

TOWN MEETING INFORMATIONAL MEETING

March 4, 2024 @ 6:30 PM

Alburgh Community Education Center

Attendees: See attached sign in sheets

School principal Marlon Maylor went over a presentation about school progress and goals for education and improving the school grounds.

Terry Tatro as moderator read through school articles 1-5 one by one.

While looking at the budget within the town report, comments were made on the cost of groundskeeping, food service, and the rise in costs. The CLA for property in town is lower than 83% which affects the state formula used to create education rates.

The town's portion of the meeting opened at 7:35pm by moderator Terry Tatro. He read each article one by one. Aside from Article 2, they were all ballot items.

Article 1 was for the election of officers (ballot item)

Article 2: Chair Josie Henry had a slide showing the makeup of general and highway budgets and how the budget increases partly stemmed from not using delinquent funds as revenue in the manner it had been done in the past.

Alexander McCracken motioned to accept the reports of the town officers – John Beaulac seconded – all in favor – so approved

Article 3: John Beaulac asked what major increases were in the general fund? The answer was mostly the sheriff's contract and health insurance.

Article 4: Carol Behrman asked if snow removal comes out of the highway? Yes. A milder winter this year may cause fewer expenses in payroll overtime, vehicle maintenance, and salt/sand. Surpluses can be carried over, unlike general fund.

Heidi Gotshall asked what increases were in the highway budget. Capital equipment was one of the larger line increases. There are no new major vehicle/equipment schedule for FY 2024-25. The highway department does need a new excavator and sidewalk plow but nothing to actively purchase. Paving roads, while the 2024-25 line item went down from last year, is expensive—around \$100K per mile.

Raleigh Palmer asked if there was a surplus, what would it be used on? Russell Duchaine said if the budget passes, likely capital equipment to put toward an excavator. The current one is 25 years old.

Rene/Skip Prairie asked about highway payroll and got clarity on actual figures versus budgeted ones.

Article 5: Raleigh Palmer asked about the fire department accounting, surpluses, et al and reference was made to page 32 of the town report.

Herbie Durham asked why articles 5 and 6 for the fire department weren't combined. Moderator Tatro said they could be, they've always just been separate.

Article 6: No comments.

Article 7: Carol Behrman asked if Alburgh Rescue has found a location. No, they have given up that pursuit for now as they lease space from the fire department. She asked how the \$300K voted last year was spent. Answer: payroll. Josie Henry asked how much came from billing Isle La Motte, why isn't the \$300K figure offset? Terry Tatro answered he believed they asked for \$60K and Isle La Motte will vote on it tomorrow.

Paul Fortin thought the \$300K was stated as a one-time deal last year, is \$300K what it costs each year? Terry Tatro said as this is the first year, it is too early to tell. Nathan Gotshall said it also depends on how many volunteers they also get. The more volunteers, the lower the cost, but roughly it's about \$250K. Paul Fortin asked about grants and Nathan Gotshall said if they didn't apply for grants the cost would be closer to \$350K.

Damien Henry asked why rescue must pay the fire department if the taxpayers pay for both? It was explained the buildings are owned by the fire department, not rescue or the town, though a lot of the department's funds come from the public.

John Clarke asked a question on payroll that couldn't be heard by the scribe. Skip Prairie asked why the rescue and fire department report was merged in the town report and Ron Kumetz answered the entities were not separate last fiscal year but are now and reports will be split next year. It was asked if the fire department's expenses will be reduced when they split from rescue, but revenues also came from rescue/ambulance bill so it's hard to tell. Ron Kumetz said for years they've tried to level fund, but they should have something of a savings. Insurance alone is almost \$30K a year.

Article 8: Heidi Gotshall asked why this donation was singled out and not within the general fund budget. Josie Henry explained the new 2022 appropriation request policy where a petition was required for donations which weren't always a part of the general fund.

Article 9: No discussion.

Article 10: No discussion.

Article 11: Carol Behrman had a question on tax bills listed on the town's website and how she doesn't like her name and address published even though it's public record. Two years ago, the municipal office put all tax bills online to help mortgage companies, title searchers, attorneys, and property owners because it is a very common request.

Dennis Irick asked why one of the town's usable plow trucks is parked at the Missile Base site. After the purchase of a new 2023 plow truck, that makes 4 vehicles for 3 highway employees. One could be sold to help cover expenses. Russell Duchaine explained it's good to have a spare in case one is out of commission, especially in a snowstorm. Dennis Irick said they could use one of his. Russell Duchaine said they'll be evaluating their options, which could include selling a truck or building a lean-to at the current town garage site.

Carol Behrman asked what the board was proposing for the old Bell property the town acquired at tax sale. Josie Henry explained they had reached out for public comment and have done an RFP for demolishing the structures on site for a possible dog park, extra parking. It is still being actively worked on.

Moderator Tatro asked the 4 candidates running for selectboard if they would like to take a minute to speak to the crowd. Damien Henry, Alexander McCracken, Jayson Martin, and James Hokenberg were in attendance and spoke of their brief background and desire to be on the selectboard.

Skipper Deyo asked if the rescue request for \$300K gets voted down, what would ambulance service cost? No one had data at hand but had estimates from two years prior they could look up. Josie Henry said a townwide reappraisal is coming along slowly. Cheryl Dunn said they put out RFPs to several companies and heard back from 3 who were not interested. It will be 5-6 years if we're lucky since so many towns also need reappraisals based on sale data.

Alex Goddard mentioned a safety and security handout for the upcoming solar eclipse available at the town office and virtually. The event is expected to draw many people.

Lastly, the Town of Alburgh unveiled both a plan and banner to rename Bicentennial Park after Terry Tatro for his decades of community commitment in functions ranging from the planning commission to village trustee, tax collector, charter fire department member to dog catcher and Meals on Wheels driver. With ARPA funding, the town is excited to pursue playground equipment and more recreational options for this village park. Well done and well earned, Terry.

John Beaulac motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:45pm – Herbie Durham seconded – all in favor – so approved!

Respectfully submitted,

Danielle James Choiniere

(School portion subject to better minutes by their minute taker)