

Town of Cornwall
Public Information Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 2, 2021

Voters in attendance: Margy Young, Ben Marks, Magna Dodge, Ben Wood, Kate Gieges, John Roberts, Cy Day Tall, Jordan Young, Marge Drexler, Don Burns, Stu Johnson, Susan Sears, Jean ?, Barbara ?, Paul Urband, David Dodge, Elizabeth Keefe, Katherine Branch, Steve Edwards, Todd Kincaid, Michael Sheridan, Tanya Byker, Drew Kervick, Peter Conlon, David Anderson, Steve E., Donna Marks, Sarah Wood, T Tall, Lise Anderson, Miles Peterle, Mary Jane Broughton, Denry Sato, David Berno, George Family, Mary Dodge, Sarah Pelkey, Gary Barnett, Bill Johnson, Anne Collins, Brian Collins, Sarah Goodman, Bethany Menkart, Andrew Menkart, Elizabeth Morrison, Joseph ?, Chris Kramer, Conor Stinson (47 +/-)

Guests in attendance: Erin Robinson, Steve Cash, Molly Witters and Joanna Doria, from Saving Our School – Ripton

The meeting was opened at 7:05 pm after a pre-roll prepared by Jordan Young. The pre-roll provided information related to the meeting. We were treated to the Town Meeting song by Jon Gailmor, thanks to him. This public information meeting is considered a Selectboard meeting, not the traditional town meeting. No votes will take place and no amendments can be made to the warning.

Ben Marks began the meeting by giving some opening remarks and reiteration of how the meeting would be run. Ben introduced Cy Day Tall, our Town Moderator who would be facilitating the meeting.

Cy Day Tall introduced Jordan Young who was acting as technical advisor along with Margy Young. Jordan spent a few moments going over the mechanics of using the Zoom platform. Once that was completed, the meeting turned back over to Cy.

Cy read each Article and then opened the floor for discussion on each topic.

Article 1: *Shall the Town of Cornwall apply any budget surplus to defray property taxes?* Sue Johnson explained that the amount of the surplus can be found on Page 21 of the Town Report. The amount is \$103,622.73. If you are in favor of using the surplus to lower taxes, vote Yes on Tuesday on the ballot.

Article 2: *Shall the voters approve a General Fund budget of \$499,608?* Ben Marks explained that the Selectboard had basically level funded the General Fund. Some items were increased, and others lowered in order to keep the total close to last year's amount. This year's total is slightly less than last year. The Selectboard had voted to give the 3 full time town employees a cost-of-living raise.

Article 3: *Shall the voters approve a Highway budget of \$451,713. State Aid is expected to be approximately \$65,000, resulting in a budget of \$386,713?* Ben Marks explained that this budget had been level funded except for the labor budget.

Article 4: *Shall the voters appropriate \$69,750 to be transferred to the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department to pay its expenses from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022.* Dave Berno, Fire Chief explained that the budget was the same as the previous year. Dave also reported that a new engine has been ordered with expected delivery in a year or so. The replacement Utility Truck has been delivered and in use. The truck replaces the one that was destroyed in an accident and was paid for with insurance money. The department also refurbished the existing brush truck with a new Waterous pump. This truck will serve the department for at least the next 16 years and will not need to be replaced in a few years as was originally planned. Ben Marks asked Dave to explain how service has been different in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dave explained that the department is using PPE, sanitizing, and minimizing exposure. The high majority of calls are medical in nature and the medical team is following all state protocols.

Article 5: *Shall the voters appropriate \$4,000 to be transferred to the Cornwall Free Public Library to pay its expenses from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022?* Sue Johnson thanked the town voters for their annual support of the library. Sue explained that the library was unable to hold their annual book sale in 2020, so they have sent out a direct appeal letter to help with additional expenses and adding materials to the library. In 2020, the library added an online catalog and access to download audio and eBooks through the State Library system.

