

Town of Pomfret Selectboard
Annual Town Meeting Informational Hearing Minutes
February 22, 2025

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

Public: Terri Antal, Cyrus Benoit, Liza Bernard, Melanie Bowen, Abigail Brickner, Katie Brickner, Senator Alison Clarkson, Tina Clifford, Vern Clifford, Cathy Emmons, William Emmons, Gerry Fields, Alan Graham, Kris Graham, Greg Greene, Jon Harrington, Sue Heston, Cynthia Hewitt, Laura Kent, Sherman Kent, Neil Lamson, Joanna Long, Norwood Long, Nancy Matthews, Ted Matthews, Cathy Peters, Lynn Rauch, Betsy Rhodes, Jim Robinson, Marie Robinson, Betsy Siebeck, Cory Smith, Representative Heather Surprenant, Cory Swingle, Frances Uptegrove, Roderick Williams, Mary Worrell, “bill”, “Charlotte’s iPad”, “iPhone (20)”, “jan”

1. Benjamin Brickner called the town meeting informational hearing to order at 9:02 am.
2. Agenda Review – None.
3. Discussion of Annual Town Meeting Articles – Mr. Brickner began by thanking Cynthia Hewitt and Alice Lamson for providing refreshments, and Town Auditors Tracie Hartford, Annie Mears Abbott, and Patti Wickersham for preparing this year’s annual report. Mr. Brickner then welcomed Senator Alison Clarkson and Representative Heather Surprenant and thanked them for attending. Mr. Brickner then explained when and where polls will be open on Town Meeting Day and how to obtain an absentee ballot if desired. Mr. Brickner then proceeding through the Annual Town Meeting Warning article-by-article.

ARTICLE 1 – Election of Town Officers

Town Moderator – No discussion.

Town Clerk – No discussion.

Selectboard Member – John Peters introduced himself, asked to be considered for Selectboard Member (3-year term), and explained his interest in the position. Mr. Peters noted he has served on the Selectboard for several years and would like to continue to serve. Emily Grube introduced herself, asked to be considered for Selectboard Member (2-year term), and explained her interest in the position. Ms. Grube has also served on the Selectboard for several years and would like to continue working on the Town Hall renovation, town plan update, and upcoming budget challenges.

Cemetery Commissioner – Greg Greene introduced himself, asked to be considered for Cemetery Commissioner (3-year term), and explained his interest in the position. Mr. Greene joined the commission last year and feels it is an important job, especially the historical aspect and grounds upkeep. Mr. Greene has been working on digitizing the town’s burial records. Mr. Greene also noted that Bruce Tuthill (who could not be present) intends to run as a write-in candidate for Cemetery Commissioner (2 years to finish a 3-year term).

Treasurer – No discussion.

Lister – Marie Robinson asked whether the town had considered eliminating the Officer of Lister in favor of hiring a professionally qualified assessor as several area towns are considering this year. Lister Neil Lamson suggested this was something that should be

considered at a future town meeting and offered that having someone other than one's neighbor perform property valuations could be advantageous.

Auditor – No discussion.

Library Trustee – Betsy Rhodes noted that Jocelyn Randles (who could not be present) was running for reelection and asked the assembly to consider Ms. Randles for Library Trustee (3-year term).

Trustee of Public Funds – No discussion.

ARTICLE 2 – Collection of Current Taxes

No discussion.

ARTICLE 3 – Approval of FY 2025 Town and Highway Budget

Jonathan Harrington questioned the large increase in the amount to be raised in taxes. Mr. Brickner explained that while the amount to be raised in taxes would increase 13.7%, spending would increase by only 6.9%, and that the difference between these figures is due to a decrease in non-tax revenue available to the town since last year.

Mr. Harrington also asked about the use of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funds for paving. Mr. Brickner explained that the town needed to commit all ARPA funds by last December or else they were subject to recapture by the federal government. Using some of the ARPA funds to offset last year's Stage Road paving expense was one way to do this. Ms. Grube also noted that the cost of paving has increases significantly in the last few years. Mr. Harrington suggested that the town develop a capital plan for paving projects.

Mr. Harrington also asked about the drivers of the proposed increase in spending. Mr. Brickner explained that the town received a letter from Blue Cross Blue Shield late last year indicating that health insurance premiums (which the town pays on behalf of its employees) would increase by more than 18% in 2025. Mr. Peters explained that the cost of all types of insurance has increased significantly, noting that most of these expenses are not discretionary and must be incurred by the town to deliver municipal services.

Mr. Harrington also asked why the budget proposes using only 60% of available fund balance (sometimes called the "surplus") to offset taxes to be raised, rather than the entire amount. Mr. Peters and Meg Emmons explained that by using only a portion of the fund balance, the Selectboard aimed to smooth the year-to-year tax raise because once the fund balance it depleted, that amount will need to be replaced with additional taxes and/or spending cuts.

