

1 **Town of Richmond**
2 **Selectboard Meeting**
3 **Minutes of February 26, 2024**
4

5 **Members Present:** Bard Hill, Jay Furr, Jeff Forward, Lisa Miller
6

7 **Absent:** David Sander
8

9 **Staff Present:** Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Duncan Wardwell, Assistant to the Town
10 Manager; Dennis Gile, Fire Chief; Gerald Levesque, Assistant Fire Chief
11

12 **Others Present:** Meeting was recorded by MMCTV, Amy Wardwell, Andrew Bessette,
13 Chris Granda, Christy Witters, Judy Rosovsky, Judy's iPhone, June Heston, Laurie Dana,
14 Martha, Pete Halvorsen, Rachel's iPad
15

16 **MMCTV Video:** https://youtu.be/2CYH4r_HMOI?si=URr2DkZZxNMAGGXi
17

18 **Call to Order:** 7:00 PM
19

20 **Welcome by:** Furr
21

22 **Public Comment:** None
23

24 **Additions or Deletions to Agenda:** None
25

26 **Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**
27

28 The presentation slide provides information associated with all agenda items:
29

30 [https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1c2_FY2025
31 Budget_Presentation_-_2-23-24.pdf](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1c2_FY2025_Budget_Presentation_-_2-23-24.pdf)
32

33 **Australian Ballot Information Hearing**
34

35 **Review and discuss Article 12: Shall the voters authorize renovating and making**
36 **capital improvements to the Town Center building to address conditions affecting**
37 **user health and safety concerns (i.e., deteriorating windows, electrical and HVAC**
38 **systems, emergency egress deficiencies, and the absence of a sprinkler system) and**
39 **to bring the building into compliance with flood-related zoning regulations, and to**
40 **issue notes or other debt instruments in an amount not to exceed Nine Million, Eight**
41 **Hundred Forty-One Thousand, Six Hundred Three and 00/100 Dollars**
42 **(\$9,841,603.00) and for a term not to exceed thirty (30) years (the “Project”), subject**
43 **to reduction by grants in aid and other state and federal funds then available to the**
44 **Town for this purpose?**

45 Timestamp: 0:03
46

47 https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1a_TC_Information_Packet_1-31-24.pdf
48

49 People who participated in discussion: Furr, Forward, Miller, Hill, Granda, Halvorsen
50

50 Furr reviewed what it would take to get the Town of Richmond budget back on

51 Australian ballot. Furr stated that there could be a petition to get it on the Town Meeting
52 Warning for next year or they could vote the question of whether it should go to
53 Australian ballot so the whole town would get to choose but neither step has been taken.
54

55 Forward presented the Town Center and Library Committee's progress for five years'
56 worth of meetings studying the building and researching what it will take to fix the
57 things. Forward stated that half of this building was built in 1907 and the second half of
58 it was built between 1911 or 1914. Forward reviewed that in the late 1980s, a new school
59 was built, and the Town moved the municipal services in here followed by the Post
60 Office and the Supervisory Union Central Office. The Supervisory Union moved out in
61 2019 and the Selectboard formed the Committee to figure out what to do with this
62 building and how we house Town services.
63

64 Forward reviewed that the Committee came up with a list of criteria to prioritize who
65 should be using the empty spaces that were in the building. Forward stated that they
66 hired an architectural firm to develop conceptual plans on whether to build new or
67 whether to renovate this building and has been exploring alternative financing
68 mechanisms to fund this project. Forward reviewed the hard costs to pay a general
69 contractor to do the construction along with soft costs that go beyond the general
70 contractor. Forward stated that they could find cost savings when they do the final
71 construction design but the \$9.8 million is the most they could cost it without going back
72 to the voters to ask for more money. Forward stated that they are proposing a legacy
73 project for future generations with new mechanicals, new windows and refurbishing and
74 they don't think any part of this project is unnecessary with the exception of green space.
75 Forward stated the intent to be as transparent as possible and answer as many questions.
76

