

1 TOWN MEETING MINUTES (DRAFT)

2 INFORMATIONAL MEETING FEBRUARY 28, 2022

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4 The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. The first order of business was for Merrily
5 Lovell, Selectboard Chair, to give a brief presentation on important happenings in the past year
6 in the town as well as recognizing the staff for all of their hard work and adaptations during the
7 past two years while dealing with Covid protocols.

8 She then handed the floor over to Todd Odit, Town Manager, who gave a short
9 overview of the budget and presented information relating to the main drivers of budget
10 increases as well as explaining the Capital transfers and how that works. Odit then handed the
11 meeting over to Frank Twarog, Moderator, who proceeded to open the discussion on Article III.

12 **ARTICLE III: Shall the Town approve a General Government budget of \$1,678,706 with the sum of**
13 **\$1,211,891 raised through taxes?** The discussion started with Richard Watts wondering how the town
14 had transitioned from a town meeting where discussion happened in person, and people had the
15 opportunity to offer amendments to the budget, to a town that “had ended town meeting” and would
16 vote by ballot from here forward. He quoted from a Seven Days article suggesting that someone should
17 sue the town for having the vote to change to Australian ballot by Australian ballot rather than an in-
18 person meeting to make that decision. Chairperson Merrily Lovell said that the Selectboard had been
19 very worried about the emergence of the Omicron variant and the fact that the Legislature had not
20 voted to continue the rules that were in place for the 2021 town meeting by November despite them
21 having a special legislative session. The Selectboard therefore felt compelled to have a vote in order to
22 protect the citizens of Hinesburg from having to participate in an in-person meeting in March. Someone
23 at the meeting asked if it was still possible for a suit to be brought and someone else asked the
24 Selectboard to investigate how to reverse this change. Attorney Roger Kohn sent a chat saying he would
25 not recommend a lawsuit. The discussion then moved on to the Article at hand. Having no further
26 questions, Moderator Twarog moved on to Article IV.

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28 **ARTICLE IV: Shall the Town approve a Highway Department budget of \$728,733 with the sum of**
29 **\$573,233 raised through taxes?** Paul Lamberson stated that he is concerned about the sustainability of
30 a highway crew consisting of only 2 people. Todd said that we are actively looking for more employees
31 for the highway department. Phil Pouech made the point that it is very difficult to find people who want
32 to do that kind of work and that we have almost never been fully staffed. The discussion ended and
33 Moderator Twarog moved on to the next article.

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35 **ARTICLE V: Shall the Town approve the Hinesburg Community Police Department budget of \$815,483**
36 **with the sum of \$714,983 raised through taxes?** As always, the police budget generated a lot of
37 discussion. Sam Hemingway asked about why we needed a sixth officer. Merrily Lovell said that they
38 wanted to provide adequate staffing to have 2 people on duty at all times for officer safety. Someone

asked why our costs are higher than most towns our size and Lovell responded that Richmond's are higher than ours per capita and she said she appreciates the work they do. Selectboard member Phil Pouech said that we should continue to have a community discussion around what we want the police department to look like in the future. Mary Crane asked a question about the night shift and whether we needed two officers on for that. Pouech said they don't get many calls at night.

Someone asked about whether there was data available regarding the number and types of calls the police respond to. Pouech said that there isn't much data available. Chief Cambridge said that what you see in the newspaper is picked out of the total calls often for entertainment purposes. He also stated that on-going cases are not included until they are resolved. Enrique Peredo suggested that we hire a mental health counselor or social worker instead of the 6th officer. Selectboard member Maggie Gordon said that we do contract with Howard Mental Health. Mike Loner said it had been discussed but no progress in that regard had been made but that it still warrants further discussion.

Will Patten made a comment about the militarization of police departments around the country and noted that our officers are covered in tons of gear all the time and that might be intimidating to people. He also said that the police shouldn't allow the paper to dictate what they print in the call log.

Jennifer Decker mentioned that the history of policing in this country was to help slave owners recapture fugitives and to keep exploited workers under control. She pointed out that the safety of the community is about the people, not the number of police and that the budget is actually for 7 FTEs, not 6. Many people said that the police showing up doesn't help to de-escalate a situation and that the budget is too high. Another community member asked for a definition of what constitutes community policing and how did we make the decision to have this? Phil Pouech said it was started under Chief Morrell and that it really means they respond to any issues that people might be having including locking keys in the car, for example. Paul Lamberson said he has witnessed our officers functioning very well as social workers. Richard Watts said he had posted his survey of other community's police departments online. Dawn Francis then asked if the Selectboard had considered sharing police services with another community such as Richmond, for example? Or perhaps having other communities pay us for coverage? Carl Bohlen feels we need a community discussion about what level of policing we want but that we definitely need good data in order to have that discussion. He feels the town needs to reevaluate the staffing levels and wonders why we need more people. Merrily said that the population has increased so the Board felt we therefore need more staffing.

ARTICLE VI: Shall the Town approve the Hinesburg Fire Department budget of \$426,347 with the sum of \$386,347 raised through taxes? Paul Lamberson asked a question about Capital funds given that he remembers the town buying a \$700,000 fire truck without voter approval. Todd Odit said that the Board policy is that anything over \$400,000 needs to be put forth for a vote. He also noted that you can't borrow for more than 5 years without voter approval.

