

2025 STRAFFORD TOWN MEETING

The Town Meeting was called to order at 8:00 AM on Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at the Strafford Town Hall, in the Town of Strafford, by Town Moderator Ralph Wegner, to act on Article 1 by ballot vote. The ballots were cast and the meeting recessed at 7:00 PM for the purpose of tallying the votes.

The 205th Town Meeting was called to order again at 8:55 AM on Saturday, March 15, 2025 at the Strafford School by Moderator Ralph Wegner to act on Articles 2 through 26.

JD Clarke led the Pledge of Allegiance. Ted White offered an opening prayer. Moderator Ralph Wegner welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced himself, and reviewed the rules of proper conduct and order for the meeting. He shared that there were several secret ballot requests and asked for kindness and patience through the process of the meeting.

Motion to move warrant articles #6 - #12 to be discussed and voted on at the start of the meeting before warrant article #2.

Motion made by JoAnn Brown Seconded by Liz Evans

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the Selectmen had a PowerPoint presentation and acknowledgements to share, but she could hold off if the body wanted to move forward with the meeting.

Mike Harrington stated he was confused on the motion, and asked if it was to vote the articles as a single article or to move the articles.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, clarified it was to move the articles to the beginning of the meeting.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to move articles #6 - #12 Passes

6. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,084,006. for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Terry Hyland Jr.

Discussion:

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, announced that by request of five voters this is a secret ballot vote.

Mike Harrington questioned why this budget is up 119% since 2018 as population is only up 7.5 % since 2018.

Denise Rainey stated that since 2004 annual taxes have increased 3.74 %. She shared some history, noting that the Fire Department was once all volunteers. She shared concern for tax increases over the next 20 years and for residents who can't afford higher taxes and that she will not be supporting any tax increases.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, began a PowerPoint presentation to review Fire Department operations which highlighted: operations, statistics, staffing, benefits not used by staff in previous years that are now being used causing an increase in the budget, 11% call increase last year, challenges in finding people to work these jobs post COVID, 65% of the Fire Department's staff are residents, the need for a second boat on a trailer for water rescues, maintenance contracts, unforeseen bills, supplies, vehicle replacement needed.

Eric Almanzan called for a point of order and asked for the Fire Chief to address separate warrant articles as they come up instead of all under this one article.

Steve Smith shared that he is alarmed at the rate of increase of this budget compared to the rest of the Town. He shared concern over one-time expenses, found on a detailed report he requested, totaling over \$174,000 and being added to the annual budget. He listed surrounding towns cost per call comparison and found Strafford had a much higher cost per call. He asked how the Town can quantify this budget.

Motion to amend article #6. To see if the Town will vote to raise the sum of \$1,000,000 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department.

Motion made by Steve Smith Seconded by Donald Coker

Discussion:

Mike Harrington shared that the amount of calls is up 18% vs the budget that has increased 119%.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, read the motion again.

Scott Whitehouse stated that as Fire Chief, he had spent 10 years explaining the budget, noting that many things are out of the Fire Department's control. He stated that it is a challenge in a small Town to be competitive with other towns, we do not have the volunteers as we did 20 years ago, and it is hard to keep staff. He encouraged voters to consider all that the Fire Department does for the Town.

Eric Almanzan asked Chief Johnson about the \$6,000 increase for a second overnight staff member.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that it is a per diem amount and that NH Law requires two EMS. He shared that staffing is a struggle across NH. He shared that the Fire Department would like to be able to handle calls without always relying on other towns, as we did 47 times last year.

Eric Almanzan stated that we are growing at a rate that is unsustainable with the tax base in this Town and that he would be 100% okay with an all-volunteer Fire Department.

Donald Coker asked for clarification of the amendment on the floor.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, clarified that the amendment is to cap the amount at a million dollars.

Donald Coker questioned last year's budget and how the amendment amount figured in.

Chris Garcia, Selectman, offered some clarification to the question.

Mary Hoyt stated that she was thankful for the Fire Department as they were called many times when she cared for her parents. She shared that she supports adequate staffing of the Fire Department.

Bob Fletcher questioned what was being discussed and if a vote was needed.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked for a vote by raise of cards to accept discussing the article #6 amendment. Cards were raised in favor of continuing discussion.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, offered clarification on what was being voted on. To start again and avoid more confusion and maintain order, she called for a vote to continue discussing the amendment on the floor.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, called for a count of raised cards and announced that the vote to continue discussion on the amendment failed.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, stated that a vote on the amendment was now required.

Mike Harrington asked for a point of order and questioned if the amendment was a secret ballot vote.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, stated that we could vote the amendment by raise of cards.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, announced that we would take a vote by show of cards.

Eric Almanzan asked if we should vote on whether it should be by secret ballot.

Bob Fletcher pointed out that now we are voting to accept the amendment or not to accept the amendment. He suggested we raise cards and get this done.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, again stated we will vote by raising cards.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #6 Fails

Discussion continues on article #6:

Ron Lemieux called for a vote.

