

## **Town of Saint George 2024 Annual Meeting**

**March 6, 2024**

### **Town Meeting Minutes**

SELECTBOARD: Sarah Tischler (Chair), Joel Colf, Rob Crites, Harry Bowen

MODERATOR: Steve Faust

Steve Faust, duly elected Moderator of the 2023 Annual Town Meeting, called to the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and read the warning for the 211<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Town of St. George and the 146<sup>th</sup> meeting held in the Little Red Schoolhouse, stating that the legal voters of the Town of St. George, Vermont, are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Little Red Schoolhouse, 35 Barber Road, St. George, Vermont, on March 6, 2024 at 6pm to transact the following:

#### **Article 1: To elect a Town Moderator**

MOTION to nominate and elect Steve Faust as Moderator by Philip Gingrow. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Marc Tischler.

No other nominations.

VOTING on ARTICLE 1: All in favor of Steve Faust as Moderator; none opposed.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Steve Faust as Moderator

#### **Article 2: To hear the reports of the Town Officers**

Steve Faust went over the rules of Town Meeting.

The Moderator and Sarah Tischler recognized the following residents volunteering in Town and heard reports from the following:

CCRPC – Sarah and Eliana

DRB – Abel Russ – There hasn't been any DRB business in the last year.

St. George Connect - Abel Russ – Reported on the St. George Connect survey.

Planning Commission - Connie Kendall – Connie introduced Article 18 to reserve the remaining land of Lot 4 of the Town Center Subdivision to be used for Town purposes.

Community Garden - Lisa Hodgkins

Animal Control Officer – Jeffery Wells

Green Up Day – Connie Kendall – We need volunteers.

Cemetery Commission – Terri Hallenbeck – Headstone cleaning

CVSD Representative – Lindsay Colf – The school budget didn't pass. Budget re-vote anticipated for mid-April.

**Article 3: To elect a Selectperson for the remainder of a three-year term expiring in 2026**

MOTION by Charles Scott to nominate Rob Crites. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Kelly Bowen.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Rob Crites as selectperson.

**Article 4: To elect a Selectperson for a two-year term expiring in 2026**

Harry Bowen thanked everyone for allowing him to serve on the Selectboard for 10 years. Harry Bowen is a firm believer in term limits and stated that we need new ideas and people involved in St. George. Harry Bowen encouraged others to get involved in our town.

MOTION by Jeffery Wells to nominate Lorri Terrier. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sandy Jarvis. Lorri Terrier lives across the road in the Co-op and serves on the Co-op board.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Lorri Terrier as selectperson.

**Article 5: To elect a Selectperson for a two-year term expiring in 2026**

Richard Whitehead has decided not to run again.

MOTION by Sarah Potter to nominate herself. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Joan Landon. Charles Scott sang Sarah Potter's praises.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Sarah Potter as selectperson.

**Article 6: To elect a Selectperson for a three-year term expiring in 2027**

MOTION by Marc Tischler to nominate Joel Colf. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Charles Scott.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Joel Colf as selectperson.

**Article 7: To elect a Lister for the remainder of a three-year term expiring in 2026**

No nominations. Table Article 7.

**Article 8: To elect a Lister for a three-year term expiring in 2027**

No nominations. Table Article 8.

**Article 9: Pending Articles 7 and 8, shall the voters authorize the elimination of the office of Town Lister in accordance with 17 V.S.A. §2651c(b)(1) and replace it with a professionally qualified assessor who shall have the same powers, discharge the same duties, proceed in the discharge thereof in the**

**same manner, and be subject to the same liabilities as are prescribed for listers or the board of listers under the provisions of Title 32?**

Joan Landon asked for clarity on how the grievance process would work without listers. Justin Mason stated that someone who has a grievance would be meeting with a hired person instead of an elected person. Charles Scott stated that grievances could still be brought to the Selectboard, and volunteers could help with the grievance process. Eric Becker questioned if it would be preferable to have at least one lister. Justin Mason stated it's better to have two listers or no listers because of quorum. Justin Mason suggested the Town could have an Assistant Assessor. Connie Kendall requested information on the process of requesting a grievance. Justin Mason stated that grievance mailing must be sent out before June 4<sup>th</sup>. Philip Gingrow asked what if the paper ballot vote fails. The response was that the town would function without listers as it has been. Terri Hollenback asked if there was a cost to the town for having an assessor versus lister.

MOTION made by Marc Tischler to approve ARTICLE 9. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Charles Scott.

