

Selectboard Town Informational Meeting
Grand Isle School 224 US-2 Grand Isle, Vermont
Minutes of the Meeting for Saturday, March 2, 2024

The 2024 Informational Meeting was called to order at 10:00 A.M. by the Town Moderator, Ron Bushway, on March 2nd, 2024.

Ron Bushway welcomes those joining the meeting and asks Michael Morgan to lead them with the Pledge of Alliance.

Ron Bushway asks everyone to mute their phones and lets everyone know they will be following Robert's Rule of Order. Ron Bushway asks the Selectboard to introduce themselves.

Selectboard members present: Jeff Parizo- Chair, Ellen Howrigan, Josie Leavitt- Vice Chair, Jennifer Morway.

Ron Bushway explains that this is the Annual Informational Meeting to review the warning and all questions going before the voters on Tuesday, March 5th, 2024. Ron Bushway explains that any questions need to be directed to the moderator or the selectboard, that attendees should raise their hands to be recognized and that they should state their name and speak loudly. Ron Bushway asks everyone to be respectful of each other.

Ron Bushway states that the State County Legislators, Michael Morgan and Josie Leavitt, will begin the meeting with their updates.

Michael Morgan Update

Michael Morgan (Morgan) explains that he is on the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs. Morgan says that Vermont is a Dillon's Rule state, explaining that our towns get their legal authority from the Vermont Legislature. Morgan says that he worked with South Hero to create their charter. Morgan says that South Hero opted for a Local Option Tax, which proposed a 1% tax on rooms, meals, and alcoholic beverages, noting that they did not propose to put it on sales as many towns do. Morgan gives the example of Williston who has a tax on sales and that it covers significant costs in that city. Morgan says the Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs covers a broad spectrum of issues ranging from municipal government to military affairs. Morgan explains that they have not addressed many issues within military affairs, that they have focused on municipal government. Morgan says they just passed a Miscellaneous Cannabis bill. Morgan explains that the bill installs guardrails on how Cannabis businesses are cultivated, managed, and monitored. Morgan notes that the board handling the Cannabis businesses does a good job. Morgan says another issue they are looking at are Municipal Boards' Rules of Ethics, that they are debating whether there should be a State-wide code of how municipalities are operated. Morgan says they took testimonies from towns on their thoughts on this and the feedback has been that towns would like to decide that for themselves. Morgan says Budget Adjustment Act passed this past week and gives a brief overview of the process and what the Act entails. Morgan says that the Governor is pushing three main items- public safety, housing, and affordability. Morgan says that 90% of the calls he receives are regarding affordability. Morgan says that he is very

concerned with the amount of people who are actively planning on leaving the State of Vermont because of affordability. Morgan says that last year the budget had half a million dollars in new taxes and that he feels that is a problem. Morgan says that education funding is an issue, that he feels they need to scrap the current education funding plan and start over. Morgan notes that this is not an issue with the teachers, principals, or superintendents, that it is an issue with what the state legislature has put in place.

Josie Leavitt Update

Josie Leavitt (Leavitt) introduces herself. Leavitt begins by explaining that part of the school tax issue is Act 127. Leavitt explains that it is not working the way they had hoped. Leavitt explains that they are trying to fix is now, that there are many committees and people working on it. Leavitt reminds everyone that of the people affected by rising property taxes, teachers are also affected. Leavitt says that she is on the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry Canvassing Committee. Leavitt reports that none of the bills her committee is currently working on have appropriations attached to them. Leavitt explains that one of the bills they passed is the Timber Trespass and gives a brief overview of what that bill entails. Leavitt says they passed Bill H603, noting that they call it the Chicken Parts Bill, and gives a brief overview of that what that bill entails. Leavitt notes that this allows farmers maximize their chicken processing operations. Leavitt says they are working on H128 Removing for Barrier for Working Land Businesses and gives a brief overview of what that entails. Leavitt says they working on H706, an act relating to banning the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, and gives an overview of what that entails. Leavitt explains that seeds are treated with the pesticide, that they proactively treat with the pesticide, that the pesticide ends up in the water and air, that this pesticide has a devastating effect on pollinators. Leavitt notes that Vermont would like to align with New York State with this change. Leavitt explains that they are allowing waivers for those who are unable to obtain untreated seed, noting that they do not want to make it harder to farm but instead to ensure a healthy environment for pollinators. Leavitt notes that Quebec has done this since 2018 and their crop yields have increased. Leavitt says they are hoping to have the changes enacted by 2029, that it was originally 2027 and they felt the farmers would need more time to adjust. Leavitt says that part of their mandate is Food Resiliency, that they have been working closely with the Vermont Foodbank, that they have asked the governor to add \$2.5 million in the 2025 budget for the Vermont Foodbank to specifically go towards buying Vermont food. Leavitt explains that the Foodbank went from a \$3 million one-time funding to \$84,000. Leavitt says in discussing that amount with the Foodbank, \$84,000 would only provide about 5 truckloads of food. Leavitt finishes her update and asks for questions. Ellen Howrigan asks about Steve Collier's testimony which stated that there is no scientific proof that neonicotinoid pesticides are causing a decline in bees and that the untreated seeds are not available and that farmers often have to pivot with when they plant seeds. Leavitt says that they changed the date from 2027 to 2029 and decided on offering waivers when they cannot find untreated seed based on that testimony, that in his testimony he stated that this pesticide needs to be banned. Howrigan says she will have to rewatch the testimony because she does not recall him saying that. Beth Deimling comments that she feels neonicotinoid pesticides need to be banned, that she can live without dairy, corn, and beef if that's what it takes.

