

Bakersfield Zoom Informational Town Meeting  
Wednesday, February 24, 2021  
7:00pm

Lance called the meeting into session at 7:00pm.

Select Board members present: Lance Lawyer (chair), Josh Goss, Gary Denton, Terri Gates, Sam Cribb via zoom

Residents present: Roger Lindala, Brenda Churchill, Tami Brennan

Residents present via zoom: Sarah Jo, Deanna and Rodney Allen, Mark Doremus, Sue Sonski, Melanie and Savannah Riddle, Kristin and Nathan Tuttle, Sharon Lawyer, Linda McCall, Sherry Westcom, Jamie Ballowe, Vera and Allen Lawyer, Dand and Katie Forand, Abbey Miller, Sharon and Pat Evans, Heather Tanner, Paul and Linda Stanley, Gary and Alice Foote, John Thompson, Betsy Reed, Tyrone Shaw, Beth and Maura Horne, bwtvt-Brenda Westcom, Jim Croft, Mary Schwartz, Euan Bear, Bill Irwin, Resource Brian Westcom, Ginny, Hollie, Sophie, Stacy, Curtis Family, Jan Ketcham, iphone Brian, iphone,

Lance began by thanking everyone for attending and saying that he appreciated the participation. He said that he was deeply sorry not to have town meeting, but he hoped that more people would be able to share their input via Australian ballot, possibly even more than could actually attend a regular town meeting.

Josh said that he understood that this was not an ideal situation this year, but it was due to an uncontrollable circumstance and we are making the best of an undesirable situation. The recorded link to the meeting will be available to view tomorrow afternoon and the link will be posted on the town website and the Community Facebook page. Town Meeting will be held by Australian ballot this year so there is no ability to adjust the ballot, this meeting and the discussion on the articles on the ballot tonight, is strictly for information. We have no ability to change anything.

During this zoom meeting, we will discuss the articles in order. Two moderators will put your questions in when we cover an article. We won't swing back to a previous article until all the articles are covered. When you state your question, please state your first and last name and the number of the article questioned. We will continue, and address any questions on articles not yet resolved, at the meeting planned for Friday, the 26 beginning at 7:00.

You'll find a chat button at the bottom center of your zoom screen to click on to open up the chat box and type your questions. Corrections to the town report are to be typed into the chat box and we've already addressed the spelling of Lane Lawyer and Chris Newitt. All microphones will be muted until it is time for the participant to speak.

I've talked with Kathy and absentee ballots can still be requested this week, until 11:00 on Friday and then again on Monday from 8-12. The mail takes at least one day to receive ballots so the ballots will need to be dropped off by the time the polls close at 7:00pm on Tues, March 2. The polls will be open from 10:00am to 7:00pm. All poll attendants will be taking all precautions to keep everybody safe.

Tonight, we'll start with article 4 and will go item by item. The board will give a brief summary of each and then address questions.

Sarah Jo said that we will use the zoom chat exclusively and won't be unmuting to ask questions.

Josh apologized in advance for any mispronouncing of names.

Article 4- Shall the Bakersfield voters authorize the Select Board to appoint a Town Clerk, as provided in 17 V.S.A & 2651E, after the current term expires in 2024?

Sue Sonski asked, "Why does the board want to do this and if passed, how much will the town clerk be paid?"

Lance said the town clerk will be paid 12,000.00 a year, plus clerk fees and if delinquent tax collector as well, a percentage of the delinquent taxes collected.

Josh said that it was brought to the board that the town clerk wasn't going to run, and we weren't sure if we had another person who wanted to run. If we appoint a town clerk, we can hire someone out of town. At the last Regular Select Board Meeting, we passed a motion that states whoever wins the election for the town clerk this year, then the board agrees to appoint that person for 3 years.

Euan asked, "What is the motivation here? What about the contradiction with State regulations, the 45 days, etc.?"

Josh reiterated the reason above, saying that the board acted under the assumption that we did not have anybody running for Town Clerk and we wanted to be able to hire out of town if needed.

Article 5- Shall the Town vote to have its Property Taxes due on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021?

No questions

Article 6- Shall the town authorize the Select Board to set a tax rate to cover expenses as voted?