Randy Young said he would second.

Seeing no other voters in line to speak, the Moderator called to vote on Article #6.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by secret ballot. (per petition by 5 present voters)

Ballots Counted: Yes 138 No 98

Article #6 Passes

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked voters to arrive early to check in, so the meeting can begin promptly at 8:30 AM next year.

Motion to limit debate to 2 minutes per person, unless the body approves to extend a member's time limit.

Motion made by Heath Howard Seconded by Terry Hyland Jr.

Discussion:

Eric Almanzan shared that he did not think we should censor people.

Donald Coker agreed that we should not censor speakers and that 2 minutes is unreasonable.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to limit debate time Passes

7. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$154,161. for the fourth year's payment of the lease agreement for the new Fire Engine Tanker approved at the 2022 Town Meeting and to authorize the withdrawal of \$77,081. from the Fire Engine Capital Reserve Fund to be used for this purpose. The balance of \$77,080. to come from general taxation. This lease/purchase agreement contains an escape clause. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Heath Howard

Discussion:

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, stated that this is a recurring amount.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$130,824.59.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, shared that this article is not a secret ballot vote.

Bob Fletcher asked for the term on the lease.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that there were two more years on the lease.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #7 Passes

8. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. for the purpose of purchasing equipment and supplies for the ambulances, and to authorize the withdrawal of \$25,000. from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Special Revenue Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that every year this covers the replacement of medical equipment.

Bob Fletcher asked for the balance and term.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$97,338.95.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that this is a yearly expense.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #8 Passes

Motion to restrict reconsideration of article #6.

Motion made by Heath Howard Seconded by Kurt Wuelper

With no discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion Passes

9. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$65,000. for the purpose of purchasing a new First Responder Vehicle and equipment (i.e. Lighting and Radios) for the Fire Department and to authorize the withdrawal of \$65,000. from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Special Revenue Fund to be used for this purpose. No funding to come from general taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, reviewed the secret ballot request rules.

Mike Harrington asked how much is in the fund now.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$97,338.95, minus \$25,000 we just took out for the prior article.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that car 1 needs to be replaced with a new utility truck, F250 quad cab, gas motor. He shared that the plow on the existing truck will be used on the new truck.

Ron Lemieux asked if petitioners were verified and if we could vote to withdraw the secret ballot request.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, replied that the petitioners were verified and that we cannot vote to withdraw.

Eric Almanzan shared that he does not agree that this vehicle needs to be replaced and that it should be repaired, like we would do with our personal vehicles. He asked if estimates and bids were received.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that quotes and bids were received, this vehicle is 10 years old, has over 100,000 miles and has \$20,000 in repairs needed.

Terry Hyland Jr. shared that this was discussed at the budget hearing; he agrees it is the right call at this time to get a gas engine and that undercoating should be done to prevent rust.

Motion to move to vote on article #9.

Motion made by Terry Hyland Jr. Seconded by Heath Howard

Discussion:

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, said that he would hear the last person in line.

Eilish Marston stated that we cannot compare an emergency vehicle that saves lives with our own personal vehicles.

Kurt Wuelper called for a point of order to vote on the motion on the floor.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to move to vote Passes

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by secret ballot. (per petition by 5 voters present)

Ballots Counted: Yes 164 No 48 Blank 1

Article #9 Passes

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, gave permission for an announcement to be made.

Tahja Caron announced the services of Ready Rides and need for volunteers.

10. To see if the Town will vote to change the purpose of the Capital Reserve Fund known as the Dry Hydrant Fund established by Article 11 at the March 12, 2016 Town Meeting to the Dry Hydrant, Fire Gear/SCBA and equipment fund for the purposes of dry hydrant repair/replacement, purchasing turnout gear/SCBA and equipment, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend. The Selectmen recommend this article. (2/3 vote required)

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$41,417 and that no money was put in this fund last year.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, reviewed dry hydrant use for water supply, shared that we have 13 hydrants in Town, with 3 hydrants needing work. He shared that switching the fund name will allow use of this fund for other purposes such as replacement of turnout gear and equipment needed.

Bob Fletcher asked for clarification of how capital reserve funds are disbursed.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, clarified that the Department Head makes a request for fund use to the Selectmen

equipment, furnishings, etc.

Mike Harrington asked how much additional will be needed and that he feels it will be substantial.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that he was unsure and did not want to just throw out numbers. He shared that he is hopeful for grants to help with those costs.

Denise Rainey shared that other towns have more business and industry to help with these cost, and that in Strafford the cost is all on the taxpayer.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that he understands that there is no industrial base but that does not change the Town's needs, 25% of Strafford is elderly, we have more need. He stated that they will look at every grant possible.