77 Forward stated that this building has suffered from deferred maintenance for 100 years
78 and the last time the Town invested money in this in this building was about 30 years ago
79 when we moved in. Forward reviewed that many of the mechanical systems are at the
80 end of their useful life and they're deteriorating. Forward reviewed the plan to put in all
81 the mechanicals including electrical lighting, plumbing, sprinklers, and fire alarm
82 because it really needs it. Forward summarized that they calculated with that 30-year
83 bond, it would be \$96 per \$100,000 valuation. Forward confirmed that it is about 5000
84 square feet for each floor and the Post Office or about 15,000 square feet of usable space
85 as the basement will not be occupied. Hill stated that some of these things like the cost of
86 replacing windows is not really maintenance but asset management significant
87 expenditures. Forward stated that it's less costly to do this in one shot than to string it out
88 over time. Forward confirmed that the vault is a big issue and they budgeted \$100,000
89 for moving folks out during construction and it's possible that it could be staggered.
90 Granda stated that there will be a reduction in the operating costs of the Town. Forward
91 stated that this building will have significantly less carbon footprint, but it is hard to
92 calculate how much money it will save.
93

94 Granda asked if there was any thought to a configuration that involves a rentable
95 apartment. Forward stated that their charge was to develop a plan to house Town
96 services that takes one and a half floors, the Post Office is a very high priority, and
97 housing would be a completely different project. Furr stated that modern police facilities
98 are also worth having.
99

100 Halvorsen stated that he hasn't seen anything that describes what more expensive means,
101 there's no comparison. Halvorsen stated that the Town Services can be put somewhere
102 using commercial costs and it's relatively cheaper to do that. Halvorsen stated that if you
103 commercialize the building, there's income to the Town with tenants. Forward stated that
104 people told us time and again that it was important for the Town Services to be in a
105 central location and businesses notice the support with the traffic. Forward stated that
106 they asked the architects the differences in cost between tearing this building down and
107 building new. Forward confirmed that the architects said it would be more expensive to
108 build on this sight.

109
110 Forward reviewed his observations of the floodwaters that go about halfway in the
111 parking lot in the back and the Post Office is built on top of a tunnel that holds the
112 heating pipes which is below the floodplain. Forward stated that the floodplain
113 regulations require us to move the mechanical room out of the basement and to fill that
114 pipe trench, so the basement does not fill up with water. Forward stated that the
115 basement is not occupied space but could be used for storage. Forward reviewed that if
116 the whole building gets surrounded by floodwaters that could create pressure and
117 compromise the foundation and in order to avoid that the suggestion is to put a relief
118 valve in the floor to allow water to come in and stabilize the pressure. Forward also
119 stated that another flood mitigation strategy is to allow water to come in through the
120 windows from the basement. Forward stated that if we want to be responsible stewards
121 of this building, we should address these issues.

122
123 Forward confirmed that the Post Office will move back in as the local postmaster would
124 love to do that and they like the space. Forward confirmed that there isn't another good
125 alternative. Miller asked if they have enough space currently in the renovation to
126 accommodate the workforce for 20-30 years. Forward confirmed yes and if push came to
127 shove with additional staff like a facilities manager or a recreation director, that they have
128 told all of the tenants that if the Town has a need to use that space for some other
129 purpose, they have the right to give them notice.

130
131 **Review and discuss Article 13: Shall the Town of Richmond vote to approve funding**
132 **the Conservation Reserve Fund by adding one cent to the municipal tax rate in the**
133 **2024-2025 fiscal year?**

134 Timestamp: 0:57

135 [https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1b_2023_CR](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1b_2023_CR_F_Funding_Selectboard-121823-CRF-FINAL-V1.pdf)
136 [F_Funding_Selectboard-121823-CRF-FINAL-V1.pdf](https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1b_2023_CR_F_Funding_Selectboard-121823-CRF-FINAL-V1.pdf)

137

138 People who participated in discussion: Furr, Rosovsky, Hill

139

140 Rosovsky stated that she is the Chair of the Richmond Conservation Commission, and the
141 primary purpose of the Conservation Commission is to disperse funds from the
142 Conservation Reserve Fund, which was established in 2005. Rosovsky summarized that
143 you can find a list of projects and details on the Town website:

144 <https://www.richmondvt.gov/boards-meetings/conservation-commission>

145

146 Rosovsky reviewed the geographic diversity of the projects and how they try to follow
147 the Town Plan priorities and support projects. Rosovsky stated that for every dollar that
148 the Town has put into the Conservation Reserve Fund, they've gotten almost \$4 back.
149 Rosovsky stated that anyone in the Town can apply for Conservation Reserve funding.

