TOWN OF PANTON ANNUAL MEETING

INFORMATIONAL MEETING MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2023

MINUTES

In attendance: Selectboard Member Zach Weaver, Town Moderator Martha DeGraaf, Town Advisor Sandy Fogg, Emergency Management Coordinator Bob Groff, Justice of the Peace Eileen Brennan, Justice of the Peace Diana Raphael, Town clerk & Treasurer Maggie McCormick, Town Assistant clerk & Treasurer Suzanne Snyder, Road Crew Mike Danyow, Seasonal Road Crew David Rheaume, Delinquent Tax Collector Barbara Fleming, Audio-Visual Expert David Sullivan, Ed Brennan, Paulette Bogan, Joe Bogan, Tom Morgan, Amaya Morgan

Via zoom: Selectboard Chair Howard Hall, Justice of the Peace Paula Moore, Sharon Ashcraft, Robin Herbick, Skip Masback, Beth Tarallo

Zach Weaver called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m., introduced Town Moderator Martha Degraaf, and turned the meeting over to her.

Martha led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. Martha acknowledged the Town Report dedication to Town Advisor Sandy Fogg, then directed the group to page 31 of the report, added David Raphael to the list of Panton residents who passed in 2022, and asked for a moment of silence in remembrance.

Martha introduced Town staff: clerk Maggie McCormick, Assistant clerk Suzanne Snyder, Road Crew Mike Danyow, Seasonal Road Crew David Rheaume.

Martha asked any new residents to introduce themselves. There were none.

ARTICLE 1: To hear the reports of the Town Officers. Martha asked for a motion to hear the reports of the officers. Sandy Fogg moved to hear the report of the Town Officers. Ed Brennan seconded. All in favor; the motion passed.

Zach directed participants to page 20 for the Selectboard report and noted:

a. ARPA funds received of $211,340
    i. Meetings held to discuss how to use the funds
    ii. Solar panels at garage which will reduce the Town's carbon footprint and save on energy costs
    iii. Radiant heating at garage
    iv. Town Hall meeting room painting and floor refinishing
    v. Digitization of town land records.

The proceedings were halted and the floor was given to Senator Ruth Hardy.

Senator Hardy gave out comic books on how government works

She is on the Health and Welfare Committee and is chair for Government Operations Committee.

Working on bills:

- to protect reproductive health care practitioners
- address the shortage of childcare in the state
- protect adults with disabilities and guardianship issues
- address food scarcity
- extend remote meeting provisions due to Covid

- expanding access to voting and pilot project for ranked choice voting
- Oversight of sheriffs
- Improve statewide emergency services dispatch
- Affordable heat act
- Create more affordable housing

Paulette Bogan asked about the Affordable Heating Act (S 5)

- Sen. Hardy replied that the bill seeks to address climate change by transitioning from fossil fuels to biofuels and electricity for heating, since that and vehicle emissions are the main sources of CO2 emissions in Vermont.
- Individuals would not be required to change anything. Instead, fuel dealers and distributors would be required to reduce their sales of fossil fuels, incentivized by credits for transitioning customers to biofuels or electricity.

Ed Brennan pointed out that Vermonters will pay higher fuel prices to cover the fuel dealers' expenses for these conversions and that fuel from cows is methane, which is a greenhouse gas.

- Sen. Hardy replied that biofuels were controversial but added to make the interim/immediate transition to cleaner energy more affordable. She also noted that wood chips and other natural fuels are Vermont and/or New England products, rather than imported, creating a local economy boost.

Joe Bogan asked about a statewide real estate appraisal system.

- Sen. Hardy replied that the Ways and Means Committee is looking at ways to increase the number of certified appraisers since so many Vermont municipalities have CLAs and CODs that make reappraisal mandatory.

Martha resumed the meeting with Zach continuing with the highlights from the Selectboard report:

i. Working with Maple Broadband: 25% of Panton residents still without broadband internet access
ii. Real Capital Consulting has been hired to conduct a town-wide reappraisal
iii. Protecting Panton's interest in the Vergennes bypass
iv. Recognized Bob Groff's excellent work as Emergency Management Coordinator
v. Recognized Town employees

Martha read Article 2:

ARTICLE 2: Elimination of elected Listers

Shall the voters authorize the elimination of the office of Town Lister in accordance with 17 V.S.A. §2651c(b)(1) and replace it with a professionally qualified assessor who shall have the same powers, discharge the same duties, proceed in the discharge thereof in the same manner, and be subject to the same liabilities as are prescribed for listers or the board of listers under the provisions of Title 32?

