

Town of Brookfield 2023 Annual Meeting

The legal voters of the Town of Brookfield met for the annual Town Meeting, at the Brookfield Elementary School at 1725 Ridge Road, Tuesday, March 7, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. to transact the following business:

Call to Order at 10:00 a.m.

Moderator, Gregory Wight, opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

G. Wight reviewed Roberts Rules of Order to the audience. He welcomed everyone to Town Meeting and announced that the Girl Scouts were selling cookies in the teachers work room. He also announced the Brookfield Historical Society was selling Ice-Out tickets as well.

Article 1: To elect all officers as required by law for the ensuing year by Australian ballot. For this purpose, the polls will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Article 2: To hear and act on reports of the Town Officers.

John Benson, Selectboard Chair, thanked everyone for coming out. He reported that recently all 3 town dump trucks have had a down period affecting plowing times with the recent snow accumulations. One crew member has been out with pneumonia. Keith Sprague, Road Commissioner, spent time under the trucks to help get them up and running again. The road crew was down 1 member from February-November but was able to hire a new employee from Williamstown to have a full crew for the Winter. Being short a crew member prevented them from getting summer jobs done. The Selectboard enlisted help from WB Rogers with jobs on Eagle Peak and Old Post Roads. There was a study done on the small bridges to ensure their stability. All 3 that showed abutment issues have been taken care of. The Town has applied and received a grant to replace Bear Hill & Halfway Brook Road culverts. The Town is also working on the Parker Road Bridge for possible upgrades.

J. Benson also spoke of the upgraded town website. Stuart Edson has been working with the webmaster to improve the look and functionality of the website. If you have any comments or concerns to please direct them to S. Edson.

With current concerns for the Orange County Sheriff Department (OCSD) not knowing where it is going to end up, the Selectboard has asked them questions on where the Town stands for coverage. They have not heard back yet. OCSD is the primary law enforcement for the Town. The Vermont State Police doesn't have the capacity as first responder. Several years ago it was mentioned at Town meeting about looking into creating a police force for Brookfield and the cost would be astronomical with training, vehicles, and insurance for law enforcement. It was decided at that time that OCSD was the best option.

J. Benson recognized Teresa Godfrey, Town Clerk, has done a great job and the town was going to miss her. She took on Lister and when the Town Report needed to be done the last couple of years, she took on that task as well. There was a standing ovation for her.

Article 3: To see if the Town will authorize the Selectboard to borrow money in anticipation of revenues.

Motion by Erik Nielsen, seconded by Joy Kacik.

J. Benson said this is in there in case we have to borrow but do not anticipate having to borrow.

Call to vote. Motion carried.

Article 4: To see if the Town will vote to have all taxes paid into the Treasury as provided by law in two installments, and if so, to set the dates.

Motion by Marylou Maeder, seconded by Dan Childs that the first payment of 2023/2024 property taxes be due November 4th, 2023; the second payment due May 4th, 2024.

No discussion.

Motion carried.

Article 5: To approve a 12-month budget for the financial year of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town General Fund and to authorize the Selectboard to set a tax rate sufficient to provide the same.

Motion by Kym Anderson, seconded by Erik Nielsen.

K. Anderson asked about the ARPA funds and what the Town is doing with them.

J. Benson stated they are not included in the budget. The Town held a number of Selectboard meetings on the use of the money and there was only 1 suggestion from the public. The Selectboard narrowed down the possible use of expenditures and as a long-term benefit to the Town. They decided to use the money to replace the shed at the Town Garage.

Jon Binhammer asked if there was more than one bid for the shed, what the bidding process is and how much money is there for the ARPA amount.

J. Benson said when they put it out to bid, there were no bids so they went out to local builders. One local builder expressed interest to take on the project. The concern is the cost of the materials but they put in a bid of \$350,000-\$390,000 which is within the balance of the ARPA fund of \$400,000 that the Town received.

Patricia Kennedy asked if the Selectboard compared the cost of a steel building vs a wooden structure.

J. Benson said they are looking at a wood frame with steel siding to minimize maintenance costs. It must pass the VT Energy Code. A total steel structure will not meet the energy code. The architect, Black River Design assisted in the design process.

J. Kacik stated that not having the budget to study before the meeting she sees the amount increased significantly. The town should live within the budget. She understood that with the assessment going up, the tax rate went down but when setting the tax rate the amount needed went up. Where is the need to increase the budget?

J. Benson explained the cost of everything has gone up. The tax rate is a comparison between the reappraisal amount, the budget, and the tax rate. The Grand List went up but the amount each property owner pays stays the same. One of the reasons the budget went up is that to increase the interest in Town Clerk and Treasurer positions we needed to look at benefits for those positions. The budget now includes Health and Dental Care in case whoever wins and needs benefits it is available. It is required by law to offer it.

No other discussion.

Motion carried.

Article 6: To approve a 12-month budget for the financial year of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town Highway Fund and to authorize the Selectboard to set a tax rate sufficient to provide the same.

Motion by Kym Anderson, seconded by Amy Ingrassia.

No discussion.

Motion carried.

