

## **2024 Town Meeting Minutes**

### **Tuesday, March 7, 2024**

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. by Michael Hogan, Chair of the Selectboard. There were approximately 70 attending

Before opening the meeting, Mike Hogan stated that 2023 was a very difficult year for our town with catastrophic floods and aftermath, and we almost lost our business district. In all his years of living in Cabot, he never saw so many people coming together to help. We wouldn't be where we are without the amazing volunteers that helped with whatever needed to be done. We've accomplished a lot since that day, and we have a lot more to do.

Our first order of business was to elect a Town Moderator. A motion was made by Connie Hourihan with a second by R. D. Eno to elect Jeanne Johnson as moderator. There were no other nominations. Motion carried. Mike then turned over the floor to Jeanne as moderator.

The next order of business was Article 2: Mike Hogan advised there was a correction to the wording from "Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot vote to accept the Town Report as printed for FY23" to "Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot vote to hear the reports of the Town Officers?" Correction was accepted by the body.

First town officer report was from Selectboard chair Mike Hogan: The formal selectboard report is in the printed Annual Report and the *Cabot Chronicle*. 2023 was very challenging year for the board; after dealing with COVID-19 the previous year, the town faced a terrific flood. The amount of damage was substantial, but future plans for flood mitigation are hopeful. The town borrowed over \$3 million to deal with the damage. FEMA will reimburse us for 90%, and the State will reimburse 5% or possibly more. The state condemned the fire department building and it will be taken down shortly. A temporary building is being built on the recreation field parcel with FEMA funds, and FEMA will sell the building back to Town at a fully depreciated cost (unknown value).

The selectboard had a lot of budget meetings, hearing from departments before finalizing the budget. While very aware of financial pressure for taxpayers, the board is working to prepare the town for any future floods to prevent such damage from happening again. When flood repair expenses are reimbursed by FEMA, that money will be returned to the general fund.

Dean Deasy, Fire Chief, spoke next. The Fire Department is scheduled to move into the FEMA-funded temporary building on March 29. Interior work is going on now. Wetlands made it so that the temporary building could not be anywhere but where the basketball court was. The Rec committee was also on board with the moving of the court. Put in a request to FEMA to cover this cost of moving the court. Fire department will only be in the temp building for 18 months. The work on the new building will take all of the 18 months to two years to complete just for the amount of groundwork going into the permanent building for storm water runoff and decontamination.

A question was asked by Connie Hourihan "How is the new fire department going to be funded? Dean stated FEMA will put in around 90% as well as the state hopefully helping with the rest. He is working on grant funding and noted that FEMA is also paying for restoration of the recreation field. Sandy Pond asked who pays for the interest, Mike stated the town is responsible for the interest at almost 5%. Sandy asked what is the amount of interest that we could be responsible for as a town? Mike stated that we don't know the number, it is still climbing. Sandy suggested that we should know how much the interest will total for the next few years as part of the total funding package.

Question from audience: "What is the dollar number amount for the new building?" Dean stated that he wished that he had that number, but they are working on that and he hopes to have that number in the next few weeks. The cost for the demolition of the old fire station is \$54,000. The temporary building is around \$1.3 million including the basketball court. The funding process is that FEMA reimburses the state, then the state reimburses the town.

Ama Peyman is interested in how to be good neighbors and discussing the border and protecting the water. Dean stated they will be setting up meetings with neighbors. The siren will not be moved to the new location, it will remain at the old fire station site, and Dean expects there will be landscape screening between properties. The new facility will have a kitchen, multi-purpose room for meetings, training, emergency operation center, which will be available to the community.

Connie Hourihan asked if we have enough calls to warrant funding the new fire station. Dean said we had 220 calls in the last two years and volume has increased in the past year. We have staff, call volume and passed all hurdles to justify the facility they are planning for. Connie asked if that is ambulance and fire department, and Dean said it was just the fire department.

Carrie Moll is a firefighter and social worker, and pointed out they do not have anywhere to decontaminate, so they take any contamination home with them. That capacity is essential.

Ama Peyman said she heard that we are going to move to a pay squad; Dean said that is just a rumor, we have sufficient volunteers with a membership of 30. There is a possibility to move to regional firefighting, and we could be a prime candidate down the road. Mike identified a stipend for fire fighters of \$5,000 to cover training.

