

TOWN OF ALBURGH

MINUTES FROM 03/06/2023 TOWN MEETING.

PRESENT: Chair, Josie Henry, Russell Duchaine, Shawn Creller, Elliot Knight, Clerk, Donna L. Bohannon, Moderator, Terry Tatro

GUEST SPEAKERS on behalf of Fire and Rescue: Fire Chief, Ron Kumetz, Rescue Chief, Pete Brescia

GUESTS: Mallory Ovitt, Tom Jacobsen, Bernard Savage, Patricia Savage, John Goodrich, Jim Magner, Cheryl Dunn, Lorraine Bruso, Alton Bruso, Carol Behrman, Paul Fortin, Gina Lewis, Danielle Choiniere, Bill Gett, Chuck Pease, George Hakey, Adam Vincelette, Noah Vincelette, George Boutah, Katherine O'Reilly, Chuck Blair, Rodney James, Skip Lewis, Sandra Rosa, Martha Goodsell, Steve Donovan, Edward Bosquet, Kevin Creller, Bonnie Creller, Herbie Durham, Stacey Ladd, Roger Lanoue, Angela Prefontaine, Richard Ernest, Jed Ladd Sr., Jed Ladd Jr., Leslie Ward, Ramona Reed, Jennifer Theoret, Danielle Simoneau, Lisa Arnold, Kayla Patnode, Erik Ramakrishnan, Sreejith Ramakrishnan, James Wyman, Skip Prairie, John Chesarek

The meeting was called to order at 7PM by Moderator, Terry Tatro

Terry read the warning as it was written, explaining that there would be nothing voted from the floor, with the exception of approving the town report as written, but would all be on the ballot on March 7th. He also explained that the polls would be open on March 7th from 7am to 7pm.

The articles were read in entirety and then individually as follows for discussion:

ARTICLE #1. TO ELECT BY AUSTRALIAN BALLOT THE FOLLOWING OFFICERS:

(ALL 1 YEAR POSITIONS UNLESS SPECIFIED OTHERWISE.)

- **MODERATOR**
 - **TOWN CLERK FOR (3) THREE YEARS**
 - **TOWN TREASURER FOR (3) THREE YEARS**
 - **DELINQUENT TAX COLLECTOR**
 - **SELECTMAN FOR THREE (3) YEARS**
 - **SELECTMAN FOR TWO (2) YEARS**
 - **LISTER FOR THREE (3) YEARS**
 - **AUDITOR FOR THREE (3) YEARS**
 - **CONSTABLE**
 - **DEED AGENT**
 - **GRAND JUROR**
- Moderator, Terry Tatro read article #1 and explained that these items would be voted on the next day and no action was needed at the meeting.

ARTICLE #2. TO HEAR THE REPORTS OF THE TOWN OFFICERS.

- Moderator, Terry Tatro read article #2 and explained that this was not an item that is voted by ballot, but for information only and that the public would just be voting to accept the town report as written.
- He opened the floor for public comment and/or questions.
- Danielle Simoneau explained that she was from Island Arts and asked why the donation for Island Arts was excluded in the budget.
- Josie Henry, Selectboard Chair explained that a new process was put in place and that any group asking for a donation would need to present a petition to the board asking that an article be placed on the ballot so the voters could decide if they want to donate to each entity.
- Alton Brusco asked why there is an amount of money placed in the budget for delinquent tax revenue but there isn't one for expenses.
- Josie explained that they took an average of what is paid in each year for delinquent taxes and that is what they used as an estimate of what might go delinquent.
- Alton responded that there should be an offsetting amount of what is projected to go delinquent for the new tax year.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #2.
- None were heard.
- Moderator Tatro asked for a motion to accept the reports as written.
- *Skip Lewis made a motion to accept the report of the town officers as written – seconded by Adam Vincelette – no nay's – motion carried - reports accepted.*

ARTICLE #3. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$849,603.20 WITH \$211,853.20 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, TO BE USED FOR GENERAL TOWN PURPOSES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Terry Tatro read article #3 and asked if there were any questions or comments on the article.
- John Chesarek asked what the difference is between the budget of the general fund and what is being asked for by taxation.
- It was explained that the revenues vs the expenditures is what makes up the "by taxation" part but that this budget also included some surplus funds being applied to offset the expenditures.
- Skip Prairie asked how much the board anticipated would go delinquent as that would influence the amount needed if it had been factored in.
- Josie Henry answered that yes, delinquent taxes will factor into the total but that as a rule the amount taken in by the delinquent tax collector from previous years and the amount that goes newly delinquent generally come close to offsetting each other.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #3.
- None were heard.

