

# 2020 TOWN WARRANT

## Town of Benton March 10, 2020

The Town Meeting was called to order at 7:00PM by the Moderator, Gil Richardson.

He asked that we recognize any members, past or present, of the Armed Forces, as well as any First Responders and thank them for their service to our community and country. A round of applause was given to those members. We were then led through the Pledge of Allegiance. At 7:04PM a motion was made to recess to the School District meeting. The motion was seconded, and by voice vote, the Town Meeting was recessed to the School District meeting.

At 7:16PM, the Moderator reconvened the Town Meeting.

**ARTICLE 1.** To choose persons for the following positions and terms of service:  
(Majority vote required)

The following Town Officers were elected after a voice vote:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expires</u>	
Moderator	2 years	2022	Gilbert Richardson
Selectman	3 years	2023	William Darcy
Treasurer	1 year	2021	Dwight Swauger
Town Clerk	1 year	2021	Michael Stiebitz
Tax Collector	1 year	2021	Michael Stiebitz
Supervisor of the Checklist	3 years	2023	Erich Saffo
Ballot Clerk	1 year	2021	Frances Hadden
Ballot Inspector	1 year	2021	Maxine Tyler
Surveyor of Wood and Lumber	1 year	2021	Joseph Boutin, Jr.
Planning Board Member	3 years	2023	Sam Gregory
Planning Board Member	3 years	2023	Kim Carpenter
Trustee of the Trust Funds	3 years	2023	Laura Richardson

**ARTICLE 2.** To see if the Town will vote to accept the reports of the officers and agents as printed. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept article as written, motion was made to amend due to an error in the report. Motion made to amend accepted. The total amount shown on page 13 is \$414,999.00 and it should be \$448,014, as shown correctly on page 14.

Motion was seconded to accept article as amended. The article as amended passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 3.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$131,500 for General Municipal Operations. This article does not include appropriations contained in special or individual articles addressed separately. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded. With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 4.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$3,000 to be added to the Revaluation Capital Reserve Fund, previously established, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded. With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 5.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$35,000 to repave 500 feet of Tunnel Steam Road with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written. It was clarified that this project will take up where last year's paving ended.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 6.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$131,000 for the Tunnel Stream Road culvert project near Davis Brook, with \$98,250 to come from federal/state grants and \$32,750 to come from the unassigned fund balance. This special warrant article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the Tunnel Stream culvert project is completed or by December 31, 2024, whichever is sooner. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Chairman Darcy explained that the appropriation will be non-lapsing, it can be used any time before December 2024. It is unlikely to be used this year. We have the

environmental permits already and we have an estimated total cost of \$131,000.00 for the project. If we manage to secure a Federal grant for the project, we'll go ahead with the project. This type of grant is "competitive", so that securing one isn't necessarily based on need. However, to even qualify to be in the competition, we have to put up our share of the project cost. Since we have evidence that the culvert has destructively overflowed 3 times in modern history, we can expect that it will happen again in the future.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 7.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$30,000 to be added to the Capital Reserve Fund-Highways/Roads, previously established, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Chairman Darcy explained that we transferred \$30,000.00 from the fund last year to pay for the paving project. This article replenishes the fund.

The article was passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 8.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$25,000 for cemetery improvements, including repair of the retaining wall and gravestones, tree clearing, stump removal, a survey of new grave sites, and a sign, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. This special warrant article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the cemetery improvements are completed or by December 31, 2021, whichever is sooner. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Chairman Darcy stated that "even to the casual observer" the Mt. View Cemetery is in need of much work. He reported that the Selectboard have been in touch with folks from the NH Graves Association. A meeting will be scheduled to review the current state of the cemetery and to hopefully develop a set of guidelines for going forward with the repairs. He pointed out that we will spend only the amount appropriated during the next two years.

Bill Darcy pointed out that clearing of the upper reaches had begun.

Laurie Elliott stated work on the damaged stones should be a priority.

Stef Saffo asked about the cemetery wall. Bill pointed out that this fund is mainly to fund repairs to the collapsing wall between the cemetery and Coventry Rd. If the wall has a major collapse, the Town could incur serious debt. It does not seem like a simple repair,

as there are graves very close to the wall. A comment was also made that the original stones should be reused, as they help define the character of the Mt. View Cemetery.

Gina Elliott mentioned the plan to construct a "Mt. View Cemetery" sign, and remove the current "Benton" sign.

