

**Town of Sharon  
Annual Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Moderator Galen Mudgett called the meeting to order at 9:00AM

The Moderator led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Moderator asked the voters if there was unanimous consent to allow Representatives Jim Masland and Rebecca Holcombe to speak to the voters.

There were no objections and voters yielded the floor.

Representative Jim Masland discussed the challenges facing the State. Representative Masland spoke about an influx of federal money into the State and the changing economics of the State. Representative Masland also addressed the reality of inflationary changes.

Representative Masland noted there are 50 new members in the House in 2023, and he encouraged people to consider serving in State government.

Representative Masland serves on Ways and Means Committee, and he brought to the voter's attention three primary discussions taking place in the committee currently including 1) Universal School Meals, 2) Universal PreK and 3) Paid Family Medical Leave.

Following Representative Masland, the voters heard from Representative Rebecca Holcombe.

Representative Holcombe reported that she serves on the Appropriations Committee, and she noted that the Appropriations Committee is taking measures to create a "soft landing" in anticipation of contracting State revenues. Representative Holcombe said it is important to acknowledge that Federal funding will ultimately return to levels more in line with pre-pandemic levels.

In her update to the voters, Representative Holcombe also highlighted some of the main topics in the forefront of the State legislature in particular the housing, development, education funding, social infrastructure funding, and emergency response funding.

Representative Holcombe also referenced the US Supreme Court decision in Carson vs. Makon and how it relates to tuition assistance for Towns, such as Sharon, that do not operate local middle and high schools but instead provide tuition assistance to students. Representative Holcombe noted that the US Supreme Court decision means that the State will be required to send tuition funding to sectarian schools. She noted that this ruling is in direct conflict with the Vermont constitution, which specifically prohibits the raising of taxes to support religious institutions. Representative Holcombe said it is important for the State to find solutions to this and the many complicated questions it faces right now.

The voters were given an opportunity to ask Representatives Masland and Holcombe questions.

Susan Root asked a question about the Affordable Heat Bill which she feels is underdeveloped and had not been well explored.

Representative Masland responded that he felt the bill has one substantial flaw that needs to be addressed. The bill currently allows Vermont, through a mechanism called “renewable energy attributes”, to import fracked gas from the Midwest and still consider the gas to be renewable. Representative Masland said this needs to be addressed. Representative Masland said the bill that came out of the Senate would create a study of the cost of implementing an Affordable Heat Bill.

Representative Holcombe said the State has been somewhat protected from fluctuations in electric costs, but she said that Vermont ultimately depends on energy supplies that come from outside of the State. This creates dependence on outside fuel sources rather than supporting Vermont-based energy alternatives.

Joe Willis asked about solar farms and where energy created in the State is going as he believes the solar energy created in the State is being sent out of state.

Representative Masland said the question is really a question of where the Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) go. The electric companies in Vermont benefit from RECs when they sell them to other states. Representative Masland said he is also concerned that the major utility companies are purveyors of nonrenewable energy but are in fact counting them as renewable. Representative Masland shared the questioner’s concerns and is interested in keeping renewable energy sources in the State.

After thirty minutes, the Moderator asked that the Q&A portion conclude, so that the business of the Town of Sharon Annual Meeting might proceed.

**The Moderator read Article 1.**

**To elect the following Town Officials by Australian Ballot:**

- Town Moderator for 1-year term
- Collector of Delinquent Taxes for 1-year term
- Selectboard for 3-year term
- First Constable for 1-year term
- Lister for 3-year term

The moderator noted that these positions are on the Australian Ballot and that voters will need to vote by 7:00pm today to have their vote counted.

**The Moderator read Article 2. To elect the following Town Officers:**

**Trustee of Public Funds – 3-year term**

Doris Backus nominated Martha Fisk.  
Seconded by Jim Kearns.

With no further nominations, the Moderator entertained a motion to instruct the Clerk to cast one ballot in favor of Martha Fisk for a 3-year term as Trustee of Public Funds.

Jason Flint made the motion. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

**Trustee of Baxter Memorial Library – 3-year term**

Laura DeCapua nominated Karen Rodis.  
Seconded by Susanne Jones.

