



Town of Deerfield
Town Deliberative Session Minutes
February 3, 2024

Location

Town Hall, 10 Church Street, Deerfield, New Hampshire 03037.

Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 9:00 am by the Moderator Dan Holdridge.

Pledge of Allegiance

Moderator asked all to rise.

Board of Selectmen Present

Frederick McGarry, Chairman, Richard Pitman, Vice Chairman, Cindy McHugh, William Huebner, Stephen Barry.

Others Present

Dan Holdridge, Moderator, Erik K. Gross, Assistant Moderator, Kelly Roberts, Certified Town Clerk/Tax Collector, John Harrington, Jr., Town Administrator, Nathan Midolo, Town Counsel, Matt Fisher, Fire Chief, Joanna Waring, Supervisor of the Checklist, Frances Maureen Quinn, Supervisor of the Checklist, Christina Pretorius, Supervisor of the Checklist, Bob Molloy of Molloy Sound, Deerfield Woman's Club.

Rules of Meeting

Read by the Moderator

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is the SB 2 Deliberative Session of the 2024 Deerfield Town Meeting, as defined in NH RSA 652:16-f. You will act as a legislative body to determine the final form of the Warrant Articles that will be voted on at this location, at the March 12th Town Election. All the Articles, by law, MUST be placed on the ballot.

Each member who wishes to vote in this meeting should have checked in with the Supervisors of the Checklist and should have received a voting card and a sheet of Yes/No Ballots. If you are a registered voter and have not checked in, please do so now.

Are there any individuals present who are not registered voters of the Town of Deerfield? Though you are not permitted to vote, by Deerfield tradition you are permitted to participate in the debate. Without objection, we will continue this tradition today.

The rules for this meeting are as follows, and are updated as of 2024:

Our meeting today is “for the transaction of all business other than voting by official ballot.” The first session “shall consist of explanation, discussion, and debate of each warrant article.” Since Deerfield operates via Senate Bill #2 Town Meeting, all warrant articles, amended or if not amended, will automatically be placed on the ballot. There is no need for motions to place articles on the ballots, unless they are amended. Please note, all Zoning Articles are not open to amendment per NH RSA 675:3.

Our business today is to consider each warrant article and, within the limits of the law, determine the details of those articles to be voted by official ballot at the March 12th Second Session. Amendments to articles are in order and will be voted at this meeting. However, at the conclusion of our deliberation on each article, we will not vote on passage of the warrant article. Instead, the chair will instruct the Town Clerk to place the article on the official ballot.

In the event you want to make a motion for an amendment, please be sure to write down the amendment information on the slips provided, and once acknowledged by the chair, read your suggested amendment into the microphone. Then, kindly bring the written amendment information to our Town Clerk, Ms. Kelly Roberts for recording of the minutes. Our goal is for our legislative body here this morning to be efficiently on the same page, with all the information as discussed.

The chair will read each article, then recognize a representative of the warrant article author to speak. Then the floor will be open to all. If you wish to address the meeting, please approach the microphone. The chair will recognize members at the microphones in turn.

When it is your turn to speak, please step up to the microphone and speak directly into it. The microphone is voice activated, and your remarks are recorded so that the clerk may make an accurate record of this meeting.

All remarks must be confined to the merits of the pending question, or to questions of order or privilege, and all remarks must be addressed to the chair. When recognized, please state your name and address to begin addressing the chair. Each speaker, if not the author of a warrant article who is presenting the article's information, will be allowed three minutes to express his or her views. You may speak as many times as you wish, but all members who wish to speak will have a first turn before any has a second turn. The overriding principle in all cases is fairness.

A speaker may address the current pending question, or they may move to close debate, but may not do so in the same turn. This means that if a speaker argues for or against a motion, he or she may not then conclude their remarks with "and I move the previous question." We adopted this rule many years ago, and with the support of the assembly, will follow it in this meeting.

A secret ballot, per RSA 40:4-a, must be conducted when requested by five members in writing prior to a hand vote. Such request must be for a specific vote, not for "all votes in this meeting" or "all amendments to this article." The five members must be present and stand when called to verify they are in attendance. The secret ballot provision exists to offer secrecy and is not intended to be used as a tactic of delay. If you wish to request a secret ballot, please approach a microphone, and when recognized, make the request. Then pass the written request to the moderator. Secret Ballot Forms are available on side tables to where you are seated.

Otherwise, votes will be by a show of voting cards. If the Chair cannot judge a clear majority, he will move to a Division. Likewise, if a member is not satisfied that the result announced by the Chair is correct, they should request a Division. Division will be a count of the raised hands.

Seven members who question any non-ballot vote immediately after it is announced, may request a written ballot vote. If the margin of a vote by Division is narrow, the moderator may also move to a ballot vote.

Five voters may request a recount of a written ballot vote, "providing that the vote margin is not more than 10% of the total votes cast". In this case, "the recount shall take place immediately following the public announcement" of that vote, per RSA 40:4-a.

If there is something you wish to accomplish here but you are uncertain how to proceed, please ask. You can do that at any time during the meeting at the microphone, or you can approach any of us during a recess. Similarly, if during the meeting, something is not clear to you, please rise to a point of inquiry – using the microphone and addressing the Chair, then ask for an explanation.

As a legislature, we will be discussing the Warrant Articles before us. Those discussions will be respectful of everyone's opinion. We do not cheer nor applaud when someone says something you agree with, and we do not boo nor groan when we disagree with what is said. Please be respectful of all comments and opinions as you would want yours to be respected. To keep

personalities out of the debate, please use terms such as “the previous speaker”, the selectman, or the Budget Committee Member. All questions and comments are to be directed to the Moderator. There is no requirement that anyone must yield to answer a question poised to them.

Finally, the role of the Moderator is to fairly organize and regulate the meeting according to rules agreeable to the Legislative Body in attendance. Rulings of the Moderator are subject to appeal by any member. An appeal must be made immediately following the ruling. A second is required. The ruling and the appeal will be explained to the Legislative Body. Then the members will vote either to sustain or to reverse the ruling.

We may take a break after lengthy articles; however, our goal is to conduct business efficiently for the respect of your valuable time here today. Also, this meeting is being recorded for viewing at a later date to be posted on the Town web site.

Thank you for being a part of today’s Deliberative Session and participating to help Deerfield become a bright future for generations to come. We hope to see you all again for the February 10th School Deliberative Session next Saturday, held in the School Gymnasium, starting at 9 AM. Also, please join us from 7 AM to 7 PM on March 12th for the Town Election, to be held here in the Town Hall. And as a small favor, when today’s event has concluded, we would be grateful for a few volunteers to help us fold the chairs and place them in the back of the room for us.”

FIRST SESSION:

To the inhabitants of the Town of Deerfield, in the County of Rockingham, in said State qualified to vote in Town Affairs:

You are hereby notified to meet at the Town Hall, 10 Church Street, on Saturday, the 3rd day of February 2024 at 9:00 a.m. This session shall consist of explanation, discussion and deliberation of the Warrant Articles numbered One (1) through Seventeen (17). The Warrant Articles may be amended subject to the following limitations: (a) Warrant Articles whose wording is prescribed by law shall not be amended, and (b) Warrant Articles that are amended shall be placed on the official ballot for a final vote on the main motion as amended.

SECOND SESSION:

The final ballot vote for warrant articles will take place at the Town Hall, 10 Church Street, Tuesday, March 12, 2024. The polls will be open from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.

1. To choose all necessary Town Officers for the year ensuing.
2. To see if the Town will vote to adopt amendments to the existing Town Zoning Ordinance as proposed by the Planning Board. (The amendments as proposed by the

Planning Board are available for inspection at the Offices of the Town Clerk and the Selectmen during business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Mondays and from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday.)

3. To vote on the following Warrant Articles, as amended, including the proposed budget as a result of the action of the First Session.

Zoning Amendment # 1:

Are you in favor of the adoption of Amendment No. 1 as proposed by the Planning Board for the Town Zoning Ordinance as follows: delete Section 211 Floodplain Development Regulations in its entirety and replace it with a new Section 211 Floodplain Development Regulations as necessary to comply with requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program?

Selectman Chair Fred McGarry introduced the article and deferred to Peter Schibbelhute, Chair of the Planning Board, to speak to it.

Peter Schibbelhute, the Chair of the Planning Board, provided insights on the zoning article. He clarified that the update is essential to meet the requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program. The update's main goal is to make sure that new building projects comply with the latest regulations.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the zoning article on the ballot as written.

Zoning Amendment # 2:

Are you in favor of the adoption of Amendment No. 2 as proposed by the planning board for the town zoning ordinance as follows: amend Article III Section 325.4.D.(b) by inserting the following new section and editions:

(b) Internal Setbacks and Separation:

(1) Front setback: Structures and/or buildings shall be located at least twenty-five (25) feet from the edge of any roads in the subdivision.

(2) Side and rear setbacks: Structures and/or buildings shall be located not less than 20 feet from internal side and rear property lines.

(3) Dwelling units Separation: The depth of side and rear yards (measured from building to property lines) shall not be less than 20 feet. The Planning Board may approve a smaller separation if an acceptable alternative for fire safety, as determined by the Fire Chief, is provided. The location of setbacks proposed to achieve this requirement shall be depicted on all plats in the proposed open space subdivision.

Selectman Chair Fred McGarry introduced the article and deferred to Peter Schibbelhute, Chair of the Planning Board, to speak to it.

Peter Schibbelhute emphasized the necessity for updating the original open space subdivision regulations from 2006. He pointed out a significant oversight in the existing rules, which did not consider the impact of buildings constructed too close to property boundaries. Specifically, while the original rules mandated a 25-foot setback from the front road and a 40-foot distance between buildings, they failed to prevent buildings from being erected directly on the side property lines.

Chairman Schibbelhute highlighted the potential issues this could cause for adjacent lots and the overall layout of the subdivision. To rectify this, he informed the body of needed amendments made to the ordinance. These revisions will introduce a minimum space requirement between all property setbacks to ensure proper placement of buildings. The updated regulation will provide clear and enforceable guidelines for the building inspector when evaluating building permits, thus safeguarding the design and spacing within the subdivision.

Herman Pretorius of Bloomfield Road asked if this amendment would be retroactive. Chairman Schibbelhute advised that it would not be retroactive but would be implemented moving forward.

Herman Pretorius, a resident of Forest Glenn—a recently established open space development with about 30 to 40 houses near South Road—voiced his concerns regarding the proposed amendment. He drew attention to the tangible effects of the new regulations on an average lot size of 1.258 acres within the community, pointing out that the town's directive would limit homeowner usage of 36% of their property despite their obligation to pay taxes in full.

Pretorius questioned the fairness of such restrictions, suggesting that it would feel unjust if the government dictated the use of a significant portion of one's property. He also expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of the setback in solving the problem it was intended to address, arguing that it would hinder future development and the character of open space developments.

Pretorius noted that all existing houses in the Forest Land development currently meet the 40-foot setback requirement, indicating that there is no current issue with spacing between properties. The implication was that the new regulation could unnecessarily restrict the ability to build and develop properties as desired.

On a non-quantitative note, the speaker raised concerns about the impact of building regulations on neighborly relations, suggesting that residents should have the freedom to maintain personal relationships without excessive regulation.

Mr. Pretorius expressed concern about the increasing costs of running the town, noting that despite higher taxes, there have been no significant improvements in the size of the school or

the condition of the roads. He urged the town to consider ways to attract more residents as an alternative to continuously raising taxes. He compared the town's financial situation to being trapped in a locked room, seeking a way out. He warned that the current approach of the board of selectmen—raising taxes—would only exacerbate the problem. Mr. Pretorius called for the town to be mindful and empathetic towards his perspective, emphasizing that the issue at hand affects not only his property use but also the town's overall growth and development.

Phil Bilodeau of Nottingham Road conveyed a concern regarding the proximity of houses in a neighborhood, with one house built up to the property line on the left and another to the right. This close spacing presents a significant issue for the fire department, which he mentioned would have difficulty accessing an area if one of the houses were to catch fire due to them being only inches apart.

Jeanne Menard of Mountain Road suggested that purchasers of lots in an open space development should be aware that while they might have smaller individual lot sizes, they also benefit from the communal open space, such as a 100-acre area available to the community. This shared space can offset the reduced private lot size, offering added value. Menard emphasized that potential buyers should consider these communal benefits—alongside the limitations of their personal lot, such as the 40-foot setback from neighboring houses and frontage setbacks—when assessing the value of their purchase in an open space development.

Selectman Chair Fred McGarry highlighted a scenario where an owner of a vacant lot faces potential limitations due to the current ordinance, which allows neighboring properties to build close to the property line. He clarified that under the current rules, two adjacent houses must adhere to a 40-foot setback, ensuring that they cannot be built closer than 40 feet to each other. Mr. McGarry expressed his support for this precondition, which mandates a minimum distance between houses, thus safeguarding a degree of open space around each property.

Mr. Pretorius expressed his appreciation for the conservation of natural resources around Forest Glen and his strong support for protecting these areas. However, he conveyed frustration as an engineer with ambitions to build structures like chicken coops, storage for equipment, or a lab on his property, which he is unable to do because of restrictions on the use of the open space. Despite acknowledging the communal ownership of the open space, he feels that his rights as a property owner are being infringed upon because he cannot utilize this space for his desired purposes. He emphasized that these restrictions reduce the utility of his property, which he pays taxes on and believes he has earned the right to use it fully.

Ed Cross of Thurston Pond Road raised concerns about the lack of clarity regarding the frequency of conflicts arising from the current open space development regulations. He questioned whether such issues had been problematic in the past and sought information from the board on this matter. Additionally, he pondered the practicality of aiming to solve all problems at all times, suggesting it may not be feasible.

As a developer, Cross noted that adhering to the open space development rules and regulations is required for projects exceeding three lots. He acknowledged that while developers like him can meet these requirements without issue, it is the citizens who are most affected. They may feel their property rights are being compromised, especially when it comes to using their land for basic structures like sheds over 200 square feet, which might now require a variance for placement closer than 20 feet to a property line.

Cross clarified that from a developer's perspective, these regulations do not pose a significant challenge, but he emphasized that it is the citizens who face the most significant concerns with this issue. He requested that the implications for citizens be explained clearly.

Selectman Chair Fred McGarry commented on receiving notification from the Building Inspector regarding an issue that was initially presented to them. In response to this issue, they have drafted and proposed this ordinance as a solution.

Mr. Pretorius sought to clarify his previous comment, emphasizing that any building, regardless of size—whether it is 200 square feet or 100 square feet—requires approval from the building inspector. He expressed his belief that it is unnecessary and a waste of the inspector's time for minor storage structures, such as those intended for lawn mowers.