John Thompson asked, "Is this item just procedural?"

Lance said yes, pretty much...we take the smallest number we can manage with for the municipal tax rate and then we wait for the state to dictate the school tax rate and then we add them together.

Article 7- Shall the Town authorize the Select Board to borrow money in anticipation of taxes?

Lance reminded all attending that we will be voting on the 2021 budget and we are already well into 2021 which makes handling the budget difficult and we'll need to borrow money.

John Thompson asked, "Is this essentially a short-term bridge loan to pay expenses until taxes are received? Will it have an impact on tax rates?"

Abbey said that the loan get paid at the end of the year after the tax monies have been collected and the interest needs to be budgeted into the budget. There is a slight impact on tax rates.

Article 8- Shall the Town appropriate \$300,000.00 for Road Work?

Bill Irwin asked, "Why did this go up \$130,000.00 from last year."

Lance explained that this number in the past was split into two lines, winter work and dirt work. This year we combined them into one line item.

Josh said that this year they combined dirt work and winter work because it needs to be combined when we apply for loans.

Brian Westcom asked how much we have received from FEMA.

Lance said that at this point we have received nothing from FEMA. We had a hard time for the first year getting responses and answers because of the FEMA rep. He has been replaced with a new FEMA rep who is working well and things are going more smoothly. We are having weekly meetings which is a great improvement. Until a few weeks ago, we had had about three meetings total in a year's time. But FEMA is to pay 75% of expenses, the state of VT pays 12½%, and Bakersfield pays the remaining 7½%

"Do we have an idea as to how much you will receive from FEMA?"

Lance gave the example of Goat Path project. FEMA allocated \$1.2 million. It costs \$90,000.00 for demolition. Lance said that ultimately, he is guessing about a quarter of a million dollars from FEMA.

Article 9- Shall the Town appropriate \$10,000.00 for a Paving/Grant Fund (Matching Funds for Grants)?

Lance explained that the town has paving projects every 3-4 years. They are usually very expensive, and the grants are matching funds. Typically, 80% grant and 20% from the town. A simple paving project easily costs \$100,000.00.

No questions.

Article 10- Shall the Town appropriate \$10,000.00 for a Bridge Repair Fund?

Matching funds for Goat Path would come out of this fund. The new bridge will cost around \$600,000.00.

Resource- Brian Westcom asked, "Why was Allen Bridge not part of FEMA?"

Goat Path bridge, by the Allen's, is part of FEMA, but we still have to pay 7½%.

Article 11- Shall the town appropriate \$265,000.00 to defray the General Expenses of the Town?

Kerry Flieger asked, "Why is there an increase of 40,000.00?" "I'm also wondering if this is an appropriate time to discuss wages since 2017 have gone up around 36,000.00, looking at page 13 in the book."

Euan asked, "Would Abbey try to answer why expenses could just pile up over several years?"

Abbey, to Euan and Kerry, said piling up isn't really the right wording. The increases in wages from 2017 around \$26,000.00, has to do with hiring a new zoning administrator with more hours, estimate for an animal constable, the listers have been busier. Some of this stuff is mandated by the state of VT...clerk fees, some goes to the state, some goes back to the town. We are required by the State to have a book restoration fund to upkeep the record books. Base expenses rates rising, that we can't control. The budget has been level funded for 2-4 years while contracts, that we are obligated to pay, to the Bakersfield Fire Dept and the Enosburg Emergency Service, have built in yearly increases each year, that have not been reflected in the budget in previous years. The increase reflects the increase in expenses and getting the budget on track to where it should be. The \$10,000.00 town hall repair building maintenance was to build the ramp outside.

Josh commented that the new zoning administrator has already cleared up some hot topics and increasing the ZA hours is in response to the request of town's people for more hours a week.

Paul Stanley asked, "Not sure what article this in in, is the school district bond for BES building upgrade page 21?"

Abbey said that the bond is part of the school budget, so that's a question for the school budget meeting tomorrow night. The town of Bakersfield doesn't write the check, the school writes the check for the bond.

Scott Flieger asked, "Is there a plan to collect delinquent taxes? It's up to almost \$90,000. Looking at taxes from 2019 and 2018, looks like the Town is collecting less every year pre-COVID.