A paper vote was conducted by Amanda Vincent and Justin Mason.

ARTICLE 9 passed with 19 yes votes and 9 no votes.

**Article 10: To elect an Auditor for the remainder of a three-year term expiring in 2026**

MOTION by Charles Scott to open the floor for nominations. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Marc Tischler.

Joan Landon gave an overview of the auditor job. Caroline Jalbert suggested that auditors do a quarterly review with Adam Beach. Adam Beach is willing to provide training to auditors. Charles Scott stated that the Selectboard also reviews orders at every Selectboard meeting.

MOTION by Lisa Hodgkins to nominate herself. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Caroline Jalbert. Lisa Hodgkins is Treasurer of the Co-op and a long time St. George Resident.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Lisa Hodgkins as Auditor.

**Article 11: To elect an Auditor for the remainder of a three-year term expiring in 2027**

MOTION by Sandy Jarvis to nominate herself. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Nancy Brennan.

Sandy Jarvis is president on the co-op board and wants to get more involved at the Town.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to nominate Sandy Jarvis as Auditor.

**Article 12: Pending Articles 10 and 11, shall the town authorize the elimination of the office of Town Auditor, with future audits to be provided by a public accountant licensed in this State in accordance with 17 V.S.A. §2651b(a)?**

MOTION by Philip Gingrow to table the article. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Marc Tischler.

Motion tabled.

**Article 13: To elect a Cemetery Commissioner for a 3-year term expiring in 2027**

Sarah Tischler noted the Cemetery Commissioner terms are jumbled. Terri Hallenbeck's seat is up for re-election.

MOTION by Philip Beliveau to nominate Terri Hallenbeck. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Marc Tischler.

No other nominations.

Town Clerk cast a single ballot to elect Terri Hallenbeck as Cemetery Commissioner.

**Article 14: To authorize the collection of personal and real estate taxes as provided by law and as set forth below:**

- a. **Taxes to be collected; one-half on October 1, 2024, and the remaining one-half on April 1, 2025**
- b. **Interest to be charged on unpaid taxes at the rate of one percent (1%) per month for the first three months for any late payments from the due date, and one and one-half percent (1.5%) per month for any late payments more than 3 months from the due date. Postmarks dated October 1, 2024, and April 1, 2025, are acceptable as on-time payments for each due date. Taxpayers are responsible for ensuring that taxes are paid from mortgage escrow accounts.**
- c. **In addition to interest, a penalty of eight percent (8%) of the tax bill shall be imposed for any late payments received after April 1, 2025.**
- d. **A service charge of twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) will be assessed for checks returned for insufficient funds.**

MOTION to approve ARTICLE 14 by Philip Beliveau. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Nancy Brennan.

Sandy Jarvis asked who collects taxes. Adam Beach stated he is the St. George Delinquent Tax Collector.

VOTING on ARTICLE 14: All in favor; none opposed.

**Article 15: "Shall the voters authorize total fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$369,455, of which \$300,000 shall be raised by taxes and \$69,455 be non-tax revenues?"**

MOTION to approve ARTICLE 15 by Marc Tischler. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sandy Jarvis.

Philip Beliveau asked if we are using one time revenue or recurring revenue to balance our budget. Adam Beach stated that we have operated with budget surplus in the past and that we can use those reserves as we see fit. We are using excess revenue to make the budget balance for this year. Adam Beach doesn't want to make a habit of using excess funds. Adam Beach suggested that we will need to either raise revenue or lower expenses in the future to make the budget balance, but most likely, we will need to do a mix of both. Charles Scott noted he doesn't want to see the town use our reserve funds for reoccurring expenses. Adam Beach noted that

we want to propose restrictions in the future on our reserve funds so we can't use reserve funds for reoccurring expenses. Adam Beach noted that the town has been operating in a surplus and the majority of our funds haven't been earmarked for anything and that all the surplus is sitting in the General Fund. Adam Beach stated that our budget should reflect Town values.

Connie Kendall noted that 70 and 71 and 101 seemed quite low for budgeted amounts. Adam Beach noted the trends of spending and noted the reserve funds for building improvements, road maintenance, capital improvements, and plowing and sanding.

Sue Duell asked if we've been getting money for Winterbottom. Charles Scott stated that the State didn't accept the discontinuance of Winterbottom as a Town maintained road. Sue Duell asked if we have been getting money to maintain Winterbottom. The town will investigate if we have been getting money to maintain Winterbottom. Justin Mason added this to the next Selectboard agenda.

