

Bakersfield Town Meeting Informational Meeting #2  
February 26, 2021  
7:00pm

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

Members absent: Gary Denton

Residents present: Roger Lindala, Brenda Churchill, Sarah Jo Willey, Abbey Miller, Linda McCall, Jim Croft, Dan and Katie Forand, Sharon Lawyer, Erin, Nathaniel Cobb, Vera and Alan Lawyer, Jean-Marie Clark, Tami Brennan

Lance welcomed participants to the 2021 informational meeting, in place of Town meeting, saying that he was disappointed not to be able to meet in person, but that he hoped that more people would be able to voice their opinions because they wouldn't normally be here because they are at work. Lance turned the meeting over to Josh saying that he was better qualified to explain the Zoom meeting protocol.

Josh welcomed everyone, saying that it was not an ideal situation this year but that it was uncontrollable and that we are trying to make the best of an unfortunate situation. As the town has gone to Australian ballot for this year, there are no changes or adjustments that can be made to an article. This meeting is strictly informational.

Zoom directions: Articles will be discussed in order, plan your questions in advance and enter your questions into the chat box, the chat box button is in the bottom center of your zoom screen, and address them to everyone. Please include your first and last name and the article number to which the question pertains. Zoom hosts will confirm your question has been received and we will check for your feedback to make sure you are content with the answer received. If you have additional questions after an article is passed, feel free to ask and we will circle back after all articles have been addressed. Please keep microphones muted until asked to unmute to avoid audio complications.

Absentee ballots can be picked up at the Town Clerk's office on Monday and dropped off no later than 7:00pm on Tuesday. Polls will be open from 10:00am to 7:00pm on Tuesday and all poll workers will be following a protocol to keep people safe.

Please enter any corrections or comments on the Town report into the chat box, they will be recorded and addressed after the articles are discussed at the end of the meeting.

Discussing article 4-22...

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?

Lance said that due to unforeseen circumstances and conditions that were not really in our control at the time, this article was put forth as a contingent for not having someone run for the Town Clerk's position. We would like to put forth, at this time, that the voters in the town of Bakersfield vote no for article 4.

Jean-Marie Clark asked, "Why didn't you remove that article from the ballot?"

Lance said that everything on the ballot has to be posted so the voters have a chance to review. It was already posted before new information came.

Jean-Marie Clark said, "Not to belabor the point, but regarding article 4...how was there not enough time to get that article off the ballot after the 2 candidates submitted their paperwork to get on the ballot? It just seems disrespectful by the board and potentially to the voters to even have that on the ballot while candidates are running."

Lance said that the article was voted on at a warned Select Board meeting which was before the deadline for candidates to submit their application. It was voted on the second meeting in January.

Terri said that we put it on to begin in 2024 and then we found out that we couldn't do that.

Josh said that it does say in the article that it would not take effect until 2024 because we found out that people were running so it was amended instead of removed.

Abbey Miller asked, "Can you explain how this changes the current Town Clerk dynamic if it passes so we are all aware?"

If article 4 passes, we have 45 days to appoint a town clerk, however at the last official town meeting we agreed that the Select Board would abide by the town vote, so the appointee will be the person who is elected. If the article is turned down, things will remain as they have been for two centuries. The town clerk will be elected by popular vote and serve 3 years.

Deanna Allen said, "But you talked about it in the November (appointing a town clerk) minutes."

SJ Marcotte asked, "If this Article passes, we won't have the ability to vote for this position after 2024, correct?"

Lance said, That is correct. Lance said that he personally does not believe the Select Board should have that authority. He believes that the Town Clerk should be determined by popular vote. Intentions were good. Select board members brought up different scenarios and I can say honestly that the intentions were good.

Josh said that since there are two people running for the position, he feels that the town should vote it down and keep the selection with the town. That the only time this would be beneficial is if we didn't have someone in town running, we would be able to expand our search outside of town. And if he was not on the board, he would absolutely want the right to vote for Town clerk in 2024. Intentions were good. Maybe there wasn't enough research on our part, and it led to an article that may or may not should be on the ballot, but it is, at

this point we can't change it. It has two boxes...yes and no...I will be checking the no box.