Kurt Wuelper asked if the Town does not own the property of the existing fire stations, will we be getting rid of all of the fire stations.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that the Crown Point Station would be kept as a call station to reach that part of Town.

Kurt Wuelper asked if they had looked at response time.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that they had considered response times and that keeping two stations keeps us centralized.

Scott Whitehouse shared that budgets in the past had been turned down for this, he feels the Town is gambling with the lives of men and women who protect this Town, we are just hearing the report. He asked voters to please look at this study and stated that this will be a big bill no matter what.

Bob Fletcher stated that a site to build was needed first before determining response times and a plan.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that we are looking for a central site, and need a budget to get the land.

Doug Hayes questioned the system to exhaust fumes as he was on the Fire Department for many years.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, replied that the hoses do not stay in place with that system.

Don Clifford shared that he is a member of the committee and a lot of discussion and time went into it. He shared that the school bond will be ending and the Town will own the school. He feels now is the right time to start thinking about and discussing this future fire station.

Eric Almanzan asked if there were any other options presented beside this massive complex, maybe using what we have, possibly use Town Shed land and build a carriage house.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that the Town Shed land is already being utilized and there is not enough room at the Town Shed for an addition of a fire station. He stated that first we need to find the land then tackle the design down the road.

Eric Almanzan shared that he is not opposed to decontamination, living quarters, improved ventilation, but would like to look into doing something smaller scale. He feels the most expensive plan is what is being brought forward. He asked if there will be additional cost to remove the old buildings.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that they are considering what is needed and he is unsure of cost to remove old buildings at this time.

Bill Tower asked if there was any equity in the current buildings that could apply.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, stated that this is starting from scratch, yet there might be some equipment that we can utilize in the new building.

Bill Tower asked for clarification that existing land being used is not owned by the Town.

Steve Johnson, Fire Chief, shared that the Town does not own the existing land and it is deeded to return back to the owner of the properties when the Town is done using it.

Kim Bickford asked the audience to recognize the First Responders – the audience applauded. She shared that she was a First Responder and that she sees safety issues in the old buildings being used. She presented a request for an air quality study to the Selectmen.

Sheila Varney-Straffin shared that she came into the meeting with the intention of voting no on everything, but after listening she feels supporting the Fire Department is important.

End of New Fire Station Committee Discussion.

12. To see if the Town will vote to establish a capital reserve fund pursuant to RSA 35:1 to be called the Fire Station Expansion/Improvement and/or Relocation Fund to be used for the purposes of funding expansion, improvement, and/or relocation and raise and appropriate \$200,000. to be placed in this fund, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Heath Howard Seconded by Mike Harrington

Motion made to amend article #12. To see if the Town will vote to establish a capital reserve fund pursuant to RSA 35:1 to be called the Fire Station Expansion/Improvement and/or Relocation Fund to be used for the purposes of funding expansion, improvement, and/or relocation and raise and appropriate \$100,000. to be placed in this fund, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend.

Motion made by JoAnn Brown Seconded by Mike Harrington

Discussion:

Mike Harrington shared that he is confused on the expenditure. He would like the Selectmen to answer what we would be getting for \$100,000 or \$200,000.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, stated that this is to create a capital reserve fund, the amendment on the floor is to reduce the amount from \$200,000 to \$100,000, and we have not found a piece of land yet.

Chris Garcia, Selectman, shared that this capital reserve fund is intended to enable the Town to locate and purchase a piece of land.

Mike Harrington asked where 3 acres of land could be found in Strafford for \$100,000 or \$200,000.

Chris Garcia, Selectman, shared that the original request was for more and they came down to \$200,000, most likely \$400,000 will be needed to purchase the land.

Liz Evans shared concerns for the elderly people in Town on a fixed income, bringing this amount down may help taxpayers while still getting the fund started.

Kurt Wuelper stated that we need the capital reserve fund to get started.

Eric Almanzan asked if it was feasible to move the Town Shed and how much land was at the Town Shed.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied that the Town Shed was on 3 acres of land that will eventually be utilized for the Highway Department.

Eric Almanzan asked why the Highway Department would require that much prime land.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, stated that the conversation was getting off topic, the center is the best location for everything. She stated that the Highway Department will eventually be at the Town Shed.

Michelle Bengner asked for a point of order and if a vote on discussion was needed.

Terry Hyland Jr. offered a point of order clarification. He stated, we had a motion, a second, and now we are discussing, we do not need a vote to discuss as the amendment is on the floor already.

Linda Pape shared that she sees a problem with the name of the fund and feels the name is too broad, allowing the use of the money for other purposes. She would like a guarantee from the Selectmen that this money will sit in the account until land to purchase is found, with no other use of the fund.

Mike Harrington shared that he would like a better plan.

