

Town of Pomfret Special Select Board Meeting
February 20, 2021

Town Meeting Information

Present: Emily Grube, Steve Chamberlin, Scott Woodward, John Peters, Chuck Gundersen,
Kevin Geiger Moderator

Public: Betsy Rhodes, Elly Pizzani, Terry Kennison, Holly Strahan, Nick Goldsmith, Hull
Maynard, Patti Wickersham, Ann Raynolds, Priscilla Masicovetere, Nancy Matthews, Joanna
Long, Scott Milne, Billy Emmons, Alice Gundersen, India Mazzucco, Hillary White, Kevin
Rice, Marge Wakefield, Phil Dechert, Annie Bower, Deanna Jones, Jon Harrington, Margaret
Maynard, Ben Brickner, Sean Williams, Alan Graham, John Moore, Cathy Peters, Becky
Fielder, Cory Smith, Craig McRae, Neil Lamson, Cynthia Hewitt

1. Emily Grube called the meeting to order at 9:00 am
2. No public Comment
3. Town Meeting. Review – Kevin Geiger, Moderator – Please stay on mute until you are recognized; talk only to Kevin. No back and forth. Comments limited to one minute. Subject of the meeting is the Town Warning, in the Town Report.
 - a) Becky Fielder-- In-person voting is available on Tuesday, March 2, 8 am- 7 pm. Mask, hand sanitizing, and social distancing are required. Bring your ballot, mail slot, ballot box, or come in to vote.
 - b) Article 3 – Budget Figures. Follow up to Betsy Rhodes’ comments on the 17th regarding confusing budget figures – those in the warning do not match those in the town report p. 31 – Emily stated the Social Appropriations are listed separately in the warning because they had to be separate items in order to be sure each was considered vs considered as a whole. The amount of \$487661 is taxes already raised. Also, there is a general fund balance involved 45056 which has to be voted on.
 - c) Articles 4-14 – Social Appropriations were all the same amount as last year. Deanna Jones stated that the Thompson Senior Center has a robust aging at home support program focused during this pandemic. They served 1268 Meals on Wheels to Pomfret residents, twice the amount of last year.
 - d) Article 15 – Teago Village Fund – John Peters explained -- Kathleen Dolan, the Executive Director of Artistry, agreed to pay a donation of \$20000 in lieu of taxes for Artistree, a nonprofit organization. This bestows \$10000 into an unrestricted reserve fund, and \$10000 replaces that amount of taxes. The Selectboard made the decision to create the Teago Village Fund. The Board would like to use the money towards making the Pomfret Road, Stage Road Library Street safer for pedestrians and bicycle traffic. Need voters’ approval to establish a reserve fund. No formalized plans have been made regarding the intersection after Teago construction. Emily Grube stated that the board wishes to increase pedestrian safety in the area. Rita Seto from Two Rivers is helping with design. Billy Emmons asked how long this donation would last, John Peters answered it is for 10 years. Jon Harrington asked if the developer was paying for the curbing, access management, etc. Scott Woodward answered yes. John Peters reported a mutually owned culvert, was partly paid by

Pomfret. Elly Pisani asked if Teago was separate from Artistry – Scott Woodward answered yes.

