

2025 ANNUAL TOWN AND SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING

Moderator, Tim Arsenault opened the Town Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, March 3, 2025.

Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. There was a moment of silence for all residents that lost their lives in 2024.

The Moderator went over the rules of the meeting.

The Moderator introduced Zon Eastes the Vermont State Representative for Vernon and Guilford. Zon will be working to protect our democracy in Vermont. There are four major issues for Vermonters: Taxes, Restructuring of Education, Housing and the rising cost of Healthcare. Zon is part of the following: Human Services Committee, VT Rural Caucus, Older Vermonter's Caucus. The Secretary of State would like to award Tim Arsenault with a Vermont Public Service award. Tim has been serving the Town as Moderator for 27 years and several years as Town Clerk. Zon encourages residents to reach out to him with your concerns and questions.

T. Arsenault introduced the School Board who gave a presentation on the FY 26-27 budget.

T. Arsenault stated this is the Selectboard portion of the meeting and introduced the Selectboard Chair Sandra Harris. S. Harris introduced board members: Brandon Bucossi, Jean Carr, Jim Pinkerton and Jeff Dunklee. Sandra also introduced the Assistant Treasurer, Kathy Walker and Town Administrator, Shelly Banford.

S. Harris thanked J. Dunklee for serving again as the appointed Selectboard member for the last year. S. Harris would like to recognize Head Lister Carol Hammond for the many years of service and she will be missed. S. Harris would also like to thank T. Arsenault for his many years of service to Vernon as Moderator, BCA member and Town Clerk.

T. Arsenault read the following articles:

Article 4: Shall the voters authorize Town General Fund expenditure for operating expenses of \$2,403,759.00 of which \$2,020,859.00 shall be raised by taxes, \$282,900.00 by estimated income and \$100,000.00 to be carried over from FY23-24. *B. Bucossi moved that the voters authorize the Town General Fund expenditure for operating expenses of \$2,403,759.00 of which \$2,020,859.00 shall be raised by taxes, \$282,900.00 by estimated income and \$100,000.00 to be carried over from FY23-24. J. Carr seconds the motion. B. Bucossi moves to amend the article to authorize the Town General Fund expenditure for operating expenses of \$2,411,379.00 of which \$1,999,759.00 shall be raised by taxes, \$314,320.00 by estimated income and \$100,000.00 to be carried over from FY23-24. The motion was seconded.* The Moderator read the amended article. *Mr. Gassett motioned for the article to be divided so residents know what is being spent for each line item. There was a second.* The Moderator noted this motion would need to pass with two thirds vote. The Moderator called for the vote. The BCA members took a count and the motion failed No-73 to Yes -44. The first amended article passed.

Article 5: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$140,536.00 to be raised by taxes for administration of the Vernon Free Library? *Julie Evans motions that voters appropriate the sum of \$140,536.00 to be*

raised by taxes for administration of the Vernon Free Library. The motion was seconded. The article passed.

Article 6: To elect a Library Trustee to fill the unexpired term of three years through Town Meeting of March 2026. *Cassie Sailsman motions to nominate Wendy Schuman to fill the unexpired three-year term through Town Meeting of March 2026. The motion was seconded.* The article passed.

Article 7: To elect a Library Trustee to fill the expired term of three years through Town Meeting of March 2028. *Julie Evans motions to nominate Cassie Sailsman to fill the expired three-year term through Town meeting of March 2028. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 8: To elect a Library Trustee to fill the expired term of three years through Town Meeting of March 2028. *Nicole Deyo motions to nominate Kristen Bratton to fill the expired three-year term through Town meeting of March 2028. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 9: To choose a committee to disburse the income of the Marsh Fund. *J. Carr motions to appoint Sandra Harris and James Brown to the Marsh Fund Committee to disburse the income of this fund. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 10: To choose a Memorial Day Committee. *S. Harris motions to nominate Peter and Angela Miller to the Memorial Day Committee. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 11: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,200.00 to be raised by taxes, to fund Vernon Historians, Inc. for the expenditures related to Vernon's historic preservation, educational promotion and required insurance? *H. Frost motions for the voters to appropriate the sum of \$1,200.00 to be raised by taxes, to fund Vernon Historians, Inc. for the expenditures related to Vernon's historic preservation, educational promotion and required insurance. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 12: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$150,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the "Professional Services Fund"? *Chad Baldwin motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$150,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the Professional Services Fund. C. Baldwin clarified these funds are used to fund the constant litigation and mediation attorneys relating to the utilities appealing their tax assessments. The Town expends about \$100,000.00 each year. There is currently only 35,000.00 left in the fund. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 13: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$10,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the "Emergency Repair/Replacement Fund"? *J. Pinkerton motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$10,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the Emergency Repair/Replacement Fund. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 14: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$150,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the "Town Road Upgrading Fund"? *J. Dunklee motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$150,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the Town Road Upgrading Fund. The motion was seconded.* The article passes.