Heath Howard asked for a point of order. He stated that under the rules and limitation of the state a person may only speak once and a roll call to vote has already been given.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, stated that there was confusion on that call to vote and he called for a first and second to vote on the motion to amend.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #12 Fails

Motion to amend article #12. To see if the Town will vote to establish a capital reserve fund pursuant to RSA 35:1 to be called the Fire Station Expansion/Improvement and/or Relocation Fund to be used for the purposes of funding expansion, improvement, and/or relocation and raise and appropriate \$200,000. to be placed in this fund.

Motion by Katrina Labrecque

Seconded by Eric Almanzan

Discussion:

Katrina Labrecque stated that there is uncertainty regarding the Town’s input on this spending, taking out “to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend”, will make it a Town only vote to expend funds.

Kurt Wuelper asked for verification that this amendment would make expenditure from this capital reserve fund by Town vote only.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, stated that this amendment would mean no money spent without a vote from the Town at Town meeting.

Jessy Copeland shared concern that if this passes, now we would have to wait until the next annual Town meeting to vote and that would hold up a purchase of land.

Denise Rainey shared that the Town could call a special meeting at any time to vote on this and it would not have to wait.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked the Selectmen if that is true regarding a special meeting.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that there is a process for a special meeting.

Don Clifford urged the voters to make a decision today, not at a special meeting.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, called for a first and second to vote.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #12 Fails

Discussion on article #12 continues:

Donald Coker shared concern that taxes are increasing and we will just be adding more every year.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, clarified that it sounds like we will add to this fund yearly.

Donald Coker shared taxes are increasing and urged the Town to vote this down.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by secret ballot. (per petition by 5 present voters)

Ballots Counted: Yes 129 No 80

Article #12 Passes

Motion made to restrict reconsideration of article #12.

Motion made by Heath Howard

Seconded by Terry Hyland Jr.

With no discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion Passes

Motion to move article #24 to the next item on the agenda.

Motion made by Heath Howard

Seconded by Terry Hyland Jr.

Discussion:

Sharon Omand asked if this was the whole budget.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, clarified that this was just the general budget.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, clarified that article #24 was the operational budget for the Town.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to move article #24 Passes

24. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,925,112. for general Town operations.

Executive	\$100,814.
Election & Registration	33,750.
Financial Administration	111,075.
Appraisal of Property & Tax Maps	49,047.

Legal Expenses	60,000.
Employee Benefits, FICA, Medi & Unemp. Comp.	45,918.
Planning and Zoning	53,150.
General Government Building	57,700.
Auto Permits/Town Clerk Fees	42,350.
Insurance	75,735.
Advertising and Regional Association	5,000.
Strafford Regional Planning Comm. Dues	5,682.
Contingency Fund	15,000.
Annual CPA Audit	13,000.
Emergency Management.....	5,500.
Building Inspection	36,621.
General Highway Expenses and Town Maintenance	750,790.
Street Lighting	5,500.
Solid Waste Disposal	402,247.
Animal Control	1,800.
Cemeteries	11,000.
Cornerstone VNA	3,991.
General Assistance and Welfare	10,000.
Community Action	2,000.
Haven Sexual Assault Support Services	992.
My Friend's Place	1,000.
The Homemakers Health Services	3,200.
Catamount Womenaid	1,000.
Ready Rides	1,500.
CASA	500.
Strafford Nutrition & Meals on Wheels	1,500.
Parks and Recreation	6,350.
Patriotic Purposes and Fireworks	6,900.
Conservation Commission	2,500.
Interest Expense & Tax Anticipation Notes	2,000.
TOTAL. <u>\$1,925,112.</u>	

(The intent of this article is to raise the sum of \$1,925,112. exclusive of all other Articles addressed.)

Motion made by Heath Howard Seconded by Terry Hyland Jr.

Discussion:

Claire Murdough asked about the Parks and Recreation line item amount.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the amount is to maintain the beach/dam area, and that it was higher when we had life guards.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, called for a first and second to vote.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #24 Passes

Motion made to restrict reconsideration of article #24.

Motion by Heath Howard Seconded by Terry Hyland Jr.

With no discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion Passes

Moderator Ralph Wegner read the results of the March 11, 2025 Election.

** 1. To choose all necessary Town Officers for the year ensuing.

Voters on the Checklist 3436

Votes Cast 507 (486 Election Day Voters and 21 Absentee Voters)

Selectman (One Year Term)

R. Stephen Leighton 426

Selectman (Three Year Term)

Brian J. Monahan 390

Town Clerk (Three Year Term)

Terri L. Marsh 466

Town Treasurer (Three Year Term)

Sharon Huckins 431

Planning Board (Three Year Term)

Philip Auger 392

Zoning Board of Adjustment (Three Year Term)

Katrina Labrecque 355

Alan Williams 321

Trustee of the Trust Funds (Three Year Term)

Charles Burnham 423

Library Trustee (Three Year Term)

Teri Shakal 413

Moderator Ralph Wegner read the results of the School District Election.

