

TOWN OF SCOTLAND



ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES June 13th, 2024

The Annual Town Meeting was called to order by First Selectman, Dana Barrow Jr at 7:05pm. Present were Dana Barrow, Jr, First Selectman, Mike Gurnack, Selectman, Bart Laws, Selectman, Wendy O'Connor, Administrative Assistant to the First Selectman, David Zito, Treasurer, Mary Ann Lawrence, Acting Assistant Treasurer, Sharon George, Town Clerk, and members of the audience.

1. To elect a moderator. First Selectman Dana Barrow, Jr called for nominations.

Motion to nominate Chris Reddy as moderator made by Kevin Benito, 2nd by Clark Stearns.

No other nominations and nominations were closed.

Motion carried unanimously.

First Selectman, Dana Barrow, Jr alerted the audience that the online link was not able to be obtained and therefore the meeting would not be live.

Moderator, Chris Reddy began by thanking the citizens of the town of Scotland reviewed the rules before proceeding.

* We will be following Rober's Rules of Order

* Each person who would like to speak should approach the microphone and clearly state their name and address for the record

* Town residents are allowed to participate and will allow 1 minute of discussion per person

* All questions are to be directed to the Board of Selectmen

* Please maintain decorum during our meeting

Chris Reddy gave a brief history of the town of Scotland and an update that covered the past year.

Motion to move item #7 and item # 9 above item #4 by Cassidy Martin, 2nd by Scott Cormier.

Motion carried unanimously.

Items #7 and #9 will be addressed as 3a.

2. To consider and act upon the recommendations of the Board of Selectmen that appropriations be made for the expenditure of Town Aid monies for the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget and to make such appropriations as are advisable.

Motion To consider and act upon the recommendations of the Board of Selectmen that appropriations be made for the expenditure of Town Aid monies for the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget and to make such appropriations as are advisable was made by Clark Stearns, 2nd Gary Greenberg.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. To empower the Board of Selectmen to borrow a sum not to exceed \$500,000 in anticipation of tax revenue.

Motion to empower the Board of Selectmen to borrow a sum not to exceed \$500,000 in anticipation of tax revenue was made by Dan Syme, 2nd Nancy Polydys.

There was no discussion.

Motion carried unanimously.

- a. To elect a member to the Regional District 11 Board of Education for a term of three years. (previously #7)

Motion to elect Mike Smardon to the Regional District 11 Board of Education for a term of three years made by Cassidy Martin, 2nd Sherry Smardon.

There were no other nominations.

Motion carried unanimously.

- b. To consider and act upon the budget of the Scotland Board of Education and levy a tax of the Grand List of October 1, 2023 of \$155,432,600, for Scotland Elementary School, subject to state mandated tax rates for the Motor Vehicle Grand List of \$15,371,500 (previously #9)

Motion to consider and act upon the budget of the Scotland Board of Education and levy a tax of the Grand List of October 1, 2023 of \$155,432,600, for Scotland Elementary School, subject to state mandated tax rates for the Motor Vehicle Grand List of \$15,371,500 made by Gary Greenberg, 2nd by Kim Martin.

There was no discussion.

Motion carried with 1 No vote.

4. To consider and act upon a multi-year project budget for the Town Hall Renovation Project

Motion to consider and act upon a multi-year project budget for the Town Hall Renovation Project made by Terry Delaney, 2nd Gary Greenberg

Discussion:

At this point, former 1st Selectman, Gary Greenberg gave a Power Point presentation (see attached slides) on the Town Hall Renovation Project. Information regarding the four grants the town would be utilizing, the funds the town would put forth, the architects involved and the estimator who will give an accurate cost for the proposed renovations were included. He also mentioned the time frame for the project, who was on the building committee, where/when they meet, and how to contact him with any questions or concerns.

Clark Stearns: Inquired about the \$100,000 that was appropriated, wanted to know if those funds were sequestered somewhere.

Mary Ann Lawrence: Confirmed that the funds were allocated and gave a description of how the funds flowed through the different town accounts. She explained that some of this may have been spent at this time, we won't know until the end.

Terrance Delaney: Spoke about fire code violations that the current building has and reiterated that this project will address these issues and asked if First Selectman, Dana Barrow, Jr could address these issues briefly.