ARTICLE #4. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$1,055,156.68 WITH \$954,656.68 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, TO BE USED FOR YEAR-AROUND MAINTENANCE OF TOWN HIGHWAYS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Terry Tatro read article #4 and asked for comments or questions.
- The question was asked as to why the highway budget is up so much from last year.

- Josie replied that the board factored in more money for paving.
- Russell Duchaine, Road Commissioner explained that the cost of materials has gone up and that they are trying to upgrade the fleet. He also explained that the cost of healthcare for the employees has gone up by 25%. All these things factor into the increase.
- Terry Tatro asked if there was a surplus in the highway fund and how much it was.
- Josie Henry indicated that the surplus in the highway fund was \$315,866 and that the new mower was purchased with surplus funds.
- She also stated that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) recommends that there be surplus funds in the highway fund in case of unforeseen emergencies such as floods, etc.
- Jennifer Theoret asked if the expansion at the Alburgh Springs Border station was going to affect the roads and mentioned that the tractor trailer traffic through that border and the Border Rd border is already high and was most likely going to increase, causing more stress on the roads.
- The board agreed that traffic will most likely increase.
- Bernard Savage asked if the board had a plan for what roads would be paved next.
- Russell Duchaine explained that they have not made a final determination, but that Bay Road is a possibility, and that Martell Road needs to be top-coated.
- Alton Brusio suggested that the surplus funds be put toward the purchase of any new equipment with currently lower interest rates.
- George Boutah asked if there is a plan to finish Martell Road.
- Russell explained that it does need to be top coated and is one of the projects under discussion.
- Angela Prefontaine asked when Alburgh Springs Road was last done and what the life expectancy of paving is.
- Roger Lanoue asked if sealing adds 10 years to the life of a road.
- Russell Duchaine answered that yes, sealcoating a road will add years to the road, but that other factors play a part as well, such as the amount and type of travel on the road, for example heavy farm equipment and tractor trailer trucks.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #4.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #5. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE THE SUM OF \$ 70,000.00 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION FOR ALBURGH VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT INCORPORATED, FOR GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #5 and asked for comments or questions.
- Skip Prairie asked if there is an increase in the request this year.
- He was told that yes, the request went from \$55,000 to \$70,000.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #5.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #6. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE THE SUM OF \$25,000.00 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION FOR ALBURGH VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT INCORPORATED, TO BE USED TO PURCHASE EQUIPMENT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Terry Tatro read article #6 and asked for comments or questions.
- Herbie Durham asked what equipment has been purchased.
- Ron Kumetz, Fire Department Chief, replied that they have purchased replacement hoses, air packs and bottles.