Nathan Smith, fire volunteer, noted they do donate time and work on getting to a call quickly. What is a concern is that we do not bring dangerous contaminants home to the family as they do now. Being able to properly decontaminate your equipment before going home to your family after fighting a fire is a significant morale factor.

Larry Gochey asked if there will be a helicopter pad at the new public safety building, and how high the new building will be. Dean responded that there is not a helicopter pad being

incorporated. A fire department has full authority to shut down roads to allow for transport by helicopter.

Further, he reported the building will be two stories to shrink the footprint because of wetlands on the parcel.

R.D. Eno noted there was some concern from neighbors on both sides of the parcel. Dean met with them and kept them in the loop, using a diplomatic approach. He saluted Dean's efforts to keep the community informed. Mike pointed out that all selectboard meetings are warned and open to the public.

Ama Peyman said she doesn't want to be leveraged against her neighbors on either side of the parcel or across the way, with whom she is in solidarity; she wishes to be friendly and nice but wants to be included in a meeting where the neighbors can see the diagram.

Doug Cooke spoke up in support of public safety volunteers, but feels the scale is out of character for our community, and asked when there will be a public vote for the permanent building. Mike stated that statutes allow the town to purchase property without a vote, and he does not believe there will be a vote. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the town to build two buildings and get federal funding to pay for them, which we've never been able to do before. The town will pay very little.

Connie Hourihan opined that a lot of people are not here because of frustration with the selectboard. The board does what it pleases and does not keep us informed. The town voted some time ago and voted the building down, and learned it was a nonbinding vote. She doesn't mean to be disrespectful, but sometimes it needs to be done. Mike noted that the advisory election was a very close vote. R.D. noted that he didn't believe any fire department decisions were ever made in executive session.

Mike stated that all our meetings are open meetings. The only time we went into executive session was for the Masonic Hall sale.

We expected a public deliberative process for the new public safety building, but the flood changed everything. We lost the public safety building that we had, and we need a public safety building. and FEMA stepped in and offered to pay for all these expenses. We need to meet standards to be eligible for that funding. There are reasons the building is as big as it's going to be to meet the needs of the fire department and FEMA standards, but it's not as big as it might have been. He encouraged residents to come to meetings and look at the plans.

Karen Larsen pointed out we do not have a fire station right now. We need one. We are meeting all requirements including ADA and decontamination. That building has exactly – not more – than what is needed to meet state and federal standards if we wish to access federal funds. We need to protect those who protect us.

Lee Blackwell motioned to cease discussion with a second by Judy Pransky. Motion carried.

Frank Kampf asked about the minutes of previous town meeting. Noticed minutes of last town meeting were not in the annual report and did not see the last time we approved minutes. Not included – will include in the future.

Gary Gulka took the floor next to talk about the Flood Resiliency Task Force. The Conservation Committee offered to lead up the task force with help from the Friends of Winooski. They meet monthly to avoid damage in the future like we have seen recently. They have walked the tributaries. We have engaged engineers about moving the debris that built up contributing to the flooding. Have applied FEMA funding that will help model the flows and conditions that we can mitigate flooding and provide remedies to avoid it in the future. We don't want to try to second guess what we think should be done, and we are holding out to see what the engineers suggest. There is an article in The Cabot Chronicle that includes more details. We will be having public meetings over the next year. We do have some challenges and real possibilities to make headway in the coming year. We have applied for a \$7,000 grant a 25% in kind match to study the two tributaries and develop a scope of work. We hope to hear about the grant so we can complete a study by the fall. We are working on additional ways to slow and divert damage in other parts of town, as well. We are hoping we will find some solutions we can implement long-term. We plan public forums to talk about mitigating flood hazards in the future. We have some challenges but we also have some real opportunities. We will keep folks informed through the Chronicle and public forums once we have the engineering study results available. Also working on updating a Hazard Mitigation Plan required by FEMA for funding projects.

Mike noted the town is inundated with all types of grant options to help us through the maze of damage. Looking for help from community volunteers.

Amy Hornblas – previous representative to Regional Planning Commission – feels that more involved the town is with outside organizations and funding sources the farther the town get from being able to make our own decisions. There are always strings attached.

Gary noted there will be plenty of opportunity for community members to hear about and discuss the engineers' report when it becomes available.

Connie Hourihan thanked Gary for all the work he did, noting that he brought high school students in on the project.

Cabot Chronicles has all the task force reports on the website CabotChronicle.org.

There were no other reports.

