**TOWN OF CASTLETON**

**INFORMATIONAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES**

**MONDAY, FEBURARY 28, 2022 at 6:30 PM**

**VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING**

Zoom Meeting Link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/DSIjndQzLQoSRf-sHUyWqe7IoHmniTHmhh_LxuDiYHtkN9L7WzoJ4sZB_89GgGA2.JHpz16VcyQ7CUcAg>

**PRESENT**: Michael Finnegan, Moderator; Michael Jones, Town Manager; James Leamy, Selectboard Chair, Richard Combs, Selectboard Vice Chair; Robert Spaulding, Selectboard Member, Joseph Mark, Selectboard Parliamentarian, Michael Holden, Selectboard Member, Representative Robert Helm, via Zoom; Representative William Canfield, via Zoom; Joe Zietler, Charles Brown, Eric Nielson, Mary McIntyre, Pat Schrader, John Burke, Thomas Murphy, Sandy Churchill, MacArther Stein, Don Wood, Nancy Mark, Nick Thornblade, Ann Niklasson, Nancy Trudo, Mary Droege, Dan Ducharme, Katie Thornblade, Mr. Diekel, Julie Finnegan, Susan Day, Ted Day, Brian Moore, Liz MacKay, Martha Clifford, Sharon Ryan, Kerry Fowler

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

Mr. Michael Finnegan called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm

Mr. Finnegan also shared guidelines with the audience for the evening regarding Zoom and any comments, asking everyone to announce name and address.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mr. Finnegan led the Pledge of Allegiance. Also recognized with a moment of silence for those in Ukraine. Mr. Finnegan also asked all cell phones be muted.

**REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT HELM & REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM CANFIELD**

Mr. Helm could be heard via Zoom, but not by the audience that was present at the Town Meeting. Redistricting is happening in the legislature, done every ten years, encouraged phone calls for comments, and it looks as though Castleton will be a standalone town, without Hubbardton. Hubbardton will be moved to Orwell, Sudbury and Shoreham. Work on VT Route 22 is in a five-year process. Fair Haven Depot bridge will also be put back together. The big part to present is the Public Safety dispatching. Mr. Helm started to indicate there was a proposal from DPS, but the meeting was moved ahead due to technical difficulty.

**SELECTBOARD INTRODUCTIONS**

Mr. Finnegan introduced the Members of the SelectBoard. Director of Student Government Activities at Castleton University introduced, who made a brief presentation, he is on the SGA and current vice president of community relations. (Lost sound as he started to speak for about 2 minutes). Coordinated with green campus initiatives, have done work on campus and in Rutland. New students introduced to community service aspect. Have had numerous activities for black history month. Have over 50 students involved in Student Government. Spartan Family Food drive, on campus from Oct – Dec collected food to feed about 100 families for 2 weeks. Hope to grow this event. Have about 50 active clubs, academic and social. Reviewed the numbers of participants in various activities on and off campus. Also reviewed new events coming up as well as long standing events that they are continuing to participate in.

Willow Hogan and Tyler thanked for running microphones and helping with process of meeting.

Mr. Finnegan asked everyone address questions to moderator, will direct to appropriate board member. Voting on things tomorrow at the Castleton Fire Department from 8am-7pm.

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES WILL BE VOTED ON MARCH 1, 2022 BY AUSTRIALIAN BALLOT.

Article **1.** To elect Officers for the following terms: two (2) Select Board members for **1** year; one (1) Select Board for 3 years, One (1) Library Trustee for 5 years, One (1) Town Moderator for 1 year.