With no further nominations, the Moderator entertained a motion to instruct the Clerk to cast one ballot in favor of Karen Rodis for a 3-year term as Trustee of Baxter Memorial Library.

Mary Gavin made the motion. Dee Gish seconded.  
Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**Trustee of Baxter Library – 3-year term**

Suzanne Jones nominated Emma Basham. Jonathan Stoeckle seconded.

With no further nominations, the Moderator entertained a motion to instruct the Clerk to cast one ballot in favor of Emma Basham for a 3-year term as Trustee of Baxter Memorial Library.

Mary Stoddard made the motion. Mary Gavin seconded. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**Trustee of Downer Fund – 3-year term**

Jim Kearns nominated Martha Fisk. Jason Flint seconded.

With no further nominations, the Moderator entertained a motion to instruct the Clerk to cast one ballot in favor of Martha Fisk for a 3-year term as Trustee of Baxter Memorial Library.

David Karon made the motion. Elaine Kearns seconded. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 3. To receive the reports of Town Officers.**

Mary Gavin made the motion. Doris Backus seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion.

Selectboard Chair Kevin Gish welcomed the voters and took time to introduce some of the Town employees and officers who were present for Town Meeting.

Kevin also thanked the volunteers and organizations who provide service to the Town.

Kevin acknowledged the service of Ira Clark, who has been involved with the Planning Commission for 12 years. Ira recently informed the Selectboard that he is stepping down from the position in April 2023

Kevin also took a moment to recognize the contributions of Margaret Raymond and to thank her for her over three decades of service to the Town of Sharon. In the past, Margaret has been a Town Auditor, Treasurer and Assistant Town Clerk, and served for a time on the Conservation Commission. Margaret is now serving as a Justice of the Peace.

Kevin also encouraged residents to consider how they might be of service to the Town including the open positions available currently, such as on the Planning Commission.

Kevin Gish also wanted to speak about the function of the Emergency Response team and the opening of warming shelters in the Town. Kevin noted that with the extended power outages in December, the Fire Department opened as a warming shelter under the direction of the Emergency Director, Nathan Potter. Kevin spoke that it is important to know that residents are welcome to reach out to Town officials including Nathan Potter or the Emergency Coordinators, the Selectboard Members, the Town Health Officer, or the Selectboard Assistant should they find they are in need of a helping hand during these localized emergency situations.

Kevin Gish reminded voters that Selectboard meetings are open to the public and are held on the first and third Monday of the month. Kevin also mentioned that the Selectboard meetings will offer hybrid participation of both in-person and digital options moving forward. Meeting agendas are posted on the listserv, the Town Offices Facebook page, in the Town Offices, at the Post Office and also the Library

Next, Sarah Pfeiffer spoke about the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Sarah noted that the Town received \$457,356.82 in funding, and she explained that there is specific ARPA funding information available in the Town Report and also on the website. Sarah highlighted that the Selectboard has set aside up to \$50,000 for community projects including the four topics included in a town-wide survey available at Town Meeting for voters to complete or also online on the Town's website. Sarah encouraged voters to participate and provide feedback to the Town, and she opened the floor to questions.

Steve Basham asked for clarification on the definition of "health-related" programming. Sarah agreed that the question was purposefully broad so that residents could weigh in more specifically what that might mean to them.

Kevin Gish added that the Selectboard has grappled with what should be the role of the Town as far as funding certain programs such as mental health support programs or the Arts and if this type of funding is within the purview of the Town government.

Elaine Kearns asked if this funding would be considered a one-time appropriation or ongoing funding. If it would be ongoing, then she noted that essentially it would become a budget item and not an appropriation.

Sarah Pfeiffer agreed that the funding should not be used for an ongoing programming funding as that was discussed by the Selectboard and they agreed that the Town is not looking to fund programs long-term.

Sue Sellew asked the Board if the Arts funding question on the survey would be relevant to the Historical Society's mission and building improvements to the Old Town Hall.

Deb Jones noted in the Town Report there is a list of proposed ARPA funding projects, and there is an amount included under building infrastructure that is earmarked for Old Town Hall building projects.