- Diana Raphael asked if this was because the Town can't find people to fill the lister position. Zach answered yes and explained that the increasing complexity of the job is another deterrent to volunteers.

- Ed Brennan asked how much this would cost the Town. clerk responded that the number is in the budget and the town is billed $65/hour for the regular lister work of updating values based on permits issued.

- Dave Sullivan asked about the town-wide reappraisal process. clerk answered that she didn't know the exact timing and process, but that communication would come from Town Hall to residents on what, when, and how the assessment would proceed.

- Ed Brennan asked if taxpayers could expect substantially higher tax bills following the reappraisal. clerk answered that the Town only needs a certain amount of money to operate, so that even if the property value went from $100, 000 to $200,000, the Town doesn't need an additional $100, 000 in revenue, so that just because your property value goes up doesn't mean your property tax bill goes up. Dave Sullivan added that with all property values going up, the individual taxpayer's piece of the pie stays the same. Ed also noted that if previously undervalued properties are brought to appropriate amounts, the overall tax rate could go down.

Dave Sullivan noted that Zoom participants were having trouble hearing questions and answers. Skip Masback stated that the proceedings were very hard to follow when the person speaking wasn't at the microphone. Howard also asked that people come to the microphone to speak.

Martha invited anyone running for an office to speak if they would like to and read Article 3.

ARTICLE 3: To elect the following officers by Australian Ballot:

Moderator (1 year term)
Selectboard Member (3-year term)
Zach noted he is up for reelection.
Lister (3-year term)
Martha noted these offices would be obsolete if Article 2 passed.
Lister (two years of a 3-year term)
Lister (one year of a 3-year term)
Constable (1-year term)
Dog Warden (1-year term)
Vergennes-Panton Water District Representative (3-year term)
Vergennes-Panton Water District Representative (one year of a 3-year term)
Addison Northwest School District Representative (3-year term)

Martha let participants know that she is on the ballot for moderator and ANWSD representative. Noted that her mother, Ann, was moderator in Panton for many years and she grew up in Town Hall and she would be honored to be Panton's moderator. For ANSWD, she stated she and both her parents graduated from Vergennes Union HS and she had been the Vergennes ANSWD representative until moving back to Panton in 2021. Would love to return to continue the work of the school board.

Beth Tarallo informed the group that her husband, Meddie Perry, has been on the Vergennes Panton Water District as a write-in for the three-year term and has been on the VPWD since 2009 and is the current chair.

Martha noted that her husband is also a candidate for the VPWD board and had been on the board for Vergennes when they lived there.

ARTICLE 4: Shall the voters appropriate the following sums which shall be raised by taxes, to be placed in the Town Reserve Fund accounts as noted:

Fund	Amount
Digitization Fund	$2,000

Highway Capital Equipment Fund	$20,000
Highway Capital Project Fund	$20,000
Reappraisal Fund	$2,000
Tire Fund	$12,000
Emergency Reserve	$4,500
Town Building Maintenance Fund	$5,000
Total	**$65,500**

Martha noted that the reserve fund information was on page 18.

Robin Herbick asked if someone's term expired in 2023, they were automatically put on the ballot. The clerk answered no. She also asked if a single write-in vote would make someone the winner. The clerk answered no, to win, a write-in candidate needs a number of votes equal to a percentage of all Panton voters, and that she would have to look up that percentage.

Martha read the funds and amounts requested.

Diana Raphael asked if someone could speak to the Tire Fund. The clerk answered that the Tire Fund is used to buy tires for all the Town equipment, such as the grader and the plow trucks. A single tire for the graders is $1200, so putting only $2000/year in the tire fund doesn't cover costs. Tire Fund currently has a negative balance because we needed two grader tires last year.

Martha noted that the proposed budget starts on page 12 of the report and read Article 5:

ARTICLE 5: Shall the voters adopt the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024) General Fund Operating Budget in the amount of $842,441 of which $703,672 shall be raised by taxes and $138,770 by non-tax revenue?

