

POMFRET

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

March 3, 2015

Moderator Kevin Geiger called the meeting to order at 9:15 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. The Reverend Jennifer Donaldson offered a prayer of peace to the assembly.

1. Kevin Geiger was elected Moderator for a one-year term. The oath of office was given by Town Clerk Becky Fielder.

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

3. Orson St. John moved to accept the reports as submitted, seconded by Mark Warner. Orson St. John encouraged the Selectboard to include the Fire Department Capital Plan for Equipment Replacement over the next several years in future town reports. The motion to accept the reports as submitted passed by unanimous voice vote.

4. The following officers were elected:

Selectboard	3 year term	Scott Woodward	Unopposed
Treasurer	1 year term	Ellen DesMeules	Unopposed
Collector of Delinquent Taxes	1 year term	Jay Potter	Unopposed
Cemetery Commissioner	3 year term	Ona Chase	Unopposed
Cemetery Commissioner	1 year term	Bruce Tuthill	Unopposed
Lister	3 year term	1 declined nomination - vacant	
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	Betsy Siebeck	Unopposed
Library Trustee	3 year term	Tessa Westbrook	Unopposed
Trustee of Public Funds	3 year term	no nominations - vacant	

Laura Kent was nominated to the office of Lister, but politely declined. Following the election of the Library Trustees, outgoing Trustee Jenny Satterfield was thanked by Betsy Siebeck for her dedication and service to the Library Board for the last 9 years.

5. Anne Bower moved that the Town of Pomfret vote to prohibit the office of Constable from exercising any law enforcement authority pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §1936(a). JoAnn Webb seconded the motion. Melanie Williams wished to make clear that voting yes is a vote to take away law enforcement authority from the Constable. Marge Wakefield asked what the Constable's duties consist of without law enforcement, and Kevin Geiger read from subsection (b) of the statute in question that outlines the Constable's duties. Laura Kent clarified that the vote is essentially to remove the rights of search and seizure and arrest from the position of Constable. Andy Mann pointed out that the Town can vote to change this in the future if deemed necessary. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

6. Anne Bower moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$37,754 for the Abbott Memorial Library. Betsy Rhodes seconded the motion. Eleanor Pizzani spoke to what a wonderful resource and beautiful setting we have in the library, and Deanna Jones echoed her sentiments with regards to the after-school program for children. Melanie Williams pointed out that the Library is the only town department that nearly level-funded this year. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

7. Deanna Jones moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,575 as the town's share of service for the Woodstock Council on Aging to run the Thompson Senior Center. Liz Hatfield seconded the motion. Deanna Jones, executive director of the Thompson Senior Center, outlined the services provided to seniors in Pomfret, such as Meals On Wheels, transportation, and educational offerings. Joanna Long noted that the Senior Center rose to the occasion to provide the lunch service for our Town Meeting. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

8. Laura Kent moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,500 to support programming of the Ottaquechee Community Partnership (OCP) and OCP's Mentor and Buddy Program. Anne Bower seconded the motion, then