Mr. Pretorius pointed out that the variance allowing buildings close to the property line has been in place since the area began development. He highlighted that there are houses built in the mid-2000s not in compliance with the proposed zoning amendment.

The reason this has become a problem, according to Herman, is due to a new building inspector who has decided to address this specific issue. He urged caution, suggesting that this problem was not identified or addressed in the past, even with existing non-compliant houses. Herman concluded by warning that this change does not add value and only detracts from the community.

Kim Black of Meetinghouse Hill Road asked whether the discussed regulations or requirements apply exclusively to open space developments. Additionally, she inquired about whether non-open space developments are subject to similar or different requirements.

Selectman Chair Fred McGarry explained this zoning amendment being discussed applies specifically to open space developments. He compares the setback requirements for open space and non-open space lots, noting that a non-open space lot has a setback of 37 feet.

Mr. Pretorius clarified that the 37-foot measurement being discussed is relevant to properties larger than three acres, which is the minimum lot size in Deerfield. He wanted to ensure that people understood this number represents 20% of a three-acre lot's width. He also suggested that most people present likely own more than three acres, implying that the 37-foot figure would constitute an even smaller percentage of their property. Herman's point was to put into perspective the impact of the proposed amendment on open space development, noting that it would be roughly half of what the amendment would entail.

Zach Langlois of South Road Zach raised concerns about the retrospective application of a housing ordinance and its potential impact on the community, drawing from his personal history with the town's first cluster zoning subdivision. As a former resident who sold his home after facing issues related to the subdivision's governance, he shared an anecdote about being pressured to sign documents and comply with sudden demands.

He empathized with current and future residents who might be affected by the ordinance, particularly those involved in planning or buying into new developments. Zach cautioned against the ordinance's potential to retroactively affect homeowners who have established their roots in the town, arguing that it would unfairly alter the conditions under which they purchased their homes.

Mr. Langlois called for transparency and clarity in the ordinance, stressing the importance of understanding whether its provisions would apply only to new developments or also to existing ones. He insisted that while new buyers could make informed decisions if they knew the rules upfront, changing the rules for existing homeowners would be unjust, likening it to moving the goalposts—a situation he experienced firsthand, ultimately leading to his decision to leave the subdivision.

In summary, Mr. Langlois advocated for a clear and fair approach to the implementation of the ordinance, one that respects the investments and expectations of current homeowners while guiding future development.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the zoning article on the ballot as written.

Article # 1 Shall the Town of Deerfield raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by the vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein totaling **\$4,967,688.00**. Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be **\$4,379,617.00** which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Town of Deerfield or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13X and XVI, to take up the issue of the revised operating budget only.

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 5-0-0

Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 4-3-0

Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value for Proposed Budget \$3.81

Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value for Default Budget \$3.06

Terry Roy, Chair of the Municipal Budget Committee explained that Warrant Article 1, the budget, underwent a thorough review by the municipal budget committee, which scrutinized the proposal line by line and department by department. Although some members had specific concerns, such as an issue with the firefighter line item being allocated only \$1, the majority

concluded that there were no significant cuts to be made that wouldn't affect the services provided.

Peter Aubrey of Mountain Road expressed concern that by not maintaining a surplus, the town had no flexibility to mitigate taxes in the current year. He highlighted the importance of managing what is returned to the taxpayers, suggesting that if tax relief is offered one year, there should be a plan for the following year. He questioned the current status of the fund balance and the town's direction, seeking clarity on what the community could expect for the next year concerning tax relief and whether there would be sufficient funds to avoid a tax increase. He implied that the lack of a surplus might lead to a lack of protection against rising taxes.

Selectman Steve Barry explained in 2021, the school returned \$1.2 million, resulting in immediate tax reduction. In 2023, the Board of Selectmen utilized \$1.5 million from the surplus for tax relief. This year, due to the absence of a surplus, taxes have returned to their previous levels with additional increases.

Mr. Aubrey raised a concern about the lack of a financial buffer due to the absence of a surplus, which left no room to provide tax relief this past year. The importance of consistently managing tax revenue was emphasized, as actions taken one year set expectations for the following year. Questions were posed regarding the current fund balance and the direction for the future, with a call for transparency on what can be expected in terms of tax relief and financial planning for the next year. He explained this information is crucial for all residents to know. Mr. Aubrey asked what was in the current fund balance and the Board did not give him a figure. He noted the voters need this information to make informed decisions in March.

***** Point of clarification for the minutes: the fund balance was not given at this meeting. For informational purposes a copy of the 2023 Tax Rate Breakdown will be attached to these minutes for reference. *****

Mr. Barry clarified he wasn't on the Board of Selectmen during the two years in question. He had warned that taxes would rise without surplus funds, which occurred. He stated that tax levels are unlikely to decrease and highlighted the need for voter involvement in town decisions.

Richard Boisvert of Church Street expressed dissatisfaction with Mr. Roy's motion to move directly to a vote on the overall budget without further discussion. Boisvert felt that by limiting debate, the opportunity for a comprehensive review and discussion of the budget by all members of the body was unfairly restricted, even though he personally viewed the proposed budget positively.

Andrea Hotaling of Lake View Lane, and member of the Municipal Budget Committee stated her opposition to the budget, citing excess funds in certain lines and the town's ability to operate within the default budget each year. She criticized the budget preparation process, suggesting it

lacks the flexibility to make cuts due to various constraints. Hotaling noted that while last year's taxation was affected by \$1.1 million in additional warrant articles on top of the default budget, this year's warrant articles total \$400,000, indicating a \$600,000 decrease in warrant articles up for a vote. Despite this, there is a roughly \$600,000 increase in the regular operating budget, which could result in the same tax rate of \$4.54 if all is approved. She advocated for reducing the proposed budget and approving only essential warrant articles. Hotaling also mentioned the challenges of a bottom-line budget, which can lead to imbalances in how funds are allocated. She concluded that even if everything is approved, including the default budget, there could be a tax decrease for the town, but acknowledged that the overall budget is set to increase due to reasons that will be discussed at the School's deliberative session.

Selectman William Huebner affirmed his role as the representative to the Municipal Budget Committee (MBC) and echoed the concerns raised by Andrea Hotaling about the budget. He noted that the Select Board as a whole endorses the budget, while the MBC narrowly recommends it. Huebner praised the MBC for improving its performance over previous year and endorsed the sentiment that the town is operating on a "bare bones" budget. He highlighted the efficiency of the town's operations within this budget, albeit with difficulties, and called for increased confidence among voters regarding the budgeting process. Huebner's comments suggest an endorsement of fiscal prudence and an appeal for voter support of the town's departments.

Mr. Aubrey raised concerns about the town's plastic recycling practices, questioning the effectiveness and honesty of the current system due to his surprise upon discovering potential issues. He reported making a stink about the matter, which led to expectations of an announcement from the board that has not yet materialized. He inquired about the status of plastic recycling and any associated costs within the budget, emphasizing the need for clarity on this issue, especially regarding any financial implications for the town's waste management budget. Additionally, he touched on the upcoming contract negotiations and the potential for decreased costs per ton for waste disposal, which could affect the overall budget.

Selectman Steve Barry informed the body that there is no longer a market for plastics. Alden Dill of Griffin Road noted that there is no existing market for these materials. He mentioned that there would be a reduced cost per ton for disposing of plastics if they are separated from general trash, despite ultimately being disposed of in the same location. Dill emphasized that the current focus is not on solving the issue of plastics but rather on the implications for the budget.

Terry Roy, Chair for the Municipal Budget Committee, clarified to a previous speaker that it was not his intent to squash conversation about the budget or suppress debate. He noted that the MBC had determined the budget to be as lean as possible, with no significant areas to reduce without compromising the town's essential services.

Andrea Hotaling of Lake View Lane brought up concerns regarding budgetary discrepancies in the town's growth and expenditures. She referenced page three of a document, noting that the appropriations line for highways and streets indicated a budget of \$1,151,934 as of December 31, 2023, but the actual spending was reported at \$388,807. She highlighted that this figure did not align with the known expenditures from warrant articles, pointing out that while \$250,000 of one article was fully spent, \$93,000 remained unspent from another. Andrea then directed attention to page 51 of the regular budget, detailing discrepancies in reported expenditures for highways and streets – with a budget of \$551,934 but spending of \$394,226. She also noted a budgeted \$257,000 for roads on line 4312.03.735 with no corresponding expenditure. Andrea questioned these inconsistencies and sought an explanation for the unspent funds and apparent budgetary mismatches.

John Harrington, the Town Administrator, clarified the budgetary issues raised by Andrea Hotaling. He stated that the town began with expenditures from the warrant articles, with one non-lapsing article still having a balance. The other, more general warrant article was fully expended. The \$257,000 allocated for fall projects was not spent because the projects could not be completed in time; adverse weather conditions and the inability to secure a commitment from the paving contractor before the season ended resulted in the funds remaining unutilized.

Andrea Hotaling asked if it was possible to adjust the allocation of the budget, specifically to spend more from the operating budget and preserve the remaining \$350,000 of the non-lapsing funds for future use. She inquired about the feasibility of reallocating expenditures to ensure that the non-lapsing dollars are the ones that remain unspent, considering the tightness of the budget and the importance of having non-lapsing funds available for subsequent periods.

Mr. Harrington responded by acknowledging that while it may seem straightforward to reassess financial decisions at the end of the year, it is more challenging to make those calls during the year without knowing future circumstances. He indicated the importance of making informed decisions in the moment and suggested that getting too caught up in the potential for future reallocations could complicate the process.

Zach Langlois emphasized the need for a budget increase to address the town's ongoing issues. He pointed out that while the budget committee is proposing a \$5 million budget, which he believes is necessary to start rectifying problems, there is a plan to approve only \$4.4 million. Langlois warned that this would lead to cost-saving measures, particularly in road maintenance and building upkeep, continuing a pattern of deferring essential maintenance that has been happening for the last 7 to 10 years. He cautioned that such deferrals will inevitably result in higher taxes later, as the town will face even greater expenses to reconstruct roads and rebuild buildings. Langlois argued that it's counterproductive to save a small amount now only to incur higher costs in the future. He advocated for providing the necessary funds to do the required work, highlighting the urgency of addressing the issue to prevent further deterioration of the town's infrastructure.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the zoning article on the ballot as written.

Article # 2 Shall the Town vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars **(\$150,000.00)** for the purpose of repair and/or reconstruction of existing roads and associated drainage improvements? Shall the Town further authorize the Board of Selectmen to accept any and all State Aid or other revenue source that may become available for this work. The funds will be used for the improvement, reconstruction, maintenance, crack sealing, engineering of roads and tree removals as needed. This will be a non-lapsing appropriation as per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until December 31, 2025.

Roadway Construction - Background: *Road rehabilitation and reconstruction continues to be a challenge. In an effort to work towards a goal of improving overall road conditions within the Town, these funds will be utilized to systematically improve roads based on the results of the Road Service Management System Report completed by NH Southern Planning Commission and in consultation with the Road Agent. Road program priorities are generally guided by road condition, traffic volumes, and opportunities to coordinate road construction with other projects.*

*Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 4-1-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 10-0-0
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.19*

Selectman Chair McGarry recapped previous discussions on road funding, reminding that a \$350,000 article was proposed at last year's town meeting. Following concerns about tax increases, the Board of Selectmen initially considered not allocating additional funds for roads. However, after several votes, they ultimately decided to designate an extra \$150,000 for road maintenance, acknowledging that while not a large sum, it would provide some additional resources for road work.

Mr. Schibbelhute provided an explanation for the unspent \$350,000 from last year, specifically the additional \$200,000 earmarked for fall paving projects that were not completed. The contractors were unable to commit to a completion date, and there was concern about leaving roads in disrepair heading into winter. He advised the Selectmen against starting projects that could result in unfinished gravel roads during inclement weather, which are difficult to maintain. He mentioned that proposals received last fall would be put out again for bids before the election, with their execution contingent on approval at the town meeting. He also referenced the recent paving of South Road, which cost over \$600,000 for 8,000 feet, and compared it to the estimated \$180,000 for the uncompleted projects. Schibbelhute highlighted the increase in costs related to paving and construction, suggesting that accomplishing more work would require more funding. He proposed increasing the budget for road work to \$500,000.

Amendment 1 Warrant Article 2

Mr. Schibbelhute made the following amendment, seconded by Zach Langlois.

“Shall the Town vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars **(\$500,000.00)** for the purpose of repair and/or reconstruction of existing roads and associated drainage improvements? Shall the Town further authorize the Board of Selectmen to accept any and all State Aid or other revenue source that may become available for this work. The funds will be used for the improvement, reconstruction, maintenance, crack sealing, engineering of roads and tree removals as needed. This will be a non-lapsing appropriation as per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until December 31, 2025.”

Discussion on Amendment:

Mr. Schibbelhute stated that the proposed increase is intended to enhance productivity in road maintenance. However, he acknowledged that the decision to allocate additional funds rests with the town's residents, who may have reservations about tax increases. He emphasized that road construction and repair are expensive and ultimately, the community must decide whether to invest in these services. The outcomes will depend on the available budget as determined by the town's people.

Mr. Langlois expressed support for the amendment, emphasizing the importance of allocating funds for town infrastructure repairs. He urged others to support the motion, noting that it is a nonmatching article, meaning the funds will roll over to the next year if not used, allowing for proper planning and utilization of the entire budget.

Mr. Boisvert, discussed the potential outcomes of voting on the proposed amendment. He highlighted the need to consider the likelihood of a \$500,000 budget passing, in contrast to a more modest \$150,000 starting point. He suggested that while he might support the larger amount personally, there is a risk that if it fails, the town could lose out on even the smaller amount. Mr. Boisvert emphasized the importance of considering the community's reaction to the budget figures when voting and the consequences of the decision, such as the extent of road repairs that can be funded. He did not strongly advocate for either option but wanted people to be mindful of the implications of their vote.

Selectman William Huebner, aligning with the previous speaker, suggested that it might be prudent to reduce the proposed amendment amount to ensure its passage. He referenced that the Selectmen initially proposed a \$350,000 budget, which they believed was significant yet reasonable for the town's needs without excessively increasing taxes. He recommended that the petitioner of the amendment consider reverting to this original proposed amount to enhance the likelihood of the motion's acceptance.