Article 6: *Shall the voters appropriate \$3,500 to be transferred to the Cornwall conservation Fund, to pay for educational and outreach conservation programs form July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022? The unspent portion of this appropriation will remain in the Conservation Fund as a reserve to be used to support long-term conservation efforts, such as helping to conserve farms and natural areas.* Mary Dodge, Conservation Commission Chair, showed and spoke to a power point called Strengthening Cornwall's Conservation Efforts. Mary explained that an advisory group has been appointed by the Selectboard to create procedures for spending the funds in the future. The power point focused on three major topics. 1) The town has shown great support and desire for conservation in town. 2) Why start funding now? Many farms are being sold and this leads to the possibility of valuable land being lost. The fund will allow landowners greater options and local matching funds are required when asking for outside funding. 3) Uses of the fund will be two part. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the money will be used for long term conservation and $\frac{1}{4}$ will be used for education and outreach. Mary explained that 55 towns in Vermont have conservations funds. Most towns use an annual appropriation to accumulate funds, others put an amount on the tax rate. There is information on the town's website about the conservation fund. T Tall spoke in favor of the conservation fund but was concerned about creating a new account. John Roberts replied that he did not see a new account as a problem. Andrew and Bethany Menkart spoke in favor of the conservation fund. Stu Johnson asked about the process for spending the funds. Ben Marks explained that the advisory group is working on process and the Selectboard will have the final say when expenditures are requested. Gary Barnett wanted to clarify whether this funding

request will be a recurring request. Mary indicated that the funding request would be an annual request on the warning. It is possible to vote on a longer-term funding request, but the Conservation Commission will wait to see how this year's request is received. Lise Anderson spoke in support of the Conservation fund.

Article 7: Shall the voters appropriate \$10,000 as a portion of the cost of a town-wide reappraisal anticipated in three to five years? Ben Marks explained that the State of Vermont will require a town-wide reappraisal in a number of scenarios. First, a town should do a reappraisal every ten years. Second, if the town's CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) falls below 80%. Third, if the town's COD (Coefficient of Dispersion) rises above 20%. The cost of a reappraisal can run \$50,000 - \$60,000. The Selectboard felt it made sense to start accumulating funds to pay for the reappraisal now. Todd Kincaid explained that if our Common Level of Appraisal remains at 100%, we will not pay additional money to the Education Fund.

Article 8: Shall the voters appropriate the following amounts to be transferred to the listed organizations? Sue Johnson explained that Elderly Services opted not to request funding this year due to the pandemic, but they will be back on the list next year. Bethany Menkart spoke in support of Age Well. They have continued providing Meals on Wheels even during the pandemic. Sarah Pelkey asked about the childcare agencies that request town funding and wondered why more childcare facilities do not request town funding. Margy Young explained that agencies need to be non-profit in order to qualify for town funding. T Tall explained that this started in the early 70's at the time of revenue sharing. Kate Gieges that years ago the agencies would send a representative to speak in support of the various agencies. Sue Johnson indicated that packets with all the information provided by the various agencies will be available at the town hall for pick up or review this week.

Article 9: Shall the voters approve the billing date of September 1, 2021 for property taxes, payment of half that amount due November 1, 2021, and payment of the second half due May 1, 2022? Taxes are to be paid to the Cornwall Town Treasurer. Any taxes that are due, but unpaid after November 1, 2021, are considered late. Interest will be charged at the rate of one percent (1%) per month. Any taxes unpaid after May 1, 2022 will be considered delinquent. Interest will be charged on delinquent taxes at the rate of one percent (1%) per month, plus a collector's fee of eight percent (8%). Cy Day Tall asked how long the town has been charging the 1% interest. Sue explained that it has been 1% for at least 10 years. The warning used to include 1 ½ % interest, but this was always amended to 1%. Stu Johnson asked about changing the dates due for tax payments to the 15th of the month. Often the General Election falls around November 1st and tax collection and the election at the same time are very difficult to manage. Kate Gieges said that the Town Auditor's would look into the process for changing the dates for next year.

