

EDEN TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

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Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Selectboard Present:

Ricky Morin

Clayton Whittemore

Tim Bullard

Town Clerk and Treasurer:

Melissa Whitcomb

Board of Civil Authority Present:

H. Bruce Burnor

Amy Fitzgerald

Molly Morin

Steve Schmelzer

Leslie White

Bruce Burnor opened the meeting at the Eden Central School at 9:04 am. Bruce asked the voters for permission to allow our State Representative, Mark Higley to speak. The major issues in Montpelier this session are school funding reform, holding those that break the law accountable, the affordability of housing and rolling back some of the climate change initiatives that are driving up costs. The initiative to conserve 30% of Vermont land by 2030 and 50% of Vermont land by 2050 will put tremendous pressure on property taxes and be difficult to achieve considering 80% of the land in the state is privately owned and the state is hoping that this initiative will only involve voluntary participation. The consolidation of school districts is also under consideration although the final number of districts has not yet been confirmed.

**Article 1: To determine whether Roberts Rules or other rules of order shall govern the parliamentary procedure of this meeting.**

Leslie White moved to use Robert's Rules of Order to govern the meeting. Burt Manning seconded. Approved.

**Article 2: To elect a moderator.**

Tim Bullard stepped forward to act as moderator. Warren Whitcomb nominated Bruce Burnor. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Bruce Burnor. Approved.

**Article 3: To see if the voters will accept the town report. Presentation of the Bullard Award.**

Leslie White clarified that the caption for the cover page on the inside of the front cover needed correction. The third sentence should read: "The business class at the Green Mountain Technology Center printed the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade basketball jerseys, basketball bags for the boys' and girls' 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teams in addition to the warm-up shirts for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade teams." Leslie then moved to accept the town report with the stated correction. Amy Fitzgerald seconded. Approved.

Tim presented the Bullard Award to Colleen Brennan thanking her for all the work she and her husband Vinny and many others have contributed to the town in connection with the Greeter program and the work towards the eradication of the invasive Eurasian Water Milfoil that was detected in Lake Eden. She was presented with a small engraved brass plate in a frame and a check for \$200 for the Lake Eden Association.

**Article 4: To elect all Town and School District Officers as required by law.**

**Office to take effect after the adjournment of Town Meeting.**

- a) **Selectperson for 3 years.** Faye Cochran nominated Tim Bullard for selectboard. There were no additional nominations. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Tim Bullard. Approved.
- b) **Auditor for 3 years.** Melissa Whitcomb nominated Leslie White for auditor. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Leslie White. Approved.
- c) **Cemetery Commissioner for 5 years.** Matt Hill nominated Adam Degree. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Adam Degree. Approved.
- d) **Cemetery Commissioner for 3 years.** Faye Cochran nominated David Deery. David asked what the position entailed and how often the commissioners meet and accepted the nomination. Warren Whitcomb motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for David Deery. Approved.
- e) **First Constable for one year.** Phil Morin nominated Matt Hill. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Matt Hill. Approved.
- f) **Second Constable for one year.** Leslie White nominated Bert Manning. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Bert Manning. Approved.

- g) **Grand Juror for one year.** Faye nominated David Whitcomb. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for David Whitcomb. Approved.
- h) **Agent to convey real estate for one year.** Leslie White nominated Monique Morway. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Monique Morway. Approved.
- i) **Trustee of Public Funds for three years.** Leslie clarified that the offices of Auditor and Trustee are not able to be held at the same time so she would not be running again for the position. Leslie also explained what the job entails, keeping track of the existing CD investments at Edward Jones and when they mature. Kristina Brown nominated Trevor Bidwell. Bruce Shields motioned to cease all nominations and cast one unanimous ballot for Trevor Bidwell. Approved.

The position of Town Agent was eliminated in 2020 by Act 84 pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2646.

**Article 5: To see what sum of money the Town will raise on its grand list for the highway department?**

	<b>Budget Proposal</b>	<b>\$699,615.00</b>	<b>6.8% increase</b>
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Jackie Larsen expressed concern regarding the 6.8% increase. There was discussion on the increase in the cost of materials, sand, gravel, culverts and fuel as well as insurance costs. The question was posed: if the budget is not approved, what happens then? Tim and Ricky responded that services would be cut and if the budget was reduced, the town would work within the amended budget amount. It was stressed that the expectation in today's world is that roads need to be plowed and sanded at all times and that level of attention is expensive. Leslie motioned to move the article as written. Amy Fitzgerald seconded. The motion passed as written.

**Article 6: To see what sum of money the Town will raise on its grand list for the Selectboard Fund?**

	<b>Budget proposal</b>	<b>\$564,300.57</b>	<b>4.38% increase</b>
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**Selectboard and Highway budget combined: 5.47% increase**

Leslie provided the perspective that the municipal budget for the 2024-2025 budget actually went down by 3.53% so an increase this year is only a slight increase when looking at the 2 years together. Leslie commended Melissa on all the hard work and changes she has implemented at the office and the many ways she has saved money for the town. Leslie motioned to move the article as written. Bert Manning seconded. Selectboard budget passed as written.

