

(Note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town Meeting originally scheduled for March 9, 2021 was postponed until June 8, 2021.

2021 TOWN WARRANT

Town of Benton – June 8, 2021

The Town Meeting was called to order at 7:00PM 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 thanked 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 during the pandemic such as teachers, medical professionals, cashiers and everyone else who helped bring us through the crisis, and had to wear masks every day all day. He also recognized the folks we lost over the last 15 months, in particular, former Selectwoman Carol Vincelette. 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 7:51PM, 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>	
Selectman	3 years	2024	Kimberli Carpenter
Treasurer	1 year	2022	Dwight Swauger
Town Clerk	1 year	2022	Michael Stiebitz
Tax Collector	1 year	2022	Michael Stiebitz
Supervisor of the Checklist	3 years	2024	Stephanie Saffo
Ballot Clerk	1 year	2022	Frances Hadden
Ballot Inspector	1 year	2022	Betty Nickles
Surveyor of Wood and Lumber	1 year	2022	Joseph Boutin, Jr.
Planning Board Member	3 years	2024	Martin Noble
Trustee of the Trust Funds	3 years	2024	Mark Elliott

Discussion was held regarding the Ballot Inspector position. Maxine Tyler had previously expressed her desire to step down. It was pointed out the position is not typically an elected one. In most towns, two (or more) Ballot Inspectors are selected out of the

registered voter population by the two political parties. In cases where the political parties fail to select inspectors, the Selectmen choose two persons to perform the function. Although there was some discussion of the Town revisiting this subject during the next election cycle, Betty Nickles was nominated and elected to this position.

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 the article as written. Chairman Darcy detailed the extensive efforts being made to facilitate the design and construction of a fiber optic broadband network to bring high speed internet to Benton and other underserved communities in Grafton County. Benton in particular is somewhat unique in that it is 100% served by the New Hampshire Electric Co-operative (NHEC), and has little to no broadband internet availability.

In December of 2020, the NHEC won the so called Census Block which includes Benton, in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction. They are now obligated to design, construct and offer for service a Broadband Internet network in Benton within 8 years.

While that seems a long way off for some of us who presently have little or no service, Bill is working to garner allies within the Broadband Committee of Grafton County, the NHEC, of which he is a Director, as well as the State of NH to help accelerate the process. There is approximately \$121 million available at the State level for Broadband initiatives and the NHEC has requested some of this funding for its project.

The Selectmen have pledged Benton's share of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (approximately \$36,000) funds as well as the \$25,000 which was appropriated on last year's warrant to any entity which can help to quickly provide Broadband Internet service to Benton.

The article passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 3. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$129,100 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.

The Town-wide revaluation is statutorily required to take place in 2023. This year's appropriation will bring the total fund to approximately \$13,000. The Selectmen will determine the actual amount required for the audit and adjust next year's appropriation accordingly.

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 Howe Hill 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 start at the intersection of Howe Hill Road and Route 116 and end at the section paved two years ago.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 6. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$15,000 for cemetery improvements, including a survey of new grave sites, gravestone repair 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, 2022, whichever is sooner. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Chairman Darcy explained that he has met with a surveyor and will be presenting a draft gravesite survey at the next meeting of the Selectboard.

In response to a question about the estimated date of availability of gravesites in the section cleared last year, Bill said that a set of cemetery rules will probably be presented at next year's Town Meeting and that lot prices will undoubtedly rise. Our current fee of \$75 per plot is grossly underpriced in relation to the actual cost of providing and maintaining the plot, as well as in comparison to other towns.

A comment was made and resonated with the group regarding the great job Boutin & Son did last year on the upper section.

Similar comments were also made about the impressive rebuilding of the cemetery wall. It does look great and Chairman Darcy pointed out that proper drainage has been incorporated into the backside of the wall to hopefully eliminate the destructive effects of frost.

The dire condition of the High Street Cemetery was brought up by Linda Gregory. She has seen folks visiting the cemetery as she commutes to work at the Glencliff Home and said that she was appalled at the current state of the place. She would like to see it brought back into a respectful condition.

After much discussion, Selectwoman Gina Elliott agreed to head up a committee of volunteers to cut the brush, tend the gravestones and generally spruce up the place.

A follow on suggestion was to have the cemetery lawn mowing contract include a once a year going over for the High Street Cemetery.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 7. 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.

Chairman Darcy explained that this article is a repeat from last year's warrant, as the project did not get done. The initial quote was for simply reissuing PDF maps that would incorporate changes to bring them up to date.

We recently received a quote from a different vendor to bring the maps up to date and issue them in both PDF and digital formats. This will permit fairly simple updating when required.

The article was passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 8. 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.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

Chairman Darcy stated that this article is another repeat from last year, as the projects did not get accomplished. We will try to do better this year.

The article was then passed unanimously by voice vote.

ARTICLE 9. (By Petition) To see if the town will vote to urge that the New Hampshire General Court, which is obligated to redraw the maps of political districts within the state following the federal census, will ensure fair and effective representation of New Hampshire voters without gerrymandering. Additionally, these voters ask the town of Benton to urge the NH General Court to carry out the redistricting in a fair and transparent way through public meetings, not to favor a particular political party, to include communities of interest, and to minimize multi-seat districts.

The record of the vote approving this article shall be transmitted by written notice from town officials to Benton's state legislators, informing them of the demands from their constituents within 30 days of the vote. (Majority vote required) (Selectmen oppose this Article)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Lara Saffo, the principal sponsor of this article in Benton stood and expressed her belief that the redistricting should be a non-partisan affair, conducted in the public eye, as the results affect all of us, and should not benefit one political party. She declared that the current procedure is absolutely partisan.

Chairman Darcy gave the Selectboard's opinion that a) redistricting is not something that towns should be giving guidance to the State on, b) we currently are represented by two State Representatives, giving us more representation than we would have with a single State Representative, and c) we shouldn't be "poking the bear" when the "bear", the current House, Senate, and Governor opposed to this proposal, when the "bear" doesn't have to listen to us in the first place. He finished up by stating that he and Lara agreed on one thing, that the process is indeed partisan.

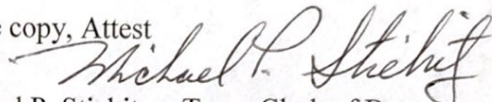
Ballot slips were handed out and when the results were totaled, 14 were "Nay", 12 were "Yea". The measure was defeated.

The article was then denied.

The Moderator asked for and received a motion and a second to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 8:43 PM.

Chairman Bill Darcy administered the oath of office to all the newly elected present.

A true copy, Attest



Michael P. Stiebitz – Town Clerk of Benton

