

## 2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES

Saturday, February 26, 2022, at 10:00 AM

Conducted in compliance with Vermont Open Meeting Law with electronic participation

Present: Town Moderator, Chuck Wooster; Selectboard Chair, Dan Fraser; Selectboard Vice Chair Joe Major; Selectboard Clerk, Kim Souza; Selectboard Members, Ally Tufenkjian, Mike Hoyt, Lannie Collins, Dennis Brown; Town Manager, Tracy Yarlott-Davis; Town Clerk, Lisa O'Neil; Town Staff: Lori Hirshfield, Paula Nulty; Members of the general public; Members of the Town and School Meeting Committee: Nikki Boyle, Ryan Scelza

Town Moderator, Chuck Wooster, opened the Annual Town Meeting at 10:50AM

Dan Fraser called the Town Meeting to order at 10:52

Marie Bartlett, Wilder: Asked is electronic version of TR available:

Mike Morris, Hartford: Asked Selectboard Members who voted against budget, why

Joe Major: Supports parking meters, were not included

Lannie Collins: Did not support budget process: increase in personnel expense to tax payers; fire station in Quechee: build new station costly, increases go on year after year; no capital projects; infrastructure not addressed; CAP not addressed after voter approval; parking meters not addressed

Dennis Brown: Similar concerns as Mr. Collins: supported meters; CAP not addressed; budget guidance insufficient; full cost of Quechee fire station – building, four new firefighters not one year but forever - not considered

Kim Souza: Addressed budget process; may have been unclear to new members, all members; missed chance to address concerns; error was corrected, supports increase in personnel; growth and development in town supports increase; postponed parking meters because of construction downtown, not urgent, likely we will be able to fund through ARPA and infrastructure funds from non-local dollars

Moderator provided direction to find Town Report

Mike Hoyt: Addressed support of budget, good debate, error was corrected, addressed budget percentage increase; listed benefit in services to residents with new staffing; if rejected will result in fewer services; strongly supports budget

Dan Fraser: Thanked Selectboard and Town Manager; made note of pandemic, understaffing, budget process, supports budget and modest tax increase

Carol, WRJ: Gates Street detour signs confusing

Town Manager: Signs are required DOT, please call in any damage or maladjustment to signs

Marcy Bartlett, Wilder: Thanked Mike Hoyt for owning budget error, new mechanic position is for Police and Fire and has heard supported by PW Director as needed

Kim Souza: Background info on need for Public Safety mechanic; second mechanic needed in addition

Moderator noted 57 people in attendance on Zoom

Tom McLeary, Hartford: Engineering study on Gates Street traffic, Selectboard voted for one way traffic: any restoration should be for two way to serve greater town needs

Ally Tufenkjian: Addressed Selectboard support for one way option, once engineering study comes will be bonded and approved by voters

Lannie Collins: There is residual traffic in other areas with closure of lane; supports reopening Gate Street and Fairview Terrace fully but is aware of budgetary constraints; issues under road are of concern

Kim Souza: Potential issue of eminent domain a factor in decision to go one way

Erik Krauss, Hartford: Concern budget process only looks at current year, with no available draw down of \$1mil Unassigned Balance fund, wonders what will budget look like for 2024

Town Manager will research and reply

Geri Williams, Wilder: Selectboard Members who voted for budget: what is thinking of four new firefighters to Quechee in terms of housing and looking ahead for new firehouse; responsibility of Quechee Lakes; are there 10 new positions – or 13/14?