Abbey said that she was confused because where she was looking at 2017-2019, each year the amount collected for delinquent taxes has increased from the year before. She also said that Kathy sends a letter to those behind in taxes, offering to set up a payment plan. Those people who are making faithful payments toward their taxes will not go to tax sale. Bakersfield typically has a tax sale every two years and 2020 would have been a tax sale year but the State would not allow it due to COVID. The tax sale plan is to go forward this year. Scott said that it's always the same people on the list and the numbers keep growing and asked if there was some way to publish who are making payments toward their delinquent taxes so that we know they are trying. Abbey said that we've never published or posted what people's payment schedules are. She said that Kathy gives the Select Board a report each month showing the delinquent tax balance, maybe Tami could include that balance in the minutes. Abbey also said that the number of people on the list is lowest that

she's seen. Lance said that this is not the Select Board's responsibility. This is a Town Clerk and delinquent tax collector responsibility, and that Kathy is very good about informing us when she is going to do a tax sale.

Article 12- Shall the Town appropriate \$55,834.84 for the annual payment for the trucks?

Lance said that this is the actual amount of the payment on two of the trucks. One truck has two more payments and the new truck, we are just beginning to make payments on.

No questions.

Article 13- Shall the Town appropriate \$15,000.00 to the Equipment fund?

Mark Doremus asked, "Are there any funds for replacement of the grader, 30 years old?"

Lance said that the Equipment Fund is for buying new equipment...\$15,000.00 each year. We would like to put more in it but didn't feel it was the year to do it. The balance is \$30,000.00, which is not enough to buy a new grader at this time.

Article 14- Shall the Town appropriate \$19,000.00 for Equipment Repairs?

Lance said that we need 19,000.00 to top off this account to be able to make equipment repairs.

Brian Westcom asked, "Does the equipment operating expenses still come from the general Road fund?"

Abbey said yes, and that if there was any money left over in the equipment operations account, we would pay it into the new equipment fund or the equipment repair fund, but we haven't been able to do that because we have not had any money left over. That's why the equipment repair fund was established.

Article 15- Shall the Town authorize the Select Board to receive and expend for town purposes and additional gifts, grants or other revenue in excess of those calculated in the proposed budget?

Linda McCall asked, "Do you have any long-term plans to build a larger Town Garage? If so, is it on your radar for grant applications?"

Lance said that our new zoning administrator is also a grant writer and that we are hoping that she can help us apply for a grant.

Article 16- Shall the Town appropriate \$16,080.00 for Dispatching Fees?

This is overseen by the St. Albans police department. They are responsible for all the dispatching for the Fire Dept. Abbey said this charge is based on rate per capita, so we have no control over this. They just send us an invoice.

No questions.

Article 17- Shall the Town authorize the surplus funds from the H.F. Brigham Library, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, amounting to \$15,593.12 to be returned to the Town General Fund for use in 2021?

Lance said that this was not a request from the Select Board, it was a request from the Library trustees.

Euan said she was curious to know why this amount wasn't reflected in the increase of the General Fund. Lance said that that would be counting your chickens before they are hatched. We had no way of knowing if this would indeed be voted in. If there are left over funds in the General Fund at the end of 2021, then it would come off the request for 2022.

Article 18- Shall the Town appropriate \$35,000.00 for the H.F. Brigham Library for 2022?

Euan made the note that this is level funding from the previous year.  
No questions.

Article 19- Shall the Town of Bakersfield grant authority to the Trustees of the H.F. Brigham Public Free Library to spend monies raised by grants or contributions?

No questions.

Article 20- Shall the Town appropriate \$10,000.00 for the Maple Grove Cemetery?

Josh said that this is not level funded, it is down \$5000.00 from last year.

Kerry Fliieger asked, "Why is it less?"

Euan said that she had spoken to Ron Marcotte and he said that last year they had to do restoration and this year it is just for maintenance. Abbey said that this amount is just a little bit over the amount that they pay for their mowing maintenance contract with Ross.

Article 21- Shall the Town appropriate \$10,000.00 for the Bakersfield Historical Society?