- spoke on behalf of the program as a past Mentor and encouraged support for the motion. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.
9. Laura Kent moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$400 to WISE, which states that it is the sole provider of emergency services and advocacy for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking in our area. Melanie Williams seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.
10. Marge Wakefield 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. Bill Emmons seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.
11. Marge Wakefield moved that the Town appropriate the sum of \$750 to support programming of the Spectrum Teen Center. Anne Bower seconded the motion, which then passed by unanimous voice vote.
12. Orson St. John moved that the Town authorize the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$374,000 from the Fire Apparatus Fund for the purchase of a pumper tanker for the use by the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department. Marge Wakefield seconded the motion. Chief Kevin Rice outlined the need for the new truck, speaking about the recent retirement of a tanker and the need for a pumper truck to be moved from primary to secondary status. He referred to the 1999 plan of the Pomfret Emergency Services Commission which outlined a recommended equipment replacement schedule. Scott Woodward commended Kevin and his crew for their recent public forum and informational session. Bill Emmons seconded Scott's comments, stating that there is a lot more to the fire department than just fighting fires – that they respond to all 911 calls at all hours of the day and night. Melanie Williams noted that neighboring towns rely heavily on donations, and that moving forward the department needs to look for more opportunities for financing aside from what the Town provides, such as fund-raisers and grants. Orson St. John referred to the 1999 PESC plan as well, agreeing that it was time to begin implementing the plan. Andy Mann asked Kevin to speak about the training and needs for volunteer firefighters, and Kevin outlined the training requirements and spoke of the cadet program. He also stressed that volunteers are always needed in all capacities, not just as firefighters but as auxiliary members as well to assist the department. Neil Lamson questioned why the purchase of the truck is not listed in the 2015-16 budget, and Phil Dechert clarified that the payment for the truck is coming out of funds already in the reserve account, and that in future reports the moneys allocated from reserve accounts will be indicated more clearly. Bruce Tuthill talked about the current truck and said that a replacement truck is necessary to avoid breakdowns and large repair bills. Leon Stetson remembered his time as fire chief and talked about how the equipment and needs have changed over the years, and indicated that he fully supports the needs of the department. Melanie Williams asked about the purchase cost, and Kevin answered that the current estimate for the truck is \$346,000. Betsy Rhodes asked if the money not spent will remain in the reserve fund for future needs, and Kevin affirmed that it would. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.
13. Norm Buchanan moved that the Town establish a reserve fund to be used for a future town-wide reappraisal, and Eleanor Pizzani seconded. Norm spoke of the need for a future reappraisal and the high cost associated with the undertaking, and that funding should be spread out over several years rather than as a lump sum in one year, as the cost could be higher due to the likely need for an outside appraiser. Frances Uptegrove asked why an outside appraiser would be necessary, and Norm said that it is a long and involved process and we do not have a full Lister board and that trend could continue. Other local towns already bring in outside appraisers to assist or perform their reappraisals. Phil Dechert said that the reserve fund is also necessary to hold grant funds that we receive from the state for future reappraisals. Betsy Rhodes agreed that it is getting more difficult to find people to fill the Lister position, and it is a good idea to plan ahead so we do not get hit with the entire cost all at once. The motion to establish the reserve fund passed by unanimous voice vote.
14. Phil Dechert moved that the Town establish a reserve fund to be used for restoration of the Town Hall. Marge Wakefield seconded the motion. Phil said that the purpose of setting up the fund is to plan for the long-term use, evaluation, and fund-raising for the building, and that with the possibility of grants and donations we need somewhere to keep the money. Scott Woodward asked if there was a sense of the to-do list for the hall, and Phil replied that there are plans to form a community committee to evaluate the needs and that it would be a public process. Orson St. John encouraged the Selectboard to have an idea of the cost of repairs, renovations, and needs by the next Town Meeting. Neil Lamson asked if a recent \$10,000 donation was earmarked for the Town Hall, and if that money would go into the reserve fund. Michael Reese said that the discussion and decision on that has yet to be made, and it will depend on the nature of the reserve account. Bill Emmons asked if there was a plan to get the building listed on the national historical register, and Phil said that it is a possibility but that no plan has been discussed yet publicly. The motion to establish the reserve fund passed by unanimous voice vote.
15. Mark Warner moved that the Town establish a reserve fund for re-paving town roads, and Marge Wakefield seconded the motion. Phil Dechert stressed the need to set up the account so that if the Town receives paving grant funds from the state, remaining budgeted funds may be carried over to the next year. Scott Woodward asked for clarification between resurfacing and rebuilding roads, and Phil talked a bit about the differences with regards to preventative maintenance versus complete rebuilding. The motion to establish the reserve fund passed by unanimous voice vote.

