

TOWN OF SHARON, VT

Received for record March 11 A.D. 2024  
at 8:41 o'clock A M. and recorded in  
Sharon Town Records, Vol. 1 Page 103-111  
Attest: Catherine Lator J.C

Town of Sharon  
Annual Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Moderator Steven Basham called the meeting to order at 9:00AM

The Moderator led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Moderator referenced procedural reminders and common motions.

The Moderator introduced Representative Jim Masland, and with no objection, the voters yielded to the floor.

Representative Jim Masland discussed the difficulties this year in education funding. Some by default and some by design. He discussed spending items being looked at by the Legislature. Representative Masland talked about Act 127 and weighted students, as well as Act H850, instituting a credit and establishing a linear relationship.

The voters were given the opportunity to ask questions. With no questions asked, the business of the Town of Sharon Annual Meeting proceeded.

**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
- First Constable for 1-year term
- Selectboard for 3-year term
- Town Clerk for a 3-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 -3year term**  
**Trustee of Baxter Memorial Library-3 year term**  
**Trustee of Downer Fund-3 Year term.**

**The Moderator called for nominations.**

**Trustee of Public funds 3-year term.**  
Galen E Mudgett nominated Pauline Morrill, with no other nominations, Pauline Morrill was elected as Trustee of Public funds for a 3-year term.

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

Emma Basham nominated Finni Trimpi, and the Moderator stated that as the nomination was uncontested, Finni Trimpi was elected Trustee of Baxter Library for a 3-year term.

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

Bob Ferguson nominated Jim Kearns, and with no objections or other nominations, Jim Kearns was elected.

The Moderator corrected himself stating that he neglected to have a voter move Article 2.

Elaine Kearns moved the article, and Will Davis seconded.

The Article 2 motion passed unanimously by a voice vote.

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

The Moderator explained that as this article is common business, it could be adopted without a vote. As there were no objections, the article was adopted, and the voters proceeded to hear the reports of the Town Officers.

The floor was opened for discussion.

Selectboard Chair Kevin Gish welcomed the voters and took time to introduce Town Officials and employees who were present. He thanked the volunteers and organizations who provide services to the Town.

Kevin also encouraged residents to consider how they might be of service to the Town including the open board positions available currently, such as the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District, Tri Valley Transit and South Royalton Rescue. Kevin reminded the voters that if they have interest in any other boards, to please come in and discuss, as it might give a long-time member the chance to step back.

Kevin spoke about the 2023 flood damages being stabilized, in great part due to preventative measures by our road crew. All repairs are complete except for one bank slide, which is stable. FEMA reimbursement and state funding is expected to cover most repairs.

He explained the town's receipt of 80/20 grant funding for an upcoming scoping study involving sidewalk upgrades for bike access and safe walkability.

Kevin went on to talk about the many older buildings that Sharon owns and maintains. The Old Town Hall, currently occupied by the Historic Society, needs extensive repairs, and the Town Garage with its many deficiencies, including a leaky roof and lack of space. Thoughts are around repair or replacement of that building.

Kevin discussed ARPA funding of \$450,000.00 and read a report from Sarah Pfeiffer, who together with Deb Jones and Lucy Pierpont, make up the town's ARPA committee.

Kevin Gish reminded voters that Selectboard meetings are open to the public and are held on the first and third Monday of the month, in person or remote, at 6:30PM.

The floor was opened for questions: With no questions asked, the Moderator moved to the next article.

**The Moderator read Article 4. Shall the Town of Sharon appropriate the amount \$2,019,789 for necessary town expenses, including highways and transfers, of which \$1,480,000 shall be raised by property taxes, and authorize the Selectboard to set a tax rate sufficient to provide the same?**

Dee Gish made the motion. Mary Stoddard seconded.  
The Moderator re read the article.  
The floor was opened for discussion:

Assistant Selectboard Chair, Scott Henkels thanked everyone for attending and gave his report of the Towns budget, noting the impacts of Health insurance increases and employee retention as well as support services including South Royalton Rescue, Fire Department, Sherriff Servies and Senior Center. Scott explained the Fiscal Year setup and talked about this year's budget increase being less than last year's increase. Scott talked about fund balances and transfers, and FEMA support.

Scott summarized by commenting about the overall balanced budget being an increase of 5.6% over last year equaling a 4.3 cent tax rate increase. The average \$200,000.00 home would be estimated to increase by \$86.20 per year.

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

Article 4 passed by a unanimous voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 5. Shall the voters of the Town of Sharon authorize the Town Treasurer to collect current taxes pursuant to 32 V.S.A §4791?**

The Moderator stated that as this article was standard business, the voters could adopt the article without a vote. With no objections, the article was therefore adopted.

