

**Joint Budget Hearing of Benton School Board and Town of Benton
January 27, 2021**

Board of Education: Joseph Boutin, III, Chair and Kristina Harris (via telephone conferencing).

Board of Selectmen: William Darcy, Chair; Gina Elliott and Kimberli Carpenter

Also Present: Dwight Swauger, Town Treasurer; Gil Richardson, Moderator; Laura Richardson, Chair, Trustee of the Trust Funds

Chairman Darcy called the meeting to order at 7:12 PM after the conclusion of the Board of Education budget hearing.

Copies of the proposed budget and warrant articles were distributed and Chairman Darcy stated that there was very little changes from the prior year. Many of the warrant articles are the same as the previous year, including those concerning Town Hall improvements and Tax maps, which were not accomplished during 2020. \$15,000 is being requested for continuing work on the Mountain View Cemetery and \$35,000 for Howe Hill Road paving. No questions were asked concerning the budget or warrant articles proposed by the Selectboard. There was discussion of the petitioned warrant article concerning the Town taking a position on legislative redistricting. Gil and Laura Richardson and Chairman Darcy addressed the issue.

Discussion turned to the possibility of postponing the March Town Meeting because of the COVID-19 virus. Previous discussions at the Selectboard indicated it was possible to hold the hearing, especially with reduced attendance, and still meet social distancing guidelines, but that would be far from an ideal way to proceed and there was no option to meet outside in March. The Governor had recently issued an executive order making it easier to postpone the town meetings while not impacting the Town or School Board financially or operationally. The increased availability of vaccines for the elderly and vulnerable made it more likely that a postponed meeting could have more complete participation by residents. As an additional benefit, the difficulties of the Board of Education estimating end of year finances would be significantly improved and the setting of the tax rate more predictable with the meeting held at the end of the School Board's fiscal year. Video conferencing was discussed but dismissed as not a viable alternative. There was also discussion of whether all the SAU towns had to agree on a joint postponement date but it was decided it was not required as they always in previous years had different town meeting dates.

A vote was taken of the School Board members present, the Selectboard and Moderator and all voted to postpone the meeting until June 8, 2021, at 7:00 PM at the Town Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 PM.