

March 2nd, 2024, Isle LaMotte Town Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Town Moderator, Rusty Spaulding at 9:00.

In Attendance: Rusty Spaulding, Joseph Deller, Cary Sandvig, Mary-Catherine Graziano, Vickie Buswell, Marie D'Angelo, Terrance Tuck, Erin Gilligan, Deborah Langlois, Charles Gurney, David Gurney, Marjorie Bertram, Joyce Tuck, Mike Smith, Sherry Gaudette, Ray Gaudette, Anne Jobin-Picard, Stephen Mank, Andrew Whipple, Patti Celler, Judy Bennett, Carol Stata, Steve Stata, Deborah Spaulding, Maureen Turner, Selby Turner, Steve Foley, William Johnson, Valerie Sinnamon, Paula Bennett, Jason Wright, Beth Meese, Lucinda Varga, Sylvia Jenson, Steven Rowe, Carol Michaels, Tara Deller, Pat Treckman, Alicia Leonard, Timothy Leonard, via Zoom: Michelle Murray, Bobby Dean, Alex Montagne, Carmine Centrella, Gladys Barnes & other attendees who did not announce or sign the attendance list or use full names on Zoom.

### Summary

Isle la Motte - Ballot Mailing, Town Report, and Animal Control Officer

The town discussed issues with the mailing of Ballots, where some addresses were incorrectly listed, causing ballots to be sent to the wrong places. There was also confusion when people expected ballots to be mailed as they had been in the past, but this time there was a delay. The town decided to refine the process for future instances. Furthermore, the town clarified that the meeting was a non-voting meeting, allowing people to freely speak without the need for approval. Concerns were raised about the decision to omit certain reports from the printed town report to save money. The selectboard agreed to investigate the cost of printing these reports and consider making them available online. Lastly, the town discussed holding a rabies clinic and the challenges of finding a veterinarian and volunteers to help.

Transitioning Rescue Group Costs and Budget Concerns

The team discussed the transition from a volunteer rescue group to a paid group and the increase in costs due to a flaw in the calculation of the total cost. They mention that North Hero will be doing the same thing, resulting in the same or more cost as the volunteer rescue org. The audit services budget has increased from 7,700 to 11,400, which was the lowest bid. The increased cost of the ambulance service was also discussed. Mary Catherine asked about the role of staff and the need for more information on the budget.

Salaries, Budget, and Town Hall: Selectboard's Reconsideration Needed

A discussion about the selectboard reconsidering its approach to determining salaries in light of the current economic situation. They also expressed concerns about the future of the budget, predicting objections and disputes. The Town discussed the 2023 budget, which was \$4,000 more than the 2022 budget, totaling \$82,540. The increase was due to several factors, including the reallocation of funds and the realization of a surplus from the highway fund. The Town also recognized ongoing challenges and the need for solutions, such as hiring a town administrator. The town decided to allocate half of its budget to a highway fund and the other half to a capital reserve fund. The town also discussed the plan for the old Town Hall, which received a grant to assess its condition and potential uses, including possibly selling it.

## Financial Matters and Budget Concerns

The meeting primarily focused on financial matters, particularly the budget and payments related to the memory program and Wendy, a consultant involved in various functions. There was a discussion about Wendy's payment being categorized under consulting instead of being included in the payroll, and a discrepancy regarding the December payment. The total expenditure for the memory program in 2023 was estimated to be around \$13,000, higher than the initially calculated \$8,000. The meeting also covered the town's budget, the increase in general fund taxes and costs related to the ambulance service, and the difficulty in finding a suitable bookkeeper with Nemrc experience. The finance committee clarified that they had balanced the budget and managed to keep the town lot sales tax-free. They also addressed a \$75,000 deposit issue and the remaining balance after the sale of some town lots. Lastly, they discussed the parcel maintenance money not being sent to the fund for Reval and the current budget situation.

## ARPA Funds Usage and Transparency Discussed

There was a discussion about the use of state and ARPA funds, with a focus on maintaining a separate fund for future needs and sustainable projects. The town expressed concerns about using state funds to offset expenses and the importance of transparency in ARPA funds' accounting. There was interest in collecting community ideas for creative ways to spend the remaining funds, such as through grants, but concerns about increased taxes were raised. The town also discussed upgrading the computer system using ARPA funds, as it would benefit the entire town without increasing taxes. Dissatisfaction with how the ARPA funds have been spent so far was also highlighted, with a need for more transparency.

## Volunteerism, Internet, and Water System Issues

The meeting revolved around the decline in town volunteerism and its impact on various tasks, with the town representative and another participant emphasizing the need for increased participation. The conversation then shifted to financial matters, with the town considering upgrading their internet infrastructure if they move their records onto a cloud server. There were concerns about the lack of internet access among residents, with suggestions made for alternative methods of reaching those without internet. The importance of volunteerism within the community was highlighted, with an invitation for suggestions to be sent to the selectboard for consideration. Finally, issues with the water system in a building were discussed, with potential solutions including applying for an NRPC grant and considering simpler equipment due to the absence of an operating school.

## Selectboard Structure Debate in Small Town

The meeting deliberated on the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a 5-member selectboard. The potential benefits highlighted included increased freedom for members to ideate outside of public meetings and enhanced efficiency. However, concerns were raised regarding the potential lack of volunteers. The town representative voiced the belief that the benefits outweighed the potential drawbacks. The town decided to seek community input and potentially hold a special election to implement a change from the current board structure. Concerns about the frequency of meetings and the need for volunteers for certain tasks were also discussed.

## Volunteerism and Library Needs in Town

The meeting in the town revolved around the need for more volunteers, particularly for the library. Concerns were expressed about the need for more help in setting up and taking down the events. The town representative also emphasized the importance of volunteering in the town and suggested that the Town of Isle La Motte Community Organization might be a better organization to help foster volunteerism. There was also a discussion about the library's strained relationship with the town organization, which led to a suggestion of focusing on fostering more volunteerism within the community. Towards the end, a suggestion was made to create a list of residents without internet access who could be contacted for updates.

Ambulance Cost, Board Representation, School Budget, Population Decline.

The meeting revolved around several topics. The discussion about the potential cost of an ambulance in Alburgh and the possibility of dividing it by the full-time residents sparked a conversation. There was also a mention of a vote on a per-person charge. The importance of greater representation on the board was highlighted, with a call for more diverse voices and perspectives. Additionally, there was mention of a school budget meeting to take place after the town meeting, and a concern about the declining population in the town, which was affecting the number of students in the local schools.

Transportation, Homelessness, and Budget Approval

The town discussed the need for better bus transportation services for students, with a particular focus on reducing the long bus rides some children endure. A spokesperson shared that they are working on a solution to consolidate bus pickups and drop-offs to reduce travel time. The town also touched on the issue of homelessness and the challenges it presents, including the need for more mental health support in schools. Finally, the town approved a budget for 2024, which includes expenditures for road maintenance and the expansion of the selectboard from three to five members.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:18.