- Skip Prairie asked if the money could be used to purchase AED's that could be placed at other public areas in town.
- Ron replied no that the AED at school is not compatible with the AED's that rescue uses.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #6.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #7. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$300,000.00 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, FOR THE STARTUP OF ALBURGH RESCUE, INC? (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #7 and asked for comments or questions.
- The question was asked as to why this is needed.
- Pete Brescia, Alburgh Rescue Chief, replied that there are not enough volunteers during the heaviest times of the day to respond to calls. He explained that this is because of peoples work schedules and the lack of certified people available that can answer calls.
- He also explained that Alburgh is one of the last strictly volunteer departments in the state and the goal of this change is to have coverage 24 hours a day 7 days a week so all calls can be met.
- Ron Kumetz added that the \$300,000 is roughly operating expenses, as staff will be paid for hours that volunteers are not available.
- The question was asked if \$300,000 will be needed for operating costs every year.
- Pete replied that they don't know for sure, but hope that once everything is in place, they will be able to apply for available grants to help with costs.
- He also explained that they will need a facility for the staff and equipment as the current building is not designed to accommodate staff staying on site.
- Skip Prairie asked what the current cost split is between the fire department and rescue.
- Ron replied that EMS has been budgeted separately and that it is approximately 1/3 of the expenses. (Power, heating, etc)
- The question was asked what the plan is for spending the \$300,000 if the article passes.
- The reply was that supplies and training will be needed but that a new facility will be the top priority as there isn't currently a place to house paid staff. It will take a few years to build up the funds to build an EMS station.
- Carol Behrman asked if this will be strictly Alburgh or if other towns will be part of this proposal as well.
- Pete Brescia, Rescue Chief, replied that this will be an independent town agency but that they will share resources with other towns as part of the mutual aid agreement that they have with Isle LaMotte and other towns in the area.
- He also stated that we will be pooling resources with other towns so as not to be in direct competition with them as certified EMTs are in short supply.
- Erik Ramakrishnan asked if \$300,000 was enough to start.
- He was told that probably not, but that it will be a start.
- It was also stated that if someone wants to join the rescue department and they agree to stay on with Alburgh for a year, the department will pay for the training for that person.
- George Boutah asked about the coverage hours for a paid staff.
- Pete explained that most calls not being met by Alburgh rescue are during the daytime hours, because people are working out of town and not able to go on the calls.
- He explained that 6am to 6pm would be the beginning for paid staff.

- Russell Duchaine asked if Isle LaMotte would be sharing in the expense since Alburgh covers that town as well as Alburgh.
- He was informed that Alburgh does have a mutual aid agreement in place and that we help other towns, and they help Alburgh.
- He was also told that Alburgh and Isle LaMotte boards will be meeting to discuss this.
- Skip Prairie asked if Alburgh is obligated to answer calls to Isle LaMotte.
- He was informed that yes, because the Alburgh license says Alburgh and Isle LaMotte and because of the mutual aid agreement, Alburgh is obligated to answer calls in Isle LaMotte.
- Skip asked when the license gets renewed and if it can be modified to specify how much Isle LaMotte would have to pay to be on the license.
- Pete Brescia stated that the license can be renewed at any time.
- The comment was made that Isle LaMotte should be paying an appropriate amount based on the percentage of calls that are for Isle LaMotte.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #7.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #8. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$5,000 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, FOR THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF THE ANNUAL JULY 4TH PARADE AND FESTIVITIES? (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #8 and asked for comments or questions.
- Erik Ramakrishnan asked why it was part of the overall budget last year but is appearing as a separate article this year.
- Josie Henry replied that it was a request from the parade coordinator that it be included as a separate article.
- Some of the selectboard members felt that the voters should decide if they want to spend money for the 4th of July celebrations.
- There was some confusion about how much was going to be spent on the parade and how much would be spent on fireworks.
- Josie replied that \$5,000 is incorporated into the general fund budget for the fireworks and that the \$5,000 being asked for as a separate article is for the other fourth of July festivities, including the parade.
- Someone asked if this was going to be a separate article every year.
- Josie explained that it will not unless the amount needed increases.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #8.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #9. SHALL THE VOTERS AUTHORIZE THE SELECTBOARD TO APPOINT A TOWN TREASURER AS PROVIDED IN 17 V.S.A. § 2651F? (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #9 and asked for comments or questions.
- Jennifer Theoret asked why this is being asked of the voters.
- Josie Henry explained that the request for a change was based on the town auditors recommendations from the previous year.
- Herbie Durham asked how it got to the point of needing to hire a treasurer.
- Josie asked Carol Behrman to speak to that as one of the auditors.

