The meeting is called to order at a little after 5 by SelectBoard Chair Selby Turner.

Present : Select Board, Clerk/Treasurer, Lister and numerous citizens.

Selby : The purpose of this meeting is to give people the opportunity to ask questions about the 2021/2022 budget.

 I’ll turn it over to Rusty Spaulding : Select Board member and Town Moderator.

Rusty : I’ll start by going over the budget. The budget is $540,148 which includes $474,244 and the articles of $57,482. Also, a late COVID Grant from Vtrans of $6,000. We moved that to this year as a surplus. There was a total surplus of $18,861 which is 2.38% more than we knew about. I was not aware that Steve Stata had worked with the previous Clerk/Treasurers on the budget. There was a disconnect between Treasurer and Selectboard. The budget ended on 31 December 2020, we’ve been using that money to pay bills.

Barbara Callahan had a question on winter roads. The December snow plow contract payment of $22,500 was paid in January along with a payment to Beaulac of $2700. This makes the winter roads $279,125 which is over budget by 11%.

Sylvia Jensen: Are we not discussing the current budget ?

Rusty: I wanted to get old business out of the way first. It’s less confusing.

Sylvia: Can you give us the line items so we can track what you are saying?

Rusty : In the 2019 book the budget of 474,249 is on p. 57. 57,482 (articles), 15,015 for Covid grant is on 03-010.98. The last budget meeting was on 12-28 and many of the bills hadn’t come in yet.

Selby : The highway surplus of $15,015 was a grant that we received because we didn’t receive a grant.

Rusty : The grant is in highway revenue.

Sylvia : What’s leftover of the 15,015 ?

Rusty : All of it. I originally thought we spent all of it, because we overspent on paving but when I refigured the budget again, I believe that it is all leftover, $6,000 went into a surplus.

Sylvia, It’s not in the budget

Rusty : It’s in the warning. It’s not the budget, it can go into any of the highway categories.

Discussion between Rusty and Sylvia about the highway surplus.

Rusty : It has to be spent on highway.

Sylvia : You actually should have a separate highway fund. The auditors have told you that twice.

Rusty : Actually, they’ve just recommended it.

Selby : I’ve been fighting for it for a number of years, we just haven’t done it. I thought that road surpluses could be carried over from previous years as a surplus.

Selby : Questions

Charlie Andrews : I understand in 2010 State mandated the towns get all signage up to par. It was extended in 2011 due to the flood and again until 2015. It’s been 6 more years and is still not done.

Selby: I’m not aware of any grants for signage. We applied for the state to do signs in 2019, state couldn’t do it due to scheduling. Nothing happened in 2020. We weren’t going to replace signs if state was going to.

Charlie : You do have a copy Selby of the information from the state on the signs.

Marie : My question has to do with the culverts in the town. We have a culvert by our house, we have cleaned ours out well. We’ve noticed a culvert right across from the Town Hall, the road is caving in.

Selby : It’s on our schedule for this year. There is an issue with it, utilities run around it. We will have to close Main St and put out to bid. There is a process and will be in the Islander. We need to get through the snow plow season.

Charles Gurney : $14,500 for school, Can school still be used by the public ?

Rusty/Selby : Yes, absolutely.

Charles : How do we sign up ?

Rusty : Go through Select Board, we can make contacts for you. It will be easier for you.

Mary Catherine Graziano :

Can the Select Board tell us the duration for the services for the move to the school? For example, for how long will plowing be offered?

Rusty : John Yaratz and my business will move the safes and take care of the wall. If they have to be moved back, we will do it, free of charge to the Town.

Selby : It’s going to be a volunteer move. Anyone is welcome. It’s a fairly simple move, other than the safes. We have the use of furniture already here.

Rusty: We’ve moved safes before.

Selby : Any other questions ?

Charlie Andrews :

I have a comment. I think the Town Hall is fine. We can paint Town Hall inexpensively. I think moving to such a large space for a couple employees to work 30-40 hours a week. I read Sam Gibson’s comments. It doesn’t make any sense. Maybe we need more planning, because without a plan, nothing’s going to change. I’d like to see more planning.

Rusty : Thank you Charlie.

Mary Catherine :

I reviewed the budget for Town Hall repairs back to 2009. About $55,000 was budgeted and much of it wasn’t spent. Why was this money not spent?

Rusty : I’m not sure. We spent $154,00 on maintenance for the last ten years.

Sylvia : That’s not correct, that includes electricity.

Rusty : OK, We spent $124,000

Mary Catherine : Only 60% of the budgeted money was spent.

Rusty : Since I’ve been on the Board, with the declining enrollment at the school, we decided it was better to not put a lot of money into the Town Hall and to see when the school will be available. We sent out a questionnaire in 2009, and the voters agreed that moving to the school if it became available was a good idea. The Town Hall can’t serve all our purposes, we have to have another structure somewhere else.

Mary Catherine : I can’t hear you. I have contacted you three times, once in writing, about solving the structural (?) issues around the meeting and they still are not fixed. I am very frustrated. I am hearing impaired; I can’t hear you when you talk. Can you please explain to me exactly why you haven’t spent all of that $55,000?

Rusty : Because the plan has been to move the Town Office to the school when it became available. Town Hall cannot serve all purposes that we need. Can you hear me?

Mary Catherine : I’m sorry I can’t hear you. Have you set that money aside for the move?

Rusty : No, we haven’t set that money aside for the move. If we didn’t spend it, we returned it as surplus. I have a sheet right here that says since 2009, we have $724,566 in surplus to the Town. Did you hear that?