Someone then asked about the ARPA funds and what the process might be for deciding what to do with them. Odit said that the Selectboard will discuss how they will be spent and that the public will have input into the process. Will Patten asked if the fire department is now fully integrated as a town department. Phil Pouech and Nick Baker, Fire Chief, answered in the affirmative. Carl Bohlen asked about what the salaries are for and Baker responded that there are 2 fulltime EMTs who are covering

the daytime shifts and that there will be a halftime fire chief position beginning on July 1, 2022. Impact fees will be spent on a study to review the future needs of the fire station. Andrea Morgante suggested that the town continue to be frugal and not assume we need a new fire truck every 3-5 years. Pouech reiterated that he wants a robust community discussion about the ARPA funds.

Article VII: Shall the Town approve the Hinesburg Fire Department Ambulance service budget of \$139,960 with the sum of \$39,960 raised through taxes? The question was posed as to why this is a separate budget from the Fire Department. Phil Pouech said that the Selectboard wanted to know the true cost of the ambulance service had we decided to move forward with it. Since so many of the costs are actually shared, it is likely that the 2 budgets will be combined for future fiscal years. Bill Lippert asked why the Board had changed their thinking on the ambulance and asked them to walk us through their reasoning. Chief Baker said that the State would not license the ambulance as there is not enough staffing. Todd Odit said we didn't want to end up with an ambulance we can't use sitting in the station and there was still time to cancel the order. Phil Pouech made the point that it is not how fast the ambulance arrives but rather the first responders that are the lifesavers. He noted that our response time for the ambulance is quicker now than it has been for the last 40 years since switching to Richmond rather than St. Mike's. Selectboard member Mike Loner made the point that the officers of the department agreed that it is not the right time to pursue an ambulance service. Sam Hemingway and others agreed with this decision and are in favor of regionalization moving forward. Chief Baker said that using Richmond Rescue for our ambulance service does in fact represent regionalization. Jamie Carroll commended the fire department for this tough decision and said that we need to look at public safety holistically. Jennifer Decker wondered why there hadn't been more recruitment efforts. Chief Baker said again that we have been unable to recruit people fast enough and that it takes two years at a minimum to train someone so they are ready to answer calls.

ARTICLE VIII: Shall the Town approve the Carpenter-Carse Library allocation of \$235,000 with the sum of \$235,000 raised through taxes? Selectboard Chair Merrily Lovell listed all of the wonderful things that the library provides and noted that the staff had done an excellent job being adaptive during Covid. She gave them lots of kudos. Carpenter Carse board member Paul Lamberson listed off a litany of programs that the library provides to the community.

ARTICLE IX: Shall the Town approve Capital Transfers of \$726,778 with the sum of \$525,778 raised through taxes? Moderator Twarog opened this article for discussion. There being none initially, Town Manager Todd Odit chimed in to explain the item. He said that part of the strategy is to take some of the unassigned fund balance to dedicate to maintaining infrastructure. He said that having a separate dedicated capital tax rate in the future might be a good idea. Paul Lamberson said he is on board with that. Anything exceeding \$400,000 would still be a separate article requiring voter approval. Odit said it would help to even out the impact of Capital spending projects.

ARTICLE X: Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$51,200 with the sum of \$51,200 raised through taxes, to be distributed as specifically designated below?

Hinesburg Community Resource Center \$23,100

UVM Home Care & Hospice (VNA) \$7,000

Agency on Aging (CVAA) \$4,000

120 VT Family Network \$1,000
121 American Red Cross \$400
122 Hinesburg Senior Meal Site \$650
123 Vermont Center for Independent Living \$200
124 Steps to End Domestic Violence \$2,350
125 Prevent Child Abuse Vermont \$500
126 Lund Center \$1,500
127 Lake Iroquois Association \$7,500
128 Lake Iroquois Recreation District \$3,000

129 (If voters approved Articles 3 through 10 as presented, total expenditures of \$4,802,207 will be
130 required, with the estimated amount of \$3,738,392 to come from property tax revenue.)

131 An audience member asked what does the Lake Iroquois Association spend its dollars on? Mike Loner
132 said that the Board had stipulated that the funds could not be spent on chemicals for milfoil mitigation.
133 The funds will instead be spent on education at the fishing access about cleaning boats and other
134 invasives, as well as shoreline protections and improvements. Enrique Peredo said that the Agencies
135 had been an easy place to amend the budget when meeting in person. He wondered if each agency
136 could be its own yes or no vote. Andrea Morgante said that citizens can always bring their requests to
137 the committee ahead of time for inclusion.

138 ***ARTICLE XI: Shall voters authorize the payment of real and personal property taxes for the fiscal year***
139 ***ending June 30, 2023, payable in full to the Town of Hinesburg in one (1) installment, with the due***
140 ***date being November 15, 2022 and to be collected by the Town Treasurer? Any and all payments***
141 ***received in the Town Treasurer's Office later than midnight on November 15, 2022 will be considered***
142 ***delinquent and will be subject to the collection of interest at the rate of 1% per month or fraction***
143 ***thereof for the first three (3) months and thereafter at the rate of 1.5% per month or fraction thereof.***
144 **There was no discussion on this article.** There was no discussion on this article.

145 Just before a motion to adjourn was made, the zoom Selectboard informational meeting was cut off
146 inadvertently at 10 p.m. It was not resumed.

147 Respectfully Submitted,

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149 Melissa Ross, Town Clerk and Treasurer

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