Selectman Barry expressed his support for allocating \$500,000 or even a higher amount for road maintenance, rather than the \$150,000 that was also proposed. He argued that \$150,000 would

be insufficient, only allowing for minimal repairs that would leave much of the necessary work unfinished. He emphasized the need to stop postponing maintenance and to provide the highway department with adequate resources to begin substantial repairs. He mentioned that the tax impact of a \$783,182 budget would be approximately \$1.64 per \$1,000, whereas a budget close to \$500,000 would result in a tax rate increase of just under 74 cents per \$1,000.

Ed Cross expressed support for any funding allocated to road maintenance as decided by the voters. However, he raised concerns about the order in which funds are utilized, specifically the use of monies from different accounts. He recommended a change in spending strategy: funds that do not carry over to the next fiscal year should be used first, followed by those that can roll over. This approach ensures that the full amount approved by voters for road repairs is used for that purpose, rather than being absorbed into other budget areas.

Judy Marshall of Poor Farm Road, echoed Mr. Cross's concerns, questioning how budget surpluses in general funds affect the allocation for road maintenance. She sought to understand the implications of these excess funds on whether the allocation for road repairs would increase, decrease, or remain at \$150,000, even if only the default budget is passed. She requested clarification on how to determine the actual change in funding for road maintenance.

Harriet Cady expressed concern about whether there is sufficient manpower and equipment to effectively spend the budgeted amount for road maintenance, in addition to an extra \$500,000. She mentioned that for years she has suggested the town should consider taking out a bond for a significant sum, such as \$10 million, to fully address and complete all necessary road repairs.

Deb Boisvert of Church Street inquired if the funds proposed in the amendment would be used to tackle the town's significant culvert repair issues, or if these issues are already being addressed through some other means.

Selectman McGarry confirmed that any funds approved through the warrant article could be allocated for culvert work, including replacements on Haines Road and elsewhere. He indicated that even if the amendment was not approved, there would still be available funds to proceed with the necessary culvert repairs.

Mr. Schibbelhute noted that the town has several culverts in need of replacement, including some large ones. He mentioned the possibility of receiving FEMA funds due to recent storm damage, which could cover up to 75% of the replacement costs, but emphasized that this funding is not guaranteed because all plans must be reviewed and approved by both the Department of Environmental Services (DES) and FEMA before any funds are allocated.

He also stated that while the existing warrant article with \$150,000 would contribute towards material costs for culvert repairs, it would not cover the full expense of larger projects like the Range Road culvert. He added that there are other culverts that may receive FEMA funds, but this is contingent on approval of the plans.

Mr. Schibbelhute further mentioned the town's efforts to issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for paving in advance of the elections to ensure timely allocation of approved funds and to avoid delays experienced in the previous year, where paving did not commence until late in the season. He stressed the importance of expediting RFPs to allow the Selectmen to direct the funds as soon as they are available.

Mrs. Marchionni of Meetinghouse Hill Road voiced her support for allocating funds to road maintenance, as she regularly travels Meetinghouse Hill Road and recognizes the need for improvements. She reiterated Ed Cross's point that there should be a conscientious effort to spend the money that doesn't carry over year to year first, to ensure that the funds voters approved for road repairs are actually used for that purpose. She mentioned that when roads remain unfixed despite approved funding, it undermines voter confidence and increases frustration, as voters may not fully understand why the work isn't completed if they approved funding for it. She advocated for careful monitoring of spending to prevent unused funds from creating skepticism among voters.

Jim Deely of Ridge Road, following up on the previous speaker's comments, sought clarification regarding spending decisions. He mentioned that there were funds intended for spending last year and referenced a proposal to increase a warrant article to \$500,000. Deely pointed out that the responsibility for unspent funds lies with the governing body. He asked for a commitment from the officials to ensure that if the allocation is increased to \$500,000, they would prioritize spending the allocated funds within the budget first.

Mr. Pretorius asked about a past study concerning the condition of local roads and whether the findings were made public. He sought information on the study's results and queried how the current road maintenance efforts align with the study's conclusions.

Selectman McGarry explained that a study was conducted by the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission in partnership with the Department of Transportation, assessing the condition of town roads in quarter-mile segments. The evaluation categorized road sections by their condition (good, fair, or poor) and suggested appropriate repairs. This information is available at the town offices and is utilized regularly to prioritize repairs based on traffic volume and the road's condition. Roads with high traffic and poor condition are given priority for repairs, while less-traveled, poorly conditioned roads may have a lower priority for funding and repair efforts.

Mr. Pretorius emphasized the importance of using the data from the road assessment study to inform budget decisions for road maintenance. He suggested that the results of the study, which identify the condition of road sections, should be the basis for a rational and quantifiable budget proposal. Instead of arbitrarily choosing an amount for the warrant article, he argued that the study provides the necessary information to propose a budget that effectively addresses the identified road issues. He expressed concern that not utilizing the study's findings

could contribute to a lack of confidence, indicating a disconnect between understanding the road maintenance issues and the commitment to resolving them.

Mr. McGarry addressed concerns regarding changes in road conditions since the study was conducted five years prior. He acknowledged that roads deteriorate at varying rates, and as a result, road sections that were once in fair condition may still be in fair condition or could have deteriorated to poor condition. Therefore, the priorities for road maintenance are not fixed but need to be adjusted as road conditions change over time.

Moderator cautioned Mr. Pretorius to stay on point.

Mr. Pretorius argued that the approach to budgeting for road maintenance is inadequate because it lacks a strong connection to the existing data from the road study. He criticized the current method of proposing budget numbers as arbitrary and akin to a coin flip, rather than being data-driven. He expressed frustration with the town's failure to utilize available data to address the serious issue of road maintenance.

Mr. Dill briefly noted that the road study estimated a cost of seven and a half million dollars to restore the roads that were in bad condition to normal condition at the time of the study. He pointed out that, over the last decade, the town has not spent the full seven and a half million dollars on road repairs.

Rebecca Hutchinson of Lang Road moved the question, seconded from the floor.

Moderator called for a vote on the amendment:

Ayes have it; amendment approved. Amended article will read as following:

"Shall the Town vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00) for the purpose of repair and/or reconstruction of existing roads and associated drainage improvements? Shall the Town further authorize the Board of Selectmen to accept any and all State Aid or other revenue source that may become available for this work. The funds will be used for the improvement, reconstruction, maintenance, crack sealing, engineering of roads and tree removals as needed. This will be a non-lapsing appropriation as per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until December 31, 2025."

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 4-1-0

Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 10-0-0

Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.64

BACK TO THE MAIN MOTION

Mr. Langlois suggested that for the following year, consideration should be given to creating a trust fund for road maintenance. This would allow the town to accumulate a larger sum of money, or "kitty," to manage substantial projects and to set aside more funds for this purpose.

Jeanne Menard of Mountain Road requested feedback on Mrs. Cady's suggestion to bond the road work. She inquired whether bonding is a reasonable approach to consider for addressing the significant and ongoing financial needs of road maintenance.

Selectman Barry indicated that before the tax reprise, there was a plan to issue a \$5 million bond to fund road repairs. He noted that bonding for road work is not a common practice but given the substantial amount of money needed to address road maintenance—starting from \$7 million—he is certainly considering the possibility of moving forward with such a bond because of the current situation.

Mr. McGarry highlighted that the challenge with issuing a bond for road repairs is that it requires a two-thirds majority vote, not just a simple majority, which could make it more difficult to pass this measure.

Mrs. Cady commented on a past instance where additional funds were available, and the consensus among attendees at a Selectmen meeting was to allocate roughly \$400,000 for road repairs. However, she observed that these funds have not been spent on the roads. She noted that she has attended Selectmen meetings and did not witness any discussions about using the money for road work. She expressed that the Selectmen should be proactive in addressing road maintenance rather than being pressured by the public to take action. Mrs. Cady also mentioned that she has been advocating for the introduction of a bond to fund road repairs for four or five years and that others are now voicing the same suggestion.

Ms. Menard acknowledged the need for a two-thirds majority vote for bonding and expressed concern about achieving this level of support. She suggested that the responsibility should not rest solely on the Select Board because the issue of road maintenance affects the entire town. She proposed that as citizens, they have a responsibility to assist in garnering the necessary votes, indicating that it is in the best interest of all taxpayers and community members to take part in this initiative.

Selectman Huebner expressed agreement with the previous speaker regarding the notion that the responsibility for road maintenance funding should not fall entirely on the Board of Selectmen. He clarified that the Selectmen do not decide on the amount of money spent in the town, as every expenditure is approved by the voters on election day. The Selectmen's role is to determine how to allocate the approved funds, including making decisions about budget adjustments and prioritizations.

Additionally, he emphasized the power of the town's citizens, stating that if the town collectively wishes to undertake a project, it can be approved through the voting process without being forced by the Selectmen.

Lastly, Selectman Huebner shared a personal viewpoint against the idea of bonding for road repairs. He suggested that borrowing money would lead to increased taxes and make road repairs more costly in the long run. He expressed strong opposition to the concept of bonding

for such purposes, advocating instead for directly funding road maintenance without accruing additional debt.

Mr. Rhodes of Church Street stated that it is the responsibility of the Board of Selectmen to have a plan for road maintenance, whether that involves issuing a bond or taking other actions. He highlighted the importance of the Board having a strategy in place as this would instill confidence among the voters in the town.

The Moderator called for final comments on the article.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Zach Langlois of South Rd. Made a motion to restrict any further amendments to Warrant Article 1, seconded by the floor.

Moderator called for a vote on restricting the Warrant Article 1.

Ayes have it, motion passed.

~~The Moderator took a moment during the meeting to express gratitude to the Deerfield Women's Club for supplying delicious food and coffee service for the morning gathering. This gesture of appreciation was met with a round of applause from those in attendance. ~~

Article # 3 To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Seventy Thousand Dollars **(\$70,000)** to be placed in the previously established Cemetery General Maintenance Expendable Reserve Fund.

INFORMATION: The balance of the trust fund as of 11/30/2023 is \$66,900.00

*Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 4-1-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 9-1-0
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.09*

Selectman Huebner discussed the original budget proposal, noting that the initial figure was \$113,000. After deliberation, the Board concluded that \$70,000 might be a more realistic amount for a warrant article that voters would approve. To facilitate this, the Board devised a strategy to include the regular budget amount and present the additional \$70,000 to equal the \$113,000 as a separate warrant article, believing this approach would have a better chance of gaining voter approval.

Phil Bilodeau from the Cemetery Commission supported earlier comments and added that although Deerfield has over 100 cemeteries, with 28 owned by the town, currently only 6 of these are being maintained. He mentioned that the Cemetery Committee has been trying to increase care for these cemeteries, which is a requirement under state law. However, due to the town operating under a default budget for several years, it has been challenging to meet this obligation. As an example of the costs involved, he cited a family cemetery owned by the town that has fallen into disrepair. Recent estimates for tree removal were around \$20,000, and general cleanup costs were about \$30,000, totaling an expense of approximately \$50,000 for just one cemetery.

Mrs. Hotaling, from Lakeview Lane, addressed the issue of cemetery funding. She referred to a document not widely available, highlighting that last year's warrant article number seven included a vote to allocate \$55,000 for establishing a columbarium with niches as an alternative to a regular cemetery. She observed that according to this document, none of the \$55,000 had been spent. Mrs. Hotaling sought confirmation that these funds remained available for the cemetery trustees to use for their intended purpose.

Mr. Bilodeau confirmed that the town of Deerfield had indeed sought proposals for the construction of a columbarium, which is a structure with niches for holding cremated remains. He mentioned that a contract had been signed with a company from Massachusetts to install the columbarium at the cemetery on Old Centre Road in the upcoming spring. He explained that a significant portion of the allocated funds went to the columbarium company, and the rest was contracted out for landscaping around the structure. Mr. Bilodeau assured that all the money had been committed to these purposes.

Mr. Langlois reflected on the financial shortfall in the cemetery budget. He stated that the cemetery trustees require \$113,000 to fulfill their obligations to the cemeteries in the Commonwealth, but the current budget allocates only \$43,000. This creates a deficit of \$70,000 right from the start. He emphasized that this shortfall should not be addressed by seeking funds separately but should be included in the main budget. He expressed concern that the budget is significantly off the mark by \$70,000, which is not a trivial amount given the overall town budget. Mr. Langlois urged that both the community and the Board of Selectmen need to do better in budgeting to meet their responsibilities, highlighting the importance of community involvement in financial decisions.

Mr. Boisvert raised a concern that the information provided for warrant article 3 might be misleading to voters. He noted that while the funds are already committed, as stated by Phil, this detail may not be clear to voters in the voting booth, leading them to question why the money wasn't spent. He inquired whether an amendment was necessary to ensure the information accurately reflects the committed funds, or if the Selectmen could address this discrepancy on their own, as it pertains to details about the article itself.

Mr. Bilodeau clarified that the funds for the columbarium were from a separate article last year and have been entirely spent. The \$1,000 in question is actually the balance of a trust fund. He drew a parallel to road maintenance funds, explaining that if contractors do not carry out the work, the money isn't spent. The intent behind retaining the balance is to continue efforts to catch up on the necessary work.

Mrs. Marchionni, a resident of Meetinghouse Hill, commented on the significant tree work needed for the large maple trees in the cemetery at the top of the hill. She warned that without proper tree care, there is a risk of losing these trees. She emphasized that the cost of such tree work is very high, making the current financial allocation a small amount in comparison. She expressed her support for the funding, implying it was necessary despite the expense.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

Article # 4 To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Sixty-Seven Thousand Eight-Hundred Twenty-six Dollars (**\$67,826.00**), which includes additional wages and required benefits, for the purpose of providing cost-of-living adjustment to Town employees in the amount of 3.2%.

*Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 3-2-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee*

10-0-0

Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.09

Selectman McGarry presented the warrant article, the purpose of which is to provide a 3.2% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for all town employees. This percentage aligns with the COLA given to Social Security recipients. McGarry, along with the majority, felt that this adjustment was a fair measure to maintain town employees' salaries in line with inflation and the cost of living.

Mr. Huebner clarified that he was speaking as a citizen, not as a representative of the selectmen, due to the intention of proposing an amendment. He emphasized his desire to ensure that town employees are well-compensated but voiced concerns about the proposed 3.2% COLA on top of the previous year's 5% increase. With the inflation rate decreasing to the 3-4% range, he questioned the necessity of an 8.2% increase over a short period, considering that wages are unlikely to decrease if inflation continues to fall.

He argued that a better approach would be for the Selectmen to conduct performance reviews and assess total compensation relative to market rates, rather than applying COLAs without such evaluations. He suggested that salary administration should be handled more responsibly and fairly, both for the employees and taxpayers.