Mary Catherine : In 2010 -2015 the town budgeted a significant amount for repairs. I don’t understand why the money wasn’t spent.

Rusty : I am sorry, I just can’t answer that.

Barbara Callahan : Point of order. No side conversations, we can’t understand them.

Selby : Any questions from in here ? Any questions from zoom land ?

Charlie Andrews : I have a question. It’s great that the Town uses John Yaratz for road work however. If the Town had budgeted back in 2009, we could have borrowed and bought the equipment and perhaps saved the Town about $100,000.

Rusty : Let me interrupt you a minute. (couldn’t understand tape)

Charlie : A lack of a town plan is evident here. You’re always gonna have to plow roads, your

always going to have to buy sand. We’re just living hand to mouth here.

Selby : I’d be happy to talk with you whenever you want. We need to get back to topic, and whatever happened 10 years ago is out of scope.

Paul Zera : Talk about budget

Charlie : I am, I am talking about the salt shed and the interest we are paying.

Selby : The salt shed will be paid off in 2025.

Mary Catherine : I am bringing up the salt shed in the context of the parallels between the town hall move and the salt shed. I was looking at the salt shed and Bobby Dean said the footings were too small for the building. The salt shed went over budget (?) and money was diverted from roads and gravel.

Selby : Again, off topic. I will be glad to talk with you personally, but this is off topic. It is a very expensive subject and full of left hooks.

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Barbara : The budget shows $198,075 and the actual was $176,156.

Rusty : Did you see the $6,000 for the Alburgh Fire Dept on line 01-803.00.

Barbara : Where does it show the $19,919 surplus ?

Rusty : Some things go over and some things are under. There are numerous appropriations that have not been paid yet.

Sylvia : We have a surplus. Last years, it’s a known. It has to be entered into nontaxable income. There’s no line item where it says transferred into highway.

Rusty : It’s in the end.

Sylvia: You have to show all your income, non-tax income is supposed to go into non tax general surplus. It’s a known figure.

Rusty : It was spent on other categories. It’s not sitting in the bank somewhere.

Discussion about surplus between Sylvia and Rusty.

Barbara : We should have auditors because they would do a deep dive, they would reconcile these accounts. Professional auditors would not find these errors.

Rusty : Professional auditors look for the big picture. If you add these columns up, the money is in there.

Mary Catherine : I saw on Front Porch Forum the projected cost to maintain the Town Office at the school will be $15,000-20,000 (per Debbie Spaulding). Current Town Hall costs on average $7,000. Is that an official projection?

Rusty : That’s a best guess. We haven’t been down there yet so we don’t know exactly what it should cost.

Charlie A : Why aren’t you adding to the sheriff’s contract ? Another committee is not the answer ? Why are we spending such a small amount of our budget on the sheriff? What is the most important part of living here? Enjoyment of our property.

Rusty : We spend about 7% of our budget on law enforcement. They were here 3 times this week for some disputes. We’ve gotten our twelve hours for the week already. What do you think would be a good amount?

Charlie A : It should be more in the summer. You have your business. It adds an enormous amount of people to the town. We need a full-time person here in the summer.

Rusty : Summer people add a lot of revenue to this town. My business and my campers pay 6 figures in taxes to this town.

Charlie A : Summer people should be held accountable for the damage they cause to the roads. We don’t wait all summer for the good weather for these people to use the roads as a race track.

Michele Murray :

Earlier on Zoom I heard quite a bit of arguing on the surplus. I think you need to look up the state statute which says you cannot use highway surplus to reduce taxes. Why are you using it to reduce taxes? You have to leave it where it is and call it a surplus. It will just accumulate. The only thing you can reduce taxes for is municipality.

Rusty:

The Town Attorney wrote the last warrant.

Michele:

Did you change the budget from the last warrant?

Rusty : No.

Sylvia : Statement of Taxes has not been in the Town Report since Michele. That is very basic.

Rusty : You can’t get it from here (points to report). I can tell you what was billed, and what was delinquent.

Mary LaBrecque : Statement of Taxes is not required, by statute. The only thing required is the auditors report. All the rest is just information.

Sylvia : The town would need to do quite a bit more work. Explains Statement of Taxes. I think that’s what the Town Report is supposed to be. I also had a question about the Listers Fund line 04-01-0.25. Parcel Maintenance Revenue. This is 1.00 per parcel (861 parcels), so $861.

It’s two pronged, the second is 861 parcels x $8.50. 7318.50 meant to use for reappraisals by statute. We have an 1800 surplus but should be setting it aside in a special fund so we have it for reappraisals.

Rusty : We never have. Because we don’t. It makes as much sense as sitting in a fund. I’ve never read a statute law that says that.

Sylvia : I talked to Casey O’Hara who is the head of PV&R. They are expecting the listers to do the work of work of keeping the Grand List up. how much was the last reappraisal?

Rusty : I think 90,000. Everything I have understood to this point is the state would like you to do that but you don’t have to. Nobody has ever told us we had to do it. We keep it separate in the book.

Sylvia ; Talk to your Directors..

Rusty: I will be sure to check on this.
Mike Donohue: Asked for Michele Murray’s questions and those answers to be repeated. Where were the warnings posted?

Sarah Noble : Website, Town Office, Post Office, and School

Selby : Any more questions ? Are we done?

Rusty: Motion to adjourn at 6:27. All in favor Adjourned

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary LaBrecque

Acting Select Board Clerk

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Selby Turner Rustam Spaulding Paul Zera