Dan Fraser: Residents in Quechee and West Hartford deserve access to Fire, Fire Chief recommended, life and safety matter; fire station – unsure what that will look like: may bond or federal funds, will need to explore

Kim Souza: Positions total is 13, some part-time, 10 was average

Mike Hoyt: Five minute response time significant and should be provided

Lannie Collins: Supports Fire Department, served for 15 years as call firefighter, has used services; Town is a large community and covers large amount of acres - same response time across

Town is unrealistic, this makes services less equal to all residents – favors some, not all; public should vote on new station not the Selectboard; would support if residents did; concern new positions are forever; should not count on possible outside funding which are still taxpayer funds; if done in proper stages would support

Dennis Brown: Voted against budget; fear factor being utilized: does not disagree with response times, but need to balance with people's ability to pay; referenced delinquent tax balances, take care of what we have first

Mike Hoyt: Station has been in use previously; 1.64% increase can support this, Hartford already holding Federal money and likely to see more

Kim Souza: Addressed new staff vs overtime costs

Joe Major: Supports new firefighter positions for Quechee although he voted against budget

Town Manager response to earlier question from Eric Krauss: FY24 budget if we don't access unassigned fund balance as Selectboard has this year, with certain caveats including moderate growth in Grand List, \$750K from unassigned fund balance which is high historic average, excluding changes and/or costs beyond Selectboard's control – about \$100 to \$125 increase for homeowner of \$250k home; very rough estimate and multiple factors unknown

FX Flynn, Quechee: Firehouse previously operational in Quechee, was not staffed as no accommodations and other budget costs, Quechee residents higher income and higher home values than other Hartford residents, considerable tax contributions; happy to be contributing to staffing of Quechee sub-station

Becky Chollet, Hartford: Are new positions out of new need, or longer standing needs?

Kim Souza: Every other position long overdue, resident complaints exist, needed to be filled and overdue

Ally Tufenkjian: Benefits Technician, IT, both new and overdue, there is current load and growth, change necessitates need

Moderator noted 56 people in attendance on Zoom

Melinda Brooks Major, Hartford: Status of Public Information Officer position?

Town Manager: Couldn't afford on staff, Part-time contract position considered for FY23

Mike Morris, Hartford: Stated Kim Souza mentioned we have had a lot of management in the past, has heard blame on previous management for errors and incorrect budgeting process, believes inaccurate, previous managers performed well, inappropriate, lack of transparency poor in last year, lack of accuracy

Kim Souza: Former managers good and also made errors, impossible to encompass all duties and additionally amid pandemic, acknowledge Tracy Yarlott-Davis has come in to situation where foundation needs to be rebuilt by the Town Manager

Mike Hoyt: Budget error was Selectboard's, fixed, came up with a better budget

Lannie Collins: Errors have been made but not taking responsibility for errors of Department Heads and Town Manager; out of line with truth

Ally Tufenkjian: Buck stops with Selectboard, has learned what questions to ask and more about process

Jeff Arnold, Wilder: Was \$25k given for homeless? What percentage do Quechee residents pay of taxes?

Dennis Brown: Previous question from Mike Morris regarding budget process blame: Selectboard holds meetings, gives Town Manager guidance, Town Manager puts budget together and presents, maybe should have better policed budget but take what is given to them; criticism of past Town Managers not appropriate – move on. Noted Krauss question not answered.

Town Manager: Not an easy answer, the Quechee tax percentage. Can pursue.

Ally Tufenkjian: \$35k directed to homeless committee: Preemptive funds in anticipation of report; never used by ad hoc committee; not included in FY23 budget

Heidi Duto, White River Junction: Gail Ostrout (Finance Director) should not get any blame. Tried to correct at end of process. Tax-payers retired, elderly, living paycheck to paycheck; Hartford not comparable to Colchester; does not support all new positions. Divide in Town Board should look to heal.

Geri Williams, Hartford: Clarify question: What could happen as result of adding four firefighters? Raises, equipment for new station? Concerned costs will raise over time, concern is not four hires.

Erik Krauss, Hartford: Town Manager's rise in tax estimate sounded reasonable. Less concerned as stated is customary to pull from unassigned fund balance \$750K on average; what's next Capital expense: fire station, public safety building, Bugbee insulation, Maxfield parking, have been noted.