**Article 7: Shall the town transfer \$10,000 from the FY 23-24 unspent Selectboard Funds to the Outside Audit Reserve Fund in anticipation of the independent audit required in 2026 with the balance of the un-spent Selectboard funds of \$43,109.71 to be used to reduce taxes?**

Leslie provided some background to this article. The previous outside audit done in 2020 was not expensed fully in the town ledger and the outstanding balance has been carried as a liability since that time. That situation has been corrected and accounted for in the 2023-2024 budget year. Going forward, the amount budgeted annually (\$3,000) for the next outside audit due in 2026 will not be sufficient to cover anticipated costs. The article is asking to appropriate \$10,000 of the unspent selectboard funds to be added to the Outside Reserve Fund in anticipation of the next independent audit. Leslie motioned to move the article as written. Amy Fitzgerald seconded. Article passed.

**Article 8: Shall the town appropriate \$22,000 for local organizations?**

Leslie motioned to move the article as written. Kristina seconded. Article passed.

**Article 9: Shall the Town pay for the minimum estimated cost of \$9,180 for the Teach America to Swim Program from the surplus LERA funds totaling \$16,167.45 with the remaining balance to go towards the purchase of a new lawn tractor for \$4,899 and 7 new picnic tables for \$1,799.93 with the remaining balance of \$288.52 to be used for spring maintenance at the Lake Eden Recreation Area?**

There was a lengthy discussion on the increasing cost of the swim program. The selectboard wanted to clarify for the voters that the \$1,000 appropriation that has remained constant for many years does not cover the costs of the program. As the contract with Teach America to Swim for the 2025 season needed to be signed before the warning was published, there was discussion on continuing the program in 2026 and beyond with no decision made. Jackie Schmelzer as well as some other voters were in favor of eliminating the program because of the cost. There will be swimming lessons in the summer of 2025 and the selectboard is open to comments moving forward regarding the continuation of the program. Leslie moved the article as written. Matt Mitchell seconded. Article passed.

**Article 10: Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$11,587.99 for community organizations?**

Leslie explained that the monetary request for these appropriations have remained the same for more than 20 years. The amounts have not changed because the selectboard requests that if an additional amount of funds is requested, a petition signed by 5% of the voting population would need to be presented to the selectboard. Amy Fitzgerald moved the article as written. Matt Mitchell seconded. Article passed.

**Article 11: Shall the town create an Addition Reserve Fund for the purpose of expanding the office and vault space at the Town Clerk's Office to be funded with the money and accrued interest made possible by funds received during the COVID-19 pandemic? \$228,115.23 plus \$3,272.91 estimated interest?**

Tim explained how this article came to be drafted and how creating a reserve fund for the money made possible by funds received during the COVID-19 pandemic would allow the board to continue making plans for the addition without a timed deadline. The amount that remained in the ARPA fund in 2024 was used to pay for expenses accrued by the town. This freed up \$228,115.23 which would now become part of the surplus if a contract is not signed by the end of the fiscal year. The question was asked if the amount proposed would cover all costs for the addition. Tim replied that every effort would be made to complete the project with the allotted funds and will consider changes in the plans including the size of the building if needed. Bruce Shields moved the article as written. Amy seconded. Article passed.

**Article 12: Shall the interest earned on the Sweep Account, the American Gift Fund and the Good Neighbor Fund be used to offset taxes in FY 25-26?**

In discussion, Will Reen asked if the interest funds accrued should be added to the Addition Reserve Fund. No amendment to the article was made. Leslie made the motion to approve the article. Matt Mitchell asked the question how much difference this amount of money would change the tax rate. Bruce Shields stated that in years past, \$35000.00 would only change the tax rate by one penny. Leslie acknowledged that the office has discussed calculating a similar scenario but had not yet completed the task. This would be useful information next year. Molly Morin seconded the motion and the article passed.

**Article 13: Shall the town vote to pay property taxes, municipal and school combined, to the Town Treasurer in three equal installments due on or before November 12, 2025, February 15, 2026 and November 15, 2026 with postmarks acceptable?**

Matt Mitchell moved the article as written. Amy Fitzgerald seconded. Article passed.

**Article 14: To transact any other business at this time.**

- a) Leslie discussed some possible options on reducing the cost of the printing and mailing of the Town Report. The proposal was made to include a form when sending out the tax bills so that anyone could request that a town report be mailed to them. Many other towns save postage by providing reports at local locations instead of a bulk mailing. Bruce Burnor expressed that he definitely wanted a town report to be mailed to his address.
- b) Leslie asked that Vinny and Colleen Brennan be allowed to speak on behalf of the Lake Eden Association and their ongoing work with the Greeter Program and the control of the Eurasian Water Milfoil in the Lake Eden. Vinny thanked the town for their support and taxpayer financial contributions to fund their efforts. The work done during the last 2 years was summarized which included hand pulling, blankets placed to smother the invasive plants and suctioning of the plants in some areas by scuba divers. The application of an herbicide specifically targeting these plants is now under consideration by the Lake Eden Association as the other methods are not enough of a long-term control. Only small areas of the lake would be targeted and the herbicide application would not happen again for 3 years. The Lake Eden Association has applied for a grant for this method of control. Landowners around the lake have been sent a notification and there will be additional public meetings before any herbicide application begins.

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H. Bruce Burnor, Moderator

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Melissa Whitcomb, Presiding Officer

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Leslie White, Civil Board