Article 15: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$40,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the "Town Culvert Fund"? *J. Dunklee motions*

the voters appropriate the sum of \$40,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the Town Culvert Fund. The motion was seconded. The article passes.

Article 16: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$10,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the "Town Parking Lots Maintenance Fund"? *J. Dunklee motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$10,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the Town Parking Lots Maintenance Fund.*

Article 17: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$5,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the previously established "Elderly Assistance Fund"? *J. Dunklee motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$5,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the previously established Elderly Assistance Fund. Jessie Jobin motions to amend the amount to be amended to \$15,000.00. The motion was seconded. The amended article passes.*

Article 18: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$20,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the "Town of Vernon-James Cusick Scholarship Fund"? *J. Dunklee motions to the voters appropriate the sum of \$20,000.00 to be raised by taxes to fund the Town of Vernon-James Cusick Scholarship Fund. The motion was seconded. The article passes.*

Article 19: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$506,837.00 for the funding of items approved in the Capital Plan of which \$469,758.04 is to be raised by taxes? *J. Carr motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$506,837.00 for the funding of items approved in the Capital Plan of which \$469,758.04 is to be raised by taxes. The motion was seconded. The article passes.*

Article 20: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$16,007.85 to be raised by taxes for the Windham Solid Waste District Assessment to fund the previously established "Solid Waste Fund"?

As a member of the WSWMD the Town is assessed an annual fee, which in FY 25 will be \$7,854.43 from July 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025 and FY 26 from January 1, 2025 to June 30, 2025 will be \$8,153.15. This cost has increased 4% in 2026. The Town is obligated to pay this annual assessment unless it officially withdraws from WSWMD, which will take 2 years in accordance with the WSWMD charter from the State of Vermont. Due to significant state mandates, particularly providing two household hazard waste collection events per year, most towns decide to remain members of WSWMD rather than provide the mandated services on their own.

J. Carr motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$16,007.85 to be raised by taxes for the Windham Solid Waste District Assessment to fund the previously established "Solid Waste Fund. J. Jobin motions to withdraw from the WSWMD. The motion was seconded. J. Jobin would like to zero out the article amount. B. Bucossi asked Bob Spencer, WSWMD Director to detail the State mandates their services covers. There are 172 families using the facilities. If Vernon withdraws from WSWMD these families will no longer be able to access the WSWMD facilities. And Vernon will be responsible to do Hazard waste collections, writing a Solid Waste Management plan each year, solid waste education for businesses and schools. J. Jobin withdraws his amendment. Donna Toussie motions to amend the article to raise and appropriate \$8,000.00 and the remaining \$8,007.85 to be paid by the PAYT. S. Harris informed the audience the current balance of PAYT is \$7,516.81. D. Toussie amends her article to appropriate \$8,000.00 and move the remaining balance of the

PAYT over. The motion was seconded. Sandy Morrison would like to know if the Town can use the Solid Waste fund to fund this article. B. Bucossi stated he would support that. S. Harris noted some invoices haven't been posted. D. Toussie withdraws her amendment. S. Morrison motions to amend the article to take the balance of the PAYT fund and balance to be appropriate from the Solid Waste fund. The article is seconded. The article passes.

Article 21: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$17,250.00 to be raised by taxes to help support the operating expenses and utilities of the Governor Hunt House Community Center? *Arlene Palmiter motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$17,250.00 to be raised by taxes to help support the operating expenses and utilities of the Governor Hunt House Community Center. The motion was seconded. Arlene Palmiter noted this is 4% of the operating budget. J. Jobin motioned to amend the article to appropriate \$2,000.00 to support the Governor Hunt House Community Center. David Emery stated, "There are compelling arguments for and against this article." The Governor Hunt House can't be replaced and should be maintained. Residents should think about maintaining this building as it's an Emergency Shelter for a small group at no cost. D. Emery supports the \$17,250.00 appropriation. The amendment was seconded. An audience member called to cease the debate and call the amendment. The amendment failed. The Moderator called for a vote on the original article. The article passes.*

Article 22: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$15,000.00 to be raised by taxes for the operation of the Emergency Management Office? *B. Bucossi motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$15,000.00 to be raised by taxes for the operation of the Emergency Management Office. The motion was seconded. The article passes.*