Thus, Mr. Huebner proposed an amendment to make the COLA advisory to the Select board, allowing them to adjust it based on performance reviews and market comparisons. Additionally, he suggested reducing the COLA approved by voters to 1.2%, noting that the exact number is less important if the COLA is advisory, as the board can then adjust it as necessary. He recommended that if the COLA is to be approved, it should be done with these conditions.

Mr. Huebner proposed two separate amendments regarding the COLA. His primary focus is on making the COLA advisory only, and he suggests voting on this aspect first. If the advisory-only amendment does not pass, he proposes a second amendment, which includes both the advisory condition and a reduced COLA amount. He clarified that these are two distinct amendments and emphasized the initial vote should be on making the COLA advisory to the Select board.

Amendment 1 Warrant Article 4

The Moderator read Mr. Huebner's proposed amendment as follows:

“Advisory only - To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Sixty-Seven Thousand Eight-Hundred Twenty-six Dollars (**\$67,826.00**), which includes additional wages and required benefits, for the purpose of providing cost-of-living adjustment to Town employees in the amount of 3.2%.”

The Moderator called for a second on the proposed amendment. Seeing no second, the proposed amendment was defeated.

Amendment 2 Warrant Article 4

The Moderator read Mr. Huebner's second proposed amendment to Warrant Article 4 as follows:

“To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty Five Thousand Four-Hundred Thirty-Five Dollars (\$25,435), which includes additional wages and required benefits, for the purpose of providing cost-of-living adjustment to Town Employees in the amount of 1.2%.”

The Moderator called for a second on the proposed amendment. Seconded by Kathy Huebner.

Discussion on Amendment 2 Warrant Article 4

Mr. Pretorius acknowledged that while the inflation rate has decreased in the recent year or two, taking a longer view starting from COVID in 2019/2020 to the present, the overall inflation has significantly exceeded the rates. Consequently, he expressed his support for the proposed 3.2% cost of living adjustment. Mr. Boisvert expressed his disagreement with the idea of basing the cost-of-living adjustment solely on the current inflation rate, which is hypothetically 3%. He pointed out that previous rates have been higher, such as 6%, and those rates compound over time, so referencing only the current lower rate is misleading. He related his personal

experience, stating that his Social Security benefits increased by 3.2% this year, following a 5% increase from the year before. He argued that what the Selectmen are proposing aligns with the national approach to cost-of-living increases, which he considers appropriate and not excessive. Mr. Boisvert concluded by suggesting that the amendment seeking to lower the increase should be rejected and the 3.2% increase should be upheld.

Mr. Langlois highlighted the impact of a 3.2% increase on a \$50,000 salary, which amounts to \$1,600 a year or \$31 a week. He stressed that this modest increase does not even cover the rising costs that every family experiences at the grocery store. He suggested that questioning or attempting to reduce this \$31 weekly increase for an employee earning \$50,000 a year is unreasonable, given the small amount in the context of everyday living expenses.

Linda McNair-Perry emphasized that cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and merit raises or assessments can coexist; one does not exclude the other. She pointed out that most businesses operate this way, allowing for both standard living cost adjustments and merit-based raises. This practice ensures that promotions and salary increases based on performance are still possible. She firmly supported the 3.2% COLA, indicating that she sees no conflict between it and merit-based compensation systems.

Mrs. Cady expressed her concerns about the process of determining raises, particularly for elected officials compared to full-time and part-time employees. She observed that when voting for raises, the focus should be on employees, not elected positions. Cady noted that the treasurer's salary has increased significantly over time and questioned how these decisions are made, suggesting the need for a closer examination of who receives raises.

She highlighted a distinction between full-time and part-time employees, arguing that part-time employees should not receive the same raises, and that the system of awarding increases needs to be managed better. While not opposed to raises for full-time employees, she is against raises that benefit elected officials, who should not receive pay increases based on the roles they were elected to fulfill.

Mrs. Cady also touched upon the issue of Social Security, where recipients received an approximately 8% increase due to inflation, and asked others to consider whether it's the obligation of an employer to match inflation with salary increases. She questioned if such raises contribute to a cycle that perpetuates inflation, suggesting it might not be prudent to automatically give raises based on inflation rates. She called for thoughtful consideration of this issue.

Mr. Pretorius referenced Kelly Roberts, the elected town clerk/tax collector, suggesting she is likely the only elected official being discussed in the context of raises and noted her significant popularity in the town. He expressed disagreement with the previous speaker on the topic of salary increases in relation to inflation for elected officials. He argued that as a business owner, it is crucial to offer salaries that keep up with inflation to retain talent; otherwise, employees might be tempted to seek employment elsewhere due to non-competitive wages. He

emphasized the challenge of finding suitable replacements for these positions if they become vacant. Despite his general aversion to the idea of tax money being used to increase salaries, Mr. Pretorius acknowledged the necessity of providing fair compensation to elected officials like Kelly Roberts to maintain a stable and effective town workforce.

Mr. Huebner emphasized the importance of fair compensation for town employees, suggesting that they should be paid not just adequately but profitably. He advocated for the use of performance reviews and a salary administration approach that aligns with the prevailing local rates for the services the town requires. Positioning the town's operations as a business, he pointed out that like any business, the town should pay its employees based on the value of the services they provide, ensuring that their compensation reflects their contributions.

Alden Dill of Griffin Road moved the question. Seconded by the floor.

BACK TO MAIN MOTION

Mr. Cross emphasized the importance of adopting a business-like approach to operations rather than adhering to the status quo that leads to uncontrollable increases. He expressed appreciation for the Selectmen's perspective and supported the idea of making Article 4 advisory only, to empower them to manage operations as a regular business would.

Mr. Boisvert challenged the notion that town government should be operated like a business, noting that while certain aspects of government may be business-like, the primary objective is to serve the will of the people, not to maximize profit. He pointed out that the government sometimes undertakes actions that do not yield profit but are beneficial for the community, thereby rejecting the idea that the town's government functions as a business.

Mrs. Cady asked for clarification on the number of full-time and part-time employees associated with the expenditure of \$67,826.

The Town Administrator stated that the town currently employs 19 full-time and 36 part-time employees.

April Purinton of Middle Road expressed concern over the ongoing debate regarding the town's budget and the comparison of the town's management to a business. She emphasized that the town is a community focused on raising children and families, and that this perspective seems to have been lost in the discussions. She argued that continuously viewing the town through a business lens is causing recurring issues and that it's important to remember and prioritize the community aspect, especially for those who wish to raise their families in this environment, rather than treating it as a business.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

Article # 5 (Will be Article 6 on the March Ballot) To see if the town will raise and appropriate the sum of Thirty-Five Thousand, Eight Hundred Eighty Dollars **(\$35,880.00)** for additional part-time Fire Fighter / EMT hours in the Deerfield Fire/Rescue Department. Should this article pass, it would only be funded in the event that the 2024 Operating Budget fails to pass. This request has been supported by the BOS and MBC during the municipal budgeting process.

*Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 5-0-0
Not Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 5-5-0
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.05*

Mr. Huebner identified a potential point of confusion within the text of this warrant article. Although the article has the support of the Board of Selectmen, the Municipal Budget Committee is evenly split on the matter, resulting in a tie vote. As a result of the tie, the warrant article therefore should be recorded as not recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee. Mr. Huebner implied that this could be misleading to the voters.

Chief Fisher advocated for the support of an article requesting additional part-time firefighter and EMT staffing as a contingency in case the budget does not pass, similar to a situation encountered in previous years. He recounted that in 2018, the part-time program began with approximately 60 hours of assistance per week, essentially one person working 12-hour days from Monday to Friday. In 2021, an additional 30 hours of staffing were sought through the budget and a backup warrant article; the budget failed, but the warrant article passed.

Chief Fisher is now requesting the same additional 30 hours to ensure two staff members are present Monday to Friday, from 6 am to 6 pm, and to provide coverage on weekends with one person at the station on Saturdays and Sundays. He supported his request with statistics, citing that the previous year was the busiest for the department with 570 calls—76% of which were EMS-related, and 235 of those were vital transports. On weekends, there were 136 calls, and for seven of them, no one was available to respond, highlighting the need for additional staffing.

Mr. Huebner expressed his support for the article concerning additional funding for part-time firefighter and EMT hours but proposed an amendment to clarify the recommendation status. His amendment would specify that while the request for funding has been recommended by the Board of Selectmen, it has not been recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee during the budget process.

Amendment 1 Warrant Article 5

Mr. Huebner proposed the following amendment, seconded by the floor:

“To see if the town will raise and appropriate the sum of Thirty-Five Thousand, Eight Hundred Eighty Dollars **(\$35,880.00)** for additional part-time Fire Fighter / EMT hours in the Deerfield

Fire/Rescue Department. Should this article pass, it would only be funded in the event that the 2024 Operating Budget fails to pass.

This request has been recommended by the Board of Selectmen but has not been recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee during the municipal budgeting process.”

Moderator called for discussion on the amendment.

Ms. Menard sought clarification on why the language concerning recommendation status is included in the text of the article itself, rather than just being part of the informational section, as has been the case historically. She inquired about the reasoning behind this departure from precedent.

Mrs. Hotaling suggested resolving the issue by simply removing the last sentence rather than rewording it. She noted that since the recommendations are already present, the last sentence could be eliminated.

Mr. Huebner expressed his desire to withdraw his amendment. The Moderator suggested that the body vote on the current amendment and to can take up a Second Amendment after the vote.

Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 5

Motion defeated.

BACK TO THE MAIN MOTION

Amendment 2 Warrant Article 5

Mr. Huebner proposed the following amendment, seconded by the floor:

“To see if the town will raise and appropriate the sum of Thirty-Five Thousand, Eight Hundred Eighty Dollars **(\$35,880.00)** for additional part-time Fire Fighter / EMT hours in the Deerfield Fire/Rescue Department. Should this article pass, it would only be funded in the event that the 2024 Operating Budget fails to pass.”

Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 2 of Warrant Article 5

Ayes have, amendment passes.

BACK TO AMENDED MOTION

Mrs. McNair-Perry offered a point that might lead to an amendment for clarity. She discussed the financial implications of the amendment relating to a 2.05% increase but clarified that such an increase would only be applicable if the proposed budget is not enacted and the town defaults to the previous budget. She questioned whether this was correct, indicating that her point might not constitute an amendment itself but could necessitate one for clarity on the financial impact of the article.

Mrs. Hotaling responded by referencing information in the budget documentation indicating a 3.06% increase if the default budget is passed. She clarified that the subject of the discussion, the proposed amendment, would represent an additional five cents on top of that increase.

Mr. Barry emphasized that the wording in the article is already clear regarding the scenario of the budget article failing. He reiterated that it states plainly what will happen if the budget article does not pass.

Suzanne Steele from Harvey Road made a comment appreciating the town's emergency services, emphasizing their importance based on her personal experience where she was fortunate to have help when she needed it. She also posed a question asking if any explanations could be provided regarding why the Municipal Budget Committee had a split decision on the matter being discussed.

Mrs. Hotaling explained her perspective as part of the group of the Municipal Budget Committee that opposed the proposal. She provided insight into her stance, noting that there were challenges in filling the existing part-time hours with the current staff. She suggested that this difficulty in staffing raised concerns about the feasibility of hiring additional personnel to cover the new hours proposed in the amendment.

Mr. Langlois expressed concern about the recurring issue of inadequate coverage within the fire department, which had led to instances where they were unable to respond. He highlighted that both the fire chief and the selectmen have indicated a need for more coverage.

Amendment 3 Warrant Article 5

Mrs. McNair-Perry proposed the following amendment to the recommendations portion of the article, seconded by the floor:

“Estimated Tax Impact / \$1,000.00 of the Assessed Property Value if the Proposed Budget Passes = \$0.00.

“Estimated Tax Impact / \$1,000.00 of the Assessed Property Value if the Proposed Budget Passes = \$0.05.”

DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENT

Mrs. McNair-Perry shared her personal experience with the emergency services, stating that she had to call 911 numerous times and has always had someone show up to assist her. Her experiences have led her to strongly support the amendment, as she wishes to ensure that others can also receive timely emergency support when needed. She emphasized that her comments were aimed at clarifying the purpose of the amendment and rallying more support for it.

Mr. Huebner agreed with the points made by the previous speaker and acknowledged that while he wasn't entirely opposed to Barry's viewpoint, he believed it's important for voters to

have clear information about their options and the tax implications of those options. He emphasized the value of providing voters with details that help them understand the consequences of their choices.

Mrs. Cady requested clarification regarding the emergency response system, expressing her understanding that there should not have been a missed call because she believed there was a backup arrangement with Raymond in place.

Chief Fisher clarified that the specific incident of non-response mentioned by Mr. Langlois was an instance where Deerfield did not respond, but eventually, Raymond did respond to the call.

Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 3 of Warrant Article 5

Ayes have, amendment passes.

Amended language will appear on the ballot as follows:

“To see if the town will raise and appropriate the sum of Thirty-Five Thousand, Eight Hundred Eighty Dollars (\$35,880.00) for additional part-time Fire Fighter / EMT hours in the Deerfield Fire/Rescue Department. Should this article pass, it would only be funded in the event that the 2024 Operating Budget fails to pass.

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 5-0-0

Not Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 5-5-0

*Estimated Tax Impact / \$1,000.00 of the Assessed Property Value if the Proposed Budget Passes
= \$0.00*

*Estimated Tax Impact / \$1,000.00 of the Assessed Property Value if the Proposed Budget Passes
= \$0.05*

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Article # 6 (Will be Article 5 on the March Ballot) To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars **(\$25,000)** to be placed in the previously established Highway Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. The fund will have a cap at \$300,000.00 in principal.

INFORMATION: The balance of the trust fund as of 9/30/2023 is \$75,393.79

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 3-2-0

Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 10-0-0

Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.03

Selectman McGarry introduced Article 6, noting that the Highway Department has various needs. He discussed acquiring quotes for a roller, which is important for maintaining the

numerous roads. He indicated that the purchase of a roller was not imminent but used this as an example of the department's challenges related to equipment shortages. He suggested that these issues might be further elaborated upon to explain potential consequences.

Mr. Schibbelhute explained the current state of the town's snow plowing equipment, noting that one truck is 30 years old and another is 15 years old. The oldest truck recently required repairs, including work on the drive shaft before a snowstorm, and maintaining these trucks has been costly. He informed that the cost of a new truck, fully equipped for snow plowing, is \$238,000. While acknowledging the town's financial constraints, he expressed that any funding, similar to the previous year's amount or even the proposed \$25,000, would be beneficial, although it is much less than the cost of a new truck. He indicated openness to suggestions for different funding amounts to be added to the expendable trust fund and welcomed amendments and discussions on the article.