There were no questions. Bob Groff stated he has attended most of the budget meetings and that the Selectboard works hard and has done a good job and noted that his was the perspective of a former Town auditor.

Sharon Ashcraft had a question on Article 4. She referred to page 20, where ARPA funds were used to digitize the town records. She wanted to know what the Digitization fund was used for. The clerk answered that the fund was established in by ballot article in 2011 for digitization, and was modified by ballot article in 2016 to include IT expenses such as firewalls and computers. There was a one-time fee to scan and index the Town records to Cott Systems and there are ongoing monthly fees to have the system in place.

Sharon asked how it was determined to digitize back to 1972. clerk answered that 1972 is the last book with removable page binding and that unbinding books is very expensive and that 1972 exceeds the typical 40-year title search required for most property transfers.

Martha asked if there were questions on Article 5.

Martha read Article 6.

ARTICLE 6: Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to acquire a loan to obtain a new International dump/plow truck not to exceed $250,000 and for a term of five (5) years or less?

No questions or comments. Martha thanked the road crew for their great job.

Martha read Article 7.

ARTICLE 7: Shall the voters appropriate $13,501 of Town Funds to the following organizations in the amounts listed?

Adams-Kent Cemetery Association	$2,500.00
Addison County Home Health & Hospice	$800.00
Addison County Parent/Child Center	$800.00
Addison County Readers, Inc.	$250.00
Addison County Restorative Justice Services	$210.00
Agewell (CV Agency on Aging)	$650.00
Boys & Girls Club of Greater Vergennes	$1,000.00
Charter House	$1,000.00
Counseling Service of Addison County, Inc.	$500.00
Elderly Services, Inc.	$850.00
Homeward Bound, AC Humane Society	$500.00
HOPE (Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects)	$500.00
John Graham Housing & Services	$450.00
Open Door Clinic	$500.00
RSVP	$350.00
Tri-Valley Transit	$691.00
Turning Point Center	$1,000.00
VACD Rural Fire Protection Program	$100.00
Vermont Family Network	$250.00
WomenSafe, Inc.	$600.00

Martha noted that these were previously 20 separate ballot articles but were combined to save voters time filling out the ballot. She invited supporters to speak for any of these organizations.

Beth Tarallo, Development and Outreach Director for CSAC. Thanked Panton voters for their prior support. CSAC is the area's state-designated mental health facility. CSAC serves about 2000 individuals in the county and Panton had about 15,000 service hours. Asking for $500.

Diana Raphael spoke in support of Addison County Readers, which provides a free book to participants every month. The books are free, but Addison County Readers must pay postage, which is approximately $30/year/child.

Paulette Bogan asked if the Adams-Kent Cemetery was a new appropriation request this year. The clerk answered that cemetery care has been discussed in Panton and that the Town is ultimately responsible for cemeteries within the Town, but that the Adams-Kent Cemetery Association (AKCA) is long-established as the caretakers for the Adams Cemetery on Arnold Bay Road and the Kent Cemetery on Pease Road. At times in the past, money for cemetery landscape maintenance has been a line item in the budget. AKCA wants to maintain control of the cemeteries, so adding them as an appropriation as a non-profit operating providing a service to Panton residents was a way forward. Barb Fleming, of the AKCA board, stated that, in the beginning, endowment money to support the cemeteries earned enough interest to cover the landscape maintenance, but it no longer earns enough interest.

Paulette asked why Hawley is separate and the Town is funding the same "problem" in two different ways.

ARTICLE 8: To transact any other non-binding business.

Martha called for any other business. The Clerk thanked all the people who volunteer for the town, specifically Bob Groff, Barb Fleming, Diana Raphael, Martha DeGraaf, Zach Weaver, Dave Sullivan, Eileen Brennan and the everyone coming to help with the election. She called out the excellent work or assistant clerk Suzanne Snyder and the road crew for always stepping up. Noted that Howard called numerous contractors to get the meeting room restored to its glory and also put in a lot of time to take care of the details like changing out switch plates and putting padding on the feel of all the tables and chairs.

Zach noted no further business and closed the meeting at 8:14 p.m.

There was discussion of whether a motion was needed to adjourn and determined it was not necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

Maggie McCormick
Town Clerk and Treasurer

Attest: _____ Date 3/13/2023

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