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 2. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $26,618 for Legislating? (Prior year $26,542)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 3. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,965 for Ordinances & Proceedings? (Prior year $1,965)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 4. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $184,500 for Managing Municipalities? (Prior year $182,428)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 5. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $12,271 for Conducting Elections? (Prior year $8,804)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 6. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $48,817 for Collection, Custody & Disbursement of Funds? (Prior year $48,159)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 7. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $111,624 for Accounting? (Prior year $104,833)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 8. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $12,000 for Auditing? (Prior year $12,000)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 9. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $34,383 for Tax Listing? (Prior year $34,434)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 10. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $42,592 for Tax Collecting? (Prior year $42,596)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article **11.** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $83,051 for Document Recording/Issue? (Prior year $80,878)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 12. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $20,000 for Legal Services? (Prior year $20,000)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 13. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $43,711 for Municipal Planning & Zoning? (Prior year $41,738)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 14. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $8,255 for Community Development & Economic Revitalization? (Prior year $7,490)

 There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 15. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $191,828 for General Government Buildings? (Prior year $192,850)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 16. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $27,450 for General Government Equipment? (Prior year $23,439)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 17. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $531,182 for Police Department? (Prior year $526,025)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 18. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $36,218 for Emergency Medical Services? (Includes Regional Ambulance Service, Inc. & RAS/Castleton First Responders) (Prior year $36,218)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 19. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $169,575 for Fire Department? (Prior year $167,144)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 20. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $8,550 for Emergency Management? (Prior year $8,750)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 21. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,165,292 for Highway Department? (Prior year $1,155,379)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 22. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $3,900 for Town Lands? (Prior year $3,400)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 23. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $5,000 for Historical Cemeteries? (Prior year $5,000)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 24. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $29,000 for the Hillside Cemetery? (Prior year $29,000)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 25. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,443 for Health Regulating & Inspecting? (Prior year $1,443)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 26. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $5,467 for Animal Control? (Prior year $5,469)

 Joe Zietler of Drake Road asked what this amount cover or consist of or is it just the position. Mr. Holden answered that it includes the fees involved in picking up animals and the time of the officer.

Article 27. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $20,773 for the Constable? (Prior year $29,803)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 28. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $341,695 for Transfer Station? (Prior year $345,277)

Charles Brown asked what the revenue is that is coming in from the Transfer Station. Mr. Holden stated the revenues are $336,685 from the Transfer Station.

Article 29. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $185,630 for Recreation? (Prior year $113,797)

Nick Thornblade asked if the increase was what is anticipated for the salary for the director. Mr. Holden replied yes it does. Joe Bruno asked if the balance is from the director position from last year. Mr. Holden stated $50,000 is for director, and another $18,000 was for the daycare camp, but they are getting a grant for that, so they had to show it. Mr. Bruno asked what the director is going to do for $50,000. Mr. Holden referred that to Rec Committee member. She replied that their board is made up of volunteers from the community and reviewed the various activities they plan for and provide. The Director will be able to secure more grants, cheaper for the families of the town and costing the taxpayers less. Mr. Bruno stated he is disappointed that the skating rink is no longer maintained and hasn’t been for years. There are also no programs being offered for adults.

Andy Churchill wanted to comment that a director would be able to collect volunteers and outreach out for more participation in the community.

Mr. Spaulding stated that in response to Mr. Bruno’s comment about the skating rink, it is the fire department that used to do that, not the recreation department. Mr. Spaulding stated he’s not saying the recreation committee shouldn’t be in charge of it, but just wanted to clarify.

Mr. Mark stated that in the past the recreation budget has had funds in it for the salaries of two part time directors, which would be eliminated if this budget is adopted. Mr. Spaulding asked what the salaries of the part time directors was, it was $20,000 combined.

Mary Droege, what will happen to the recreation budget if this article is not passed. Mr. Holden again referred to Nancy. If doesn’t pass, will have to be voted again.

Comment Ann Niklasson, asked if anyone who wanted more information for tomorrow to leave their email and she would happy to share any information before voting

Mary McIntyre, director will help to organize and recruit volunteers

Nancy Trudo asked if the new rec director is approved will they be in charge of village school if approved. Will the new director be in charge of that. Can’t be answered until the vote, but will consider, and Mr. Finnegan also stated the Fire Department membership has addressed the rink in the past, had volunteers but never got done.

Ann Niklasson also stated the hope the director will help with coordinated activities at the village school if that is passed. She asked people to email her at niklassonvt@gmail.com with any questions.