*Art. 3. Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot authorize payment of real and personal property taxes on August 22, 2024, and November 21, 2024, by delivery to Cabot Town Hall postmarked on or before that date; and, Establish that overdue taxes will bear interest at a rate of one percent*

*per month or fraction thereof for the first three months and thereafter one and one-half percent per month or fraction thereof from the due date of such tax pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 5136; and, Establish the amount of the penalty charged by the collector of delinquent taxes for payments made after the due date for payment at 8 percent of the tax collected pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1674(3)(A)?*

A motion to approve was made by Judy Pransky with a second by Roz Daniels, motion carried.

*Art. 4. Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot elect all Town Officers required by law, according to law?* A motion was made to approve by Chris Tormey with a second by Connie Hourihan, motion carried.

Delinquent Tax Collector: – A motion was made by R.D. Eno with a second by Connie Hourihan to appoint Susan Carpenter. There were no other nominations. Motion carried.

Grand Juror: A motion was made by R.D. Eno with a second by Ken Denton to appoint Dave Pike. There were no other nominations; motion carried.

Cemetery Commissioner: A motion was made by Chris Tormey with a second by Ellen Cairns to appoint Melvin Churchill. There were no other nominations and the motion carried.

Library Trustee: A motion was made to nominate Kurt Steinert by Beth Wade with a second by Will Ameden. There were no other nominations, motion carried.

Cabot Community Investment Fund – Frank Kampf mentioned that one seat is appointed by the selectboard and one by the school board. None of the terms are up - table this for now.

Willey Building Committee: A motion was made to appoint Fred Ducharme by R.D. Eno with a second by Mike, motion carried. Mike thanked Fred and all the Willey Building Committee for doing such a good job for the Willey Building, especially in light of the centennial.

The following Articles will be voted on by Australian Ballot and may be discussed on the floor except for Articles 5 through 6.

Art. 5. To elect a Selectperson for a term of two years. [Australian Ballot]

Art. 6. To elect a Selectperson for a term of three years. [Australian Ballot]

Art. 7. Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot appropriate the sum of \$825,218 to defray the General Expenses of the Town, with an estimated \$210,089 to come from income and \$615,129 from local taxes? [Australian Ballot] There was no discussion.

Art. 8. Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot appropriate the sum of \$1,041,393 to repair and maintain the Highways of the Town, including summer, winter, and special treatment, of which

an estimated \$167,600 is to come from income and \$873,793 from local taxes? [Australian Ballot] Mike wanted to recognize the road crew and acknowledge that it is now fully staffed. We have a great crew and have a plan for work on all of the roads. Five permanent projects bid out. Dean Deasy thanked Sid Griggs and crew for allowing the two apparatuses to be stored in the town garage and being available to assist at all hours of the day.

Art. 9. Do the citizens of the Town of Cabot wish to see continued service by the Cabot Emergency Ambulance Service as the primary transport ambulance service for the Town of Cabot? [Australian Ballot]

Rory Thibault asked what is the basis for this article? Is it to change town contracting policy that requires a bid for any contract over \$25,000 or simply advisory? Amy Hornblas said the purpose was so that the town could be aware this question was on the table because people can't always attend selectboard meetings. Ruth Goodrich put on ballot by petition of many residents because they are concerned about the future of Cabot Ambulance. The direction is going forward and merger between FD and ambulance. The Cabot Ambulance was asked if they would like to merge with the fire department. Membership discussed at length. Had a membership vote, voted against merging, after which many fire department members withdrew from the ambulance service. Gained some members, members struggling across the board. A vote – decided to withdraw from a merger – have gained ground of membership. We understand that the selectboard considers this is an advisory vote. Cabot Ambulance would like to continue to serve this town as in the past 57 years with 157 people from town as volunteers over the years. Honor to continue to serve as long as the town of Cabot would like to have us. Bid process initiated after we decided not to merge. Received an appropriation last year of \$40,000 last year spent \$73,000. We do the best we can with what we have.

Connie Hourihan mentioned that Cabot Ambulance has the only four-wheel drive ambulance around.

Kris Schmitt offered Hardwick Ambulance also has four-wheel drive ambulance

Rory Thibault confused about ballot question. Still doesn't understand what this article does. Noted that quality of service. There is a standard process when getting called out. All politics aside when caring for a person.

Roz Daniels said she is confused – if the funding is in the budget, what happen if Article 9 goes down?

