Squad member for more information.

Norwood Long has made a questionnaire available from Sustainable Woodstock regarding solar siting, and would like as many people to respond as possible to share their views on locations and shielding of solar sites.

Bill Emmons first recognized the tribute in the Town Annual Report to Leon Stetson. He thanked Leon for all he has done, and for loving our town. This remark was met with applause and a standing ovation for Leon. Next he mentioned that the Planning Commission is looking for more members. Lastly, he jokingly suggested that the Select Board appropriate some funds to fix the broken clock in the Town Hall.

Bob Merrill updated everyone about the ECFiber network that has been partially built out in town, and noted that the Town Offices will soon be hooked up once the hub work is completed. He also passed on information about pre-registering for service, which can be found on ECFiber's website. He noted that the town's (unofficial) listserv has surpassed 300 members, and that interested people can subscribe to the list by sending an email to pomfret-subscribe@lists.vitalcommunities.org. Finally, he thanked Channel 8 Public Access out of Woodstock for lending us the microphone used during the meeting.

Bob Coates mentioned that Green-Up Day is coming up, and with the lack of snow cover we can already see that there is a lot of junk along the roads. He encourages everyone to get out and participate on Saturday May 7th.

Kevin Rice asked all the volunteers in the Fire Department and FAST Squad to stand and be recognized.

Anne Bower announced a talk on historical preservation at the Library on Sunday March 13th at 3:00pm. She also noted that beginning in April or May the cresting tiles will begin to be installed on the Library roof, and thanked everyone who donated to make this project possible.

Joanna Long thanked the road crew for taking such good care of the roads, and for being aware of the invasive species and adapting the mowing schedule to avoid the spread of seeds.

Bill Emmons moved to adjourn, the Moderator declared the meeting closed at 11:46 AM. The new officers were sworn to their duties by Becky Fielder.

Lunch was served by the Thompson Senior Center to benefit their Meals on Wheels program.

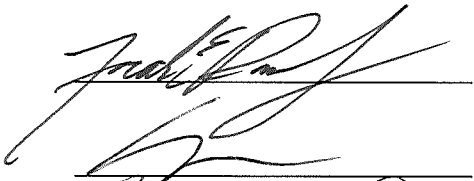
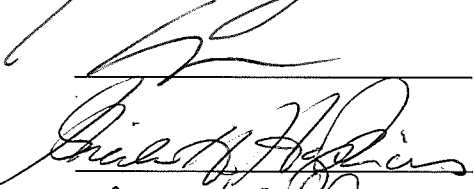
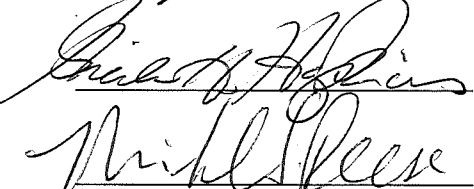
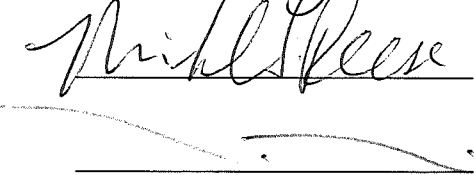

Respectfully submitted,



Rebecca Fielder, Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:

Date:

	<u>6 April 16</u>
	<u>4/6/16</u>
	<u>4/6/16</u>
	<u>4/6/16</u>
	<u>4-6/16</u>