Joe – chief operator at Castleton transfer station, feels what people aren’t realizing is the total includes what their insurance, etc., not just a straight salary number. As far as full time he knows someone part time in another town and makes only $10,000 for summer work. They are looked upon all year round, and is a lot to ask of the volunteers currently doing those tasks.

Dick Coombs stated $18,000 is for daycare, which is covered by grant, has to be spent to get the grant, need permission to spend before can get the grant. He also stated the annual salary is estimated to be $40,000 for anticipated costs for benefits.

Charlie Brown stated in years past, they had the actual department budget, and have less anticipated revenues in the actual ballot item, easier for everyone to read and understand.

Mary McIntyre volunteers are hard to come by and time consuming.

Dan Ducharme, last he heard this question was asked of the water district to use water, doesn’t believe got a response for the skating rink, he was one of the volunteers.

Dick Combs, a document available on the back table, shows anticipated revenues. He also stated flooding the rink takes many hours to commit to, takes multiple volunteers and time to accomplish.

Andy, a former program writer and director from boys and girls club, his experience is that people are needed in the position to direct these programs. Anyone present who can answer practice of the part time positions paying for costs and supplies out of pocket. Some assume it does happen but can’t say for certain. M. McIntyre stated she and her husband have contributed out of pocket in the past. Mr. Diekel stated he keeps receipts for tax purposes when he contributes. Martha Clifford yes, has expended her own money for Crystal beach. Over the past 3 years $57,078.07 average over 3 years for revenue from the recreation department.

Citizen questioned back to Article 20 articles pertaining to police, fire and rescue, and questioned what emergency management covers and why different. Mr. Leamy stated that it is for major storms and/or large emergencies where a shelter needs to be designated. Mr. Jones supports training, etc for operations of emergency operations center.

Article 30. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $10,150 for Memorial Day Decorations/July 4th Parade? (Prior year $3,300)

Katie Thornblade asked what spent on. Mr. Holden stated because of COVID, no parade or fireworks, was not in budget at all last year, and being put back in for this year. Looks large, as a large decrease last year because not done, and back in this year.

Thomas Murphy also asked same question. Mr. Zietler also asked about details of increase. Also asked for more details on prior to COVID year expenses. Mr. Jones, not sure if more detail can be added, funds carried over from previous year, did not fund any new last year and have to put back in this year.

Julie Finnegan asked if parade is new. Mr. Jones, have done 4th of July and Memorial day in the past, but have added holiday parade.

Susan Day in the past LBA has paid for the fireworks, and at this point, they feel they’ve done it enough years and have asked the town to now fund. Got it for free for many years before this.

Article 31. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $116,000 for Library Administration? (Prior year $116,000)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 32. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $1,500 for Prevention/Control of Forest Fires? (Prior year $1,500)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 33. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $10,159 for Tree Warden? (Prior year $10,161)

There were no questions or discussion on this article. Mr. Zietler asked if for entire town. Yes it is. Mr. Jones clarified highway takes down trees, for tree warden only, some of it in labor and work together.

Article 34. Shall the Town appropriate the sum of $43,000 for Rutland County Tax? (Prior year $43,000)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

**Article 35.** Shall $153,000 of the unassigned General Fund surplus balance as of June 30, 2021, be applied toward the construction of a new salt/sand shed on Staso Road?

Mary Droege how much is in the unassigned general fund. Mr. Mark stated at the end of the year if there is a balance at the end of the year, in this case, was due to things not being expended because of COVID, can’t be spent except with taxpayer permission.

Mary McIntyre asked cost of building salt shed. Joe Mark $450,000 total. Currently lease space on Route 4A for sand salt storage. Also have funds from sale of old fire station in reserve, plus this should have enough to build the shed.

**Article 36.** Because of a decline in student enrollments, the Board of Directors of Slate Valley Unified Union School District found that the Castleton Village School is not necessary for the continued operation of the school district and its educational programs, and after holding three public hearings on the matter, determined that it was necessary to close the Castleton Village School. SHALL the voters of the Town of Castleton approve the closure of the Village School?