Article 23: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,000.00 to help support the Gathering Place? *S. Harris motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,000.00 to help support the Gathering Place. The motion was defeated.*

Article 24: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$850.00 to help support the Women's Freedom Center? *J. Carr motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$850.00 to help support the Women's Freedom Center. The motion was defeated.*

Article 25: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$2,100.00 to support the services of Southeastern Vermont Community Action? *B. Bucossi motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$2,100.00 to support the services of Southeastern Vermont Community Action. The motion was seconded. The article passes.*

Article 26: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$6,576.00 for the support of Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) to provide workforce and economic coordination services to the Windham Region. *J. Carr motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$6,576.00 for the support of Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) to provide workforce and economic coordination services to the Windham Region. The motion was seconded. The article was defeated.*

Article 27: Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,850.00 to help support outpatient, mental health and substance abuse services by the staff of Health Care & Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *B. Bucossi motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,850.00 to help support outpatient, mental health and*

substance abuse services by the staff of Health Care & Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691. The motion was seconded. The article was defeated.

Article 28: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$3,250.00 to help the Visiting Nurse and Hospice for Vermont and New Hampshire? *S. Harris motioned the voters skip over this article due to a discontinuance of services in Vernon as of April 15, 2025. The motion was seconded. The article was defeated.*

Article 29: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,750.00 to help support Senior Solutions? *J. Pinkerton motions the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,750.00 to help support Senior Solutions. The motion was seconded. The article passes.*

Article 30: Shall the voters authorize payment of Real and Personal Property taxes to the Treasurer in three installments, with the due dates being September 11, 2025, January 8, 2026 and May 7, 2026? *B. Bucossi motions the voters authorize payment of Real and Personal Property taxes to the Treasurer in three installments, with the due dates being September 11, 2025, January 8, 2026 and May 7, 2026. The article is seconded. The article passes.*

Article 31: Shall the voters approve the provision of notice of availability of the Town Report and Auditor's Report by "postcard, mailed to all registered voters" at least 30 days prior to Town Meeting, in lieu of mailing or otherwise distributing the Town Report and Auditor's Report as authorized by Vermont law and 24 V.S.A. § 1682(a)(2)? *J. Dunklee motions the voters approve the provision of notice of availability of the Town Report and Auditor's Report by "postcard, mailed to all registered voters" at least 30 days prior to Town Meeting, in lieu of mailing or otherwise distributing the Town Report and Auditor's Report as authorized by Vermont law and 24 V.S.A. § 1682(a)(2). The motion was seconded.* Dale Gassett asked about the status of the Town Audit as it wasn't available 10 days before Town Meeting per State Statute. S. Harris stated she is aware of this situation. D. Gassett stated this seems to be a perpetual situation now and would like to know how the Town can correct this maleficence moving forward. S. Harris took the podium to read a letter she received this evening. The letter was addressed to the Citizens and Selectboard and dated March 3, 2025 from the Town Treasurer. The Treasurer is resigning her position effective March 3, 2025 at the end of Town Meeting due to lack of confidence. S. Harris went on to note there was a complaint the Town Administrator has not gotten back to some people. S. Harris informed the audience the Town Administrator and Assistant Treasurer have been doing all the work in the Treasurer's office. If it wasn't for the two there wouldn't be any financial information for the meeting. S. Harris stated the Selectboard and Town Administrator offered the Treasurer help but she didn't want any. Mr. Pond inquired about the time frame of the Audit and suggested it be started earlier. S. Harris stated only the Treasurer has access to the information needed by the Auditors. The Audit was not completed due to lack of information submitted by the Treasurer. B. Bucossi inform Mr. Pond the Treasurer had been contacted multiple times by the Auditors regarding the audit and was non-responsive. B. Bucossi informed the audience the Treasurer has been non-responsive when crucial information was requested. Discussion on this position being an appointed or hired position and an Audit of all the Treasurer's records followed. B. Bucossi noted there has been no response from the Treasurer for some time

regarding anything including the Town Meeting. The Treasurer hasn't responded to anyone until the letter was received at the meeting.

Article 32: To transact any other business that may lawfully come before said meeting. *J. Pinkerton motions to open discussion on the Great River Solar Array. The motion was seconded.* The Moderator noted this is not a warned topic all discussion is purely advisory along with any votes to be taken. Norma Manning from Conservation Commission has a meeting at the end of the month. The Conservation Commission has done its due diligence on the GRH Solar Array. There are handouts by the door from the Conservation Commission detailing concerns that were addressed by the Commission. The Moderator called for any other business that may come before the voters. The Moderator called the only Moderator candidate in tomorrow's election, Mrs. Amidon to close the meeting.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shelly Banford

