

# TOWN OF PEACHAM, VERMONT

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## Minutes of the 2024 Annual Town Meeting

The legal voters of the Town of Peacham met at the Peacham Meetinghouse in Peacham, Vermont on Tuesday, March 5, 2024 at 1:00pm.

Moderator Tim McKay opened the meeting and turned Article 1 over to Selectboard Chair Dick Browne.

**Article 1:** To elect a Moderator to conduct and govern the meeting and to continue to serve as Moderator for a term of one year or until his or her successor is elected.

Annette Lorraine nominated Tim McKay. There were no other nominations. Tim McKay was elected as Moderator by a voice vote.

**Article 2:** To receive the report of the Town Auditors.

Auditor Jill Hurst explained that the Town Auditors, which include Hurst, Beatrice Ring, and, until recently, Joe Alper, have two responsibilities. One is to review the books throughout the year and ensure that there is no misuse of funds and that things are done in accordance with the votes of the Selectboard and Town Meeting. There were no problems found in 2023. The other duty is to put together the Town Report, which this year includes a redesign of some of the reports in the town section. The Auditors welcome feedback on the redesign. Hurst thanked Joe Alper for his service as a Town Auditor over the past two years.

**Article 3:** Shall the voters approve total fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$2,731,059.13, of which \$1,145,965.61 shall be raised by taxes and \$1,585,093.52 by nontax revenue?

Annette Lorraine moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia.

Selectboard Chair Dick Browne announced that, although the Town waived the penalty for late-filed homestead declarations during Covid, the Selectboard has reinstated the 4% penalty for 2024 and homestead declarations are due to the state by April 15<sup>th</sup>. Joe Alper asked if the homestead declaration is a separate form than the state income tax return. Browne and Town Clerk/Treasurer Rebecca Washington answered that it can be done along with the state income tax return or it can be filed separately. Cathy Browne added a reminder that some people do not have to file income tax returns but should still file the homestead declaration (HS-122) and the income sensitivity form (HI-144), which can be found on the Vermont Department of Taxes website. Wendy Morgan explained that the income sensitivity form, filed in conjunction with the homestead declaration, could help a property taxpayer get up to \$8,000 in a property tax credit on their tax bill, which would be paid by the state to the town.

Dick Browne explained that there is no fat in the town budget. The over 8% increase is due to an increase in the cost of health insurance, salary increases for town employees, and increases in the cost of supplies, materials, and equipment. What's not included in the budget this year is the cost to retreat paved roads. The most recent estimate from Pike Industries to shim and overlay one mile of road was \$150,000. Peacham has ten miles of paved roads and, theoretically, a shim and overlay lasts about ten years. Therefore, one mile of road should be repaved every year. This does not include sections of roads that need to be rebuilt, which require a grant from the state. The town will need to start planning on spending \$150,000 per year to shim and overlay a section of paved road. It is not included in the 2024 budget, but could be added by a motion to amend the article from the floor. Rusty Barber asked if the state funds any of Peacham's roadwork. Browne answered that the town receives money from the state that's calculated based on road mileage and class of the roads, but that it does not cover the cost of retreatment.

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Moderator Tim Mckay re-read the article. Article 3 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 4:** Shall the voters authorize the borrowing for renovating the Town Hall building in an amount not to exceed \$350,000 to be financed over a period not to exceed five years?

Rick Scholes moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia

Dick Browne explained that there's a lot of maintenance of the Town Hall building that has been deferred for many years. Additionally, the Post Office has requested new carpeting, painting, new windows, and a reduction in rented space. Retired architect Rusty Barber worked with the Selectboard to identify five main areas that need to be dealt with in the building.

- The west wall desperately needs to be waterproofed and insulated and needs a foundation drain. These steps will address the mold issues.
- The ancient heating system consisting of a hot water boiler fired by propane needs to be addressed. The two Modines that hang from the ceiling in the gym are in the way, the Post Office heating doesn't work well and is noisy, there is no heating in the bathrooms, and the current system is not efficient. With the help of the Energy Committee, a plan was developed to install heat pump systems in the gym and the first floor, which will be much more efficient and provide heating and cooling to places in the building that are currently unheated.
- In addition to its other requests, the Post Office has also requested a 24-hour lobby which will require a renovation of the building's lobby area to secure the town offices after hours.
- The building currently has many ADA issues. The door to the Town Clerk's office, the bathrooms, and the access to the gym are currently not up to code.
- The first floor space would be reconfigured during the renovation. The space in the back of the building that is currently rented by the Post Office would be turned into a technology-equipped meeting room and storage space. The current meeting room would be converted to the listers office to give them more room. The bathrooms would be completely renovated.