- Carol replied that balancing the books has become difficult. She added that they did not find any inappropriate transactions, but that the NEMRC system makes it difficult to categorize everything properly,
- Carol also added that the auditors recommended to the Selectboard that they consider transitioning to a different program than NEMRC and suggested that Quick Books might be a good option.
- Josie added that this is a “big picture” change and that a restructuring of the internal office workings is the goal.
- Tom Jacobson asked if the article passes, will that immediately nullify the treasurer.
- Josie replied that by state statute, the board will have 40 days to implement the change.
- Erik Ramakrishnan asked the treasurer, Donna L. Bohannon what her thoughts were on the article as he didn’t want to make a decision without knowing what the person most affected felt about it.
- Donna replied that she is not opposed to the idea and that having a qualified person in the roll will be beneficial to the town.
- The question was asked about how this position will be paid. There was concern that Donna would still be getting the treasurer salary and another person would be getting paid as well.
- Josie replied that this is part of the big picture restructuring of the office.
- John Chesarek asked where the money will come from to pay the new treasurer.
- Josie Henry explained that the way office staff pay was structured this year, the salaries for the positions of clerk, treasurer, assistant clerk/treasurer and the position created last year of administrator were all combined into one “office payroll” and that the duties of the people who work in the office will be reestablished and rate of pay for each will be determined. She also added that without a full time administrator, the added cost of healthcare was eliminated.
- Bernard Savage asked how much in late fees has been paid out in the past year.
- Josie and Donna both stated that it hasn’t been tracked.
- Bernard stated that he heard there were a lot of late fees being paid out.
- Donna stated that there have been some but that there haven’t been a lot and will research this.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #9.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #10. SHALL THE VOTERS AUTHORIZE THE SELECTBOARD TO APPOINT A COLLECTOR OF DELINQUENT TAXES PURSUANT TO 17 V.S.A. § 2651D(A), WITH AN EFFECTIVE DATE OF MARCH 5TH, 2024? (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #10 and asked for comments or questions.
- Bernard Savage asked how long Terry has been in the roll of delinquent tax collector.
- Terry Tatro replied that he has been the collector of delinquent taxes for 45 years.
- Erik Ramakrishnan asked how it compared to other towns.
- Josie Henry replied that some towns operate the same as Alburgh has been operating and others have a collector of taxes, both current and delinquent.
- She also explained that this is also part of the office restructuring.
- Skip Prairie asked for clarification on the 8% penalty that is collected.
- Terry Tatro explained that the 8% is how he gets paid.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #10.
- None was heard.

Results of the 07 March 2023 vote:

Moderator – 1 Year -

Terry A. Tatro - 308

Write in – 6

Town Clerk three (3) years – 3 years

Donna L. Bohannon - 299

Write in -19

Town Treasurer three (3) years – 3 years

Donna L. Bohannon -280

Write in – 20

Selectman – 3 years

Elliot Knight - 294

Write in – 7

Selectman – 2 Years –

Russell Duchaine - 288

Write in – 11

Lister – 3 Years –

Cheryl Dunn - 259

Write in – 14

Auditor – 3 Year –

Alton Bruso - 311

Write in – 2

Deed Agent – 1 Year –

Write in – Majority of write ins – Terry A. Tatro - 24

Constable – 1 Year –

Jerid Creller - 298

Write in – 9

Delinquent Tax Collector – 1 Year –

Terry A. Tatro - 300

Write in – 5

Grand Juror – 1 Year –1

Write in – No majority with enough votes to declare

ARTICLES

ARTICLE #3. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$849,603.20 WITH \$211,853.20 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, TO BE USED FOR GENERAL TOWN PURPOSES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 – 2024 (Ballot Item) **249 Yes --- 83 No**

ARTICLE #4. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$1,055,156.68 WITH \$954,656.68 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, TO BE USED FOR YEAR-AROUND MAINTENANCE OF TOWN HIGHWAYS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item) **249 Yes --- 84 No**

ARTICLE #5. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE THE SUM OF \$70,000.00 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION FOR ALBURGH VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT INCORPORATED, FOR GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item) **249 Yes --- 83 No**

ARTICLE #6. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE THE SUM OF \$25,000.00 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION FOR ALBURGH VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT INCORPORATED, TO BE USED TO PURCHASE EQUIPMENT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024 (Ballot Item) **243 Yes --- 91 No**

ARTICLE #7. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$300,000.00 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, FOR THE STARTUP OF ALBURGH RESCUE, INC? (Ballot Item) **217 Yes --- 119 No**