With no further questions, the Moderator confirmed that the Board had made their full reports to the voters and restated the motion on the floor and called the question.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 4. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon allocate \$6,195.00 for FY24 for the Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator?**

Kevin Gish made the motion. Dee Gish seconded.

Ryan Haac spoke on behalf of the Town as the Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator Steering Committee member and Chair of the Energy Committee. Ryan explained that this first came before voters three years ago at which point it was a new position in the Regional Planning Commission. Ryan explained that he feels this is the best time to bring Federal funding into the Town, and the IREC position will bring funding opportunities through grant funding. Ryan explained that it is important to be able to have access to this professional support. Ryan made himself available for questions.

David Karon requested that Ryan Haac explain the IREC position.

Ryan Haac explained that the IREC is a professional consultant on the staff of the Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission. The IREC is a shared resource paid for by several area towns. They provide guidance to the Town Offices to help find ways to reduce energy use and overall energy costs as well as seeking out grant funding to install energy efficient systems.

Debbie St Peter asked if the IREC is a resource for residents. Ryan said the best way to get support through the IREC would be to go through the Sharon IREC Steering Committee

Member, who is currently Ryan. Ryan will bring questions to the IREC on behalf of residents via the Steering Committee.

Debbie St. Peter asked how residents can access the list of funding sources for residents. Ryan Haac responded that there is a "Climate Action for You" page on the Two Rivers Ottauquechee website which is a master list of funding opportunities available to residents looking to convert to more efficient systems.

Ryan Haac reiterated that the IREC position has been a financial benefit to the Town. Ryan noted he has secured funding for an Electric Charging Station for the Town.

Dan Daneen asked for the Electric School Bus timeline.

The Moderator reminded Dan that his question is not germane as it would be more appropriately addressed by the School Board.

With no further questions, the Moderator restated the article and called the question.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 5. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon appropriate the amount of \$1,908,948 for necessary Town expenses, including highways, of which \$1,395,700 shall be raised by property taxes, and to authorize the Selectboard to set a tax rate sufficient to provide the same?**

Carol Sheldon made the motion. Katherine Roe seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion.

Kevin Gish presented some information relevant to the proposed FY24 budget. Kevin said inflation was at 7.2% in November and is at 6.3% currently. Kevin noted that the Budget includes the General Fund and the Highway Fund, and the proposed budget includes a combined increase of 5.73% with an estimated 4.5 cent increase in the Municipal Tax Rate.

Kevin also noted that the Road Crew staff are currently in very high demand, and that the Road Crew received a 7% wage increase in November 2022 and will receive a wage increase along with all employees in FY24.

Kevin also noted that inflationary pressures have impacted the budget for FY24.

Elaine Kearns asked for clarification regarding the allocation for the IREC and if it needs to be added to the budget. The Moderator confirmed that it does not.

Helen Barrett asked why the Town Report wasn't mailed in 2023 and wanted to make a motion to add mailing the Town Report back.

The Moderator said the motion to mail the town report was out of order since it wasn't warned.

With no further questions, the Moderator restated the motion on the floor and called the question.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 6. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon authorize the Town Treasurer to collect General Fund, Highway Fund, and School District current taxes on real and personal estate?**

Jim Kearns made the motion. Mary Gavin seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion. There was no discussion.

The Moderator asked if the voters would move Article 6.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 7. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon authorize payment of real and personal property taxes in two (2) installments for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, the first being on or before Wednesday, September 13, 2023 and the second being on or before Wednesday, February 14, 2024?**

David Karon made the motion. Cat Buxton seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion. There was no discussion.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 8. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon vote that overdue taxes shall bear an interest rate of one percent (1%) per month or part thereof for each installment until paid in full?**

Jason Flint made the motion. Doris Backus seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion.

Mary Stoddard asked the meaning of the interest rate mentioned in the Article.

Mary Gavin responded to the question to explain that this is an interest payment applied to late tax payments. Mary Gavin also mentioned that Articles 8, 9 and 10 are related and the 1% penalty is the same as what voters have seen in past warned articles for tax penalties, but this year the interest penalty and the late fees have been warned as separate articles following guidance from the VLCT.