Dick Browne explained that, between what's left in the ARPA fund and what's in the Capital Building Fund, the town has about \$250,000-\$265,000 that the Selectboard could spend on the renovation. The total project will cost about double that and having the ability to borrow money will allow the Selectboard to put the whole project out to bid to a general contractor. The Selectboard will also be chasing grants to help pay back some of what the town borrows. Dick Browne has already applied for a grant that would cover 80% of the HVAC expense. There are also grants available for insulation and for replacing the downstairs windows. Other details of the plan include the current heating system remaining in place as a backup, all of the lighting on the first floor being replaced with LED lights, the addition of a covered walkway to the front entrance, and painting the exterior of the building.

Mel Reis asked how the \$350,000 related to the budget approved in article 3. Dick Browne answered that it would be in addition to the town budget, and would be borrowed as needed.

E Kaufman asked if there were elements of the project that could be done by volunteers or at a reduced cost by local people with equipment. Dick Browne explained that it would depend on how the RFP gets put out. Some aspects of the project might not be involved in the general contractor's RFP and might go to local people.

Annette Lorraine asked if the Department of Corrections might be available to help with town projects. Dick Browne explained that he has a call out to see if they would be available for painting, but that he hasn't heard back from them.

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Brian Barney asked if there has been an asbestos evaluation and Dick Browne answered that there has not been one to date.

Joel Wright asked if there is a possibility of the Post Office helping fund the project. Dick Browne answered that there are some small details they might do like putting in more parcel lockers, but that they are not putting a lot of money into it.

Rick Scholes asked about getting a long-term contract with the Post Office before spending money on the renovation. Dick Browne explained that it is a possibility but there are still several years left on the current lease. The Selectboard can look into it.

Barry Lawson would love to see the renovation be done and done as well as possible and asked about the borrowed money being spread out over a few years. Dick Browne answered that financing would be over five years and that grants would hopefully pay back some of the borrowed money.

Katherine Siner asked if there is any money available due to the building being in a historic district and asked about who currently cleans and maintains the building. Dick Browne explained that they will be looking into money from various historic preservation groups. Rebecca Washington explained that the Town Office staff cleans the lower floor of the building and reports any maintenance issues to the Selectboard before making calls to have repairs done. The gym has a sign-up spreadsheet for cleaning that is used by frequent gym users.

Becky Jensen asked at what point the town would replace the floor in the gym and explained that there is increased use of the gym including basketball, childcare, pickleball, a dance group, and other various uses. Dick Browne answered that, when the current floor was installed, there were serious issues discovered underneath which would make replacing the floor pricey. They could look into grant money to see if there is funding available, but that it's not in the current plan.

Beatrice Ring asked if some of the ARPA funds that are going towards the lower floor could be used to replace the gym floor. She explained that one of the proposals for ARPA funds was to improve the gym and that ARPA funds were meant to make the community more available and to have a place for the community to gather. Dick Browne answered that part of the project is to make the gym more accessible by turning the old tennis courts into ADA parking with an accessible entrance to the gym.

Jerry Senturia asked how the gym was going to be improved with the new heating system. Dick Browne responded that the heating in the gym would be improved, both by heating and cooling the whole space including the bathroom, and by doing some insulation. The windows have already been replaced and are not part of the project.

Moderator Tim McKay re-read the article. Article 4 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 5:** Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$9,929, to be raised in taxes, to support the following organizations? These requests are the same amounts as requested in 2023.

ORGANIZATION	Request	Services to Peacham (see agency reports information)
Caledonia Home Health Care and Hospice	\$2,000	Home health care; hospice; long-term care; maternal/child care; homemaking; nursing visits; home health aides; therapy visits.
Catamount Arts	\$500	Arts education, live performances, films, festivals, gallery exhibits, First Night.
Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium	\$650	Provides free unlimited general admission for all Peacham residents; offers science education, exhibits, and weather/information services.
Kingdom Animal Shelter	\$500	To facilitate placement of stray and unwanted animals and pets (cats); to establish and maintain an animal shelter; and to prevent overpopulation and cruelty to animals.

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Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging	\$660	Services to seniors: senior meals programs; wellness and fitness programs; health insurance counseling; family caregiver support; elder justice advocacy; benefits advocacy; problem-solving for Social Security and insurance; budgeting assistance.
Northeast Kingdom Human Services, Inc.	\$769	Mental health services (request based on \$1.05 per resident from 2010 census).
Northeast Kingdom Learning Services	\$300	Provides learning and childcare services throughout the Northeast Kingdom.
Northeast Kingdom Youth Services	\$500	Services to teens; parent education program; Living Room day shelter for teens; court diversion program; school outreach/mentoring programs; transitional living assistance.
Rural Community Transportation, Inc.	\$500	Regional public transportation services with scheduled services to Peacham.
SASH	\$2,000	SASH provides free support and services at home for elderly and disabled people who are Medicare eligible, including wellness visits, medication reviews, blood pressure screening, and healthy living planning.
Umbrella	\$500	Counseling, support, and safety for women, children, and families in crisis; safe house network; childcare assistance
VT Assoc. for the Blind and Visually Impaired	\$500	Training, services, support for visually impaired Vermonters.
Vermont Green-Up	\$50	Green Up Day activities and supplies in Peacham provided by VT Green-Up.
West Danville Community Club	\$500	For maintenance of free public beach at Joe's Pond.
Repeat Requests for 2024:	<b>\$9,929</b>	

The article was moved by Jill Hurst. Seconded by Diana Senturia.