16. Marge Wakefield 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. Melanie Williams seconded the motion. Kevin Rice asked if this article is necessary now that the town is on a fiscal year budget. Andy Mann clarified that should we not have enough money at some time to pay bills the board could borrow money to cover expenses until the taxes are collected or until the following budget year when the money would be raised by taxes. Neil Lamson recalled Tropical Storm Irene, and stated that we may have the need to borrow extra funds in case of emergency. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

17. Orson St. John moved that the Town approve the budget of \$1,517,855 for town and highway expenses for FY2016, and Norm Buchanan seconded. Orson raised a question about \$25,000 under Highway Reserve Funding, asking if that money was for needed town garage repairs. Phil Dechert noted that there is a Town Building Reserve Fund that contains money that can be used for that purpose. Michael Reese stated that there are definite needs for garage repairs, but those are not reflected in this budget, and there will likely be a committee formed to evaluate the needs and costs to bring the garage to code. Sherman Kent brought up the disagreements on the budget and asked the Selectboard members to individually speak to their opinions on the budget as presented. Mark Warner expressed his approval of the budget, saying that there are concerns about some numbers but overall there is nothing extraordinary in there, and that future planning through the addition of funds to reserve counts is necessary. Michael Reese had voted against the budget and abstained on the tax rate vote at the final budget meeting of the Selectboard. He is particularly concerned about previous years' surpluses, as he feels that the extra money at the end of the year meant that certain areas were being overfunded and that we are overtaxing ourselves. Phil Dechert clarified that an error involving a surplus from the end of the 6-month budget earmarked for projects in the FY2015 was missed in the budget process, and that the amount being asked for to fund the FY2016 budget is too low. His recommendations were to either pass the budget as is and make adjustments later, or do not accept the budget and warn another town meeting this spring with a new budget. Andy Hunt, Vern Clifford, Betsy Siebeck, Frances Uptegrove, Melanie Williams, and Andy Mann all expressed concern with the current budget numbers and supported voting the budget down, with Betsy and Frances in favor of reworking it into a cleaner report. Betsy Rhodes agreed, and reminded everyone that because the fiscal year doesn't start until July 1, there is still some time to rework the numbers. Neil Lamson suggested that the Selectboard should start the budget process much earlier in the future in order to catch mistakes sooner. Norwood Long expressed that the process of putting the budget together has taken leaps ahead with the new budgeting/accounting system, and that the Town is on the road to doing budgeting the right way. Eric Chase asked for clarification on the Highway Special Projects line, and Michael Reese said that the numbers don't quite match up now, but they will. Ellen DesMeules, Town Treasurer, said that it is possible to rework the budget numbers, but that she was concerned that people had been discussing a half-million dollar decrease in the budget numbers and that that amount would be unrealistic. Andy Mann agreed with Ellen that a half-million dollar is an unrealistic decrease, but that there are still inconsistencies that warrant a closer look. He advocated for redoing the budget and annualizing expenses by funding reserve accounts rather than taking care of big expenses in the year they come up. Michael Reese clarified that he did not intend to say that the budget was half a million dollars overfunded, but that better planning is needed to avoid funding surpluses in the future. Scott Woodward expressed that we should not question the diligence of the people working on the budget, but that starting from scratch and taking a good hard look at every number is necessary. JoAnn Webb, Auditor, reassured the voters that though we are still in transition the actual amounts reported from 2014 are audited and accurate. Following this discussion, the motion was voted down by unanimous voice vote.

18. Neil Lamson moved the Article to see what sum the Town will raise in taxes (estimated at \$878,326). Phil Dechert seconded. Orson St. John suggested that as soon as the Selectboard can make a projection of the tax rate, they should publish it so property owners can budget for the expense. The motion was voted down by unanimous voice vote.

Following this vote, Moderator Kevin Geiger reminded everyone that there will need to be a special town meeting later in the spring to look at a new budget and new tax rate.