Dana Barrow, Jr.: There are a lot of issues that could close the building down. Starting with the 2nd floor there are no legal exits. Over the past few years, we have been able to keep it open. If anyone had been hurt there, the town would have been liable. Once you have a violation, the town has nothing to stand on. Dana thanked the committee for their hard work so far.

Mike Smardon: Inquired if this would be going out to bid.

Gary Greenberg: Reiterated that we already received 2 different estimates, one at 3 million dollars and one at \$1.967 million dollars. Gary reminded everyone that as time goes on, the costs of things are going up.

Sherry Smardon: Questioned if it was important that the agenda reflects the dollar amounts that are up on the screen in the motion? If not, are we capped at that and where would the additional funds come from?

Mary Ann Lawrence: We handle this the same way we handle the other agenda items; you'll see that the other agenda items do not have a dollar amount because it's a separate attachment that we vote on.

Motion carried unanimously.

5. To consider and act upon the Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan

Motion to consider and act upon the Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan made by Grace Martin, 2nd Sherry Smardon.

Discussion:

Mary Ann Lawrence gave some background on how this is handled. The Capital Improvement plan speaks to the kind of projects we would be expecting to do over the next 5 years. The building official went through all the buildings in town and created a list about 3 years ago and came up with a list of projects to attend to but with the bridges collapsing this has moved things out. Next year the town needs to do a better assessment. We approve this and then in a separate agenda item we approve dollars associated with the next fiscal year.

Sherry Smardon: audible cannot be heard

Mary Ann Lawrence: This is intended to be to let town folks know that the town hall project is happening. There will be a line item for Misc Town Equipment Replacement items ie: a new printer etc. This is intended to be the generic big project

Jennifer Nelson: Looking for clarity on what financial commitment you're expecting or anticipating for all of these plans?

Mary Ann Lawrence: We will look at this in the next agenda item.

Kim Martin: Why are we approving this? Can we approve this when there are so many things to be determined

Mary Ann Lawrence: We have had a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan in the past, what we didn't have is a detailed annual budget, so that's actually the new one. I'm hesitant to pull this out because we've always done it in the past.

Lisa LaBelle: Asked why there is \$50,000 allocated in two places for the Fire Department.

MaryAnn Lawrence: It's two different things, the fire department has its own Capital Plan because it is its own entity. We do fund the Capital fund for them, and we put the \$50,000 for next year, this gives them legal authority to spend these funds.

Jennifer Nelson: For "projects to be determined" we don't know what roads are slated to be done this year?

Mary Ann Lawrence: In my experience, we used to state which roads would be done but by the time Spring came around there may have been other projects with greater need that had to be done and these got pushed out. We can't anticipate what will be the greatest need will be.

Motion carried with 2- No votes and 3- Abstentions

6. To consider an act upon the 2024-2025 Capital Improvement Program Budget.

Motion to consider an act upon the 2024-2025 Capital Improvement Program Budget made by Terrance Delaney and 2nd Nancy Polydys.

Discussion:

Mary Ann Lawrence shared a Power Point presentation with the audience (see attached slides).

Blair Rollins: Asked for an explanation on the carryover monies.

Mary Ann Lawrence: This means we have money left over at the end of this year that can be spent next year. The Capital balances will carry over, the General fund does not.

Dennis LaBelle: How is the lease purchase revenue?

Mary Ann Lawrence: We have appropriated that in the General Fund to be spent as Capital. We will spend it on the capital side. It's an accounting change as of 2 or 3 years ago.

Heather Hartley: Aren't the bridges covered by grants?

Dana Barrow Jr: The 4 bridges are covered 80% by federal government 20% by the state, we also put in for grants for Kemp Road bridge and Brooklyn Road bridge which are in great need of repair.

MaryAnn Lawrence: Clarified that she was referring to the bridge that collapsed last September. This was not covered by the grants. Moving forward, the new bridges will be applying for grants.

Nicoletta Gifford: When the Brook Rd bridges went out, I was under the impression that we did get grants for those.

MaryAnn Lawrence: The state did not pay for these bridges but did agree to increase the funding amount of the town hall grant to reduce the town's cost on that. The funding did not flow through the way we would have liked.

Gary Greenberg: We paid for the temporary bridge; the state is paying for the permanent bridge. The money we paid for the temporary bridge and the longer-term temporary bridge cost the town approximately \$700k and \$500k came back to the town through the grant for the town hall.

Clark Stearns: So, we now have to spend that money on the town hall?