Article 7: To see if the Town will authorize the Selectboard to place an order for the cab/chasey for the replacement of a Town dump truck, for delivery by fall of 2024. The cost, \$166,994.00 plus financing, would be paid for over a three-year period starting in 2024.

Motion by Linda Runnion, seconded by Erik Nielsen.

J. Benson said that as we have talked before we trade at a 9 year cycle. The next truck will be traded in 2024. It now takes 14-18 months to hold an order placement. We are asking permission to place the order but will come back next year to ask for the money for the truck. The last truck took 16 months from placement of order to receiving the truck.

Lora Churchill asked if we just need the cab & chassis but not a whole truck? How many wheels will the new truck have. We do not need another 10-wheeler. It is too big for our roads.

J. Benson replied that plowing West Brookfield can take 3 hours or 6 hours depending on the truck and how much gravel it holds. Also, the garage can haul a full load vs a half load when transferring gravel from the pit.

No more discussion.

Motion carried.

Article 8: To see if the Town will authorize the Selectboard to expend \$245,000 of the excess revenues from prior financial years as follows: \$85,000 for the replacement of the Town's 1-ton dump truck, \$60,000 for road improvements, \$50,000 to reduce taxes and \$50,000 for the replacement of the shed at the Town Garage.

Motion by Joy Kacik, seconded by Amy Ingrassia.

J. Benson stated that T. Godfrey came to the board after working with the outside auditors last year and said there was an excess of \$250,000. After the current audit review, the town has about \$680,000 in non-allocated funds. The Town works in a cash in-cash out financing. We set a budget and then the tax rate. There are revenues from delinquent taxes. The Town pays the bills and the amount needed was less than what was taken in over the years so the money was tucked away. Since T. Godfrey has taken on Treasurer, she has shown the actual revenue vs the actual expenses and that balance was applied to the new budgets to lessen the amount needed for taxes.

We do not want to use all the excess to save for unforeseen items and emergencies. The 1-ton has been used for the Town Clerk office and small roads. Buying a used vehicle, you don't know what might be wrong and now it is rusting out. We can buy new lasting 8-10 years vs used lasting 3-4 years.

We are looking at road improvements and the \$50,000 for tax reduction. The shed would be an unheated shed roof bay for other equipment.

Laura Rochat asked why we aren't using the \$680,000 vs \$245,000?

J. Benson said the Selectboard didn't think it was prudent to use the whole amount.

P. Kennedy questioned if it is a temporary structure?

J. Benson said the enclosed portion is covered with the ARPA and this \$50,000 would cover a bay shed added on the side. This addition would be added to the contract.

No more discussion.

Motion carried.

Article 9: To see if the Town will approve the revision of the five current Selectboard terms from all 3-year terms to three, 3-year terms and two, 2-year terms. If approved, one 3-year and one 2-year term will be up for election each year starting in 2024. The Selectboard will determine which two current members will agree to take a two-year term, one ending in 2024 and one ending in 2025.

Motion by Marylou Maeder, seconded by Dan Childs.

Aaron Adler as a Lawyer said he was glad to see the correction of adding the 2 Selectboard members going to 1- or 2-year terms and not 3-year terms. His concern was why and how are the Selectboard members going to decide who goes to 2 year terms.

J. Benson admitted that the Selectboard members are not Lawyers and the vote to create the 2 new positions was voted on a couple of years ago. The Clerk thought it was all 3-year terms after that. We are wanting to get on an even keel with 3-year and 2-year terms.

A. Adler asked how they are going to decide.

J. Benson said they will decide after the current vote at the organizational meeting on Monday night who will step forward to switch to a 2-year term.

There was concern that it isn't fair to those elected currently but to wait, it would take 2 election cycles to change and maybe the Secretary of States office could advise.

Keith Sprague, Selectboard member, (and currently on the ballot), remarked that he was appointed to the position originally and as an appointed, and if elected, I would volunteer for what's best for the Town.

Perry Kacik asked to "call the question."

G. Wight stated 2/3rds of the voters will have to agree to stop discussion.

Call the question: Ayes have it with no nays.

Motion carried.

Article 10: To transact any other proper business.

G. Wight said T. Godfrey was looking for vote counters. About 6 raised hands.

P. Kacik reminded everyone that St. Patrick's Day is coming up so the tickets are on green paper and the Brookfield Historical Society is selling chances to win money for guessing when the ice will go out at the Floating Bridge this year. Chances are \$2 each or 3-\$5 and you guess the date and time. The money goes to support activities at BHS at the Marvin Newton House on Ridge Road.

J. Binhammer introduced himself as the Chairman for the Conservation Commission. The Commission is offering a way to help songbirds survive. Since 1970 over 3 billion birds have been lost from pesticides, collision with windows, loss of habitat, and other ways. The Conservation Commission is giving away sets of 3 stickers to put on windows to help keep birds from flying into them. They are available in the back room.

J. Benson announced that Jon Jickling, Town Forester, has updated the master plan for the Town Forest and it is posted on the Town Website. If you have any concerns or comments you can speak to Jon Jickling.

J. Jickling suggested getting to know the Town Forest.

G. Wight, with no other discussion, adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted: Teresa Godfrey, Town Clerk