19. Norm Buchanan moved, and Marge Wakefield seconded, that the voters of the Town of Pomfret require that taxes be paid in two installments, on or before 2:30pm August 14, 2015 and February 12, 2016. An official USPS postmark/cancellation will determine the payment date for all mailed payments. Interest on overdue taxes will be charged at 1% per month, and all delinquent taxes will be subject to an 8% penalty after February 13, 2016 in accordance with Vermont Statutes. Ellen DesMeules brought up the possibility of changing the first tax due date to September as the state-set tax rates are often late getting to us to get the tax bills done in time. Andy Mann agreed that it was a good idea, but suggested we wait until next year to implement it. Norm Buchanan pointed out that if the state does not get the numbers to us in time for our warned collection date, the tax bills and due date will be delayed anyway. Joanna Long noted that when we have the special town meeting we can warn the issue of the date change. Phil Dechert also agreed that it was a good idea, and said that perhaps the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of September would be a suitable due date. Andy Mann agreed with Norm's statement, reminding everyone that taxes cannot be due before 30 days of the bill being sent out. Marge Wakefield asked what prompted the addition of a postmark or cancellation to the Article, and Phil Dechert clarified that we have a lot of mailed payments from out of state, so it made sense to base the due date on postmark so we cover ourselves in the event of late payments and assessed penalties. The original motion then passed by voice vote.

20. Other proper and necessary business:

Kevin Geiger passed along that our local representative, Teo Zagar, is sick and will not be attending the lunch today, but will be at Teago Store on Saturday morning if anyone has questions for him.

Ora Chase wondered why the handicap ramp at the Town Hall was not shoveled out. Phil Dechert replied that it was recommended not to open it because it is currently not ADA compliant and is unsafe as is. He also noted that it is on the repair list.

Neil Lamson thanked the road crew for doing such a great job this year through the multiple bad storms.

Bob Merrill updated everyone about the ECFiber trunk line that is set to go through from Howe Hill to the Pomfret School beginning this summer. He also talked about the process that ECFiber is undergoing to change to a municipal utility district governance structure; the benefit of this change is that it will make the utility more attractive to larger investors, which will allow them to further expand their service area.

Holly Strahan recognized the FAST Squad members for their service, and expressed that there is always a need for more volunteers. She then brought up whether it would make more sense to have Town Meeting on a weekend to allow for higher attendance. Melanie Williams and Joanna Long both replied that it is a good idea if it would actually raise attendance, but that we should look at other similar-sized towns who have moved their meetings to see if it was effective in getting more people involved.

Bob Coates encouraged everyone to attend the School Annual Meeting at 1:00pm, and relayed the news that the Town of Bridgewater voted "yes" to forming a Joint School District with Pomfret (Article 3 of the school meeting warning).

Keith Chase had a question about voted appropriations listed on Page 19 of the Town Annual Report, stating that we had actually only voted on about half of them. Betsy Rhodes clarified that organizations who have requested funding by petition for more than 5 consecutive years for amounts less than \$1000 can simply request the funding be added to the budget without the need for a petition.

Scott Woodward encouraged people to look at the current draft of the new Town Plan if they are interested in the future of land use in the town. He also mentioned that the Planning Commission will be looking at rewriting the Zoning Regulations for Pomfret once the Town Plan is finalized.

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

John Leavitt wanted to thank Hugh Hermann, Lysle Chase, and all the other veterans present for their service and asked them to stand and be recognized.

Phil Dechert thanked Kevin Geiger for his research, moderator prep, and efforts this year.

Becky Fielder reminded everyone that dog licenses are due on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

Orson St. John thanked Mark Warner for his years of service on the Selectboard.

Betty Stetson wished to recognize Leon Stetson for his many years of service as Fire Warden, as he retired this year. Frank Perron is the new Fire Warden.

Bill Emmons thanked the Chase family and all those who donated money for their efforts in keeping the open land at the corner of Pomfret Road and Hewitt Hill Road agricultural.

Bill Emmons moved to adjourn, and Frank Perron seconded. The meeting adjourned at 11:49 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:

3-16-15  
3-18-18  
3/18/15