School Board Member (Three Year Term)

Katrina Labrecque 263

Jessica L. Grant 264

Moderator Ralph Wegner congratulated newly elected officers.

2. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$445,000. for Capital Improvements (Drainage work, culverts, gravel and paving) of roads within the Town boundaries at the discretion of the Road Agent, as funding permits.

Motion made by Bryant Scott Seconded by Scott Whitehouse

Discussion:

Matt Messenger, Road Agent reviewed roads scheduled to be paved.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, called for a first and second to vote.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #2 Passes

3. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,030,217. for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Police Department.

Motion made by Bryant Scott Seconded by Erica Helm

Discussion:

Randy Young, Police Chief, began by thanking the Town for the upgraded air conditioning and ventilation system voted in last year, one full-time position was filled by an officer that came already trained (Officer Felix), a detective was put in place, they were very busy with just over 6000 calls last year. He shared that we lost two officers to other towns, one to Somersworth for a \$7,000 pay increase and one to Pittsfield for a \$6,500 pay increase, despite the loss we are keeping up, may fill one position soon, the other not until June. He shared that in 2025 there is a 2.7% (\$27,000) increase in the budget, he froze most of the budget, and only raised \$2,000 for vehicle maintenance, \$2,000 for building maintenance, \$2,000 to replace camera in cruiser, totaling \$6,000, insurance and retirement went up, the remaining is for staff pay increases.

Mark Rainey questioned if the detail cost was reimbursed.

Randy Young, Police Chief, replied that all detail is reimbursed except for Town fireworks and parade.

Mark Rainey asked if there was a line item for that credit.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, clarified that any money from details goes into the Police Department's special details fund or the O2 fund.

Randy Young, Police Chief, shared that anything he does not spend out of his regular budget, he gives back to the Town.

Mike Harrington shared that details are done for work on electrical or cable, all paid back, not free.

Heath Howard asked if any money was returned to the Town last year.

Randy Young, Police Chief, replied that \$138,000 was returned to the Town last year, that was payroll and insurance from loss of staff.

Meg Herndon asked a question regarding statistics reported last year.

Randy Young, Police Chief, replied that hot calls (which need a 2-3 officer response) have increased, and we get mutual aid from Barrington, domestic violence has increased, drug cases have increased, other numbers have not changed.

Eric Almanzan asked for clarification of salaries and overtime vs. detail.

Randy Young, Police Chief, replied that details are extra, not out of salaries.

Eric Almanzan asked if Strafford's amount of hours spent on details was comparable to other towns.

Randy Young, Police Chief, replied yes, and explained that details help officers earn more money and is needed to keep them.

Hammond Brown asked why this article is a secret ballot vote.

Randy Young, Police Chief, replied that he was unsure.

Eric Almanzan shared that he signed the secret ballot petition because he does not feel people vote the way they want when they are being watched by friends and neighbors.

Regina Flynn shared that secret ballots add a lot of time to the meeting and that voters should be able to raise a card how they want to vote.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked for a first and second to vote.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by secret ballot. (per petition by 5 present voters)

Ballots Counted: Yes 147 No 23

Article #3 Passes

4. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. to be placed in the Police Vehicle and Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Randy Young, Police Chief, shared that we add to this fund every year, it used to be \$20,000 now it is

\$25,000. He shared that we used to buy the cheapest vehicles but now we are required to buy SUVs, we have no choice.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #4 Passes

5. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$61,102. for the purpose of purchasing quality communications equipment and services (i.e. body cameras). (Note: The intent is to apply for a grant to reimburse 50% of the funds expended for this purchase, if a grant is awarded, general fund will be reimbursed.)

Motion made by Kurt Wuelper

Seconded by Lynn Sweet

Discussion:

Randy Young, Police Chief, shared that Strafford is the last town in the whole southern region without body cameras, the reason is because they are expensive. He stated that we need them and now is the time to purchase them. He shared that we have to put in for the full amount to apply for the grant in hopes to get 50% reimbursement to give back to the Town.

George Joy, Police Chief of Barrington and Strafford resident, shared that Barrington went to body cameras three years ago, they have proven savings in lawsuits and complaints and useful in prosecution, testimony, criminal investigation, citizens review committee, and turnaround time for officers to return to the field. He shared that there is some work required in monitoring and some cost to maintain.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked about initial cost and operational cost.

George Joy, Police Chief of Barrington, replied that there is an annual cost and negotiated contracts.

Robin Ficek asked if cameras would have to be shared.

Randy Young, Police Chief, shared that each officer would have their own body camera.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #5 Passes

13. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$66,509. For the purpose of funding a full-time Library Director position at the Hill Library and associated costs. This position is currently a part-time position.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet

Seconded by Bryant Scott

Discussion:

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, shared a PowerPoint reviewing articles #13 - #16, outlining many Library services and opportunities for all ages in the community to get connected. She shared that in the last 10 years they have seen a lot of growth, more visitors, more programs, more books checked out, meaning more staffing hours are needed.