Sarah Tischler noted the correction of the summation line directly after line 5. This amount needs to be corrected to \$3,225, which in turn, will change line 22 from \$4,500 to \$16,875.

Philip Gingrow made a motion. Stephen Faust noted we need to make an amendment. Philip Gingrow withdrew the motion.

Steve Faust asked for clarification if Article 15 is accurate, and Adam Beach confirmed that it is correct as written.

VOTING on ARTICLE 15: All in favor; none opposed.

**Article 16: Shall the voters establish a reserve fund, to be known as the Conservation Fund, for the purpose of funding the purchase and maintenance of lands and rights in lands to preserve open land and natural areas in St. George?**

MOTION to approve ARTICLE 16 by Charles Scott. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Abel Russ.

Abel Russ noted that all the towns around us have a Conservation Commission and Conservation Fund. We have a Conservation Commission, but no one is currently on the Commission. A Conservation Commission Fund would allow for maintenance of trails, purchasing easements, purchasing land to conserve. Philip Gingrow asked for clarification on if we can comment on Article 17 at this time and Steve Faust asked to hold discussion until we get to Article 17.

VOTING on ARTICLE 16: Motion passed by majority vote.

**Article 17: Shall the voters establish a permanent tax in the amount of one cent on the annual town tax rate, the proceeds of which are to be deposited in the Conservation Fund?**

MOTION to approve ARTICLE 17 by Marc Tischler. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sarah Goodrich.

Philip Gingrow wondered if should use the word permanent, does it actually have to be permanent and held to the one cent forever.

- MOTION by Sandy Jarvis to amend ARTICLE 17 to change the word permanent to say recurring. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Eric Becker.

Philip Beliveau doesn't feel we should put the tax on the entire town and that it feels elitist to make this decision for all the residents. Connie Kendall stated we don't have a Conservation Commission yet and questioned who would be spending this money. Abel stated that the Selectboard would have the authority to spend the money with advisement from the Conservation Commission. Philip Beliveau suggested this fund be raised by donation instead of through tax dollars. Nancy Brennan asked why we need to have conserved land. Abel Russ noted that a goal is to connect wildlife through ecologically connected land. St. George has very little conserved land, yet much forest land.

Sarah Goodrich clarified if this would be applied to property taxes and if this tax could be applied to property values over a certain amount. Abel stated that for \$100,000 in value, this would amount to \$10 in taxes. Charles Scott mentioned homestead declarations and how those that make the least in our community get support from the State with property taxes.

VOTING ON MOTION TO AMEND: Motion passed by majority vote.

Nancy Brennan asked if we really need this in St. George or are we just following other towns leads because it's trendy.

Sarah Potter asked if it would be possible to fund the conservation fund with ARPA funds. Philip Gingrow asked if the funds could be spent in another municipality. Charles Scott stated as long as it benefits the residents, the Selectboard could spend money that way.

VOTING on ARTICLE 17, AS AMENDED: Motion passed by majority vote.

**Article 18: Shall the voters permanently dedicate the remaining land of Lot 4 (.90 acre less 100'x100' allocated in 2012 for the Schoolhouse) of the Town Center Subdivision as land to be owned by the Town and used for Town purposes, as may be voted upon by the Town or as may be determined by the Selectboard from time to time, all as may approved by the Development Review Board when required.**

MOTION to approve ARTICLE 18 by Marc Tischler. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sarah Goodrich.

Connie Kendall stated that it would dedicate about 100 feet toward the right side of Barber Road and 100 feet back toward Planet Hardwood for town use.

Tyler Dawson asked if he could speak seeing as he isn't a town resident. There were no objections to Tyler Dawson speaking.

Tyler Dawson noted there was a Lot 4A created for the Schoolhouse as it would change the voting and allocation of water and sewer for the Town Center Association.

Sarah Goodrich wanted to clarify about 2 acres that are the town park and does the Schoolhouse land connect to those acres. Connie Kendall stated that this change would connect those two lots.

Charles Scott stated that the Schoolhouse Committee convinced the Town to give them a 100'x100' lot to place the schoolhouse and this article is with the intent that was originally

intended for the Schoolhouse. Charles Scott clarified that this was subject to the DRB and Act 250 approval.

VOTING on ARTICLE 18: All in favor; none opposed.

Motion to adjourn at 8:37pm by Marc Tischler.