Joanna Waring of South Road inquired about a discrepancy in the materials provided for a town vote. She observed that a specific line indicating "for information" was missing from the ballot but was present in the voter's guide. She sought clarification from the town administrator on whether this information was intentionally omitted from the ballot. The town administrator confirmed her observation, indicating that the line in question was indeed only included in the voter's guide.

Mr. Langlois requested clarification on the intent of the article. He asked whether it was solely for the maintenance of existing equipment or if it could also be utilized for acquiring new equipment.

The Town Administrator confirmed that the article was solely for maintenance.

Leah McHugh of Harvey Road and member of the Municipal Budget Committee clarified that the process in question does not allow for the purchase of new items; it is specifically intended for the maintenance of existing vehicles.

Zach Langlois, asserting his knowledge about equipment, recommended an amendment to the proposed financial figures for fleet maintenance. He suggested that \$25,000 is insufficient for an aging fleet, and even \$100,000 would not significantly impact maintenance given the current state and age of the fleet. Although conceding that the main motion would result in some improvements and extend the lifespan of the old equipment, he proposed increasing the maintenance budget to \$50,000.

Amendment 1 Warrant Article 6

Mr. Langlois made the following amendment, seconded by the floor as follows:

"To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars (**\$50,000**) to be placed in the previously established Highway Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. The fund will have a cap at \$300,000.00 in principal."

DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENT

Mr. Langlois commented on the age and condition of the town's equipment, stating that it is significantly outdated, some being older than many of the people present. He pointed out that as equipment ages, maintenance costs and the frequency of repairs increase. He emphasized the lack of a replacement plan and the absence of funds set aside for replacing large, expensive items. Maintenance costs to keep the equipment roadworthy are rising, with expenses such as engine and transmission replacements for their size of equipment ranging from \$30,000 to \$60,000, and axle replacements could be as much as \$70,000.

He argued that the current budget is insufficient for these costs but acknowledged it as a starting point, hoping it might allow the equipment to last another year. He suggested that in the following year, funds could be allocated for equipment replacement. Mr. Langlois then addressed the proposed amendment to increase the maintenance budget to \$50,000, clarifying that this increase is on top of \$76,000 already allocated, not the total amount. He stressed that the discussion was not just about the additional amount but the total funding for maintenance.

Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 6

The Ayes have it, amendment passes.

BACK TO AMENDED MOTION

Mr. Dill expressed his interest in making an amendment to Article 6, believing that it was originally intended as a repair and replacement warrant article, which aligned with his interest. He seemed to recall that the article was supposed to address repair and replacement, and since the article was particularly important to him, he was disappointed to see it had not been written in that manner. He inquired if it would be possible to amend the article to reflect this repair and replacement focus after funds were added.

However, he was informed by the moderator and counsel that he could not make such an amendment at that point.

Claudia Libis of Maple Ave suggested that it would be beneficial for voters to understand the rental costs of equipment if the town did not have operational equipment of its own.

The Moderator explained that adding this information would change the subject of the article and that her suggestion was not actionable at the moment.

Mr. Langlois provided information on rental costs, stating that renting a roller can cost between \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month, indicating that these expenses accumulate rapidly.

Mrs. Hotaling referenced the historical scope of Article 6, which appeared to allow for equipment replacement in addition to repairs. She noted that last year's wording of Article Six

included the establishment of a highway vehicle and equipment maintenance expendable trust fund specifically for maintenance and repair, with a provision to purchase vehicles or equipment if repair was not feasible. The fund was set up with an initial amount of \$75,000.

She pointed out that, despite the name of the fund possibly being misleading, it did exist with the capacity to purchase equipment. However, she observed that this year's article lacked the same wording, suggesting a change in the fund's purpose. She asked for clarification on the current use of the fund, expressing concern about the availability of funds for purchases when repairs are impractical. She used the metaphor of one's personal vehicle to illustrate the impracticality of continuously repairing a vehicle beyond its useful life, suggesting a point at which it is wiser to invest in a new one.

Legal counsel responded to Mrs. Hotaling's question by affirming that the fund, as previously established, can indeed be used for the purposes she mentioned. They confirmed that it is permissible to utilize the fund for maintenance, repairs, and the purchase of vehicles or equipment when repairs are not feasible.

Mr. Cross from Pond Road expressed his desire to have an amendment drafted for the article under discussion, to include the exact language that was previously approved. He believes that the current wording is confusing and that reinstating the original language would make the article clearer. He indicated interest in seeing the previously used language restored to mitigate confusion.

Amendment 2 Warrant Article 6

Jeanne Menard of Mountain Road proposed the following amendment language, seconded by the floor as follows:

“To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars (**\$50,000**) to be placed in the previously established Highway Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. For the purpose of general vehicle and maintenance and repairs with the ability to purchase any vehicle or piece of equipment, should repairs not be possible. The fund will have a cap at \$300,000.00 in principal.”

DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENT 2 OR WARRANT ARTICLE 6

Ms. Menard expressed her hope that the changes being discussed would eliminate the need for clarifications in the future and that they would address any gaps in the original intent of the article in question.

Legal counsel confirmed that the language being considered for the amendment matches exactly with the wording from the previous year's warrant. They wanted to ensure that this language would not change the subject matter of the current article, emphasizing the need for it to be the same as before.

Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 2 of Warrant Article 6

The Ayes have it, amendment passes.

Amended language will appear on the ballot as follows:

“To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000) to be placed in the previously established Highway Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. For the purpose of general vehicle and maintenance and repairs with the ability to purchase any vehicle or piece of equipment, should repairs not be possible. The fund will have a cap at \$300,000.00 in principal.”

*Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 3-2-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 10-0-0
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.06*

BACK TO AMENDED MOTION

Mr. Schibbelhute commended the highway crew for their excellent work in maintaining the town's trucks, attributing their longevity, such as a truck that is 30 years old, to their care. However, he noted that even with good maintenance, the costs and efforts to keep the older vehicles operational are increasing. He mentioned that a newer truck was scheduled for a check-up to address an engine control issue related to idling, emphasizing the importance of not disassembling the truck unless it can be fixed due to the lack of backup vehicles.

He also brought up an older truck that required work on its springs and engine, suggesting that it requires more maintenance with each year. Mr. Schibbelhute echoed previous sentiments about the cost-effectiveness of continual repairs on aging vehicles, acknowledging that there may come a point when it no longer makes sense to invest in repairs. Despite this, he praised the value obtained from the trucks due to diligent maintenance, highlighting the age of the 30-year-old truck and the potential for critical components like piston walls and crankshafts to fail.

Mr. Langlois responded to Mr. Schibbelhute's comments by suggesting an amendment to increase the warrant article amount of money from \$50,000 to \$175,000.00. He noted that such an increase in funding would be significant and explained that while an average of \$50,000 has been adequate and a good starting point, the town should prepare for the eventual need to replace the vehicles. His proposed motion specifically aimed to change the funding from \$50,000 to \$175,000.

Amendment 3 Warrant Article 6

Mr. Langlois made the following amendments, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

““To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$175,000) to be placed in the previously established Highway Vehicle and Equipment

Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. For the purpose of general vehicle and maintenance and repairs with the ability to purchase any vehicle or piece of equipment, should repairs not be possible. The fund will have a cap at \$300,000.00 in principal.”

DISCUSSION ON THE AMENDMENT

Rebecca Hutchinson from Lang Road urged the body to defeat the amendment proposing increased funding. She referred to a saying that politics, like government, is the art of what's possible, expressing concern that proposing excessively high numbers might risk losing funding altogether. She emphasized her support for a more moderate increase to ensure broader support within the entire town, not just among those present at the meeting. Hutchinson feared that proposing an amendment for as much as \$175,000.00 might lead to the entire motion being rejected by the wider community, suggesting that a more modest proposal is more likely to succeed.

Mr. McGarry agreed with the previous speaker's concerns, acknowledging that while \$175,000 would enable the purchase of a new vehicle given the current fund balance, he recognized that the amount might be too high for voters. He suggested that even though \$175,000 would contribute significantly towards a new truck, it would be more prudent to stick with the proposed \$50,000.

Mr. Schibbelhute expressed that while \$175,000 would be beneficial for purchasing a new truck, he believes it is better to maintain the proposed \$50,000 figure. He acknowledged that \$50,000 is a substantial sum and emphasized the goal of extending the current truck's service life as much as possible. He concurred that seeking a \$175,000 increase in one go might be overly ambitious.

Erroll Rhodes from Church Street commended the thriftiness and frugality of the department's employees. He expressed the opinion that increasing funding to \$175,000 would be a departure from the town's traditionally careful spending and cautioned against it.

Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 3 of Warrant Article 6

The Nays have it, amendment is defeated.

BACK TO THE AMENDED ARTICLE

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as previously amended.

Article # 7 To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of up to Twenty Thousand Dollars **(\$20,000)** to be placed in the previously established Municipal Government Buildings And Related Infrastructure Expendable Trust Fund.

INFORMATION: The balance of the trust fund as of 9/30/2022 is \$25,231.03.

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 4-1-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 10-0-0
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.03

Selectman McGarry introduced Article 7, stating it would fund repairs for town buildings, notably the replacement of a failing septic system shared by the town hall, fire station, and library. He cited recent maintenance, including library roof repairs and town office refurbishments, as examples of the fund's utility.

Joanna Waring commented on the phrasing of the proposed article, specifically the phrase "up to \$20,000." She proposed a motion to amend the wording to a flat \$20,000 rather than "up to \$20,000," since the money is coming from taxes and should be a consistent figure, similar to the fund allocation from the previous year.

Amendment 1 Warrant Article 7

Mrs. Waring made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

"To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000) to be placed in the previously established Municipal Government Buildings And Related Infrastructure Expendable Trust Fund."

DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 7

The ayes have it, amendment is passes.

BACK TO THE AMENDED ARTICLE

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Article # 8 To see if the town will vote to establish a Philbrick James Library Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund per RSA 31:19-a, for the purpose of general maintenance and repair to the building and grounds of the Library building; and to raise and appropriate Twenty Thousand Dollars **(\$20,000.00)** to put in the fund; further to name the Library Trustees as agents to expend from said fund. The fund will have a cap at \$30,000.00 in principal.

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 3-2-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 8-1-1
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.03

April Purinton, a Library Trustee, emphasized the significance of the article for the library, especially given their current financial situation and the recent changes in budget allocation. She explained that due to the Board of Selectmen's decision to put the Library Trustees in charge of the library's facilities, they can no longer depend on the general government buildings maintenance fund for necessary repairs. The trustees now have the sole responsibility for overseeing the library's maintenance and management. Therefore, the trust fund is crucial for sustaining the upkeep of the historic library building, which has many needs, including addressing leaks. Purinton expressed the trustees' commitment to preserving and improving the library space for the benefit of all residents and requested community support to protect this asset for both present and future generations.

Kim Black of Meetinghouse Hill Road expressed concern about imposing a cap on the trust fund, especially in light of the logistical discussions earlier in the meeting regarding the use and intention of trust funds. She questioned whether the \$30,000 cap was a legal requirement under the RSA (Revised Statutes Annotated) and upon learning that it was not, she proposed an amendment to remove the sentence that set the fund's cap at \$30,000.

Amendment 1 Warrant Article 8

Ms. Black made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

“To see if the town will vote to establish a Philbrick James Library Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund per RSA 31:19-a, for the purpose of general maintenance and repair to the building and grounds of the Library building; and to raise and appropriate Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000.00) to put in the fund; further to name the Library Trustees as agents to expend from said fund.”

DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Alden Dill of Griffin Road contributed to the discussion by pointing out the impact of inflation on the cost of building materials. He mentioned that while \$40,000 might currently suffice for a roof, this amount might not be adequate in five years due to rising costs. His comment suggests that he views the proposed planning and funding as a preventative measure to avoid facing a financial shortfall for such expenses in the future.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 8

The ayes have it, amendment is passes.

BACK TO THE AMENDED ARTICLE

Deb Boisvert of Church Street inquired whether the maintenance and repair funds would cover updates for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance, which involves altering the building to enhance accessibility. She questioned if this would extend beyond merely

maintaining or repairing the current state to include updates that bring the building up to par with current codes. She sought clarification from the trustees on whether the fund could be used for such improvements.

Legal counsel responded by clarifying that changing the language to include ADA compliance updates would alter the original intent of the warrant article, which is not permissible. The counsel indicated that the purpose of the warrant article, as posted, was to establish a trust for maintenance and repairs, and any amendment adding a new purpose—such as ADA updates—would change the essential nature of what was originally proposed and publicly posted. Therefore, while a motion to amend could technically be made, it would be problematic as it would be inconsistent with the posted purpose of the warrant article. The counsel suggested proceeding without such an amendment to adhere to the proper legal process.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Article # 9 To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Eight Thousand Dollars **(\$8,000)** to be used by Northwood Lake Watershed Association for Aquatic Invasive Species/Aquatic Bacteria Education, Prevention, Treatment and Control in Northwood Lake.

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 3-2-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 10-0-0
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.01

Selectman Huebner discussed Article 9, addressing concerns some residents might have about why the town is supporting efforts related to Northwood Lake. He explained that a portion of Deerfield residents live on Northwood Lake, which has been affected by milfoil infestation—an invasive aquatic plant species—and cyanobacteria blooms leading to health warnings against entering the water.

The issue has persisted for several years, with the Northwood Lake Association, akin to a sister association to Pleasant Lake's, actively working to combat the infestation through manual removal by divers and chemical treatments, achieving significant progress.

The annual cost of these remediation efforts ranges between \$35,000 and \$50,000, funded by a combination of state funds, contributions from the Lake Association members, and funds from the towns of Northwood and Deerfield. Huebner stressed the shared responsibility among the communities and highlighted the importance of supporting these efforts to prevent the spread to Pleasant Lake, which could impact the local economy and tax base due to the lakes' importance to local businesses and tourism.

He urged support for Article 9, emphasizing its recurring nature and the collective interest in maintaining the health of the lakes. He then opened the floor for discussion and possible amendments to the article.

Greg Whitmore of North Road questioned why the Selectmen were divided on the issue, expressing curiosity about the reason for their disagreement.

Selectman Barry explained that his reason for voting 'no' was due to the increasing tax burden. He believed that it was necessary to have some warrant articles with no associated funding to alleviate financial pressure on taxpayers.