Lance said...as will I.

Article 5- Shall the Town vote to have its Property Taxes due on October 4, 2021?

No questions.

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

No questions.

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

No questions.

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

Lance explained that Dirt work and winter work were combined into one item for expedience and simplicity.

No questions.

Article 9- Shall the Town appropriate \$10,000.00 for the Paving/Grant Fund (matching grants)?

No questions.

Jean-Marie asked for some elaboration on each article to explain it a bit to the voters as we go along. Josh said that they would try, some are very standard.

Sharon Lawyer asked, "This does not pertain to any specific article, but what happens if the town votes no on a certain article, what happens next? Obviously, there is no opportunity for negotiations on the floor.

Josh said that at this time, depending on what the article is, it would simply be voted down and the money would not go to certain entities or the person would not be elected, or if it was for the main budget, the board would have to go through and adjust and bring back another budget for the town to look at.

Lance added, It would have to be revoted on, it would have to be warned and we would have to have informational meetings on it.

Sharon....So in the case of a town position, that would be the case.

Lance....That would depend on the position, if no one was elected for the position then the Board can appoint someone to the position. If it was for a position under Article 2, we'd have to have another election. Anything involving money, we'd have to adjust what was requested, have an informational meeting and have a new vote by Australian ballot.

Abbey said, so that everyone's aware, if the Road budget or the General budget gets voted down, it delays everything, working with the banks, tax participation, etc., so it is pretty important those budgets get passed to keep things operating smoothly.

Article 10- Shall the town appropriate \$10,000.00 for the Bridge repair fund?

Lance said that bridges are very expensive. We're looking at replacing Goat Path Bridge, estimated at around 600,000.00. FEMA will pay 75%, and we have to pay 7½%, which is still a lot of money and will almost deplete our bridge fund. Brown's bridge will need to be replaced in the future so it's important to keep money in the bridge account for that contingency.

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

Lance explained that this is the general operating expenses for the town government, this does not include the Road work at all. It contains money to pay fixed expenses....Abbey said this includes salaries, fire dept which is 73,000.00 this year, day to day office expenses, heating fuel, ambulance contract around 32,000.00.

Linda McCall said that the figures on the town report dispensary line items on page 12 do not match the figures on page 16, however the totals match up, which looks odd.

Josh said that we did have auditors go through everything and it all came out right.

Abbey said that all line items match up...could be because the page set up has different categories...pg 12 was on an excel sheet that she set up and pg 16 was a sheet set up by the auditors. Everything does add up, the audit added up fine. Abbey will set things up more similar for the future.

Jean-Marie Clark asked, "Unexpected expenses? How were you so far off for this last year? So this is a request for past expenses or upcoming? I'm used to the school board forward planning, not retro like this.

Abbey...this is the first year that we've actually sat down and set up a whole budget for the town general fund, line item by line item. Hopefully we'll see the future budgets coming in without such a deficit.

Josh said that the school board does vote for the following year and not the year that they are currently in. The town is going to need to address this at some point, but we agreed that this is not the year to do it. Abbey tried to explain this to town residents last year.

Abbey explained that the only entity that is voting their budget for the year following is the library. The town begins the new budget year in January, but doesn't vote to approve that budget until March of the same year, and then taxes are not collected until October to pay for the expenses already spent for the first 10 months of the year, which is why the Town needs to take out a Tax Anticipation note to carry us through until we receive taxes, which costs interest and causes problems. This will need to be addressed at some point, whether it means for a period of one or two or three years, there be a temporary

rise in taxes to change the budget schedule to where we are voting on a budget for the following year and not running 10 months behind and playing such a catch-up game.

Lance said that most of the towns in our region have made this change within the last couple of years.

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

Lance explained that this should really say payments because it is the exact amount of the two truck payments that town needs to make. One truck has two payments left and this is the first year for the other truck.

Article 13- Shall the Town appropriate \$15,000 to the Equipment Fund?

This fund is setting aside money for future purchases for new or used equipment to replace equipment as needed.

Article 14- Shall the town appropriate \$19,000.00 for Equipment repairs?