- e) Article 15 -- An unassigned fund balance of \$45,056 will offset the current year's taxes. The Selectboard needs reauthorization to spend these funds.
- f) Article 17 -- Change the Collector of Delinquent Taxes compensation from stipend to hourly. Annie Bower asked the rationale for this change – it was explained that the stipend did not reflect the amount of work going into the process.
- g) Article 18 – Highway Equipment Reserve Fund and re-appropriate the balance in the existing Sinking Fund (can only be used to pay debt). Neil Lamson stated all equipment purchases seem to be from a reserve fund. Neil asked should we be leasing highway equipment? Steve Chamberlin indicated the Capital Planning Committee report detailed leased equipment that would cost \$68-70000 in interest alone. Scott Woodward – This is a much bigger project than this year's budget. Other factors to consider, i.e., cash flow, or how much tax payers must pay. May come a time to lessen impact on tax payers. Chuck Gundersen's preference is that the Select Board and Town purchase equipment when the money is available and not get into financing situations, and that the town own their equipment versus leasing and financing. Steve also feels it puts the town in an awkward position to be in debt, and in an emergency lowers the towns ability to borrow. Scott Woodward points out this equity issue is a back and forth philosophically, financing is looking ahead to align the equity of the purchase, the people getting the value are those paying for it. John Peters stated that tax payers have the choice to approve the budget, the Select Board does not need permission from the taxpayers to take out a loan, what happens if they vote down a budget so they do not have to pay off the loan. Emily is a firm believer, philosophically, that if you can afford to purchase and not pay interest is the way to go. This preserves our ability to borrow in emergencies such as Irene, we had \$1 million repairs. The cost of equipment is what you need to keep equipment on the ground every year. Annual cost is the same each year, unless you borrow the money. Nancy Matthew addressed the equity issue. What is fair is to have a stable tax rate. The budgets are one thing, the reserve funds have been formed to handle big expenses. If you plan for the future carefully you can fund the reserves to handle large purchases to maintain a stable tax rate. Chuck Gundersen – feels it is quite equitable to use the reserve funds. Scott Woodward agrees stable taxes is “where it's at” and should be the goal of the Board, to keep it at a steady and predictable rate.
- h) Article 19 – Tax collection, dates, penalties, etc.
- i) Question – Cathy Peters – Wonders why the fire department budget is 4.5. times larger this year. (Page 26. Line 204) Kevin Rice explained they underwent a hose inspection and must purchase 1000ft of 4” hose. Cathy also wondered if they were able to staff North Station with lack of manpower. The town has been faced with a challenge by people moving away, retired, etc. Kevin has 12-13 active firefighters; he has reallocated manpower there are now 4 people assigned to North station. Rescue truck responds from North station. It is a non-transport piece of equipment. Can be used at the scene of an accident or fire. Chuck Gundersen thanks Kevin Rice for all the time and effort he's put into the fire department and emergency services. Kevin Rice is humbled working with such a dedicated department. They spent 300 hours in training towards serving in our community. They are the heart and soul.

- j) Billy Emmons thanks all participants today and commented on the nice town report, with the exception of page 60, there is a picture of a cow in a pond. This goes against all required agricultural practices imposed upon farmers by the State of Vermont. They are trying to prevent animals being kept close to water bodies and making great strides towards clean waterways. This photo is a flagrant disregard. . Steve Chamberlin suggests this picture was taken in Woodstock.
 - k) Betsy Rhodes, working with Alan Graham, will be making a presentation late in April re: invasive plants in Pomfret.
 - l) Scott Woodward is working with Alan Graham and the Pomfret Historical Society to update Pomfret Veterans and to design a Veterans' Memorial.
 - m) Elly Pizzani Thanks everybody in the town government, fire department, library, have seen people out working in a very orderly fashion, she supports totally the social services allocations.
 - n) Question from McRae – Emily Grube answered -- Teago Store is owned by Kathleen Dolan. We are not doing anything to invest in her private business. Artistry is nonprofit and exempt from taxes, via a State process. Ms. Dolan agreed to personally donate 200% of her taxes towards forgiveness of her taxes. No Town funds into her business. Teago Village Fund is to help improve safety around the Library, Teago, and Artistry pedestrian traffic. Teago has nothing to do with a tax deal, it is not nonprofit. John Peters commented.
 - o) Neil Lamson, in the absence of Fred Doton, gives proper recognition to the highway crew for the tremendous job they have done this year.
 - p) Elly Pizzani thanks the moderate, Kevin Geiger, for doing a wonderful job.
4. Scott Woodward moved and John Peters seconded for adjournment at 10:10 am.