Mr. Whitmore discussed the pollution problems in Northwood Lake, identifying point source pollution as the main issue. He referred to reports from the North Lake Watershed Association that pinpointed inlets as the primary source of phosphorus pollution, originating from household detergents and farms. He expressed concerns about the seriousness of the bacteria and E. coli issues in the lake, emphasizing the risks they pose to people and pets who swim in the lake.

Mr. Whitmore advocated for increased funding in subsequent years to address these pollution issues more aggressively. He called for collaborative efforts between the town of Deerfield, neighboring towns, the North Lake Watershed Association, and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services to tackle the root causes of the pollution.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

Article # 10 To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars **(\$2,500)** to be used by the Pleasant Lake Preservation Association to increase the number of hours for trained attendants to provide courtesy boat inspection at the public access ramp on Gulf Road to prevent the introduction and spread of exotic aquatic plants, like variable milfoil and aquatic nuisance animals like zebra mussels from entering Pleasant Lake.

*Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 4-1-0
Recommended by the Municipal Budget Committee 9-0-1
Estimated Tax Impact/\$1,000.00 of Assessed Property Value \$0.01*

Selectman Huebner introduced Article 10 by contrasting it with the previous article related to Northwood Lake. He explained that while the Northwood Lake article was remedial, aimed at funding clean-up efforts for existing problems, Article 10 is preventative in nature.

Article 10 pertains to the Pleasant Lake Preservation Association and its lake host program. This program involves hosts at the lake who inspect incoming boats to ensure that they are not carrying milfoil or other invasive species on their trailers or boats that could contaminate the

lake and disrupt its ecosystem. Huebner highlighted the program's success over more than a decade in protecting Pleasant Lake from environmental threats.

Mr. Whitmore emphasized the detrimental impact of milfoil on lake ecosystems, stating that if it invades Pleasant Lake, which is renowned for its excellent water quality in New Hampshire, the consequences would be severe. He pointed out that milfoil is virtually impossible to eradicate once it becomes established in a lake, and it is just one among many potential invasive species that could cause problems.

He urged the community to consider the importance of preventative measures when voting on the article, noting that although the financial amount might be small, the passage of the article is critical to preventing milfoil from entering Pleasant Lake. He stressed that the introduction of milfoil to the lake would be highly undesirable.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

[Article # 11](#) Shall we rescind the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB 2), as adopted by the Town of Deerfield on March 8, 2005, so that the official ballot will no longer be used for voting on all questions, but only for the election of officers and certain other questions for which the official ballot is required by state law?" (A 3/5 majority of those voting is required.)

Selectman Barry introduced the article by reflecting on the current process and comparing it to past practices. He lamented that the decisions once made in town meetings with community involvement have been lost to what he referred to as "drive by voters"—people who vote without engaging in the detailed discussions and decision-making processes.

Barry expressed concern that the Board of Selectmen is not receiving adequate input from the voters on what they want, highlighting that when voters simply reject the budget during voting, it doesn't provide guidance on what specific parts of the budget they are dissatisfied with.

He emphasized that the board feels the need to return to the traditional town meeting format, where the residents actively participate and provide their advice and consent on matters. Barry noted that while the town meeting discussions had been productive, altering only "words on paper," the real impact of those discussions could be negated by voters who make uninformed decisions without providing feedback to the board.

Concluding his comments, Barry stated his desire to see a return to the more participatory town meeting process. He committed to ensuring this article would be presented every year until such a change is made, stressing the importance of returning to a system that values the community's advice and consent.

Selectman Huebner spoke fervently in favor of maintaining the SB2 process for town decision-making, opposing the move back to the traditional town meeting system. He outlined several key points in his defense:

- ✓ **Deliberative Process:** He credited the SB2 process with fostering productive discussions leading to the current positive outcomes, highlighting the deliberative sessions as a critical element.
- ✓ **Democratic Representation:** Huebner argued that decision-making should not be left to only the most active or outspoken residents. He endorsed the SB2 system for providing a private and pressure-free voting environment, allowing for equal representation.
- ✓ **Inclusivity and Fairness:** He stressed the importance of inclusivity, valuing the private vote as a 'sacred' right that accommodates all voters, including those uncomfortable with public speaking.
- ✓ **Logistical Practicality:** He pointed out the impracticality of convening a large town meeting given the town's increased population, suggesting it would prevent a fair hearing of all opinions.
- ✓ **Respecting Voters' Decisions:** Huebner expressed that it is disrespectful to ignore the clear mandate from the recent vote where a significant majority opposed reverting to the town meeting format.
- ✓ **Educational Responsibility:** He emphasized the board's duty to educate voters to ensure informed decision-making rather than doubting the voters' understanding of issues.
- ✓ **Reference to Recent Vote:** He noted a recent vote where the town overwhelmingly decided to maintain the SB2 system, interpreting it as a decisive reflection of the community's will.
- ✓ **Board's Stance:** He acknowledged that the board itself was split on the issue, with not all members in favor of revisiting the town meeting system.

Selectman Huebner concluded by affirming his strong opposition to abandoning the SB2 process, advocating for respecting the process and the community's collective voice.

Mr. Barry indicated that the article in question received substantial support from the board, with four out of five board members voting in favor of it.

Mr. Huebner clarified that the board members' 4-to-1 vote was not an endorsement of the article itself, but rather a decision to place the article on the ballot. He emphasized that the vote should not be interpreted as four members favoring a return to the old system, but instead as their agreement to let the voters make the final decision on the matter.

Stacey Marchionni expressed strong objections to the term "drive by voters," considering it disrespectful and inaccurate to describe the voters in town this way. She pointed out that many residents, such as parents with children in sports, might be unable to attend meetings but are still informed and engaged with town affairs. Marchionni argued that keeping up with various board meetings and community planning is akin to a full-time job and that it is unfair to suggest

that those not physically present at meetings are uninvolved or uninformed. She believes that moving away from SB2 would disenfranchise voters, underscoring the importance of maintaining the current system which allows broader participation in the democratic process.

Harriet Cady from Old Centre Road highlighted the inclusivity that the SB2 law provides for business owners and others who are unable to participate in traditional Saturday town meetings due to work commitments. She shared her personal advocacy for SB2, mentioning her work to pass the law and her involvement in submitting five petitions before it was finally adopted in Deerfield. Cady criticized the old system, noting that during school district meetings, budgets were passed with only a small fraction of the community—170 people—present and engaged. She emphasized that under SB2, more people turn out to vote, which she views as a fundamental right, particularly when it comes to decisions on how their tax dollars are spent.

Leah McHugh from Harvey Road supported the sentiments previous speakers in support of SB2, pointing out the challenges that parents face in attending meetings due to their children's activities, which was exemplified by a friend who had to step outside the meeting because her children were being too loud. McHugh questioned the feasibility of capturing everyone's voice if not all could be physically present at meetings. She noted the discrepancy in attendance between traditional meetings and the larger turnout seen with SB2, emphasizing that every voice is important.

Ed Cross from Thurston Pond Road expressed agreement with previous speakers supporting SB2, rejecting the notion that the community is ignorant or merely consists of "drive by" voters. He affirmed his belief that the community is well-informed, taking advantage of the various mediums available to understand and engage with the information provided. Cross argued that it would be unfeasible to conduct a traditional town meeting for a community the size of theirs, as accommodating 1,500 to 2,000 people in such a setting would be impractical. He posited that SB2 is essential for the community, given its size, and that it would be a step backward to abandon this system in favor of outdated methods. Cross advocated for looking towards the future rather than returning to the past.

Mr. Langlois expressed his opinion that SB2 has not been effective over the years. He noted that most individuals who are actively involved in committee meetings, whether on the town or school side, tend to support returning to the traditional town meeting format. Langlois suggested that being present at town meetings allows for real-time participation, amendments, and honest discussions with community members, which is an important aspect of local governance.

He voiced his belief that SB2 has not been beneficial and speculated that if a poll were taken among those present, a majority would favor returning to the town meeting system. He also proposed the idea of adding a note on the warrant to indicate the level of support for articles during the deliberative session, although he acknowledged uncertainty about the legality or possibility of such an addition.

In conclusion, Langlois emphasized that many individuals who contribute to running the town and making it function smoothly have indicated a preference for the town meeting system, mentioning that the majority of towns in New Hampshire operate using town meetings. He suggested that this preference should be considered when discussing the effectiveness of SB2.

Legal counsel advised against the proposal to add polling information to warrant articles, citing that the language is legally mandated and any changes could result in non-compliance with established statutes. It was emphasized that maintaining the integrity of the warrant articles as per the RSA is crucial, and thus, modifications could render it ineffective.

Selectman Huebner spoke emphatically about the importance of broad community involvement in decision-making processes. He recognized those attending the meeting as being highly engaged, but cautioned against a small subset of the population determining fiscal outcomes for the entire town. He questioned the fairness of disenfranchising the majority and stressed that no one should presume to know better than the collective town populace. Huebner firmly advocated for the decisions to be made by all the voters, not merely a small subset, highlighting the necessity of upholding the democratic values of equal representation and voting rights for all.

Mr. Whitmore expressed strong support for SB2 and conveyed his belief that the outcomes of issues should not be determined by who can mobilize more supporters to attend a single meeting.

Judy Marshall shared her reflections on the local governing process in New Hampshire, initially praising it in a conversation with family in Chicago. However, she pointed out the complexity and confusion she encountered when reading minutes from a 2016 meeting, noting that even a highly respected voter got so tangled in the proceedings that they voted contrary to their intentions.

Marshall recounted her own experience of attending town meetings for over 7 years, often feeling lost and requiring clarification during discussions. While she appreciates the concept of town meetings, she questioned their effectiveness in practice, particularly for individuals like herself who find it challenging to maintain focus and quickly become confused.

She expressed a preference for being able to process information at her own pace and the opportunity to ask questions outside of the formal meeting environment for better comprehension. Marshall also acknowledged the role of social media in keeping residents informed, admitting that many in the town use these platforms to stay updated more effectively than she does. Thus, she concluded by implying that while she values the idea of town meetings, her personal experience suggests they may not function as efficiently as intended for everyone.

Don Wyman of Nottingham Road shared his perspective on town meetings, noting that in the past, certain issues would be tabled if they didn't meet the preferences of some attendees, a

tactic that could exclude those who, due to work commitments like farming, couldn't stay for the entire meeting. He recounted an instance where this strategy was used to acquire land under the pretext of building a high school which never materialized, leaving the town with a piece of land that is not doing anything.

Wyman expressed his conflict between work obligations and civic involvement, stating that having to work prevents him from attending town meetings and thus, from participating in town decisions. He suggested that while town meetings were once effective, the time has passed for such a model, implying that he sees merit in a system like SB2, which would not require physical attendance and would allow for broader participation irrespective of residents' schedules.

Mr. Dill disagreed with Selectman Huebner's view that revisiting the SB2 issue is an insult to voters, noting that SB2 itself was voted on five times, showing that persistence is part of the process of change. He mentioned that Nottingham, which recently switched to SB2, is experiencing some issues, leading to some questioning whether it was the right move.

From his personal experience, Dill acknowledged that while town meetings can be lengthy, he managed to participate even with his infant daughter, suggesting that it requires effort but is doable. He argued that the effort is necessary to fully understand complex issues. Dill believes that the in-person town meeting format leads to a more satisfying sense of accomplishment, with immediate results like an agreed-upon budget, compared to what he sees as the procrastination that comes with SB2's approach.

Mrs. Marchionni delivered a potent message debunking the myth that absent voters are ill-informed. She highlighted the discrepancy between the demographics present and the younger families not in attendance, illustrating how times have evolved and information is consumed in various ways. She declared the idea that physical absence equates to ignorance as not just incorrect but unjust, arguing that it wrongfully disenfranchises those not present.

She made a compelling case for the necessity of a "cooling off" period post-discussion, preventing rash decisions driven by persuasive rhetoric that could lead to substantial financial escalations for the community. Marchionni cautioned against the dangers of a small, possibly unrepresentative group making financial decisions impacting all, advocating for a more thoughtful, inclusive approach to community decision-making.

Ms. Menard acknowledged the value in discussing potential changes, as well as the merits of maintaining the current system. She recognized that the existing system seems to work for a significant majority of the community. Menard suggested that the solution might not be a simple choice between adopting SB2 or sticking with the traditional town meeting. She believes there is an underlying issue that needs to be identified and addressed to improve the town's prosperity and prevent it from lagging behind. While she admitted to not having all the answers, she emphasized the importance of moving beyond conflict to explore and discover innovative solutions that will benefit the town as a whole.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

Article #12 To see if the Town will vote to deposit 50% of the revenues collected pursuant to RSA 79-A (the land use change tax) into the Town's Conservation Fund in accordance with RSA 36-A:5, III as authorized by RSA 79-A:25, II. Decreasing the amount collected to 50% from the current 100% of the land use change tax going to the Conservation Fund will provide additional revenue to the Town general fund, thus helping to reduce the overall tax rate amount needed to meet yearly expenses. If adopted this article shall take effect April 1st, and shall remain in effect until altered or rescinded by a future vote of the town meeting.

Selectman McGarry reminded the audience that the previous year, there was a vote to allocate 100% of a land use change tax funds to the Conservation Commission. Subsequent discussions between the board and voters about an increase in the tax rate led to a reconsideration. The board proposed reverting to the previous arrangement where only 50% of the money would go into the budget preservation fund. This adjustment was primarily suggested as a means to introduce an additional source of revenue for the town.

Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 12

Josh Freed of South Road offered the following amendment to the article 12, second by the floor as follows:

“To see if the Town will vote to deposit 100% of the revenues collected pursuant to RSA 79-A (LUCT) into the Town’s Conservation Fund in accordance with RSA 36-A:5, III as authorized by RSA 79-A:25, II.”

DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENT

Mr. Freed referenced a decision made by the town the previous year, where the voters strongly supported increasing the funding allocated to the Conservation Commission, shifting the management of these funds away from the Select Board. He pointed out that this was a deliberate choice by the town and seemed to caution against disregarding that decision, as it could be seen as disrespecting the will of the town and disenfranchising the voters.

He mentioned that the Conservation Commission, an entity appointed by the Select Board, is responsible for managing conservation funds. Freed clarified that the funds in question, which arise from land use change taxes, do not impact the tax rate. He noted that the increase in funding to the Conservation Commission amounted to about \$36,000 due to the change from 50% to 100% allocation last year.

Despite the financial challenges the town may face, Freed argued that this conservation funding is not what's straining the town's budget. He emphasized the importance of conservation efforts, stating that natural resources are finite and essential to the town's character and the reasons people are drawn to it. With the cost of land being high, he pointed out that the

\$36,000 is relatively small and insufficient for the Conservation Commission to purchase even a single-family lot, implying that more funds are necessary to protect these valuable resources effectively.