150

151 Hill reviewed that as people's property valuations went up, then one cent on the rate
152 generates some modest amount of additional funds.

153

154 **Review and discuss Article 3: Shall the voters of the Town of Richmond approve a**
155 **budget of \$4,819,779.00 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town of**
156 **Richmond in Fiscal Year 2025? Note: This item will be voted from the floor on**
157 **Tuesday, March 5 but is covered in this meeting as public information. (60 min)**

158 Timestamp: 1:02

159 https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1c1_FY25_Budget_FINAL_1-2-24_For_Town_Report.pdf

160

161 https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1c2_FY2025_Budget_Presentation_-_2-23-24.pdf

162

163 https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Selectboard/Meetings/2024/02/1c3_2023RICHMONDTownReportWEB.pdf

164

165 People who participated in discussion: Furr, Arneson, Halvorsen, Granda, Hill, Forward,
166 Miller

167

168 Arneson stated that he will walk through the budget (see links above) and at the end be
169 ready for questions. Arneson confirmed that this is voted from the floor next Tuesday at
170 Town Meeting and is not an Australian ballot item. Arneson stated that the budget is on
171 pages 11 through 21 of the Town Report:

172 <https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/General/departments/town-clerk/2024/02/2023RICHMONDTownReportWEB.pdf>

173

174 Arneson stated that all the budget related information and Town Meeting related
175 information as it the Town Clerk's site:

176 <https://www.richmondvt.gov/departments/town-clerk>

177

178 Furr stated that they try to budget as accurately as possible, but if not for the flood, the
179 tax rate would have been flat, and we will be getting some FEMA reimbursement.

180 Arneson stated that is why 15% is on hand for cash flow as if there is another flood, we
181 need that money immediately.

182

183 Halvorsen asked if there are detailed line items for the Town Center renovations in
184 the budget. Forward stated they are not as it is hard to tell the construction industry right
185 now.

186

187 Granda stated that the increase in salary costs seems like a high rate. Arneson stated that
188 a lot of that is driven by a compensation study that was completed in 2022. Furr stated
189 that was for the sake of retaining our employees as it has been pointed out to us that
190 pretty much any of our Highway Department employees could go elsewhere and start
191 making \$2,000 more just the next day. Arneson stated that this budget is built on a 3%
192 increase in that compensation grid and that actual rate will be set when we get towards
193 May/June, and we get into annual increases happening on July 1 which also budgets for
194 every employee to go up one step on the grid. Arneson stated that if they hired an
195 employee who had more experience into a higher position then that is going to be

200 budgeted for their increases. Hill stated that there are bumps with a small number of
201 employees when people either avail themselves or not avail themselves of health
202 insurance. Forward stated that they went from paying 100% of health insurance costs to
203 paying 90% and asking for a 10% contribution from the employer. Miller stated that if
204 looking at the \$400,000 house, the tax increases this year amounts to 26 cents a day.

205

206 **Adjourn**

207

208 *Miller moved to adjourn. Hill seconded.*

209 *Roll Call Vote: Forward, Furr, Hill, Miller in favor. Motion approved.*

210

211 **Meeting adjourned at: 8:56 pm**

212

213 **Chat file from Zoom:**

214 00:54:42 Andrew Bessette: Do we have a commitment from the post office they
215 will move back in after wards?

216 00:59:43 Andrew Bessette: I would like to fill in the basement, move storage to
217 higher ground. some other building mabe.