

Town of Pomfret Selectboard
Annual Town Meeting Informational Hearing Minutes
February 24, 2024

Present: John Peters, Benjamin Brickner, Steve Chamberlin, Meg Emmons, Emily Grube

Public: Doug Abbott, Kasia Astbury, Anne Bower, Dan Bollag (Ottauquechee Health Foundation), Dana Chillag, Tina Clifford, Vern Clifford, Bob Crean, Ellen DesMeules, Mike Doten, Bill Emmons, Cathy Emmons, Gerry Fields, Francis Flynn, John Flynn, Kevin Geiger (Moderator), Alan Graham, Nancy Griffin, Sue Heston, Cynthia Hewitt (Selectboard Assistant), Nick Horvath, Deanna Jones (Thompson Senior Center), Laura Kent, Sherman Kent, Neil Lamson, Lydia Locke, Joanna Long, Norwood Long, Nancy Matthews, Margaret Maynard, Mike Perkins, Jack Peters, Chris Randle, Jocelyn Randle, Betsy Rhodes, Jim Robinson, Marie Robinson, Janet Salstrom, Betsy Siebeck, Cory Smith, Holly Strahan, Cory Swingle, Francine Uptegrove, Mary Worrell

1. John Peters called the informational hearing to order at 9:01 am.
2. Discussion of Annual Town Meeting Articles – Kevin Geiger, Town Moderator, began by observing the Annual Report tribute to the late Ron Weglarz and reading the names of those we lost or who were buried in Pomfret in 2023. A moment of silence followed. Mr. Geiger then proceeding through the Annual Town Meeting Warning article-by-article.

ARTICLE 1 – Election of Town Officers

Jim Robinson introduced himself, asked to be considered for Library Trustee, and explained his interest in the position. Mary Worrell announced she is seeking another term as Library Trustee. Steve Chamberlin asked to be considered for another three-year term on the Selectboard.

ARTICLE 2 – Collection of Current Taxes

No discussion.

ARTICLE 3 – Approval of FY 2025 Town and Highway Budget

Alan Graham suggested that future budgets roll over unused tree removal funds now that the emerald ash borer has been confirmed in Pomfret.

ARTICLE 4 – Appropriation to Abbott Memorial Library

Ms. Worrell, Library Trustee, thanked the Town for its continuing support of the Abbott Library and briefly described the Library's programming and noted that Library patronage has increased significantly since Covid.

ARTICLE 5 – Appropriation to Pomfret Cemetery Commission

No discussion.

ARTICLE 6 – Appropriation to Visiting Nurse and Hospice for VT and NH

Anne Bower urged the Town to vote in favor of this appropriation, describing VNH's service as a life changer and a life saver for many.

ARTICLE 7 – Appropriation to Woodstock Area Council on Aging (d.b.a. The Thompson Senior Center)

Deanna Jones, Executive Director of the Thompson Senior Center, thanked the Town for its continued support and noted that The Thompson reaches more than half of Pomfret’s over-65 age population. Bill Emmons reinforced Ms. Jones’ comments, explaining that The Thompson’s services are essential to Town residents.

ARTICLE 8 – Appropriation to Health Care and Rehabilitation Services

No discussion.

ARTICLE 9 – Appropriation to Empower Up - Windsor Central Mentoring Program

No discussion.

ARTICLE 10 – Appropriation to Spectrum Teen Center

No discussion.

ARTICLE 11 – Appropriation to Pentangle Arts

No discussion.

ARTICLE 12 – Appropriation to Ottauquechee Health Foundation

Dan Bollag, Treasurer of the Ottauquechee Health Foundation, thanked the Town for its continued support and noted that the Foundation had made about \$15,000 in grants to Pomfret residents in 2023.

ARTICLE 13 – Appropriation to Women’s Information Service (WISE) of the Upper Valley

No discussion.

ARTICLE 14 – Appropriation to Green Up Vermont

No discussion.

ARTICLE 15 – Exemption of Pomfret-Teago Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. from Real Property Taxation

No discussion.

ARTICLE 16 – Re-Appropriation of Unassigned General Fund Balance

Ben Brickner explained that the “unassigned general fund balance” is the accumulation of prior years’ budget surpluses, that the Selectboard felt the balance was more than needed to be kept on hand, and that therefore the Selectboard proposes using a portion of that balance to reduce current taxes to be raised. Mr. Brickner explained further that the fund balance is primarily a result of delinquent tax collections. Betsy Rhodes asked whether delinquent tax collections were likely to continue at the same rate. Mr. John Peters noted that the Selectboard opted to use only a portion of the current balance because it is a non-recurring revenue source.

ARTICLE 17 – Designation of Tax Payment Due Dates, Late Payment Interest and Penalty

No discussion.

3. Other Necessary and Proper Business
 - a. Marie Robinson asked about the continued closure of River Road. Meg Emmons explained that the road crosses the town line and Pomfret will need to work with Hartford to reopen the road. Mr. John Peters explained that the damage to the Hartford portion was substantial. The Selectboard will inquire of Hartford as to their timing and plans to reopen their portion of the road. Mr. Graham suggested Pomfret's portion of River Road be converted to a legal trail.
 - b. Francine Uptegrove thanked the Road Crew for their excellent work keeping the roads safe and well maintained. Ms. Uptegrove also expressed appreciation to the Town for closing Cloudland Road during foliage season. Mike Doten also expressed appreciation for the foliage season closure.
 - c. Mr. Brickner commended the Town Auditors for producing a timely and accurate Town Report.
 - d. The merits of in-person Town Meeting versus Australian balloting were discussed. Mr. Geiger noted that the Town could vote to resume in-person Town Meeting if it wished to do so. Becky Fielder, Town Clerk, explained that while she appreciated the community and deliberative aspects of in-person Town Meeting, Australian balloting allows for significantly greater voter participation. Betsy Siebeck predicted that once the Town has more experience with Australian balloting, participation in the deliberative process leading up to Town Meeting Day (including attendance at the informational hearing) will improve. Mr. John Peters explained that the Selectboard's meetings are open to the public, the meeting minutes and Zoom recording are available online, and the Selectboard invited the public to a mid-December meeting specifically for the purpose of discussing the FY 2025 town budget before it was finalized for the warning.
 - e. The assembly thanked Mr. Geiger for his skilled moderation of the informational hearing.
4. Adjournment – Mr. Geiger thanked all for attending. Mr. Brickner moved and Mr. Chamberlin seconded that the informational hearing be adjourned. Unanimous. The informational hearing was adjourned at 10:16 am.