Town Meeting Minutes

March 4, 2025

Gary Apfel called meeting to order at 9:59. He welcomed new residents to the town.

Robert Fortunati led with the Pledge of Allegiance and Marian Cawley was invited to lead everyone in America the Beautiful.

Katherine Lea read an invocation on civility.

Jeff Spiegal read the land acknowledgement presented at Town Meeting in 2024 honoring Indigenous Peoples past and present.

Holly Groschner acknowledged the 80 volunteers plus town employees that it takes to run the Town of Corinth. She then formally thanked Dick Kelley for his five years of service as town treasurer.

Gary Apfel reviewed the rules of the meeting.

The legal voters of the Town of Corinth in the County of Orange are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Town Hall in Cookeville on Tuesday, March 4, 2025 at 10:00 AM to act on the following:

Article 1. **To elect the following by Australian ballot. For the purposes of this article the polls will be open from 8:30 AM to 7:00 PM.**

Moderator for 1 year
Selectboard member for 3 years
Listers for 3 years, 2 years, and 1 year
Collector of Delinquent Taxes for 1 year
Cemetery Commissioner for 3 years
Constable for 1 year (unfunded)
Waits River Valley School Director for 3 years
Town Clerk for 1 year

No action required

Article 2. **To see if the voters will accept the various Officers' Reports as presented in the Town Report.**

KellyAnn Donahue moved this article. TR Jackson seconded.

Irene Mann asked why the audit is taking so long for the years 2022 and 2023.

Holly Groschner responded that the Financial Clerk is working assiduously with the Auditors to bring the books up-to-date as they have been in disorder following Susan Fortunati's retirement as town treasurer and that year 2022 is almost complete and 2023 is underway.

TR Jackson voiced the opinion that perhaps a professional auditor is unnecessary.

Susan Fortunati stated that as the accounts have become so complicated, professional auditors are needed.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 3. **To see if the voters will vote $530,840, of which $251,740 to be raised by taxes, to support the General Fund.**

Joyce McKeeman moved this article. Jane Conner seconded it.

Rick Cawley stated that the General Fund contains both discretionary and non-discretionary funding and questioned the separation of the Fire Department Bond payment in Article 6. He said it could be confusing to residents as that payment is a mandatory bond payment and choosing not to pay it is like defaulting on a home mortgage. He then moved to amend the article to read:

To see if the voters will vote $591,840, of which $312,740 to be raised by taxes, to support the General Fund. Linda Weiss seconded the motion.

There was some discussion around why this is separated out. Nick Kramer said it has always been done historically and that there may be a specific legal accounting reason. John Conner thought perhaps all mandatory payments should be listed as mandatory payments.

Gary called for a vote to amend the article. The nays have it

Back to the original article.

Jeff Spiegel asked about the $18,000 for law enforcement.

Holly Groschner explained that after a study of the Orange County Sheriff's Dept, it was discovered that only 10% of calls were actually dealt with by the OCSD and that the vast majority were dealt with by the State Police.

The State Police have a program where off-duty state troopers can contract with towns to offer services needed. The St Johnsbury barracks have troopers from Bradford, who are interested in serving Corinth once new recruits start in midsummer. The money budgeted is only used on a services-needed basis in addition to traffic stops.

Michael Tkac asked why the Listers' budget had increased. KellyAnn Donahue explained that there are two new listers as well as a consultant, who in past years, has been paid out of a different line item of the budget.

Gary called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 4. **To see if the voters will vote $12,000, of which $1,000 to be raised by taxes to support the purchase of Computer Equipment.**

Joyce McKeeman moved this article. Linda Weiss seconded it.

It was noted the same amount is asked for every year without the fund being drawn down. Carl Demrow explained that this is a reserve fund that is built up over time to avoid large shocks to the budget when larger expenses are required.

Rick Cawley wondered why there was an $11,000 expenditure in the proposal. Holly Groschner explained that the proposal included the estimate for new computers needed for this year.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 5. **To see if the voters will vote $5,000, of which $5,000 to be raised by taxes, to support the Town Hall Capital Improvement Fund.**

Chris Groschner moved this article. Linda Weiss seconded it.

Carl Demrow stated that the Town Hall is an old building, and it requires a lot of maintenance and repair and that much of

the money used for such is from the grants that he and Norm Collette are able to get. He is working on a grant for a proposed back porch and Norm Collette had gotten a $20,000 grant from the Vermont Historic Preservation Fund Program at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for repairs and painting required on the back of the building. The roof is also in need of replacement.

Jeremy Goodrich asked if any of this money is ARPA funds. Carl Demrow said that no, the $5,000 requested is not ARPA. He also explained that much of the ARPA grant has been appropriated and used to reimburse the town for employee salaries and wages during Covid. That reimbursement then created a surplus in the General Fund which has been used to pay for the Town Garage addition and projects on the Town Hall.

Gary Apfel called for a vote. The ayes have it.

Holly Groschner recognized Carl Demrow's work in identifying and applying for the grants for these projects.