Mike Hoyt: unassigned fund draw FY23 increased to provide tax relief; customary 15-16% of budget in Hartford fund, VLCT recommends less, we have fund built up maybe too much; Cap projects:

we have Fed funding and will receive more, get it right, involve public as we move forward; already have \$2mil in coffers;

Kim SB: ARP funds, planned use calendar, distinction approved vs proposed items – all to be considered

Sheree McLeary, Hartford: Town's water pipes on list of repairs in budget?

Kim Souza: South Main Street project does, will be addressed this summer, unsure others, question for Public Works

Town Manager: Question for Chief Water Operator, can follow up

Mary Hanson: Status of TIF

Lori Hirshfield: \$1.3mil not yet authorized by voters; implementation ongoing: South Main, Gates Street, Parking Lots, Maple Street improvements, stormwater/wastewater improvements, Currier and Church Streets

Moderator noted 52 attendees on Zoom

Lynn Bohi, Hartford: How is Police Chief search going? When did we contract with IACP?

Tracy: End of December, public surveys ongoing through 3/11/22, candidate profile being created, stakeholders being surveyed

MODERATOR CONCLUDES ITEM 1.

ITEM 2:

Proclamation from Board of Civil Authority honoring Kevin Raleigh's service to the Town

Moderator read proclamation into record:

PROCLAMATION IN APPRECIATION OF SERVICE

WHEREAS, Kevin Raleigh served as a member of the Hartford Board of Civil Authority from February 1, 1993 until January 31, 2021, and

WHEREAS, Kevin Raleigh, during his tenure, made an extraordinary time commitment and served for many years as Chair of the Board of Civil Authority, helping the BCA and Hartford taxpayers navigate both the Tax Appeal and Tax Abatement process with fairness and compassion, and

WHEREAS, Kevin Raleigh served as a dedicated election official for Hartford with an astute eye for computing final vote tallies at the end of lengthy election days and for helping the BCA transition from hand-counting at floor votes to being efficient when overseeing the voting tabulators used in Australian ballot voting on election day, and

WHEREAS, Kevin Raleigh also contributed to formulating Hartford legislative district recommendations to the Vermont General Assembly during two decennial Legislative Apportionment cycles, and

WHEREAS, the Board of Civil Authority and Town of Hartford residents are most grateful for the many contributions and countless hours Kevin Raleigh devoted to service to the Hartford community,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THE BOARD OF CIVIL AUTHORITY AND THE RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN

OF HARTFORD acknowledge and extend to Kevin Raleigh best wishes and gratitude for his loyal service .  
Dated this 26th day of February 2022.

On behalf of the Hartford Board of Civil Authority,  
Sue Buckholz, Chair  
Nancy Howe, Vice Chair

Moderator noted 52 attendees on Zoom

Suzanne Abetti, White River Junction: 12 additional attendees via YouTube 12

Lannie Collins: Thanked Dennis Brown and Joe Major. Joe: grateful for guidance; Dennis: Savvy wisdom and knowledge of history – demeanor will be missed. Honor to serve together with both. Thanks Ally and Kim as well, pending election.

Erik Krauss, Hartford: Retail cannabis - put in place zoning and ordinances first, require much review and approval; range of estimates with regulation/zoning changes; possibly next 12 months?

Kim Souza: Other municipalities' formats available to follow, guidance from State, hopes to work if re-elected with Selectboard to establish goals and objectives

Deb Winslow, White River Junction: Regulations around cannabis dispensaries and zoning: is reporting in media true, is there leeway for zoning, what does walking distance mean?

Kim Souza: Town is not able to zone it out of possibility of existing, if voters approve it

Ally Tufenkjian: Municipal guidance from Cannabis Control Board: in this document, refer to buffer zone section

Mike Morris, Hartford: Thanked Moderator; noted some water sewer lines are 100+ years old: may be addressed when Fairview Terrace undergoes construction

Marcy Bartlett, Wilder: Cannabis and zoning; does not want a dispensary in the Town of Hartford; has concerns with public process wherein private industry advocating/involvement prior to voter approval

Joe Major: Important to involve stakeholders across the board

No more questions

MODERATOR adjourned the meeting at 1:03PM