Gary Greenberg: Correct.

Bart Laws: We have 100% state and federal funding to replace 4 bridges including the 3 that were destroyed. That will be taken care of. We did have to spend money in the meantime to ensure people could get out of their homes. This has not been reimbursed directly, we got additional money for the town hall project so therefore money we won't have to spend on that.

Gary Greenberg: Most of the money that was in the CNR fund at that time, had been put there for the town hall project. We had allocated \$498k for town hall, we took out \$600k. This was not the way we wanted to do this but the \$500k that we got has been put back.

Bart Laws: There are other bridges besides those we have a commitment for that need repairs, we will apply for funding to at least partially reimburse ourselves for that. It is prudent to put money from the General Revenues into the CNR fund for future use. We are hoping to get 50% covered.

Mary Ann Lawrence: Just as we have just approved the town hall project, we will have a similar thing once the grants come through for the bridges.

Scott Cormier: Where are we in the bridge replacement process?

Dana Barrow Jr: They did the core drillings, and we just finished the archaeological digs on the sides and now we are in the engineering and design process. We put in for the grant for Kemp Road, that is a 50/50 grant with the state paying half and the town paying half. The cost will be \$800-1m for that. This is why we are putting money away. We also put in for the Brooklyn Road bridge and that is an 80/20 grant with the state paying 80% and the town paying 20%.

Dennis Labelle: Inquired if any arrow heads had been located?

Dana Barrow Jr.: Stated that we didn't have the final report yet.

MaryAnn Lawrence: When the state does the project there is no project budget, but if it's one that we are running through our books, then getting revenues back then we will have a project budget.

Motion carried with 1 abstention.

8. To consider and act upon the budget of the General Government and levy a tax on the Grant List of October 1, 2023, of \$155,423,600, subject to state mandated tax rates for the Motor Vehicle Grand List of \$15,371,500.

Motion To consider and act upon the budget of the General Government and levy a tax on the Grant List of October 1, 2023, of \$155,423,600, subject to state mandated tax rates for the Motor Vehicle Grand List of \$15,371,500 made by Scott Cormier, 2nd by Terrance Delaney.

Discussion:

David Zito gave a PowerPoint presentation (see attached slides). The proposed mil rate is 29.75 which is a decrease of 10.25 mils from last year's budget. We are not voting on the mil rate, that will be held at the BOS

meeting that follows. He also reviewed other line items including the town's expenditures, salaries, RD#, the elementary school and the Fire Department. Revenue for 2025 was discussed.

Dennis LaBelle: The new appraisals average was 42% with a reduced mil rate that would appear to bring in \$230-270,000 in tax revenue, not \$66,000. How was this calculated?

Dana Barrow, Jr: Different houses have different rates.

MaryAnn Lawrence: Explained that the town took the Grand List and applied a mil rate to it and how that process worked. She was unaware of where that percentage came from (from D. Labelle's statement) but ensured that the Grand List did not go up 44%. She also mentioned that where property taxes were going up, vehicle taxes were likely to go down.

Jennifer Nelson: Has the assessment on vehicles changed?

David Zito: We don't have anything to do with that process.

Jennifer Nelson: Pointed out that the Administrative Assistant's pay was going up significantly more than the 4% of other employees.

Dana Barrow Jr: Correct. That was a decision made by the Board of Selectmen.

Mike Gurnack: We looked at that position and we went to every surrounding town for this and all positions and determined that Scotland has some of the lowest paid positions in the area and they receive no benefits. Most other towns included benefits. As we know, it is hard to keep staff in this town and in the long run, it cost more to hire new people than to pay the ones we have. We will be evaluating every position and slowly bringing them all up. This is one position that we targeted because it is so important in the change of administration that that person pretty much knows how everything is running. Without that person, it's very hard to run town hall. So, that's a very valuable position from years past, all the ones who have held that position to the current one. We reviewed all the neighboring towns and came up with a dollar figure considering benefits, hourly pay, job functions and none of the other positions had all of the roles that ours did. The workload of our administrative assistant is twice as much as every other one. She is getting paid an hourly rate for all of them vs. past admin where they were getting paid individually for each function. We are paying for town hall hours, part time at the new rate of \$28/hr. The pay increase goes with the increased workload over the years that position wasn't getting.