**The Moderator read Article 6. For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, shall the Town of Sharon authorize payment of real and personal property taxes in two (2) installments, with due dates being Wednesday, September 18, 2024 and Wednesday, February 12, 2025?**

The Moderator stated that with no objection, as this was an article that is considered regular business, it could be adopted without a vote.

With no objection, Article 6 was adopted.

**The Moderator read Article 7. Shall the Town of Sharon vote that overdue taxes will bear an interest rate of one percent (1%) per month or part thereof for each installment until paid in full pursuant to 32 V.S.A § 5136?**

The Moderator stated that again, this article is considered regular business and can be adopted without a vote. With no objections, Article 7 was adopted.

**The Moderator read Article 8. Shall the town set the penalty charged by the collector of delinquent taxes for payments made after the due date for payment to two (2) percent of the tax for the first seven days, and then an additional six (6) percent of the tax for the eighth (8) day and thereafter pursuant to 32 V.S.A § 1674(3)(b)?**

The Moderator stated that this is considered common business and with no objection the article could be adopted.

Kevin Gish didn't object to adopting the article, however, chose to, as he felt it worthy of discussion.

Kevin Gish moved the Article. Jon Roe Seconded.

Kevin explained the change from last year. The penalties changed in percentage and timing to help ease the burden to the taxpayer. The Selectboard felt they also should've discussed this with the Collector of Delinquent Taxes and are considering a salary vs. commission for that role.

With no further questions or comments, the Moderator re read Article 8.  
The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**Article 9. Shall the Town of Sharon vote to eliminate the office of constable pursuant to 17 V.S.A § 2651a(d)?**

Dee Gish made the motion, Michael Livingston seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion:

Bob Ferguson asked the Selectboard why? Kevin Gish answered that State Law allows the elimination and that The Town of Sharon has not had a Constable in many years. Currently the Constable position requires Law Enforcement training.

Eileen Lanza asked if the safety of the town would be diminished without a Constable, or would the duties be absorbed?

Selectboard Assistant Nicola Shipman answered that the position would be absorbed by another position.

With no further questions or comments, the Moderator re-read Article 9.

The article passed unanimously by voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 10. Shall Town of Sharon vote to elect all its town officers by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2680(b)?**

Karen Rodis made the motion Dennis Tatro seconded.

Kevin Gish explained that the next few Articles were added due to a petition signed by a significant amount of voters, but failed the signature requirement. The Selectboard felt that they would bring it to the voters anyway. As this has been discussed in many towns, they chose to bring for discussion.

Kevin explained that each article is separate, and that if all 3 articles are passed, Town meeting would change to having public informational meetings before the vote. Feedback would happen, but not in the same way.

Mary Stoddard Asked for data around past Town Meeting attendance.

Town Clerk, Catherine Sartor explained voters and meeting attendance and provided a few statistics.

Lister and experienced Moderator Galen Mudgett added statistics from past years showing increased numbers during Covid and specifically during use of Australian Ballots.

Dennis Tatro introduced himself and discussed the history of Town Meeting and changing times. He felt that the town would be able to hear more voices through Australian Ballot. He noted his thoughts around fairness to people who work during Town Meeting and are unable to attend. Dennis showed appreciation to the Selectboard for placing the Articles on the warning, even though the petition did not meet signature requirements.

Karen Rodis asked to consider a Town Meeting be held on a Saturday.

Sue Sellew quoted former Governor Jim Douglas stating the adoption of Australian Ballot would make it easy to skip Town Meeting. We need a Town Meeting more than ever.

Elaine Kearns stated that she never sees a conflict in town budgets during town meetings. She wants to retain comradery, and the Australian Ballot would take away tradition.

Douglas Smith Discussed Sharon Connects group. How we need each other, we need community. He likes meeting and connecting with people and he comes away with appreciation and learning about town business.

Galen Mudgett interjected that the question at hand was whether or not to elect all its officers by Australian ballot.

The Moderator asked if anyone else wanted to discuss article 10.

Ryan Haac questioned the article affecting Trustees. Ryan stated that he was in support of this specific article.

Elizabeth Sowerwine noted that electing trustees by ballot would eliminate discussion.

Bob Ferguson talked about the Trustee roles traditionally being nominated from the floor, but with Australian Ballot, the roles would require petitions.

Jill Wilcox. She loves the opportunity to be involved with the community, but stated not everyone has time to take off to come to Town Meeting.

Dick Ruben. Commented on efforts with Sharon Connects to increase community engagement. He felt Australian Ballot would dilute that progress.

Joanne Webb was not in favor of Article 10. People can't get to know others through Australian Ballot.

Dan Deneen asked if we needed either or, or could we vote both ways for an individual nominee.

Catherine Sartor stated that we would not be able to vote for one individual both from the floor and from Australian Ballot.

Holly Cathart suggested options around questions and balloting.