Linda McCall reminded everyone that the Historical Society is run exclusively by volunteers, nobody gets paid and we are supported mainly by patron dues and contributions. She said that we hired a contractor to put flashing on the back wall and he discovered loose brick. Upon further inspection, he noticed cracking and slippage of the brick on the one-story addition that the Catholic's had added to have a pulpit, when it was a church. Apparently, when we had the huge storm on Halloween, 2019, the rain had poured in and flooded around the back foundation and then immediately froze, shifting the foundation and thus the brick. The bricks are falling off and it is dangerous out in the back. We had contractors come and inspect and give us an amount to correct the damage and save the building and we received an estimate of \$50,000.00...the quote was for \$49,300.00...22,000.00 for the new foundation and \$27,300.00 for brick work. We've been applying for grants and

have so far been denied. There are a lot of other historical buildings that retained damage as well so the competition for grants is intense. We are looking for Community Support with this \$10,000.00. We know that it is more than usual. We have been trying to get the word out, there are pictures at the store if anyone wants to take a look. Give us a call, we'd love to show you and explain the need. Call Gary Foote at 827-3042 or myself at 827-4475, and there are pictures online. Josh did a good job of getting that out.

Abbey asked, "What happens if it doesn't pass? Will the building be unusable?" Linda said that it can't go another 12 months. She doesn't think it would make it through the sonic boom of the Fireworks show. She said that the Historical Society would need to get a loan.

Kerry Fliieger asked, "What is being done to protect the collections inside?" Linda said the collections are safe in the main building and up in the choir loft. The stage and the disability bathroom are in this section. There are a few artifacts on the stage.

Abbey asked, "What about their normal \$3000.00 that the town normally gives toward operation? If this doesn't pass, did the historical society account for the lumping this all together rather than making it a separate article?" Linda said that she was confident that fund raisers and patron support could manage the regular operation expenses.

Article 22- Shall the Town appropriate the following sums of money:

- a. \$2776.00 for the Franklin County Home Health?
- b. \$1332.00 for Northwest Vermont Solid Waste District?
- c. \$200.00 for the Franklin County Industrial Development Corp?
- d. \$1507.00 for Northwest Regional Planning Commission?
- e. \$600.00 for the Missisquoi River Basin Association?
- f. \$500.00 for the American Red Cross?
- g. \$100.00 for Green Up Vermont?
- h. \$2000.00 for the Fairfield Community Center?
- i. \$100.00 for VT Rural Fire Protection Task Force?
- j. \$95.00 for Vermont Center for Independent Living?
- k. \$600.00 for Northwestern Counseling?

Tyrone Shaw said, "I would like to speak briefly about the Fairfield Community Center when that line comes up. Thanks."

Tyrone shared the statistics regarding the Fairfield Community Center's contribution and value to Bakersfield residents, stated on page 39 of the Town Report. Please read of all that the Community center offers. All to say, the center certainly fills a lot of needs.

Paul Stanley said, "Would like to comment on MRBA article 22. Paul shared that the MRBA has a report on page 42 of the Town report that highlights the activities for the year. Paul serves as Vice President and John Little as President. Paul wanted to point out that his group did a planting at

the junction of Rt 108 and Boston Post Rd by Brian Westcom's. He said if you look, you can see the stakes and to keep your eye to watch for growth. Brian had been concerned about some erosion there.

Josh asked if there were any more questions and there were none asked. Josh said that since there were no more questions, they would end the meeting.

The recording of tonight's meeting will be on Youtube by tomorrow afternoon and there will be a link on the Home page of the town website for you to click on to access the recording.

Josh said that he hoped to see you all here Friday night.

Lance said Thank you all and that he was looking forward to having a regular Town meeting in the future.

Bill Irwin said "For the budget overall: I want to thank all entities that level funded from last year to this, and to those who actually reduced their request this year. Overall, I greatly appreciate the work of the Town in this very difficult year. Though I am biased, I especially appreciate the library returning to the Town their unspent funds due to reduced hours of operations during COVID. I also think the Annual Report is excellent. It is not easy running a town. You folks are doing well. Good job running this informational meeting folks!

The meeting ended at 8:34pm.

Minutes recorded by Tami Brennan.