Article 6. **To see if the voters will vote $61,000, of which $61,000 to be raised by taxes, to pay for the existing Fire Station.**

T R Jackson moved this article. Nick Kramer seconded.

As Gary explained it is not possible to revisit a previous article, Irene Mann made the recommendation that in future, non-discretionary funds be grouped together under mandatory payments.

James Guyer asked if the surrounding towns contribute to the funding of the Corinth Fire Station. Carl Demrow and Holly Groschner explained that while other towns do not contribute to funding, they do provide mutual aid.

Jeff Spiegel acknowledged his appreciation of the Volunteer Fire Department and the good work they do.

Gary called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 7. **To see if the voters will vote $8,850, of which $500 to be raised by taxes, to support the Planning Commission.**

Anne Margolis moved this article. Liane Allen seconded it.

Anne Margolis explained that much of the Planning Commission budget is used for postage and administrative duties and advertising in the case of subdivisions and she asked for volunteers to be on the Commission.

James Guyer questioned the postage expense of the survey sent out by the Commission. Holly Groschner responded that those FY2024 numbers are not included in the line items of the FY2026 town budget, and are outside the scope of the Town Meeting and should be addressed directly to the Planning Commission or the Selectboard at another time.

Holly also stated the Planning Commission plays a large role in helping the Town comply with the ever-expanding State regulations.

Gary Apfel called for a vote. The ayes have it.

Article 8. **To see if the voters will vote $200, of which $200 to be raised by taxes, to support the Conservation Commission.**

T R Jackson moved this article. Linda Weiss seconded it.

Glynn Pellegrino stated that most of the Conservation Commission's funding comes from the bottle deposits given by the townsfolk and grants that the Commission is able to get. The $200 request is to show the State and on Grant requests that the Conservation Commission has a "token approval" from the Town.

Anne McKinsey explained that the Green Up Day expenses that had been covered by the Commission are now being covered by the General Fund Solid Waste account.

Article 9. **To see if the voters will vote $10,000, of which $2,000 to be raised by taxes, for the Emerald Ash Borer Fund.**

T R Jackson moved this article. Virginia Barlow seconded.

Virginia Barlow gave a brief description of the number of ash trees along the roadside right-of-way in town (2500) based on an inventory of half the roadways in Corinth and emphasized the need to cut them down before infestation of the Emerald Ash Borer.

Emily Marsh suggested that a larger amount was needed for this project.

Steve Long proposed an amendment to read: To see if the voters will vote $10,000, of which $10,000 to be raised by taxes, for the Emerald Ash Borer Fund. Marian Cawley seconded.

There was general discussion of ways and means of handling the EAB infestation – how it is being done and the costs thereof. There is an initial experimental plan for White Rd to be implemented this year and more information on the continued execution and resources needed would then be known.

Virginia Barlow said the one tree identified as initially infested is located on Richardson Rd, but that there are assumed to be more.

Jeff Spiegel called the question. Lianne Allen seconded.

Gary called for a vote on the Amendment: The ayes have it.

Conversation continued on the Amended article with general requests for more information on the EAB Management Plan.

Gary called for a vote: The ayes have it.

At 12:00PM the meeting was suspended for the Legislative update from Mike Tagliavia followed by a lunch provided by the Corinth Historical Society.

Gary Apfel called the meeting back to order at 12:50pm.

Article 10. **To see if the voters will authorize the Town to use surplus funds for special projects to include the restoration of the Town Hall and purchase and installation of a generator, in a combined total not to exceed $133,117.12.**

Carl explained that these surplus funds are the result of the ARPA money was used to reimburse the Town for town employee salaries and wages and that it then created a surplus in the General Fund to be used for Town Hall and Town Garage projects and replacement of the 22 year old generator.

Adam Miller asked if ARPA expenditures were handled this way because the ARPA funds had to be spent in a certain timeframe. Carl explained that yes, ARPA funds had to be allocated by end of 2024 and spent by 2026 and that by managing them in this manner, allowed more flexibility in projects.

Norm Collette asked for clarification of why the surplus seemed to be lower than he thought it should be. Holly Groschner explained that the costs of architects and prior additional expenses would account for that.

Carl Demrow gave a brief history of the Town Hall Committee and plans for an eventual public hearing for the plans for

the covered porch on the back of the Town Hall.

Gary called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 11. To see if the voters will fix the compensation for the Selectboard members for the coming year at $2,000 each.

Susan Fortunati moved this article. Lee Porter seconded it.

Joyce McKeeman stated how much time and work being a Selectboard member takes and moved to amend the article to read: To see if the voters will fix the compensation for the Selectboard members for the coming year at $3,600 each. Linda Weiss seconded it.

Susan Fortunati stated that as the General Fund was already approved and as it could not be revisited, the way to do this was to overspend the budget and the amount would come out of a separate line item of surplus funds that are available.

Stephen Devoto gave an estimate of how many hours selectboard members work each week. He further noted the many additional hours dedicated each week by our current Selectboard Chair.

Gary Apfel called for a vote on the amendment: The ayes have it.

Gary Apfel called for a vote on the article as amended: The ayes have it.

Article 12. To see if the voters will vote $966,850, of which $680,500 to be raised by taxes, to support the Highway Fund.