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

**Article 37**. An historic agreement between the towns of Castleton and Hubbardton provides for Castleton to have an 89 percent interest in financial and educational matters and Hubbardton to have an 11 percent interest in those matters. If the voters of the Town of Castleton approve the closure of Castleton Village School, SHALL the Town of Castleton buy the Castleton Village School property for One Dollar in order to acquire either full ownership of the building or, if the Town of Hubbardton also votes to buy the building, an 89 percent ownership stake in it?

Sharon Ryan, what does the town have planned for the building. Mr. Mark stated the selectboard chose not to develop a plan in anticipation of the vote of the citizenship. They believe it would not have been a useful process and time consuming when not certain would be approved. If the decision is to purchase it and close it, the board will have to initiate a significant process, along with the Town of Hubbardton if they vote to purchase, to come up with a mutual agreed upon plan, according to the agreement on the property. There are a lot of ideas, but the options range from no purchase, then reverts to school district, purchase and make actively used community source, lease it or sell it. But nothing has been discussed by the board.

Joe Bruno, reviewed a historic agreement between the Town of Castleton and the School District from the 1950’s.

Ted Day clarified have to approve closure first, questioned if decide not to close, then don’t have to worry about buying it, and who owns the school then. Mr. Mark stated if don’t vote to close, it remains to be owned by the school district. They have said they will not use it to educate students, but they are obligated to use for education, they district has indicated they would use it minimally for recreation/athletics.

Don Wood number of years ago in conversation with member of school board at the time, there was a covenant in the deed that the building be used for educational purposes. If the deed said then they couldn’t do it, how come can now. Mr. Mark stated that they have gotten a few different legal opinions, and that a lengthy title search will have to be completed if approved for purchase.

MacArthur Stein resident and parent, voices support of the option to do something with the building and foolish to pass it up.

Don Wood why wouldn’t title search and detail be done ahead of time, when may not be able to do it.

**Article 38**. Shall the town authorize cannabis retailers in town pursuant to 7 V.S.A. Section 863?

Joseph of Drake Road, certain percentage/tax town would receive from these sales, if so, how much. Board did not have anyone assigned to this article, did not have an answer. Dick Combs stated this was put on the warning because of a petition and the board was hopeful that the person putting together the petition would be present to address the issue, and they are not present. If passes, they would find out the answer.

Article 39. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $3,500 for the support of ARC - Rutland Area determining that the program serves the residents of the Town with advocacy, resources, and community for citizens with developmental disabilities and their families? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 40. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $3,600 for administrative support of Castleton Cares, Inc., determining that the program serves the residents of the Town with emergency assistance to local people in need? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 41. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $25,000 for the support of Castleton Community Seniors, Inc., determining that the program serves residents of the Town with the operation of the Castleton Community Center (The Old Homestead)? (Not included in the budget)

JoAnn Riley bring up to date, seeing people return, elderly transportation continues to be provided. Transitioned meals to dinner to go. Wellness programs continue to move forward.

Update on Article #38 Revenue and Tax on Cannabis tax question, Dick Combs googled and found retail sales tax of 20%, 14% of which is cannabis excise and state sales tax of 6% and no local option tax.

Article 42. Shall the Town of Castleton vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of $3,500 for the support of the partial funding of Marble Valley Regional Transit Districts (The Bus) public transit service to the residents of the Town? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 43. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $6,720 to support the VNA & HOSPICE of the Southwest Region?(Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 44. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $4,088 for the support of Rutland Mental Health Services, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with counseling, substance abuse and emergency services? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 45. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $900 for the support of RSVP and the Volunteer Center, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with volunteering opportunities and community services? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 46. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $2,000 for the support of Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, determining the program serves residents of the Town with elder services? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 47. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $1,000 for the support of Vermont Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with services to enable the blind and visually impaired to achieve and maintain independence? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Article 48. Shall the Town deem necessary and appropriate $2,725 for the support of BROC-Community Action in Southwestern Vermont, determining that the program serves residents of the Town with weatherization, emergency food and small business development? (Not included in the budget)

There were no questions or discussion on this article.

Andy Churchill, thanks members of the organizations for services.