Dana Barrow Jr: She has taken on the additional roles of Building Inspector Secretary, runs the town Community Center, Gun Permits etc. and the number of hours after Covid were reduced. Her net pay went down, and all of these duties were added. The Board of Selectmen made a unanimous decision. We think it's a fair number.

Jennifer Nelson: Questioned if the mil rate that was presented would be the highest it would go.

Mary Ann Larson: We do not anticipate that there will be any change to the mil rate that has been presented.

Dana Barrow Jr: Invited Jennifer Nelson to stay for the meeting that follows where the Board of Selectmen will be voting to set the mil rate.

Kim Martin: Stated that she didn't feel the explanation of salary increase for the Administrative Assistant was necessary. She felt that anyone who has been to town hall is aware of all that she does.

John Aldrich: Questioned the increase for information technology support line, it looks like it has doubled from last year. Is this because of the incident?

Mike Gurnack: Yes, it's exactly related to that. It covers everything from employee training to cyber insurance.

Dennis LaBelle: Inquired if there was a reason why the legal ads had gone up so much.

Sharon George: The state has determined that because we are part of a regional school district, we now have to place all of our legal ads in both English and Spanish and the Spanish ads are more expensive. For example, the ads for the PPP had they been placed in both languages came out to be that the Spanish ad was just under \$800.00 and the English ad was over \$600.00. We were not required to do so at that time, so I did not. There are other questions with regard to whether or not we are going to be required to have an interpreter during early elections, but this is something we are still waiting to hear back from the Secretary of State's office. I did some research on Parish Hill and found that they are not required to have an ESL class. In the past 10 years they have not had more than seven students whose primary language at home was not English. But last year or the year before there were two students who fell into that category, however that language was a dialect of Indian. I did reach out to representative Doug Dubitsky to see if he could look into this and get clarification and the response that he was given was a link from the 2020 census that showed the town of Scotland had 3.6% of residents whose primary language at home was Spanish with a +/- margin of error of 3.9. I am hopeful that the Secretary of State's office will take the time to look into this further but at this point not knowing what we would be required to do I felt the safest thing to do was to double this line item in the budget. And in all honesty, we're probably going to spend more than that but we're still waiting to hear back from the Secretary of State's office.

Dennis LaBelle: Why is there a 20% increase in the contractual auditor, is there something going on there?

David Zito: We aren't sure if last year's budget amount was accurate or was taken from the previous year. There were several items that were not updated to the actual amounts.

Mary Ann Lawrence: We spent more than that in the current year. The 2023 numbers were audited and are correct. We put it out to bid and got no new bids, the only firm that bid on our audit was our existing auditor. There have been many auditing changes and policies that have increased the pricing.

Gary Greenberg: Does this include the Board of Education?

Mary Ann Lawrence: No. That's included in the BOE budget, this is just the town.

Kim Martin: Is the elections budget set too low?

Wendy O'Connor: Melody worked out those numbers but is not here to comment.

Heather Heartly: Looking for clarification under Insurance and Bonds total? What would the bonds/blanket line amount to?

Mary Ann Lawrence: That's our tax collectors bonding that the insurance company would cover. It's fairly standard that the tax collector would be covered.

Motion carried with 5 no votes, and 2 abstentions and (?) 21 yes votes

10. To levy a tax upon the Grand List of October 1, 2023 of \$155,432,600, for the Regional School District 11 budget, subject to state mandated tax rates for the Motor Vehicle Grand List of \$15,371,500.

Motion to levy a tax upon the Grand List of October 1, 2023 of \$155,432,600, for the Regional School District 11 budget, subject to state mandated tax rates for the Motor Vehicle Grand List of \$15,371,500 made by Kim Martin, 2nd Sherry Smardon.

Discussion: Mary Ann Lawrence clarified that the wording on this one is different than the one prior to it. On the prior to we are considering and acting upon the budget, on this one it just gives the authority to levy a tax. Essentially what we are doing is giving the authority that ensures that the mil rate includes covering RD#11, we are not voting on RD#11 tonight, that's a separate referendum.

Motion carried with 1 no vote, and 1 abstention

11. To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting.

Motion to transact any other business proper to come before said meeting made by Dan Syme, 2nd Grace Martin.

John Beck gave a quick presentation on the town's Code Red program. This is how we get emergency messages to town residents; he highly encouraged all residents to take advantage of this.

12. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 pm made by Clark Stearns, 2nd by Grace Martin

Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon George
Scotland Town Clerk