Article 10: Shall the voters of the Town of Cornwall ratify the Town of Ripton's vote of January 12, 2021 to withdraw the Town of Ripton from the Addison Central School District? Steve Cash, Erin Robinson & Molly Witters were in attendance at our meeting to speak to Article 10 on our warning. Steve Cash read a statement which included: They hope that Cornwall will support

their choice. Their January 12, 2021 special vote results were as follows: 163 yes – 107 no. Saving our Schools has been advocating for their school for 2 years. Steve’s statement explained that the effect of Ripton leaving the district would be tax neutral. If the vote to let Ripton go is negative, taxes will go down .03%. Ripton is feeling great support. Todd Kincaid reminded the group about the Brigham decision that created ACT 60 twenty years ago. He asked why Ripton made the decision to withdraw from the district. Steve said the decision was made to keep their school open. It was felt that it is very important for the town to have a say in the school being open or closed. Chris Kramer, co-chair of the Friends of Cornwall School indicated his support for Ripton’s withdrawal from the district. He explained that the law is set up allowing other towns to affirm the vote because there was concern that if a larger town left the district, this would be a large problem for the other smaller schools.

Article 11: To elect all town officials as required by law. In person voting will be available on Tuesday, March 2, 2021 from 7 AM – 7 PM. Sue Johnson explained that every active voter was sent a town ballot. The hope behind sending the ballots to everyone is to keep the number of in person voters to a minimum. The two school ballots could not be sent to every voter because the school board did not vote to send them. Ben Marks explained that the school district is a separate municipality and would need to vote on this issue separately.

Other Business:

Conor Stinson, Chair of the Planning Commission prepared a video presentation regarding the work of the Planning Commission. Conor Stinson and Don Burns were available to answer any questions. The commission is currently reviewing and auditing the town plan. They have applied for and received a Municipal Planning Grant in the amount of \$13,000 with a local match of \$1300.00 to help in this process. Two new areas must be added to the Town Plan in order for it to be approved. They are: Forest Fragmentation and Flood Resilience.

David Dodge, Chair of the Lemon Fair Insect Control District spoke briefly about the district. The LFICD requests \$6,000 annually from Cornwall and the other towns in the district. The do not treat with adulticide only larvicide. He praised the LFICD board and thanked Cornwall residents Wendy Lynch & Chris Chapline for their contributions to the board. David is planning to retire from the board this fall and would like folks to think about joining the board as the third Cornwall representative. Ben Marks thanked David for all of his hard work and explained that success for this board is “nothing”. In other words, we don’t notice the behind the scenes work if there are no mosquitoes flying in our faces.

Ben Marks asked Magna Dodge to give a brief overview of the work being done by the Maple Broadband Communications Union District. Magna & Bill Johnson are the delegates to the district. Magna is a member of the 5-person executive board. The organization was created in October 2020. The website is www.maplebroadband.net All minutes and information are posted on the website. The district is currently focused on finding an operator for Maple Broadband. In order to move the feasibility study to an operating plan, they need to have an operator on board. Obtaining funding requires a business plan. The district is also interviewing design firms and

potential builders. The district is looking for several volunteers: part time bookkeeper and someone familiar with social media. There are currently 18 Addison County towns that are members of the district. The Maple Broadband CUD is its own municipality, but they have no taxing authority, they will be attempting to access other sources of income. The cost of the project will be \$27 – 30 million and would provide universal coverage as required by the State of Vermont.

Kate Gieges explained that the Town Auditors conducted their meetings and business via Zoom videoconferencing this year and it worked well. Kate thanked Sue Johnson for doing all the extra work required by the COVID-19 pandemic. Kate also thanked Sue, Cy and Jordan for putting together the informational meeting.

Ben Marks concluded the meeting by also thanking Cy, Jordan and Margy for their work behind the scenes on the informational meeting.

And Last.... Magna Dodge thanked Ben Wood for serving on the Selectboard for the last 10 years. His hard work was greatly appreciated, and his calm and thoughtful presence will be greatly missed.

Magna Dodge/Ben Wood moved to adjourn the informational meeting at 8:55 PM. The motion carried on voice vote.