Mr. Spaulding brought to attention in Article 5, there are 211 towns in state of Vermont, we take honor of having the largest number of ballot items, and is costing the town a lot more than average to hold elections. Mr. Leamy stated he can’t believe people aren’t getting tired going through it and approve just to finish. The school budget, 26 million, and vote up or down. Town does 3.5 million with 48 articles plus or minus. Have to get approval of voters to change the number of articles. Mr. Mark asked Charlie Brown to address. He stated that original town meeting would vote on every article individually and was a way to take out ten-15 minutes a year to know exactly where tax dollars are going. If someone doesn’t like a particular department, they can vote no, if like it vote, yes. If don’t like a few, and is all in one ballot item, can be voted down easily. Mr. Spaulding stated not advocating either way, just wanted the voters to know

Eric Nielson, many article have no explanation and a few at the end that have 2-3 sentences. Add that to other ones, just so all have an idea what going on with them. The way presented doesn’t give enough information.

Nancy Mark departments do put reports in the annual report and spend time working on those reports and may address questions about each department.

John Burke, days of volunteering and getting things done are dwindling, finding young members to keep clubs and organizations going is getting harder and harder. Should bear in mind what is coming down the road as to volunteers and keeping things going. Mr. Mark stated that he wanted to acknowledge Mr. Leamy in over half century of service as health officer for the town.

Thomas Murphy, what would you suggest be changed about the ballot? Mr. Leamy, just saying he thinks there are some problems with it, does have complications and feels some get discouraged with length.

Mary McIntyre how can we stop voting such articles as 42-48 without voting on them. Board stated they have to be voted on, they are by petition so have to be voted on that way.

Brian Moore – would like to thank young people in audience for holding the mike.

Ann Nicolsson agrees with any new young voters not knowing without an explanation of each item.

Rsvp if looking for volunteers, will try to match people up.

Liz MacKay while ballot is quite long, also only opportunity once a year to bring to attention and loves idea of voting individually, if voted down in a large sum, hard to know what part is under opposition.

Don wood what leeway does the board have how able to move items between articles. Can they move funds or show as overrun or underrun. Mr. Leamy stated board received a monthly report as to status, and if appears to be a problem, the manager and board address it. If an emergency, the town does have the ability to borrow funds if situation occurs.

Pat Schrader does take time to vote, town did sample ballots throughout placement and voters’ responsibility to look up information and meeting is opportunity to get answers to questions.

John Burke started out with and have forgotten since, but thank Robert Helm and William Canfield, depending on votes, may not be their representatives with the redistricting going on.

Citizen stated to follow up with and is true in whole country, volunteers and clubs/associations are dwindling. Town has tremendous prospect and hopes for volunteers. Sailing club that has been a great success and hopes can continue and carry over to other groups

Nancy with Recreation, if interested in volunteering, please sign up she will help find a group that needs assistance.

Attendee thanked selectboard for hard work all year long, as well as moderator.

Joe Bruno is the town have any information to share with residence about permit by LBA to put herbicides in lake. Mr. Leamy stated the board has become aware of the application and ware of folks opposing and a request for it to be discussed at first meeting in March. Have taken no position on it but will be discussed at next meeting.

Dick Combs stated Town needs volunteers to serve on boards and committees, PC and CDERAC. Also, Kerry Fowler spent 25+ years on the Fire Department flooding the skating rink. Thank you, Kerry Fowler! (applause). Shows the budget document and lets the public know that it is online as well as can be printed upon request at the Town Office. We would also like to thank Michael Finnegan for moderating, the University for hosting and providing equipment with set up, and the students that helped out today and Jennifer Jones for Facilitating the Zoom.

A question is raised at the end regarding an upcoming meeting at which the herbicide will be discussed? Joe Mark states that Select Board meetings are the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month. The LBA is to be scheduling a meeting. Martha Clifford states via zoom chat the Recreation Commission has openings for volunteers as well.

Town Moderator, Michael Finnegan concluded the informational Town Meeting at 8:15pm**.**

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Recording Secretary

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 Moderator

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 SelectBoard Chairman

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 Town Manager