Ron Bushway begins to read the Official Warning.

The legal voters of the Town of Grand Isle are hereby warned to meet at the Grand Isle School in-person and via Zoom on Saturday, March 2, 2024, at 10:00 in the morning for the following business:

- 1. To transact any business proper to come before this meeting and to discuss any questions which shall arise concerning the issues to be voted upon by Australian Ballot on Tuesday, March 5, 2024.**

The legal voters of the Town of Grand Isle are hereby warned to meet at the Grand Isle Municipal Offices located at 9 Hyde Road on Tuesday, March 5, 2024. Polls are open between the hours of 7:00AM and 7:00PM to vote by Australian ballot on the following articles:

1. To elect all Town Officers as required by law.

Ron Bushway notes that those officers are listed on page 38 of the Town Report. Ron Bushway reads off the list of officers:

Cemetery Commissioner, 1 year remaining of a 5-year term: David Leake & Suzanne Sauve

David Leake stands and states his name.

Cemetery Commissioner, 5-year term: Susan Lawrence & Jake St. Pierre

Susan Lawrence stands and states her name.

Library Trustee, 5-year term: Susan E.C. Willard

Susan Willard stands and states her name.

Select Board, 2-year term: Ronnie Bushway

Ronnie Bushway announces his name.

Select Board 3-year term: Jennifer Morway

Jennifer Morway stands and states her name.

Town Clerk, 3-year term: Melissa A. Boutin

Melissa Boutin states her name.

Town Constable, 1-year term: Trever Boutin

Town Lister, 3-year term: Lynda Morgan-Gardiner

Town Moderator, 1-year term: Ronnie Bushway

Ronnie Bushway announces his name.

Town Treasurer, 3-year term: Melissa A. Boutin

Melissa Boutin states her name.

Unified Union School Director, 3-year term: Deborah Lang

2. To elect all Unified Union School District Officers as required by law.

No discussion.

- 3. Shall the legal voters of the Town vote to have the full details of the delinquent tax list printed in the Town Report?**

No discussion.

- 4. Shall the legal voters of the Town vote to pay to the Treasurer, Real Property Taxes in three installments with due dates of October 31, 2024, January 31, 2025, and April 30, 2025, (32 V.S.A. § 4773) with an interest charge of 1% per month added if each installment is not paid by the due date (32 V.S.A § 5136); after April 30, 2025, any unpaid taxes would be charged an 8% collection fee (32 V.S.A. § 1674) plus the interest fees? Only official U.S.P.S. cancellation marks will be accepted if postmarked on or before the due date (32 V.S.A. § 4773).**

No discussion.

- 5. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$1,188,701 as proposed by the Selectboard to meet the expenses of the Town General budget?**

Denise Abbott-Douglass comments that she would like to see a percentage for all budget increases, that will help people understand changes in budgets.

- 6. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$22,700 to meet the expenses of the Cemetery Commission budget?**

Susan Lawrence gives an overview of the Cemetery Budget, explaining that they are level-funded, that the budget is for the upkeep of the lawn and grounds maintenance.

- 7. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$73,000 for the Grand Isle Rescue, Inc., budget?**

Bill Maksym asks if there are people from each organization to speak on their budget, such as Cemetery, Rescue, the Fire Department. Ray Mitchell (Mitchell) gives an overview of the Rescue budget, explaining that they are level funded. Mitchell explains that they have had a small staff that responded to every call and need to expand that staff, that they would be paid per diem. Mitchell explains that they have some capital costs. Mitchell asks anyone that is interested in volunteering with Rescue to get in touch.

- 8. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$16,000 to defray expenses of the Grand Isle Rescue, Inc. and Grand Isle Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. dispatching services?**

Adam White (White) explains that the Grand Isle Fire Department, Rescue, and the other services within Grand Isle County use Shelburne Dispatch. White explains that they use to pay dispatch per call, which was about \$32 per call. White says that because of the large volume of calls, Shelburne Dispatch has moved them to a flat fee. White explains that it was discovered that in the past, Grand Isle was not paying the proper share for these services and surrounding towns were bearing more of the cost than they should have been and that Grand Isle is now correcting that. White says that the \$16,000 also covers insurance on the Haz-Mat trailer as well as the three repeaters that are used.

- 9. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$105,000 for the Grand Isle Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. budget?**

Adam White (White) says that page 67 of the town report shows the budget breakdown for the fire department. White says they are asking for \$15,000 more this year. White explains that this amount will go towards compensating members. White explains that each fire fighter that responds to a call makes between \$18-\$25 per call, for a training session they receive \$15 for each training session they attend. White explains the breakdown of yearly equipment costs and the difficulties finding equipment.

10. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the annual sum of \$75,000 for the Grand Isle Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. Capital Equipment Reserve which is an increase of \$45,000?

Adam White (White) explains that in 2022 it was \$15,000 a year and the last two years it has been \$30,000 a year. White explains that in 2018 the department bought a new truck for the first time in many years, that they were able to obtain a FEMA grant for \$252,000. White explains that the department put in about \$100,000 to buy the new truck for \$350,000. White says that the same truck today costs \$600,000. White explains that they are asking for this increase so that they may better position themselves financially to purchase new equipment in the future, bearing in mind that the costs keep rising. White asks if anyone has questions. Denise Abbott-Douglass comments that the difference between the ask for \$15,000 and \$75,000 is 400%, that she would like to see all budgets have a percentage like that as well as an explanation of each budget the way Adam White just explained his budget to help people understand increases and asks. White agrees, saying that finding avenues to get the explanations out to voters is important, citing his explanations on Front Porch Forum as being one of the helpful avenues he used. Ellen Howrigan (Howrigan) thanks Adam White and all first responders in the county for all their hard work and dedication. Howrigan asks White how much in their Capital Reserve Fund currently. White says there is about \$120,000, clarifying that this reserve fund is for purchasing vehicles and equipping that vehicle, that outfitting a vehicle is an added cost. Emily Cark (Clark) asks the Selectboard how it is decided what goes on the warrant every year versus voting on an item once and have it go on forever. Jeff Parizo explains that many items are one-time asks, such as this change in capital reserve fund, that without an increase request, it would be in the fire department budget rather than a ballot item.

11. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$575,780 to meet the expenses of the Highway Department budget?

Ron Bushway (Bushway) directs people to pages 49 & 50 of the town report. Bushway gives an overview of the Highway budget, explaining that they took out \$60,000 of their budget due to that ask of \$60,000 to be added to the budget in a separate ballot item, they took out \$72,700 from state aid, and took out \$28,000 due to what they get from the Fish Hatchery, resulting in \$575,780. Bushway says that is an increase of \$92,210 which is about an 15.78% increase. Bushway explains most of that increase is for labor and insurance, citing the 3% COLA increase and a new hire. Bushway goes over other expenses. Bushway says that they received three grants this past fiscal year and gives an overview of what those were for.

12. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$60,000 to meet the expenses of the Highway Department Road Materials budget?

Ron Bushway gives an overview of what the road materials budget is used for.

13. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve a sum of \$72,033 to meet the expenses of the Library Commission budget?

Colleen Bushway (Colleen) directs people to page 11 of the town report. Colleen explains that they had to increase utilities and salaries, citing the 3% COLA increase. Colleen explains that these were things outside their control. Colleen explains that they level fund everything that they do have control over.

14. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$20,900 to meet the expenses of the Recreation Committee budget?

Roth Perry gives an overview of the Recreation budget, that they have been level funded for many years, that they are asking for a slight increase to hire a park ranger for the summer.

15. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$10,000 to be raised by taxes for removing the invasive Emerald Ash Borer trees in the Town rights-of-way as needed?

Ron Bushway explains what is involved to remove the infected Ash trees, that the amount of infected ash trees has increased. Josie Leavitt asks how it is decided if an Ash tree needs to be removed. Ron Bushway explains that they had asked the tree warden to inspect the Ash trees, but that the tree warden said it was too time consuming to do so. Ron Bushway says that he and Brad Sheridan go and assess whether an Ash tree looks to be infected. Ron Bushway clarifies that they are not cutting every Ash tree down the way other towns are, that they are trying to cut only those that appear to be infected. Michael Inners asks how far away from a road does a tree have to be to be considered in the Right-of-Way. Ron Bushway says it would be 24 feet from the center that would be considered the Right-of-Way.

16. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the sum of \$1,950 to be raised by taxes for Island Arts?

Natalie Churchill explains that they are level funded, that this ask will help fund things such as the music festival, classes, and financial aid for classes. Churchill explains that they had 19 events last year, that they want to provide more opportunities for families to attend events together.

17. Shall the legal voters of the Town approve the amount not to exceed \$35,000 to be raised by taxes, subject to reduction from available State and Federal grants in aid and other funding sources, for the costs of a generator for the town garage located at 81A Allen Road?

Ron Bushway explains the need for this generator, that they have applied for a grant for this generator. Jen Morway explains the grant they applied for, that she worked with Adam White on this application, that they should find out soon if it has been approved. Morway explains that if they are approved, they will not need this amount should it be approved by the voters.

18. Shall the legal voters of the Town elect to exempt from taxation the building and property on the corner of U.S. Route 2 and Faywood Road, owned by the volunteer organization known as the Grand Isle Rescue, Inc.?

No discussion.

Howard Demars motions to adjourn the meeting. Jeff Parizo seconds. Ron Bushway calls the vote which passes.