R.D. Eno responded that this is an advisory vote. Recognized that it was the advisory vote and see if she wanted to reword it and she refrained and remains an advisory vote. Want to continue to see Cabot Ambulance to serve the town. R.D. observed that there never was a contract in the past. It was housed with the fire department. It is an independent, non profit organization. Once again, the flood changed everything. When FEMA offered to fund a new building, we were informed that the Cabot Ambulance, as a private organization, therefore it is against the law to

house the ambulance in the municipal Fire Department building. The question was asked: Why don't you be part of the fire department. Ruth stated that the Cabot Ambulance took a vote and declined that opportunity. Then the town gave them the opportunity to be recognized as a free-standing part of the municipality and they would report to the selectboard. Vote taken on my motion, and before declare that it was approved or defeated, we tabled it. That motion is still on the table. The president of Cabot Ambulance had taken another vote and had declined to be an independent municipal agency. It was voted, but not in the minutes. That is when it was determined it would go out to bid. We will take the advisory vote very seriously. The motion for Cabot Ambulance to be an independent municipal agency is still on the table. Cabot Ambulance was not aware that motion would be offered and did not have an opportunity for input, and determined it would be better to decline until further consideration could be made.

Ruth – based on minutes – were not legal documents. Meeting held outside and cold. Missed a few things. We did correct the minutes at the next meeting. Was not aware of the resolution. We would table it at a later date. Wanted to have everyone on the ambulance to be aware of what is going on. We are looking at property to build a garage and don't want to go forward without approval. The SB was looking for a RFP.

Doug Cook – could you please define RFP. It is a Request for Proposal.

RD – this was crafted after a long conversation with Ruth and Jenn.

Ama Peyman – do we have a process for negotiations – without talking with one another

Lee Blackwell – point of order – address the meeting not one another.

Doug Cooke asked what happens in the RFP process?

Karen Larsen explained we have a purchasing policy that the selectboard has the process and asked Cabot Ambulance. The SB has looked at RFP expect CA to respond to RFP as part of this RFP process. SB is looking at best practices for transport services for collecting metrics and awarding a contract. We have a draft and will be available at next selectboard meeting. We do have a draft for public review. SB to edit and to be able to release the RFP on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March. Regularize contracting and what community hopes for in transport services.

Ken Denton – but is the new public safety building able to house the ambulance?

Dean – new building does have a place to store an ambulance.

Theresa Lay-Sleeper – can a contracted service be housed in a FEMA building? The answer is no.

A question was raised by a member of the audience: Motion tabled – what is the status of the tabled selectboard motion. R.D. said it remains on the table.

RD – it remains on the table. Motion was not compulsory, merely explain Cabot as a free-standing motion.

Kathleen Besch – who is going to occupy this ambulance space if not a contracted ambulance? Dean Deasy suggested the F.A.S.T. Squad (not transport) could use the space.

Dean – the FD is starting up a fast squad. Fast squad does not transport but able to start life-saving procedures.

Jeanne – is there room for it.

Dean – we will make space for it

Carrie Moll – dos most FD have a fast squad.

Dean – yes most do, we had meeting with other areas. Didn't see it, when Jenn asked for FD to run along side. We discovered that we do have the ability to show up.

Nathan Smith stated he is a fire fighter and was on the ambulance for a number of years. Did experience with an F.A.S.T. squad. It can be quite a job to get the people to the ambulance. F.A.S.T. Squad can help to get the person to the ambulance and then the ambulance can move the patient to the hospital with fewer people but a longer commitment time. A volunteer may not have time to transport in the ambulance but may have time for F.A.S.T. squad work.

Ellen Cairns thanked the selectboard for this work and doesn't feel the selectboard intended anything negative toward Cabot Ambulance and has done a lot of work to get us the quickest and most effective ambulance service.

Ruth Dirlam asked if it is safe to say the article is for the town to show support for Cabot Ambulance as a private entity and then the selectboard to give Cabot Ambulance an opportunity to submit a bid to serve the town. The selectboard said yes.

Miranda Hunt put a plug in we want our service local - when we need it we need it quick.

Kris Schmitt asked why is East Montpelier coming to town? What is the response rate now. The Cabot Ambulance are not making calls right now. If you want to pay somebody to paint your house and only paint 30% of it would you hire them again? Why are we giving them money?