The board is trying to keep a balance at the beginning of the year of \$35,000. The board will ask for the amount needed to bring the balance back up to \$35,000.00 to begin the year. This year the Town needs \$19,000.00 to restore the balance to \$35,000.00. The town has a new truck and most of the trucks are in good condition, but we have an aging bucket loader and an aging grader. We do not have a backhoe or an excavator, we are renting them as needed. At any given time, this equipment can need a repair that is quite expensive. We spent \$35,000.00 on repairs for one truck last year.

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

No questions.

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

These fees are paid to the St. Albans police dept who are in charge of communications for 911 and the Fire Dept operations.

No questions.

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

This is at the request of the H.F. Brigham Library Trustees.

No questions.

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

This is level funding from last 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?

I believe this is \$5000.00 less than last year. This is down due to the fact that they will not be doing restoration this year, this is strictly to cover their cost on the maintenance of the property.

No questions.

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

Linda McCall said that the Bakersfield Historical Society was formed in 1997. It is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. In 1998, they bought the St. George's Catholic Church, the brick building two buildings down from the Town Hall. We've put money into the building, in new sills, new joists, new roof, new wiring. We put plumbing in the building. And the historical society is used to collect and display their artifacts regarding town history and used for bereavement luncheons. We need this \$10,000.00 because we have noticed that the back section of the building, where the stage is, is pulling away from the building. We have received estimates to restore the foundation and the brick structure of the addition which would entail taking the brick off the back, much of that brick is loose and it is slipping. Anybody can see the slipping bricks and cracks which is a safety hazard for anybody going back there to slide or during our fourth of July celebration. Our estimates are \$22,000 for the foundation to level up the stage so we can shut the door, from Mike Lamphere who has worked on our building before. And 27,300 for Richie \_\_\_\_\_ to restore the brick on the back. That section houses our stage, our ADA compliant bathroom and our emergency exit. Both contractors are licensed. Richie would have to take off the brick before Mike restores the foundation. He will reuse any bricks that he can. We would like to get it finished before the fourth of July event. We have requested that we don't start fourth of July with the canon because it shakes the building. It's an old building, built in 1840. Start the day with a bugle. We have submitted for grants and we've been denied on two and we are trying for another one for 10,000.00 for matching funds, which we have, and we have applied for a Line of Credit loan.

Nathaniel Cobb asked, "If you land a grant covering this cost (which I realize is a pipe dream) will the historical society return any of the money if the voters approve of it?"

Linda said, that there won't be money to return based on the estimate. The grant is for 10,000.00. the total estimate is for \$49,300.00. We are still

going to be short and need that loan to supplement. The structural engineer said that the 4-foot frost wall is insufficient and to go a foot deeper would cost an extra \$10,000.00. But yes, if we had extra money, we would return it or not ask for money the following year. We've been fortunate that our fuel costs have been down this past year and we have built up a credit on our fuel plan.

Lance asked Linda if he understood that the Line of Credit that she spoke of is from the trustees? Linda said, Yes, it is. Lance said that he didn't yet know the trustees' decision on this. Linda said she understands.

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?

No questions.

Josh said they would set the clock for two minutes to see if there are any more questions and if not then we will end the meeting.

Abbey said that they should mention that articles for the monies for Fireworks and for the audio equipment used at Town meeting were not included on this ballot because we didn't use it, since we had no fireworks and no town meeting this year and we are carrying the funds over for use for the next time.

Lance said that we have 500.00 that we have carried over from last year and it doesn't look like we are going to use it this year. We would like to make a contribution to Roger Lindala's organization, Northwest Access TV, to say thank you for helping us hold these Zoom meetings, so a portion of that money may go there.

Josh said since there are no more questions, that at this time, I will conclude the meeting and thank everyone for showing up with your questions.

Lance would like to thank Northwest Access TV for helping us with this. He knows he certainly couldn't have been able to handle this.

Sarah Jo and Brenda and Roger, Thank you very much. I dreaded this but this turned out ok...Thank you.

The meeting ended at 7:52pm.

Meeting minutes recorded by Tami Brennan.