ARTICLE #8. SHALL THE VOTERS APPROVE A BUDGET OF \$5,000 TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION, FOR THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF THE ANNUAL JULY 4TH PARADE AND FESTIVITIES? (Ballot Item) **253 Yes --- 80 No**

ARTICLE #11. SHALL THE TOWN COMPENSATE THE DELINQUENT TAX COLLECTOR WITH A SALARY INSTEAD OF ANY STATUTORY FEES ALLOWED UNDER 32 V.S.A. §1674, WITH AN EFFECTIVE DATE OF MARCH 5TH, 2024? (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #11 and asked for comments or questions.
- The questions asked of article 10 covered this article as well.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #11.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #12. SHALL THE VOTERS RECOMMEND TO THE GRAND ISLE SUPERVISORY UNION THAT THEY PROVIDE A BUS FOR VILLAGE STUDENTS WHO ATTEND ALBURGH COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL CENTER? (Ballot Item)

- Moderator, Tatro read article #12, explained that if this article passes, it is only asking that the selectboard recommend to the schoolboard that they ask for the addition of a bus for the village students that attend Alburgh Community Education Center. He asked for comments or questions.
- It was stated that if this article passes, the selectboard would draft a letter to the schoolboard to make that request to the supervisory union.
- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on Article #12.
- None was heard.

ARTICLE #13. TO TRANSACT ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY PROPERLY COME BEFORE THIS MEETING.

- Moderator Tatro asked if there was any more discussion on any of the articles.
- None was heard.
- Moderator Tatro entertained a motion to adjourn.
- *At 9:25pm Erik Ramakrishnan motioned to adjourn – seconded by Russell Duchaine – all in favor – motion carried – meeting adjourned.*

Approved by:

Moderator – Terry Tatro

Date:

Terry A. Tatro

3-14-23

Selectboard Chair – Josie Henry

Date:

Josie Henry

3-15-23

ARTICLE #9. SHALL THE VOTERS AUTHORIZE THE SELECTBOARD TO APPOINT A TOWN TREASURER AS PROVIDED IN 17 V.S.A. § 2651F? (Ballot Item) **242 Yes --- 83 No**

ARTICLE #10. SHALL THE VOTERS AUTHORIZE THE SELECTBOARD TO APPOINT A COLLECTOR OF DELINQUENT TAXES PURSUANT TO 17 V.S.A. § 2651D(A), WITH AN EFFECTIVE DATE OF MARCH 5TH, 2024? (Ballot Item) **238 Yes --- 94 No**

ARTICLE #11. SHALL THE TOWN COMPENSATE THE DELINQUENT TAX COLLECTOR WITH A SALARY INSTEAD OF ANY STATUTORY FEES ALLOWED UNDER 32 V.S.A. §1674, WITH AN EFFECTIVE DATE OF MARCH 5TH, 2024? (Ballot Item) **200 Yes --- 132 No**

ARTICLE #12. SHALL THE VOTERS RECOMMEND TO THE GRAND ISLE SUPERVISORY UNION THAT THEY PROVIDE A BUS FOR VILLAGE STUDENTS WHO ATTEND ALBURGH COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL CENTER? (Ballot Item) **193 Yes --- 135 No**

School

School District Moderator – 1 Year - Not more than 1

Terry A. Tatro – Majority of write ins – Terry A. Tatro

Write in - 6

School Director – 2 Year – Not more than 1

Write in – Majority write ins – Tara Bessette

School Director – 3 Year – Not more than 1

Write in - Majority write ins – Whitney Maxham

ARTICLE 1. WILL THE ALBURGH TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT AUTHORIZE THE SCHOOL BOARD TO BORROW IN ANTICIPATION OF TAXES? **202 YES --- 130 NO**

ARTICLE 2 SHALL THE VOTERS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVE THE SCHOOL BOARD TO EXPEND \$7,280,056.56 WHICH IS THE AMOUNT THE SCHOOL BOARD HAS DETERMINED TO BE NECESSARY FOR THE ENSUING FISCAL YEAR **162 YES --- 172 NO**