Gil Richardson asked for and received confirmation that this fund is only for the Mt. View Cemetery.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 9.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$1,000 for new tax maps with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

After a brief discussion, the article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 10.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$15,000 for Town Hall improvements, including a fence on the side yard, a roof over the side door and lighted sign and notice board, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Chairman Darcy stated that this article will fund a fence on the side yard to block the view of the generator and propane tank. It also will serve to prevent vehicles from driving on the side yard potentially damaging the leach field and/or septic tank.

We will also construct an illuminated sign board with a roof over it so that important official announcements can be posted. It is envisioned that there will also be space for the "Benton" town name to be displayed.

In addition, a dormer above the side entrance will be constructed, ensuring access and egress even when there is ice and snow on the main roof.

The article was then passed unanimously by voice vote.

**ARTICLE 11.** To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$25,000 for the purpose of bringing higher speed internet service to Benton, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. This special warrant article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the internet service project is completed or by December 31, 2022, whichever is sooner. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Chairman Darcy described most of Benton as being in a “digital desert”, especially Mt. Moosilauke Hwy, Tunnel Stream Rd. and High St. He has corresponded with the Sandwich, NH Broadband Committee to see what ideas and strategies that town is pursuing to improve broadband access.

There are two main approaches 1) improving the current DSL infrastructure by extending the fiber cables to new access equipment closer to the underserved customers, and 2) creating a “fiber to the home” approach which would involve running fiber lines to every customer and installing fiber terminals in each home or business. Option #1 would most likely be the least expensive, and would result in most customers being able to get 25 Mb/s download speeds.

The second option could potentially provide customers with up to 150Mb/s download and up to 75Mb/s upload speeds. The fiber proposal is being implemented in Chesterfield, NH where the town partnered with Consolidated Communications. Chesterfield issued a bond to fund the installation of the fiber network and Consolidated agreed to pay off the bond over time. Sandwich is also trying to convince New Hampshire Electric Coop which owns most of the utility poles in their town (similar to Benton’s situation) to “facilitate” installation of fiber cables on their poles to help with “Broadband Expansion”.

Bill stated that having true “Broadband” in Benton should be a plus for property values in today’s work from home environment. He envisions this being a 3 year project.

Laura Richardson made a point that this current fund is for planning/grant study only – it will not be expended on any hardware.

Lara Saffo explained that she is working on a similar project for Haverhill and is very familiar with the grants that are available and the processes involved in applying for them. She is very willing to work with our Selectboard on this project. She asked if Benton had passed a warrant articles allowing us to accept grants. Bill stated that such a warrant article has been passed previously.

Dick Paquin asked if this would help with the “dead zones” prevalent with our cellphone service. Bill replied that it would not, but that T-Mobile intends to increase the height of the tower in Easton and a new wireless tower has been approved for Woodsville above the Cottage Hospital.

The article was then passed unanimously by voice vote.

**ARTICLE 12.** To see if the Town will vote to set the annual compensation of the Tax Collector at \$2,000 plus statutory fees, with the net increase of \$500 to be funded this year from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded. With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 13.** To see if the Town will vote to set the annual compensation for Town Clerk at \$2,000 plus statutory fees, with the net increase of \$500 to be funded this year from the unassigned fund balance. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded. With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

**ARTICLE 14.** To see if the Town will vote to modify the provisions of RSA 72:39-a for elderly exemption from property tax, based on assessed value, for qualified taxpayers, to be as follows: for a person 65 years of age up to 75 years, \$10,000; for a person 75 years of age up to 80 years, \$15,000; for a person 80 years of age or older \$20,000. To qualify, the person must have been a New Hampshire resident for at least 3 consecutive years, own the real estate individually or jointly, or if the real estate is owned by such person's spouse, they must have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years. In addition, the taxpayer must have a net income of not more than \$20,000 or, if married, a combined net income of less than \$30,000; and own net assets not in excess of \$50,000, excluding the value of the person's residence. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded.

Chairman Darcy stated that there are statutory minimums for these exemptions defined in the RSA. We are moving them up \$5,000.00 on the assessment which, if the Tax Rate was \$18.00, would result in an extra \$90.00 off the tax due.

Dick Paquin asked what oversight exists to assure compliance with the income limits. Bill explained that the Selectboard and Tax Collector will review the applications and the applicant must sign his application under the penalty of perjury.

The article was then passed unanimously by voice vote.

The Moderator asked for and received a motion and a second to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 8:26 PM.

Selectwoman Gina Elliott administered the oath of office to all the newly elected present.

A true copy. Attest

*Michael P. Stiebitz* 3/30/2020  
Michael P. Stiebitz – Town Clerk of Benton