Betsy Cozine, Library Trustee Secretary, shared she will be moving to Trustee Chair this year. She shared that parking is the biggest problem with no room for expansion. She shared that the many programs are drawing community members and welcomed people to get involved through Library Committee, Trustee meetings, Friends of the Library or the many programs available.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, shared that the budget they are asking for is actually less than it would cost patrons to purchase all the books they borrow and the many free services offered.

Mike Harrington shared his concern over the growing Library budget which has doubled over the past 8 years. He stated that it is nice to have all these things but he does not think taxpayers should be paying for all of it. He suggested charging the people who use the services to help offset the cost to taxpayers.

Ellen Yossarian shared that there are no services for the elderly available except the Recycling Center and that the Library is valuable to the community with many services such as exercise, education, and other community activities for all ages.

Sharon Omand shared that she has been involved in the Library as a Trustee, and has seen a lot of change;

books are not the only way to learn, many activities and programs motivate all ages to learn and take interest in the community. She stated that a full-time Director is needed, that will help the Library look for grants.

Bob Fletcher shared a concern that the community is in the process of developing a Library and Community Center, and suggested a possibility to combine those.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, shared that the Library is the only thing being considered right now, a Community Center is more of a recreation / athletic center.

Kurt Wuelper asked if \$66,000 was for a new Director.

Lindsay Aucella replied that it was for a full-time Director position.

Kurt Wuelper asked if the \$30,000 health insurance increase was also for the new Director.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, shared that there have been staff changes, previous staff did not take benefits, now the full-time Director and the full-time Librarian will be taking benefits.

Kurt Wuelper asked again if the full-time Director increased benefits \$15,000.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, replied that one full-time Librarian now taking benefits and one full-time Director taking benefits is the reason for that increase.

Sarah Cutting shared that a lot has changed since her kids were younger, she encourages the Town to keep these Library services going, it encourages all generations to keep involved.

Carol Cooper shared that according to the School Budget Report the School Librarian makes \$65,985 for nine months' work. She feels we are getting a lot for our money getting a full-time Director for twelve months.

Tanya Rich shared that we have the Bow Lake Community Center which has a lot of community services and gatherings, and asked why we need another Community Center.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, replied that the Library is not trying to compete with anyone, the Library offers different services on a regular weekly schedule - not just special events, and they do not charge to use the space.

Tanya Rich shared that she does not see the need and asked how much money they are asking for to build a Community Center.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, replied that they are not asking for any money to build a Community Center.

Denise Rainey stated that this Town has changed, most services used to be volunteer, now we are paying for these services. She stated that more people need to show up and vote, not just the people that want to spend money.

Sharon Omand shared that the Grange charges for its use and the Library does not.

Sonja Smith called for a vote.

Ben Wolfson said he would second.

Seeing no other voters in line to speak, the Moderator moved to vote on Article #13.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #13 Passes

14. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$174,543. for the operation and maintenance of the Hill Library.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Sonja Smith

Motion to amend article #14. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$130,210. for the operation and maintenance of the Hill Library.

Motion made by Lindsay Aucella Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, explained that this amendment does not include the full-time position that was just voted in and paid for in the previous article that passed.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked for a first and second to vote.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #14 Passes

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #14 as amended Passes

15. To see if the Town will vote to change the purpose of the existing Capital Reserve Fund known as the Library Expansion and Improvement Capital Reserve Fund established by Article 12 at the March 16, 2013 Town Meeting to the Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation Capital Reserve Fund for the purposes of Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend, and furthermore to raise and appropriate \$10,000. to add to the newly established fund. The Selectmen recommend this article. (2/3 vote required)

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Bryant Scott

Motion to amend article #15. To see if the Town will vote to change the purpose of the existing Capital Reserve Fund known as the Library Expansion and Improvement Capital Reserve Fund established by Article 12 at the March 16, 2013 Town Meeting to the Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation Capital Reserve Fund for the purposes of Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend. (2/3 vote required)

Motion made by Lindsay Aucella Seconded by Erica Helm

Discussion:

JD Clarke shared that he was the first president of the Library Association and supports the Library. *Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair*, clarified that they will still be asking for \$10,000 in the next article, they just wanted to separate it out.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #15 Passes

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Count of raised cards: Yes 103 No 10

Article #15 as amended Passes

16. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Library Expansion and Improvement Capital Reserve Fund, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend. This article will be considered null and void on the passage of Article 15. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Kurt Wuelper Seconded by Betsy Cozine

Motion made to amend article #16. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Library Expansion, Improvements and/or Relocation Capital Reserve Fund, and to designate the Selectmen as agents to expend.

Motion made by Lindsay Aucella Seconded by Carolyn Clarke

Discussion:

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, offered clarification that article #15 amendment was made to change the name of the fund and removed \$10,000, now we are voting to put that \$10,000 into another fund.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, stated that this is a question for legal counsel.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, said he would allow an amendment.