Emma Basham noted that Trustees roles are volunteer positions, and it might be too much to put a petition requirement on them.

Laura Ronan asked about petition requirements vs. vote from the floor.

Catherine Sartor answered petitions need 1% of the voters' signatures and from the floor is a majority vote.

Kevin Gish explained that an article petition needs 5% while a candidate petition needs 1%

Kit Hood asked about deadlines as often volunteers for Trustee roles come forward days before or during Town Meeting.

Catherine Sartor stated that was a good point as petition deadlines are in January.

Ryan Haac corrected his previous comment after hearing discussions and changed his opinion to vote this article down.

Scott Henkels asked as a voter vs a Selectboard Member, if the Trustees were only different from the Officials in Article 1, as they are not paid?

Catherine Sartor answered yes except for the Moderator.

With no further discussion the Moderator re read Article 10.  
Article 10 was defeated by a voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 11. Shall the Town of Sharon vote to adopt all budget articles by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2680(c)?**

Kevin Gish made the motion Joe Willis seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion:

Carol Langstaff talked about Town Meetings have come a long way. She remembers exciting discussions on budgets. It was important to her to have this day to come together for discussion.

Elaine Kearns noted that hearing tales of others can change opinions when people come together.

Bob Fergusson gave the amended school board budget article as an example of floor discussion.

Ryan Haac again took to the floor saying he feels strongly about voting the budget from the floor as there are things to act on in real time. He is against moving the budget to Australian Ballot.

Vince Gross stated that Australian Ballot as we used during Covid should be considered as we had more than double the turnout.

With no further comments or objection, the Moderator re read the article for a vote.

Article 11 was defeated by a voice vote.

**The Moderator read Article 12: Shall the Town of Sharon vote on all public question by Australian ballot pursuant to 17V.S.A § (d)?**

Holly Potter made the motion Elaine Kearns seconded.

Jim Kearns asked for clarification of the article.

Kevin Gish clarified that the intent was all business, other than the previous articles, would be on a ballot vs. from the floor. Kevin mentioned that the Vermont League of cities and towns advised to separate the articles.

Joseph Ronan was not in favor of this article but would consider moving the Town Meeting to a better day and time.

The Moderator re-read Article 12.

Article 12 was defeated with a voice vote.

**The Moderator ready Article 13. Shall the Town of Sharon vote to transact any other non-binding business relevant to this meeting?**

Karen Rodis moved the article, Michael Livingston seconded.

The Floor was opened for discussion.

Bob Ferguson spoke about South Royalton Rescue needing a representative.

Karen Rodis asked about alternative Town Meeting dates.

Laura Ronan, Will Davis, Michael Barsanti, Jim Kearns, Ryan Haac, and Elizabeth Sowerwine all noted their preference on Town Meeting dates and times.

Nicola Shipman stated that the meeting must occur within the three days prior to the first Tuesday in March

Katherine Roe stated that through her work for the State of Vermont, moving the Town Meeting to a Saturday did not prove higher voter turnouts. Data showed that Saturdays were not popular.

Kevin Gish thanked everyone for their input and the Selectboard will be checking into all the laws and rules associated with making a change.

Michael Livingston thanked the Town Officials as well as Road Foreman Frank Rogers.

Jill Wilcox thanked the town for their work and thanked the road crew.

Jill introduced the following non-binding resolution:

"I (Jill Wilcox ) ask those present to pass the following non-binding Resolution:  
Be it resolved that the town of Sharon calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the West Bank, and be it further resolved that in order to ensure the safety and right to life of Palestinian civilians, children and remaining Israeli hostages, the town of Sharon calls for an immediate end to US arms sales to Israel and that the US use its considerable influence to ensure the safe delivery of food and medical supplies to Gaza. We ask that a representative of the town send this message to the White House."

The Moderator brought forth a vote for this non-binding resolution:

Jill Wilcox made the motion, John Roe seconded.  
The motion passed by voice vote.

Elaine Kearns reminded tax payers of the Homestead declaration and that might be an avenue to decrease property taxes.



Dee Gish Thanked the officials and talked about the Sharon Cares group and its Harm Reduction Program. She reminded the voters of the overdose education training and naloxodone distribution happening on March 21, 2024 from 5:30-7:30PM at the Sharon Academy.

Kevin Gish read a recognition of service to Mary Gavin for over two decades of her service to the Town of Sharon. Mary received a round of applause.

**With no further business, the Moderator adjourned the meeting at 10:50am**

Respectfully submitted by Catherine Sartor, Town Clerk

Signed: 

DocuSigned by:

Stephen Basham

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 3/11/2024

Moderator Signed: 

DocuSigned by:

Nara E Moon

307A781738684F4...

 3/11/2024  
Justice of the Peace

Attest: Catherine Sartor Town Clerk  
Town Clerk, Sharon VT.