Ms. Rhodes asked about the Windsor County Sheriff Department's cost. A discussion ensued about the cost-effectiveness of this service and its alternatives. Senator Alison Clarkson, having been given permission by the Selectboard to address the assembly as a non-resident, asked whether the stepped-up fall foliage traffic patrols contributed to the cost. Mr. Brickner explained that the supplemental patrols during foliage season were contracted and paid for by the residents of those roads. Francine Uptegrove, a Barber Hill Road resident, and Jim and Marie Robinson, Cloudland Road residents, praised the supplemental patrols and thanked the Selectboard for closing these roads during foliage. Cory Swingle urged residents to obey local speed limits, both to slow down other traffic in town and to avoid requiring the Sheriff to spend time chasing down local speeders.

ARTICLE 4 – Appropriation to Abbott Memorial Library

Mary Worrell, Library Trustee, and Cory Smith, librarian, thanked the Town for its continued support of the library and briefly described the library’s programming, noting that local patronage has increased significantly in the last several years.

ARTICLE 5 – Appropriation to Pomfret Cemetery Commission

Mr. Greene explained the difficulty and significantly increased cost of procuring cemetery maintenance services. Mr. Greene also noted that the cemetery appropriations of neighboring towns are significantly higher than the amount proposed in Pomfret’s budget.

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

No discussion.

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

Mr. Greene described some of The Thompson’s recent activities, including an ongoing renovation. Mr. Greene also explained that demand for The Thompson’s services has increased dramatically in recent years. A discussion ensued about The Thompson’s lesser-known services and the important role that Meals on Wheels plays in promoting older residents’ health and welfare.

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 (OHF)

Ms. Rhodes noted that OHF has recently partnered with The HUB, which provides direct support to area residents facing challenges with rent, childcare, heating, transportation, and other essential services.

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

No discussion.

ARTICLE 14 – Appropriation to Green Up Vermont

Mr. Greene reported that Green Up Vermont now holds the Guinness World Record for the most pledges to clean up trash in a 24-hour period. The record was set last May when 6,833 people pledged to participate. Mr. Greene also asked how the town can ensure residents’ safety during this year’s Green Up Day on May 3. Mr. Brickner suggested that Mr. Greene attend an upcoming Selectboard meeting to discuss safety measures further.

ARTICLE 15 – Re-Appropriation of Unassigned General Fund Balance

Mr. 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 reiterated that by using only a portion of the fund balance this year, the Selectboard aimed to smooth the year-to-year tax raise because once the fund balance is depleted, that amount will need to be replaced with additional taxes and/or spending cuts.

ARTICLE 16 – Designation of Tax Payment Due Dates, Late Payment Interest and Penalty

Mr. Brickner noted that approval of this article would impose 1% monthly interest on late property tax payments and an 8% penalty on delinquent property tax payments, which interest and penalty cannot be waived by the town treasurer, town clerk or any other single town official.

4. Other Necessary and Proper Business
 - a. Senator Clarkson and Representative Heather Surprenant described activities during the current state legislative session. Senator Clarkson indicated that \$3 billion of Vermont’s \$9 billion budget is federally funded, which has created challenges following the recent change in presidential administration, particularly with the USDA, Customs and Border Protection, and federal judiciary in Vermont. Senator Clarkson and Representative Surprenant also discussed education funding and the governor’s proposal to overhaul education governance; Act 250 changes and regional planning; local authority to maintain legal trails; and the impact of enhanced immigration enforcement on the state’s agricultural sector. Both legislators encouraged residents to contact them with questions or concerns. Their information is available at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/people/search/2026>.
 - b. Alan Graham thanked the Selectboard and the Town Auditors for production of the annual report. Mr. Graham also asked about plans to address anticipated damage by the emerald ash borer. Ms. Grube explained that the town has \$20,000 available for mitigation efforts in calendar 2026 (assuming the proposed FY 2026 budget is approved) and has committed to spending that amount on mitigation efforts.
 - c. Melanie Bowen asked about the Vermont 250th Anniversary Committee. Mr. Brickner, a committee member, answered that there were no firm plans yet, but that the committee anticipated holding one or more events later this year, with other activities to occur over the 2025-27 anniversary period. The committee is also liaising with the state Historic Preservation Office, which is coordinating statewide celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in Vermont, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and the formation of the United States.
 - d. Mr. Swingle asked about a recent lawsuit against the town regarding a driveway permit that was recently approved by the Selectboard.
 - e. Mr. Lamson thanked the Road Crew for keeping the roads well maintained. Mr. Lamson recalled that his doctor recently asked where he lived. When Mr. Lamson responded “Pomfret,” the doctor described the town’s roads as “legendary.”
5. Adjournment – There being no other necessary and proper business to come before the assembly, Mr. Peters moved and Ms. Emmons seconded that the town meeting informational hearing be adjourned. Unanimous. The town meeting informational hearing was adjourned at 10:50 am.