Kurt Wuelper clarified just the wording null and void needs to be removed.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, stated that the last sentence of the article needs to be removed.

Mike Harrington asked how much is in the fund.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied that \$78,063.34 was in the fund.
With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards

Motion to amend article #16 Passes

Discussion on amended article #16 continues:

Katrina Labrecque asked how the funds will be spent.

Lindsay Aucella, Library Trustee Chair, replied that the funds would be used to explore options, appraisals on land, and surveys.

Eric Almanzan stated that he supports the Library but we just approved the full-time Director, and he suggested a pause on further spending for this year.

JD Clarke shared that he supports the Library, thanked Larisa Molloy, Library staff, volunteers and patrons.

Liz Evans stated that \$10,000 is nothing compared to other articles passed today, she supports the article.

Ken Berry congratulated Police and Fire Departments for a job well done, he also thanked the Library for doing a fine job. He stated that Library resources meet all ages and make lives better.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #16 amended Passes

Motion made to restrict reconsideration of articles #13 - #16.

Motion made by Ben Wolfson Seconded by Eric Almanzan

With no discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion Passes

17. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Town Hall Building Maintenance, Improvements and/or Expansion Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$43,530.10.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #17 Passes

18. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Future Reval/Statistical Update Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Mike Harrington

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$38,352.92.

Eric Almanzan asked if additions to capital reserve funds are raised by taxation.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied that money added to a capital reserve fund is raised through taxes.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #18 Passes

19. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Highway Department Vehicle and/or Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Randy Young Seconded by JD Clarke

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in this fund is \$32,845.43.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked what kind of vehicle this was.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied that it was a one ton with wing plow, push plow, and sander.

Don Clifford stated that this amount should be doubled for future vehicles.

Motion made to amend article #19. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Highway Department Vehicle and/or Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

Motion made by Don Clifford Seconded by JD Clarke

Discussion:

Jay Gagnon asked why the Road Agent doesn't use his own vehicle.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied that the Town owns one truck that the Road Agent uses, we will need our own vehicles eventually and this vehicle was a start.

Jay Gagnon suggested that the Road Agent should use his own equipment, instead of the Town buying equipment that had to be maintained.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied that would increase the Town budget for the Road Agent and suggested the Town could discuss that next year if the body wanted.

Greg Messenger shared that when he was Road Agent he had recommended the Town buy a truck to have another plow truck and the Town voted in favor of it.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Count of raised cards: Yes 59 No 37

Motion to amend article #19 Passes

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #19 amended Passes

20. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,000. to be placed in the Reflective Road Signage Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Randy Young Seconded by JD Clarke

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$2,959.16.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked if this is yearly.

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, replied yes.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #20 Passes

21. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000. to be placed in the Repair/Replace Recycling Center Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by JD Clarke

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$44,137.39. She shared that the fund is to maintain equipment at the Recycling Center.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked if equipment was holding up.

Chris Garcia, Selectman, shared that one compactor had been replaced last year.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #21 Passes

22. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. to be placed in the Bridge Construction & Repair Non-Capital Reserve Fund. The Selectmen recommend this article.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Randy Young

Discussion:

Lynn Sweet, Selectman, shared that the balance in the fund is \$28,291.89. She shared that the Barn Door Gap

Bridge took a big chunk of this money and that this is replenishing money to the fund.
With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #22 Passes

23. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000. to be used for the preparation of a Bow Lake Watershed Management Plan. The plan will include a comprehensive septic system inventory, road drainage analysis and mitigation to correct issues that are negatively impacting water quality in a defined watershed area. This appropriation is contingent on the Town successfully applying for a \$25,000. grant through the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Program. The Planning Board recommends this article.
Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Hammond Brown

Motion made to amend article #23. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$50,000 to be used for the preparation of a Bow Lake Watershed Management Plan. The plan will include a comprehensive septic system inventory, road drainage analysis and mitigation to correct issues that are negatively impacting water quality in a defined watershed area. This appropriation is contingent on the Town successfully applying for and receiving a \$25,000 grant through the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Program to offset the total amount of this appropriation, with the remaining \$25,000 to come from [taxation/unassigned fund balance]. The Planning Board recommends this article.
Motion made by Phil Auger Seconded by Allan Gahm

Discussion:

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, shared that they are asking for \$25,000, however the attorney recommended the amendment to reword the article.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked why the change to \$50,000 was needed.

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, explained that it is not really an increase, the attorney changed the wording.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked why the amount is doubled, he stated that the amendment needs more explanation.

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, explained that it was only a \$25,000 cost to the town once the grant is received.

Donald Coker asked if the Town would hold aside \$50,000.

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, replied no only \$25,000 will be held aside.

Kurt Wuelper asked if he understands correctly that the Town would appropriate \$50,000 to apply for a \$25,000 grant, if they get the grant only \$25,000 remaining to be appropriated from taxation.