Ruth Goodrich said there are always going to be those that will criticize. To her knowledge there have been roughly 30 calls since October, missing three of those calls. Volunteers do have lives, have family issues and have health issues. They do the best they can. When they know they don't have a crew they immediately notify partners to respond so they are already on the road before Cabot even rolls. They do this because they care. And Ruth believes Cabot Ambulance numbers are way better than 30%.



Rory Thibault thanked Ruth and said no one doubts Ruth's commitment and professionalism on these calls but the reality is it's a transport agency not a sole EMS responder. This isn't about putting down a service or volunteers, but about making sure we have a service that meets the town's needs. Cabot Ambulance is a medical transport service.

Amy Hornblas said it is her understanding that there's an 80% response rate over the year but the 30% response rate is the beginning of the year. She feels we can agree we can't take statistics from just a month and call that statistically accurate.

Karen expressed gratitude to all the members of Cabot Ambulance for many years of service and hopefully continuing years of service. But statistics and accountability are important, and these numbers come from the state. No one doubts Cabot Ambulance's care, commitment or service. But from January 1 to date there were 11 calls for transport here in Cabot. Cabot Ambulance was able to launch a legal crew for transport for 30% of those for transport and four of them for first response to stabilize a patient. Over the course of the last four years Cabot Ambulance responded to 80% of calls but their ability to legally transport is 60% right now.

Brittany Butler commented that volunteers are volunteering for the good of their community – quitting because of conflict with the head of a service is not what volunteering is about. Hether fire or ambulance you don't have to like how they operate you are there for this town. For members of the fire d quitting the ambulance then saying the ambulance isn't responding is disrespectful. FAST squads don't usually have an ambulance service already imbedded in the town. We are imbedding the F.A.S.T. squad into our budget, as well as for the transport service. We are exacerbating the budget for these two things when the ambulance has been our F.A.S.T. squad as well as ambulance transport service for the last fifty years. We can also say there are times when the Fire Department doesn't respond to fires.

Beth Wade said she has 35 year's experience as an EMT. Fire departments and ambulance services tend not to get along. One observation: You can have Cabot Ambulance respond to our house the way it should happen with enough staff, response time at about 15 minutes, maybe you have 30% chance of that happening. But if you contract with East Montpelier or Hardwick, you don't have ANY chance of them responding in that time, they are 30 minutes away. So, go with what you've got.

Karrie Moll, I know Ruth will show up no matter what, and I know the fire department will show up. If you hear people not getting along, step into their shoes. You should step up and volunteer, because it's a hard job.

David Covell – The F.A.S.T. Squad is supported by the Cabot Ambulance. The selectboard proposal that R.D. Eno tabled is still available but there are some questionable points.

Connie Hourihan asked if that selectboard proposal was reworked and accepted by Cabot Ambulance, would that negate the need for an RFP? R.D. Eno said it depends on timing. He

would be very receptive to recognizing Cabot Ambulance as a municipal entity. We have several months in the fiscal year and much time to work on this.

Fred Ducharme agreed with R.D. Eno, if the ambulance wants to come in, we can make it work. Could negotiate something so they can be in the public safety building.

Art. 10. Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot allow the Selectboard to appoint the Town Treasurer as permitted by the Vermont Legislature pursuant to 17 V.S.A. 2651 (d) and (f) for a term of one or three years? [Australian Ballot]

Connie Hourihan urged people to vote no on Article 10 because Betty should remain Town Clerk and Treasurer as she was elected. Also, community members are urged to attend selectboard meetings, otherwise they must do everything on their own.

R.D. Eno responded that the two offices have distinct responsibilities. Many towns have gone to separate those offices. The more complicated those responsibilities have become the more special skills are required. Again, the flood changed everything. Tracking grant funding and reporting is a large task all by itself.

Art. 11. To transact any other non-binding business that may come before said meeting.

Gary Gulka recommended blinds for the auditorium. The WB Committee is working on the Willey Building. Betty Ritter reported a recent energy audit and improvements planned for the Willey Building.

Trails – We have some new trails – Burtts Orchard, Old Center Road, Town Forest. Looking for more volunteers.

Betty announced Michelle Leclerc, assistant Cabot Town Clerk, has been elected Town Clerk of Danville, Vermont.

Mike Hogan urged people to keep up with town activities via *Cabot Chronicle*, Front Porch Forum and Cabot Connects Facebook page.

**Art. 12. To adjourn this meeting.** A motion was made by Fred Ducharme with a second by Dean Deasy. Motion carried and meeting adjourned at 12:42 p.m.