

2024 Town Meeting/Town Election Notes

Town of Benton – March 12, 2024

Prior to opening the Meeting, Laura Richardson was sworn in as Assistant Moderator by Selectboard Member Kim Carpenter. It was explained that Laura would be reading the articles to the assembly to spare the Moderator's voice which has been affected by an ongoing medical issue.

The Town Meeting was called to order at 7:06PM by the Moderator, Gil Richardson. Gil led us through the Pledge of Allegiance. He then 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. Gil gave tribute as well to all of the folks involved in service to the community such as teachers, medical professionals. At 7:06PM 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 7:36PM, the Moderator reconvened the Town Meeting.

ARTICLE 1. **Election of Town Officials**

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>	
Selectman	3 years	2027	Kim Carpenter
Moderator	2 year	2026	Gil Richardson
Treasurer	1 year	2025	Dwight Swauger
Town Clerk	1 year	2025	Michael Stiebitz
Tax Collector	1 year	2025	Michael Stiebitz
Supervisor of the Checklist	3 years	2027	Stephanie Saffo
Ballot Clerk	1 year	2025	Frances Hadden
Surveyor of Wood and Lumber	1 year	2025	Joseph Boutin, Jr.
Planning Board Member	3 years	2027	Martin Noble
Trustee of the Trust Funds	3 years	2027	Mark Elliott

ARTICLE 2.

Acceptance of Town Reports

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 and then seconded.

Selectboard Chair Bill Darcy took a moment to mention several issues that directly affect Benton. First, the rollout by Conexon of high speed fiber broadband internet service on behalf of NH Broadband and NHEC, is a reality. The infrastructure has been installed and individual customers are being connected daily. The Town Building now has reliable 100 megabit per second (Mbps) service.

The proposed Twin States Clean Energy Link which would have seen increased capacity added to the high voltage power lines which traverse Benton on RT 25 has been discontinued for now. Benton would have seen some increased tax revenue from the project as well as some project-sponsored initiatives for the Town. Bill feels that it may get resurrected in the future.

Last year the Selectboard voted to move a large portion of the Town's "Unexpended Fund Balance" into the New Hampshire Public Deposit Investment Pool ("NH PDIP"). While the savings account at the local bank was paying around 0.1% interest on our deposits, the PDIP is currently paying 5.36%. So far the Town has realized approximately \$15,000 interest.

Scott Matz, Benton's Emergency Management Director, is currently working on updating Benton's Emergency Management Plan (EMP). This has to be done every 5 years in order for Benton to remain eligible for FEMA reimbursements for disaster relief. Bill asked for anyone interested in providing input or volunteering to help with the Emergency Plan to contact Scott or him.

The article passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 3.

Operating Budget

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$134,925 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.

Bill Darcy listed two of the line items that increased in this year's budget, Woodsville Ambulance service and the Avitar Assessing contract. He then pointed out that our projected revenues more than offset those increases. Along with having the lowest tax

rate of any incorporated Town in the State, our projected tax rate for 2024 will be approximately \$1.00 less than it otherwise would be.

He went on to state that the next articles dealing with the funding for various reserve and maintenance funds will have no effect on taxes, as the monies will come from the “Unassigned Fund Balance”.

There will be a couple of Town Building projects which Bill said will be tackled this year.

Lastly, another stretch of Tunnel Stream Road will be dug up and repaved this year. It is the piece leading off of Coventry Rd. and connects to the section repaved last year.

The article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 4. Tunnel Stream Road Paving Work

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$35,000 for paving 200 feet of Tunnel Stream Road with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount is to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

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

The article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 5. Town Hall Property Improvements

To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate \$10,000 for Town Hall improvements. That sum is to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount is to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

An illuminated Notice Board will be put up on the front of the building, to the left of the front door. A walkway will be constructed from the parking lot up to the new notice board.

A fence on the right side of the building will be installed to separate the parking area from the side lawn, partially screening the propane tank and generator, and providing protection for the septic tank and leach field.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 6. Add Funds to Highway Capital Reserve Fund

To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$30,000 to be added to the Highway/Roads Capital Reserve Fund previously established. Selectmen recommend this article. The sum to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount to be raised from taxation. (Majority vote required.)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Article 7. Add Funds to Bridges Expendable Trust Fund

To see if the town will vote to add \$5,768 to the Bridges Expendable Trust Fund with funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Bill Darcy explained that this article allows us to put the money we received from the State for a dedicated purpose (bridges) will only be used for that purpose as a result of placing the money in the Trust Fund

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

Article 8. Add Funds to the Town Maintenance Expendable Trust

To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$20,000 to be added to the Town Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund previously established. This sum is to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount is to be raised from taxation. The 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.

Adjournment

The Moderator asked for and received a motion and a second to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 7:52 PM. Assistant Moderator Laura Richardson administered the oath of office to all the newly elected present.

A true copy,

Attest: Michael P. Stiebitz – Benton Town Clerk

Michael P. Stiebitz - 03/18/2024