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, withdrew his motion to correct the wording and amend the article.

Motion to amend withdrawn by Phil Auger.

Motion to amend article #23. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$50,000 to be used for the preparation of a Bow Lake Watershed Management Plan. The plan will include a comprehensive septic system inventory, road drainage analysis and mitigation to correct issues that are negatively impacting water quality in a defined watershed area. This appropriation is contingent on the Town successfully applying for and receiving a \$25,000 grant through the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Program to offset the total amount of the appropriation, with the remaining \$25,000 to come from taxation. The Planning Board recommends this article.

Motion made by Phil Auger Seconded by Mike Harrington

Discussion:

Mike Harrington stated that there are problems with cyanobacteria that need to be fixed and that we need this approved to apply for the grant.

JD Clarke shared that homes around the lake with old septic systems pollute and put stress on Bow Lake.

Donald Coker shared that the Master Plan established that the health of Bow Lake is important to our community and that we need to do something before the lake dies.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #23 Passes

Discussion on article #23 continues

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, shared a PowerPoint highlighting problems, plan and educational outreach.

Bruce Freeman shared that he is a member of the Bow Lake Camp Owners Association, NH Lakes Association and Master Plan Committee and stated that this is a necessary step to apply for grants.

JD Clarke asked about algae blooms on Bow Lake.

Bruce Freeman discussed algae blooms and that lake testing shows a trend going in the wrong direction.

Ralph Wegner, Moderator, asked why we couldn't address the septic problems directly.

Phil Auger, Planning Board Chair, replied that this is not just a septic problem.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #23 as amended Passes

25. "Shall the Town vote to change the Veterans' Tax credit (the optional tax credit for all Veterans and Service Connected Total Disability) upon adoption by the Town pursuant to RSA 72:28 and RSA 72:35, shall be the amount of \$500.00 and \$1,000.00. The optional tax credit and service connected total disability shall replace the current credits of \$200.00 and \$700.00 in their entirety and shall not be in addition thereto." (by Petition.)

Motion made by Lynn Sweet

Seconded by Donald Coker

Discussion:

Don Clifford shared that he brought this to the Town, it has been 20 years since this amount was changed, and he is asking the Town for their support. He listed Veteran's Tax Credits given in surrounding towns.

Judith Dupre stated that 5% of our residents are Veterans. She stated she is for Veterans and that she spoke about this need for an increase last year. She would like to see \$300 instead of \$500.

Motion to amend article #25. Shall the Town vote to change the Veterans' Tax credit (the optional tax credit for all Veterans and Service Connected Total Disability) upon adoption by the Town pursuant to RSA 72:28 and RSA 72:35, shall be the amount of \$300.00 and \$1,000.00. The optional tax credit and service connected total disability shall replace the current credits of \$200.00 and \$700.00 in their entirety and shall not be in addition thereto.

Motion made by Judith Dupre

Seconded by Sheila Varney-Straffin

Discussion:

JD Clarke stated that too many Veterans are living in tents in the US. He feels Strafford is financially well off and should be able to pay this.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion to amend article #25 Fails

Discussion on article #25 continues

Rick Cecchetti shared that he is a Veteran; he wants voters to understand if we give him as a Veteran this break, someone else's taxes will go up. He stated that he does not think it is fair for other people to pay more taxes because he is a Veteran.

Donald Coker shared that his mother was a widow of a Veteran and benefitted by paying no taxes on her house in Merrimack for several years and that he is happy to pay a little extra towards this.

With no further discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Article #25 Passes

Motion made to restrict reconsideration of all articles not already restricted.

Motion made by Bob Fletcher Seconded by Teri Shakal

With no discussion, a vote was taken by show of cards.

Motion Passes

Selectman Lynn Sweet asked the Town to acknowledge and recognize several people:

Scott Whitehouse, who retired as our long-time Fire Chief last year. He received a standing ovation.

Cindy Cushing who has served as our long-time Treasurer and has served in the Town for over 36 years.

Chris Garcia who has served three years as Selectman.

Bryant Scott who returned when needed as Selectman to fill a vacancy.

All were applauded and recognized. Thank you!

Moderator, Ralph Wegner, thanked election staff and volunteers for all of their hard work.

26. To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Bryant Scott

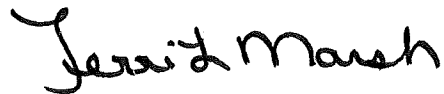
With no further discussion, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Lynn Sweet Seconded by Bryant Scott

Meeting was adjourned at 3:17 PM.

Given under my hand and seal, this 20th day of March, in the year of our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-five.

Respectfully Submitted,



Terri L. Marsh
Strafford Town Clerk

*Comments made at the meeting are presented as summaries rather than direct quotes.

**259 registered voters were checked in at the 2025 Annual Town Meeting.