Jon Saken moved this article. Jeff Spiegel seconded it.

Jon Saken suggested that with inflation, the Highway Budget seemed a little flat. Lee Peter stated that actually the Highway Budget increased $14,000 but the amount to be raised by taxes had decreased by $2300. Healthcare and new trucks have increased substantially, but Joe Blodgett has done a tremendous job getting grants to cover many of the town projects.

Joe Blodgett said that that the rotation of trading town trucks has been a huge boon as is his excellent road crew.

Greg Smith expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation for the excellent work of the town road crew.

Dan Wing asked when the Joe Lord Bridge project would be complete. Joe Blodgett said that all three Bridge repair projects in town (Joe Lord Rd, Johnson Rd and Turkey Hill Rd) will all be complete by end of September of this year. All three projects come to just under $1,000,000 and the monies paid for by FEMA.

Carl Demrow expressed his appreciation of the incredible work that Joe Blodgett and Lee Porter are able to accomplish and stated that, as a result of their work, the roads in Corinth are far superior to any other in the state.

Holly Groschner cautioned that in future, there could be less federal grant funds available and there may be a need to increase taxes to cover expenses or build the reserve fund.

Gary called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 13. To see if the voters will vote $129,700, of which $129,700 to be raised by taxes to support the Highway Capital Equipment Fund.

Joyce McKeeman moved this article. Chris Groschner seconded it.

Lee Porter explained that this was pretty much level from previous years and that the rotation of equipment is working as planned to align equipment costs with the fund.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 14. **To see if the voters will vote $15,000, of which $15,000 to be raised by taxes to support the Bridge Reserve Fund.**

Adam Miller moved this article. Linda Weiss seconded it.

Lee Porter explained that this amount was to help build up the reserve fund for times when other funds / grants for bridge repair and replacement are unavailable.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 15. **To see if the voters will authorize the town to use funds received from the Better Back Roads grant program.**

T R Jackson moved this article. Jeff Spiegel seconded it.

Joe Blodgett explained that this State fund was used for ditching projects / culverts / etc and was a great program.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 16. **To see, in the case of unanticipated State funds not included in the budget for specific highway and bridge projects applied for and received during the fiscal year, if the voters will authorize the expenditure of such funds for those projects.**

Jeff Spiegel moved this article. KellyAnn Donahue seconded.

No discussion.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 17. **To recommend to the Selectboard for appointment five or more taxpayers for the Budget Committee for 1 year.**

Nominations included:
Elizabeth Davis
John Melquist
Raymond Moulton
John Sutton
Mike Pittman
Jon Saken
Eileen Nickles

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Holly Groschner thanked Amy Peberdy and Lee Porter for their years of service on the Budget Committee.

Article 18. **To see if the voters will vote to have the taxes collected by the Treasurer and fix the dates of payment for the same on or before the close of business the second Tuesday following Labor Day each year, and on or before the close of business the 2nd Tuesday of February each year. Postmarks not accepted.**

Susan Fortunati moved this motion. Lee Porter seconded it.

Susan Fortunati explained it was the same wording as last year and therefore easier for people to follow the tax deadline.

Gary Apfel called for a vote: The ayes have it.

Article 19. **To transact any other business that may legally come before the meeting.**

Rick Cawley wondered if the cuts in federal funding would impact the Pike Hill Project. It is unclear at this time.

Dan Wing asked everyone present to reflect on those who have died in the past year as well those who have been born or married.

Chris Groschner suggested that the town allocate funds for a digital speed sign on Cookeville Rd (cost $4,000 - $7,000) as the one in East Corinth has been so successful.

Stephen Devoto explained that the town is currently updating its Flood Hazard Mitigation Plan and input is needed from residents. There will be an online survey to look for.

Jeff Spiegel made an announcement on behalf of the Corinth Community Coalition for a scam prevention presentation that will be held on May 19th, 2025 at the Town Hall. He also mentioned the Transfer Station Mural that is now housed in the WRVS school and another community one that will be done at the transfer station along with five resident artists.

John Ruggles asked Gary Apfel to read a resolution of support for Ukraine: "We the people of Corinth Vermont do by way of resolution, declare our support for the nation of Ukraine in its battle for democracy against foreign forces and quest for peace on terms favoring that great nation!" Holly Groschner called for a division of the house. The resolution was approved.

T R Jackson urged the town to take advantage of free software that is available and does not become outdated.

Consiglia Longo thanked everyone for their support of the Corinth Historical Society.

Holly Groschner stated that the coordinator for the Pike Hill Mine Project, Ed Hathaway is ill with a serious cancer and those who wish to contact him to wish him well are encouraged.

Gary Apfel closed the meeting with an appreciation for all those who made the effort to attend and participate in Town Meeting.

Chris Groschner moved to adjourn the meeting. Linda Weiss seconded.

Meeting adjourned at 1:59PM.

Respectfully Submitted by

Martha A Brough, Town Clerk

Gary Iffel

Approved By

Moderator

Office Held

Holly Lunn

Approved By

Select board

Office Held