Mary Gavin said the late fee question was an issue brought before the Selectboard by a taxpayer, and the Selectboard discussed how to respond to complaints that the late fee of 8% felt punitive. The solution presented in the three tax penalty articles is a compromise formulated by the Selectboard over the course of at least three open meetings to ensure taxpayers make timely payments, but that the late fee feels less punitive.

There was no further discussion.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 9. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon vote that tax payments made after the second installment due date of February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024 be assessed a late fee of two percent (2%) for payments made on or before Wednesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024?**

Mary Gavin made the motion. Mike Barsanti seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion.

Mary Gavin provided some background about the decision of the Selectboard to create a less punitive delinquent penalty for tax payers by creating a stepped penalty for those who are late paying but still pay in full within two weeks of the second installment deadline

Helen Barrett asked where the late fee dollars go.

Mary Gavin said late fees are used to pay the Collector of Delinquent Taxes.

Jim Kearns stated that he was unaware that the penalties were paid to the Collector of Delinquent Taxes.

Mary Gavin said that it is required by Vermont law that interest is paid to the Town and the late fees are paid to the Collector of Delinquent Taxes. Mary also noted that the interest and late fee penalties are required to be included as warned articles each year.

Deb Jones stated that the funds do not get paid to the Collector of Delinquent Taxes so long as the taxes are delinquent. Late fees rather are the payment from the Town for the services provided by the Collector of Delinquent Taxes.

Margaret Raymond asked for a clarification for the combination of interest and penalty in that 10-day period suggested by the article.

Mary Gavin noted that interest does continue to accrue until taxes are paid in full, and that the period between the due date and the full penalty is 14 days, rather than 10 days.

With no further questions, the Moderator restated the article and called the question.



The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 10. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon vote that tax payments made after February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024, be assessed an additional six percent (6%) late fee for a total of eight percent (8%) for any delinquency?**

Mary Gavin made the motion. Mary Stoddard seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion. There was no discussion.

The Moderator called the question to see if the voters would approve Article 10

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 11. Shall voters of the Town of Sharon vote to schedule its next Town Meeting for 9AM Tuesday, March 5th, 2024?**

David Karon made the motion. Karen Rodis seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion. There was no discussion.

The Moderator called the question to see if the voters would approve Article 11.

The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 12. To transact any other non-binding business relevant to this meeting?**

Elaine Kerns asked if it would be appropriate to recognize Margaret Raymond since she was absent during the Selectboards report and is now present. The voters recognized Margaret for her contribution to the Town.

Deb Jones thanked Nicole Antal for providing snacks and coffee for the voters.

Dee Gish shared that she serves on the Sharon Energy Committee, and they are working in collaboration with the Vermont Council on Rural Development to revive an operation to create a coordinated effort among municipal committees and local organizations and volunteers to build local emergency resilience and response.

Cat Buxton mentioned she manages the School compost program and invited residents to reach out to her to learn more about composting.

Jim Kearns announced that the Vermont Department of Taxes website has information for filing the homestead declaration and property tax rebates based on income sensitivity. He encouraged residents to apply for property tax rebates and that he would also assist people.

Deb Jones followed Jim's comment to remind residents that residential homeowners are required to annually file their Homestead Declaration using the HS-122 form and, even if they do not think they qualify for income sensitivity, that it is also worth filing form HI-144

Ira Clark invited residents to attend the Planning Commission's Town Plan Hearing on March 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00PM. The meeting will be held at the Sharon Elementary School Music Room. The Planning Commission is looking for public input/commentary on the revised Town Plan.

Catherine Sartor mentioned that there is a draft Town Plan available online on the Town's website, and there is a hard copy available to view at the Town Clerk's office. She noted that anyone wishing to purchase a copy may do so for \$10.

Ira Clark thanked Cathy for the reminder. Ira noted that the full color maps are at the end of the digital document, and that they are also in a hard copy available at the Town Offices.

**With no further business, the Moderator entertained a motion to adjourn at 10:11AM.**

Michael Barsanti made the motion. Joe Willis seconded.  
The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted by Nicola Shipman

Signed: Mason C. Mudgett

Signed: Margaret B Raymond 3/28/23

Attest: Catherine Sartor Town Clerk 3/28/2023  
Town Clerk, Sharon VT.