Mrs. Cady inquired about the actual amount of land in Deerfield that is suitable for development, such as building houses. She expressed uncertainty about where to find this information, even recounting an instance where she encountered unexpected geographical features like a pond in the middle of a potential site. Suggesting that Deerfield might not have as much developable land as people assume, she requested that someone reach out to the Conservation Commission to determine the extent of developable land at three-acre lot sizes within the town.

Mr. Boisvert expressed interest in the topic concerning the amount of land that could be developed in Deerfield, which was separate from his main point. His question or comment was specifically about the implications of removing land from conservation status, indicating a concern or interest in the potential development of land currently designated for conservation.

Mr. Boisvert inquired about the legal validity of a proposed amendment concerning the allocation of funds. He questioned whether an amendment that seeks to change the allocation from the existing 100% to a new figure of 50% would be considered valid and legitimate. He raised a concern regarding the potential for a legal challenge to the amendment, seeking clarification from town counsel on this matter.

Legal counsel advised that an amendment to change the fund allocation to 100% is unnecessary since it is already at that level. If the intention is to maintain the 100% allocation, simply voting against a reduction to 50% would be sufficient. Altering the amendment could cause confusion, and there is no practical reason to amend something that already stands at the desired 100%.

Mr. Boisvert acknowledged that while legal counsel's opinion suggested an amendment to the 100% allocation was not needed, it did not necessarily address the validity of such an amendment. He expressed his intention to propose a new amendment, despite supporting the principle of the current one, because he believed it would be confusing as it stood. He planned to vote against it and recommend an alternative amendment for a less significant decrease in allocation.

Mr. Huebner expressed his concern that if the proposed 100% allocation is put to a vote and struck down, it would create a problematic situation since it would involve the voters rejecting an arrangement that is already in effect. He suggested that legal counsel should consider this outcome, as negating an amendment in such a way contradicts the purpose of the article. Furthermore, he worried that if voters voted "no" on this, it would leave the town in a precarious position without a clear course of action, since the current system is already set at 100%. Huebner also observed that this situation could be frustrating, as not everyone may understand the implications of their vote.

Legal counsel concurred that there is a risk in amending and then seeking approval for the same provision that is currently in place. The advice given was to avoid approving such an amendment to prevent confusion. Counsel stated that while the decision ultimately lies with the body, the recommendation was not to proceed with the amendment.

Mr. McGarry expressed concerns about adding language to the amendment, understanding the intent behind George's proposal. He suggested that an amendment for 95% allocation might achieve Mr. Freed's goals without leading to a questionable situation.

Mr. Cross noted after listening to legal counsel, McGarry interpreted the proposed amendment as effectively cancelling the current arrangement, which he deemed unwise.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 12

The Nays have it, amendment is defeated.

BACK TO THE MAIN MOTION

Mr. Barry proposed a motion to simplify the amendment by removing all text except for the phrase "to see." The Moderator explained that approach is no longer legally valid.

Amendment 2 of Warrant Article 12

Mr. Boisvert made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

"To see if the Town will vote to deposit 95% of the revenues collected pursuant to RSA 79-A (the land use change tax) into the Town's Conservation Fund in accordance with RSA 36-A:5, III as authorized by RSA 79-A:25, II. If adopted this article shall take effect April 1st, and shall remain in effect until altered or rescinded by a future vote of the town meeting."

DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENT

Mr. Huebner labeled the article as trickery, expressing his opposition to it. He criticized it for being a redundant effort to challenge an article that had just been addressed through a vote, implying that it was an attempt to circumvent the democratic process.

Mr. Boisvert conveyed deep offense at the notion of being called a trickster, especially in such a public forum. Mr. Boisvert defended the legitimacy of his intentions and the integrity of his proposal, expressing a strong resentment toward the insinuation that his efforts were anything other than earnest and well-meaning.

Mr. Huebner acknowledged the validity of Mr. Boisvert's feelings and offered a personal apology for the offense caused by his earlier comment.

Mr. Rhodes provided his insights into the motivations behind the original article, noting that it was intended to supplement the town's budget and assist with tax rates. He expressed his perspective that impact fees seemed to be diverted from conservation efforts, particularly from land under current use. He pointed out that Deerfield attracts residents partly due to its environmental quality, emphasizing the importance of the Conservation Commission and the necessity of having a strategic plan to preserve the town's natural wealth rather than leaving open spaces unmanaged.

Mr. Rhodes questioned the effectiveness of impact fees when they are allocated to a general fund rather than being used directly for conservation purposes, which is their fundamental origin. He raised a concern about the potential disconnect between the collection of fees under the guise of conservation and their actual use for broader tax-related purposes. He invited further comments on this issue, seeking to ensure that the funds are used in a way that aligns with the conservation values that make Deerfield attractive to its residents.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 2 of Warrant Article 12

The ayes have it, amendment is passes.

BACK TO THE AMENDED ARTICLE

Mr. Boisvert made a motion to restrict any further amendments to Warrant Article 12, seconded by the floor.

Moderator called for a vote on restricting the Warrant Article 12.

Ayes have it, motion passed.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Article # 13 To see if the town will vote to adopt the Conflict-of-Interest Ordinance approved by the Board of Selectmen on June 5, 2023, copies of which are available at the Town Clerk's office, posted at the George B White Building, Library and Post Office, on the Town webpage and Town Facebook page.

Selectman McGarry discussed the need to establish a conflict-of-interest ordinance, as mandated by the previous year's vote where 892 were in favor and 32 opposed. He explained that contrary to the initial plan for the Board of Selectmen to adopt the ordinance, it must be approved by the town's voters, which is why the matter is currently being addressed.

Mr. Rhodes reiterated the Selectmen's mention of last year's town vote to develop and ratify a conflict-of-interest ordinance. He clarified that the intention was not merely to introduce the ordinance but to make it a two-year process: the first year to develop the policy, and the second to present it to the town for ratification. He noted the strong voter support for the policy, with

two-thirds in favor. The Board of Selectmen completed step one by creating the ordinance with the town council's help, ensuring it met the town's needs and legal requirements. Although widely distributed for review, Mr. Rhodes emphasized that it would not be official until ratified by the town's legislative body. Step two will codify the ordinance and make it law in Deerfield should it pass by the voters.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

[Article #14](#) To see if the Town will vote to adopt the Deerfield Community Power Plan, which authorizes the Deerfield Select Board to develop and implement Deerfield Community Power as described therein (pursuant to RSA 53-E:7), the goal of which is to lower electric supply costs. There is no tax impact or use of Town funds.

Selectman McGarry explained many communities have adopted similar community power plans as reported in the Concord Monitor and the Union Leader. The plan enables residents to pool their electricity usage, forming a larger buying group, which could negotiate lower electricity rates due to the combined purchasing power. The intent of the article is to establish such a power plan for the town.

Mr. Rhodes discussed the origin and development of the plan, which began seven years ago with the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission aiming to reduce electrical costs for individuals and businesses. In 2021, the Select Board unanimously agreed to a memorandum of understanding with Standard Power, who has been guiding them through the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) mandated process. Last year, Rhodes chaired a committee that held public meetings and developed a plan, which was open for comment and subsequently approved, although most comments were received post-approval. The plan has been submitted by the Select Board to the PUC for approval, which is expected within 60 days. The article under discussion is to determine whether the town's legislative body will approve the plan so that Standard Power can proceed with the process to potentially save money for the town's businesses and residents.

Mrs. Cady expressed opposition to the proposed electricity plan, highlighting that it automatically enrolls all residents, who must actively opt out if they prefer a different provider. She criticized the plan for limiting free choice and mandating a community-wide provider, which she felt was contrary to American values.

Mr. Cross inquired about the availability of the terms of the electricity agreement for public review prior to the voting day, asking where and when it can be found. He also asked if the agreement allows for future negotiations with other companies after the current agreement ends, to ensure a competitive bidding process. He stressed that having access to this information is crucial for informed decision-making by the public, regardless of their stance on the issue.

Mr. Rhodes emphasized that the electricity plan is not mandatory; it offers residents the option to opt-out if they choose not to participate. He specifically mentioned that those with solar installations in town might find the plan financially unbeneficial and will have the opportunity to assess whether it suits them before any implementation. The plan is designed to potentially save money for those who rely on the standard electricity supply, as it aims to provide a lower negotiated rate compared to the utility rate. Residents will continue to receive the same service for emergencies or repairs; only the supply cost on their bills will change. Rhodes cited that the town offices have seen savings of about 50% over the past six or seven years with a similar plan through Standard Power. He assured that the full details of the plan are available for public review and that there would be future opportunities to consider other providers, ensuring flexibility and ongoing savings for residents. The plan is available online on the Town's website, as well as available at the Town Offices, Library, and Clerk's Office.

Mr. Wyman expressed skepticism about the proposed electricity plan, particularly the opt-out provision, suggesting that an opt-in approach would be more palatable. He pointed out a lack of information regarding solar users and the rebates they receive from their primary power companies, which may not be available if they switch to a secondary provider like Standard Power. He raised concerns about the impact of the plan on future solar projects by the town of Deerfield, hinting that the town might need to opt out to benefit from solar arrays. Wyman also questioned the stability of the rates offered by Standard Power, comparing it to the fluctuating costs of energy similar to gas prices, which can go up and down seasonally. He concluded by voicing his disapproval of the opt-out option, advocating for the freedom to choose and opposing the idea of being automatically enrolled in the plan.

Mr. Rhodes responded to concerns by highlighting that electricity has been deregulated for 20 years with an opt-in system, but the uptake has been low, under 5%. He explained that the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has determined that an opt-out system is necessary to achieve effective aggregate purchasing power for better pricing. The proposed plan allows residents to opt in or out at any time, providing flexibility for those who actively manage their electricity supply. Despite the number of solar arrays in town, he believes they do not affect the aggregate power to a significant degree. Rhodes also mentioned the difficulties with solar adoption due to utilities' slow provision of necessary data, which hampers market interest. He suggests that as data sharing improves, more bidders will enter the market, resulting in lower electricity prices.

Mr. Wyman clarified that contrary to the previous speaker's comments, opting out of the electricity plan is not as flexible as suggested; it must be done within one's billing period. If this period is missed by even a day or two, the opt-out must wait until the next billing cycle. He remained neutral about Standard Power but advocated for an opt-in system rather than opt-out system.

Mr. Huebner voiced strong opposition to Article 14, considering it a violation of American principles of freedom and liberty. He stressed that private citizens have the right to enter into

contracts for goods and services voluntarily and that the competitive free market allows consumers to choose their suppliers based on quality and reliability. He argued that if Article 14 passes, residents of Deerfield would automatically have their existing contracts with their chosen power suppliers canceled and be involuntarily switched to a new contract set up by Community Power, without their consent. This would legally bind them to pay for services from a provider they did not select and potentially do not trust. To revert to their original provider, they would have to take active steps to opt out and reestablish their prior contracts.

Mr. Huebner sees this as governmental overreach and argues that if Community Power has a beneficial offer, it should be marketed competitively, allowing residents to opt in voluntarily. He urged Deerfield not to infringe on the liberty and rights of citizens who may not want this program and to avoid granting anyone authority to interfere with private contracts and personal choices regarding service providers.

He called on Deerfield citizens to recognize the government overreach embedded in the article and to respect each individual's right to choose and manage their financial obligations. Mr. Huebner proposed that the article be amended to ensure that the Community Power program, if passed, would be an opt-in program, thereby preserving individual freedoms and fundamental rights.

Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 14

Mr. Huebner made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

"To see if the Town will vote to adopt the Deerfield Community Power Plan, which authorizes the Deerfield Select Board to develop and implement Deerfield Community Power as described therein (pursuant to RSA 53-E:7), the goal of which is to lower electric supply costs. There is no tax impact or use of Town funds. The Plan will be amended to be an "opt-in" Plan only."

DISCUSSION ON THE AMENDMENT

Ms. Menard from Mountain Road expressed her preference for an opt-in option regarding the electricity plan.

Mrs. Huebner expressed her support for an opt-in option and corrected a previous statement by clarifying that opting out of the billing arrangement cannot be done at any time. She highlighted that, according to the materials she read, opting out is only possible once a month on the billing and reading dates. If this date is missed, one would have to wait another month to opt out. She finds the idea of someone changing her billing without consent to be concerning.

Mr. Wyman raised concerns about the lack of comprehensive outreach regarding a survey on the issue, noting that it was neither mailed to citizens nor broadly distributed. He pointed out that the survey only garnered 62 respondents, and he questioned the legitimacy of moving forward with a decision based on such a small sample size. Mr. Wyman suggested that this number of

respondents does not represent the broader community opinion and indicated that he had only just discovered this information.

Mr. Rhodes clarified that the 62 surveys received were not votes for Standard Power but were instead related to electric use in general. He suggested that there might be a misunderstanding from the last speaker regarding the nature of the surveys.

Mr. Cross expressed his support for an amendment that would establish an opt-in system. He voiced concerns about losing the right to make his own decisions, emphasizing the importance of preserving individual liberties, including the ability to make one's own financial choices. Mr. Cross stressed that even if a program could potentially save him money, he prefers to have the choice and not be forced into it, valuing his autonomy over potential financial benefits.

Ms. Quinn shared her perspective, noting that when she moved to Deerfield, she was not given a choice of electricity provider but was required to use Eversource. She made the point that there was no initial opt-in or opt-out option. To continue using the service, she had to review her bill, agree with the charges, and pay it by the due date. She argued that having an opt-out system is not an unusual practice and that it requires adults to be responsible for monitoring their services and costs. Ms. Quinn suggested that the proposed system, which allows changing services monthly, is not an infringement on personal freedoms but rather a matter of personal responsibility and attention to one's service choices and expenses.

Mrs. Cady succinctly questioned the nature of the proposed system by implying that if it truly does not infringe on her freedom, she should not be compelled to accept it in the first place.

Legal counsel commented on the proposed amendment, noting that the referenced statute, RSA 53-E:7, only provides for opt-out agreements. Therefore, the current proposal aligns with that statutory framework. While they did not outright reject the motion for an amendment, they suggested that if the amendment were to pass, it might render the article ineffective or merely advisory because the amendment seeks to introduce an option (presumably opt-in) not contemplated by the statute. The counsel's assessment is that the article, as it stands, is structured around an opt-out model as per the legal requirements of the statute.

Mr. Rhodes addressed the discussion by reiterating that the proposal is structured according to RSA and PUC regulations. He emphasized that the vote is not about whether individual electrical bills will change, but rather if the town of Deerfield as a collective should opt into this program. He suggested that the focus on opt-in versus opt-out and the concerns about personal freedoms might be missing the broader point. According to Mr. Rhodes, the decision should be made by the citizens of Deerfield as a whole, not just by individuals at a deliberative session discussing the process's merits. His comments suggest that he sees the vote as a community decision rather than an individual one.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 14

The Nays have it, amendment is defeated.

BACK TO THE MAIN ARTICLE

Mr. McGarry sought to clarify that the discussion pertains to the electricity supply portion of the bill, which is separate from the delivery charge. He indicated that regardless of the supplier, the entity currently responsible for delivering electricity would continue to do so.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

Article # 15 Advisory Only. To see if the Town of Deerfield supports the Deerfield Fire/Rescue Department and the Board of Selectman in pursuit of transitioning away from a Non-Transport Emergency Medical Service to a Transporting Emergency Medical Service and obtaining Deerfield its own Ambulance.

Selectman McGarry introduced a discussion about potentially expanding the town's ambulance service. He mentioned ongoing debates about funding and, after speaking with the chief, acknowledged the time frame of four or five years to have an operational, fully staffed ambulance if the voters decide to proceed. He deferred to the chief for more detailed information.

Chief Fisher explained that the department has been considering the transition from a non-transport to a transport ambulance service for many years. With the availability of additional funds in recent years, the feasibility of acquiring an ambulance increased. After conducting extensive research and receiving community feedback, the department is still evaluating the transition. Currently, Deerfield provides initial care until contracted ambulance services arrive to transport patients. The department is gauging community interest in moving towards providing full transport services. Additionally, Chief Fisher noted the department's first response vehicle is aging and costly to maintain, prompting a decision on whether to replace it with a transport-capable vehicle or continue with the non-transport model. He also provided details of the current contract with their ambulance service provider, including the rates for the coming years.

Assistant Fire Chief Dubiansky, with a long history of service in Deerfield, expressed his support for the town's transition to a transport ambulance service. He encouraged the community to utilize the period before voting to discuss and consider the proposal thoroughly. Dubiansky emphasized that the decision was significant for the town's future in public safety and that the timeline to implement a transport service would be three to five years post-approval. He also noted the necessity of deciding on the replacement of the 20-year-old first response vehicle. He warned of potential delays due to order backlogs during peak times and the reliance on federal funding, which could extend the timeline further. The vote presents a crucial opportunity for residents to direct the town's public safety strategy, whether to maintain the first response service or to initiate transporting services.

Ms. Libis suggested the idea of modifying the proposal to prioritize hiring a full-time medical professional to operate the ambulance over the acquisition of the ambulance itself. She noted

that currently, there are part-time paid staff, and expressed her view that having the appropriate full-time personnel in place should come before purchasing an ambulance. She did not formally submit an amendment, stating she was interested in the fire department's response to her proposition.

The Moderator indicated that while Ms. Libis could request an opinion on her suggestion, she could not alter the article in question because it would change the subject matter of the article itself. The article is advisory only regarding the decision between transport and non-transport services, and a change in personnel would constitute a different subject matter than what is currently under consideration in the warrant article.

The Chief responded by stating that Ms. Libis's suggestion to prioritize hiring full-time staff could not be incorporated into the current proposal. He emphasized that the decision about whether to transition to transport services is closely linked to personnel considerations. He conveyed that if voters decide against transitioning to a transport service, this information is crucial for planning. Conversely, if voters are in favor of acquiring an ambulance, it's time to reflect on the necessary changes, including staffing—whether to hire full-time employees or maintain the current part-time program complemented by a nine-week call program similar to other communities. The Chief noted that 75% of their calls are EMS-related, which is a significant portion of the department's work. If the decision is to pursue transport services, it would increase the department's workload and require a full assessment of their capabilities to manage the increased demand. He expressed his disagreement with the idea of hiring a full-time person first, instead of acquiring an ambulance, suggesting that understanding the department's direction in terms of transport service is the more immediate need.

Mr. Rhodes questioned the availability and adequacy of educational materials provided by the fire chief and department for the townspeople. He expressed uncertainty about whether the town has been sufficiently informed to form an intelligent and meaningful advisory opinion regarding the decision on ambulance services. He sought clarification on the complexity, time commitment, cost, and personnel implications of the decision, suggesting that without this information, it would be challenging for the town to make a meaningful advisory recommendation to the department.

The Chief responded that the current discussion serves as an initial step in gauging the community's interest and opinions on the direction of fire and rescue services. He acknowledged that while he has his own ideas about what the department should do, community input is crucial. The Chief clarified that the department is not asking the town to purchase an ambulance at this moment but is seeking to understand if the community favors moving toward a transport service. He emphasized that the question at hand is not about immediate action but about preparing for the potential of becoming a transporting agency in the future, suggesting a timeline that might extend three years out for such developments.

Amber Lagasse of Mountain Road inquired about the current number of full-time and part-time employees within the fire and rescue department.

Chief Fisher indicated that for part-time members, there are currently 90 hours per week allocated, which are filled from Monday to Friday. During these weekdays, there are generally two people on duty, except for Thursdays, when there is one person. After the allocated hours, the system relies on an on-call basis, with volunteers available if needed.

Ms. Lagasse reflected on her personal background, growing up in Atkinson, New Hampshire, where they had a volunteer fire department equipped with an ambulance and fire trucks. She mentioned family involvement in the fire and EMS services, with her stepdad serving as deputy chief and her mother also being part of EMS and fire. From her perspective, having an ambulance is crucial to ensure prompt response times, especially given that most calls are medical in nature. She emphasized the importance of being able to respond quickly to such calls.

Mr. Dubiansky addressed Mr. Rogers's earlier question by emphasizing that all three chiefs are accessible via phone or email for any inquiries, and he encouraged people to reach out if they have questions. He clarified that he is not trying to discourage discussion but wants to ensure that the community has immediate answers or that the chiefs can conduct necessary research to provide information. Mr. Dubiansky highlighted the advantage of their reporting systems, which can retrieve historical data for reference. He mentioned that his earlier reference to a "cooling off period" was intended to suggest that there is time for the community to get their questions answered, discuss issues with neighbors, and engage with the chiefs, which would help everyone make an informed decision about the specifications for the next vehicle the department should consider.

Ms. Black expressed her appreciation for having an advisory article on the topic and pondered whether the town would be able to decide which direction to take regarding rescue and planning. She agreed with earlier comments on the value of discussing the matter with volunteers, staff, medical professionals, and other departments to understand what works best, what doesn't, and what changes might be needed. Ms. Black mentioned that these individuals are willing to answer questions and engage in conversations. She noted her own experience of reaching out and getting many of her questions answered, suggesting that it is beneficial for others to take the initiative to gather information as well.

Mrs. Cady requested more detailed information in Article 13, particularly the costs associated with ambulance services, as seen in towns like Epsom, which spends \$438,000 annually. She inquired about the average cost of an ambulance and the potential for funding through grants and loans. Highlighting the personal importance of ambulance services, she wished the article had provided clearer cost breakdowns and requirements for service implementation.

Ms. Lagasse suggested that for those concerned about how ambulance services might be implemented, it's possible to start small, perhaps with volunteers, and then gradually progress as the need grows. She questioned the Chief whether we have current staff that could drive the ambulance. He confirmed that yes, there were staff that are qualified to drive an ambulance.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as written.

Article # 16 WE THE UNDERSIGNED PETITION TO CHANGE THE ELDERLY EXEMPTION TO \$50,000 AT AGE 65 WITH INCREMENTS OF EVERY 5 YEARS BEING AN ADDITIONAL DEDUCTION OF \$50,000 (AT AGE 65 EXEMPTION TO BE \$50,000 AT AGE 70 \$100P,000, ETC). THE RECIPIENT MAY HAVE UP TO \$150,000 IN ASSESTS NOT COUNTING THE HOME AND UP TO TWO VEHICLES. [Sic] (Petition Warrant Article)

Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 16

Harriet Cady made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

“Shall we modify the elderly exemption for property tax in the town of Deerfield based on assessed value for qualified taxpayer, to be as follows; at age 65 a resident who qualifies may apply for the elderly exemption the exemption shall be \$50,000 increased every five year age grouping (example at age 65 the exemption shall be 50,000 at 70 the exemption shall be 100,000 in each age increase of five years an additional 50,000) To qualify a person must be a resident of New Hampshire for a minimum of five years, own real estate individually or jointly; if real estate is owned jointly must have been married five years or more. Taxpayer may not have income of more than \$50,000 per person and not have more than two cars.”

DISCUSSION ON THE AMENDMENT

Mr. Langlois requested clarification on the article, indicating that he was experiencing difficulty in comprehending its content the way it was worded.

Mr. Boisvert expressed concerns about the language of a petition intended to benefit older residents, potentially being applicable to non-resident property owners. He advocated for the exemption to be limited to Deerfield residents to support the local community and suggested that the petition's language needs clarification to reflect this intent. He requested the primary petitioner to clarify the measure to ensure it applies specifically to primary residences of the community members.

Ms. Lagasse, of Mountain Road, sought clarification on an amendment, specifically confirming whether it involved an income threshold of \$50,000 per person. Upon confirmation, she remarked that during her teaching career, she did not earn \$50,000, and questioned why individuals earning more than a teacher would receive a tax break.

During a scattering of discussion, several key points were addressed concerning the proposed amendment. Doubts were raised regarding the amendment's validity and whether it would be sanctioned by the Department of Revenue Administration. Speakers sought clarity on the baseline for veterans' exemptions and the current exemption limits for income and assets in the community. While there was general agreement on the value of exemptions for the elderly, the method for assessing eligibility, particularly the choice between income and assets, was

debated. The inclination was to use income as a more straightforward eligibility criterion. Consequently, it was recommended to vote against the current amendment but to consider revisiting the matter for further advisement by the governing body. The importance of providing clear instructions for the tax collector and selectmen to effectively implement exemptions was noted. A poignant personal narrative underscored the urgency of revising exemptions to aid residents struggling with the increased cost of living and taxes, ensuring that long-standing community members can afford to remain in their homes.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 16

The Nays have it, amendment is defeated.

BACK TO THE MAIN ARTICLE

Amendment 2 of Warrant Article 16

Mr. Langlois commented on Article #16, stating his support with the caveat that there should be reasonable limits, suggesting that those who are elderly but have sufficient income should pay their taxes. He proposed adding the term "advisory only" to the end of the article language, indicating that if approved, the Board of Selectmen should develop a plan or update the advisory exemptions for the next year's ballot.

Mr. Langlois made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

"WE THE UNDERSIGNED PETITION TO CHANGE THE ELDERLY EXEMPTION TO \$50,000 AT AGE 65 WITH INCREMENTS OF EVERY 5 YEARS BEING AN ADDITIONAL DEDUCTION OF \$50,000 (AT AGE 65 EXEMPTION TO BE \$50,000 AT AGE 70 \$100P,000, ETC). tHE RECIPIENT MAY HAVE UP TO \$150,000 IN ASSESTS NOT COUNTING THE HOME AND UP TO TWO VEHICLES. Advisory only [Sic] (Petition Warrant Article)

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on Amendment 2 of Warrant Article 16

The Ayes have it, amendment passes.

BACK TO THE AMENDED ARTICLE

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Article # 17 This petition will recind the vote of Article #6 of May 2021 allowing the selectmen to appoint the road agent. We the undersigned petiTion the town voters to return to an elected highway agent with salary to be \$70,000 per year with raises as to each years town employees. The road agent shall received all benefits the full-time employees receive. [Sic] (Petition Warrant Article)

Mrs. Cady highlighted issues observed during Selectmen meetings over the last two years, specifically relating to problems arising from the Selectmen's appointments of the road agent position. She indicated that due to these difficulties, her stance is to revert to having an elected road agent.

Amendment 1 of Warrant Article 17

Mr. Langlois made the following amendment, seconded by the floor to read as follows:

“Shall the position of the Road Agent continue to be appointed as it currently is.”

Mr. Langlois suggested that during his time observing the process, elected road agents tended to submit repetitive and potentially outdated budgets, which did not reflect the increasing costs. He implied that the move towards appointing the road agent led to a more accurate representation of the town's financial needs. However, he expressed a concern that reverting to an elected road agent might result in a reluctance to propose necessary budget increases due to the fear of not being re-elected.

Mrs. Hutchinson expressed her support for the amendment, stating that its clarity would ensure voters fully understand what they are voting on if that language is used.

During the discussion, it was decided that adding the phrase "advisory only" to the article would better communicate that the vote on the article is intended to be non-binding. This led to an amendment of the original amendment, essentially modifying it. The moderator then included the term "advisory only" within the amendment's language to reflect this change. Following this, a call for a vote or a show of hands was made to approve this secondary amendment—that is, the inclusion of "advisory only" in the wording of the article.

Amendment of Amendment Warrant Article 17

Mr. Langlois corrected the language of his proposed amendment as follows:

“Shall the position of the Road Agent continue to be appointed as it currently is. Advisory only.”

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator called for a vote on the corrected amendment of Warrant Article 17.

The Ayes have it, amendment passes.

BACK TO THE AMENDED ARTICLE

Mr. Wyman raised concerns regarding the procedure the Selectmen would use to hire a road agent, should the article be passed. He inquired about whether the position would be advertised and sought clarification on the selection process to ensure the hiring of a competent individual. Mr. Wyman's apprehension centered on the possibility of the Selectmen hastily choosing the first applicant without a comprehensive evaluation. He requested detailed

information on the hiring strategy to be implemented by the Selectmen to ensure the proper vetting of candidates.

Selectman McGarry explained that the hiring process for a road agent would involve receiving and reviewing applications, much like any standard employment procedure. Candidates would be evaluated on their qualifications to ensure they are capable of fulfilling the role. He noted that there had been a lack of qualified applicants in the past.

Mr. Cross expressed support for the Select Board's authority to appoint the road agent, specifically commending the current road agent, Pete Schibbelhute, for his excellent work and understanding of the job, which he performs well with the available funds. He suggested that if there are issues with attracting applicants, the Board should consider whether the salary offered is sufficient for the responsibilities of the position. He acknowledged the tight budget but emphasized that hiring qualified individuals, like the current road agent, is worth the cost, as not doing so could lead to greater expenses in the long run.

Seeing no further discussion the Moderator instructed the Clerk to place the article on the ballot as amended.

Mr. Langlois moved to adjourn at 2:11 pm, seconded by the floor.

Minutes transcribed and respectfully submitted by,

Kelly Roberts

Kelly Roberts, Certified Town Clerk/Tax Collector