Dick Browne explained that last year the Selectboard decided to break out the Peacham organizations' requests and/or the requests that had increased from the group in article 5.

Mel Reis expressed appreciation for the town's support of Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging and explained their mission and how last year's appropriation was used.

Adam Kane expressed appreciation for the town's support of the Fairbanks Museum and explained that Peacham residents get free admission to the museum.

Beatrice Ring wondered if, next year, the Selectboard could look into why SASH's appropriation request is for \$2,000, which is not proportional to their services nor proportional to Peacham's population. Dick Browne answered that they did not request SASH's appropriation requests for other towns and said that it would be appropriate to request that information in the future.

Moderator Tim McKay re-read the article. Article 5 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 6:** Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$1,000, to be raised in taxes, to support Peacham Community Housing?

Jane Woodhouse moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia.

Morgan Gold thanked the town for its support of PCH. PCH works to help support affordable housing and community in Peacham as the owner of structures in town such as the Café building, the Guild building, the Academy Apartments, and the town green. They are still working on subdividing the Academy Apartments and the old, vacant science building from the green and working with Rural Edge to transform and rehab the science building to create more affordable housing. The timeline that they're currently working on is securing funding and completing the property transfer by the summer and having construction done by late 2025. There will be a community forum in the spring to keep everyone up-to-date.

Moderator Tim McKay re-read the article. Article 6 passed by a voice vote.

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**Article 7:** Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$2,000, to be raised in taxes, to support the Peacham Historical Association? This is an increase of \$500 from 2023's appropriation of \$1,500.

Jane Alper moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia. Article 7 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 8:** Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$33,800, to be raised in taxes, to support the Peacham Library? This is an increase of \$1,800 from 2023's appropriation of \$32,000.

Johanna Branson moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia.

Cathy Browne thanked the town for its support of the library over the years. This year's increase is reflective of basic cost of living increases. The library plans to make small increases to its request each year instead of making a larger increase request every few years.

Article 8 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 9:** Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$23,000, to be raised in taxes, to support Peacham Fire District #1? This is an increase of \$20,000 from 2023's appropriation of \$3,000.

Diana Senturia moved the article. Seconded by Dart Thalman.

Jonathan Kaplan explained that the increase is not a permanent increase. The Fire District initially put together a proposal for ARPA money that would increase resiliency against climate change, which included digging another well, enabling the district to maintain status as a volunteer organization, and putting in a generator. Kaplan expressed his gratitude for the attention that the ARPA committee put into the proposal and its recommendation that they receive \$80,000 in ARPA funds. Since the Selectboard decided to use ARPA funds for other projects, this \$23,000 appropriation request would go toward replacing the 20 year old control board. The water users are already bearing over \$1,000,000 in debt from replacing the pipes.

Moderator Tim McKay re-read the article. Article 9 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 10:** Shall the Town pay its real property taxes to the Town Treasurer on or before November 1, 2024, with delinquent taxes having interest charges of one percent per month and with an eight percent penalty charged against them from the due date?

Rick Scholes moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia. Article 10 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 11:** Shall the voters of the Town of Peacham, pursuant to 17 VSA 2650(b), approve increasing membership on the Selectboard from three members to five members, with the additional two members to serve two year terms?

Annette Lorraine moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia.

Barry Lawson asked why. Dick Browne explained that it was one of the recommendations that came out of the Peacham Democracy Committee's report. Expanding the Selectboard would get more voices on the board, lighten the work load on individual members, and allow for conversations about town business between two members outside of a meeting, which currently violates open meeting law.

Moderator Tim McKay re-read the article. Article 11 passed by a voice vote.

**Article 12:** To elect a Selectboard member for a term of three years.

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Karen Lewis nominated Dave Edwards. Rusty Barber nominated Will Kempton. Chuck Gallagher nominated Molly Willard. Will Kempton nominated Christian Snow. Barry Lawson nominated Morgan Gold. Morgan Gold declined the nomination. Rusty Barber nominated Andrea Kane.

Becky Jensen got clarification from Moderator Tim Mckay that a majority was needed to be elected. Moderator Tim Mckay further explained the rules of procedure.

Rusty Barber withdrew the nomination for Will Kempton. Will Kempton withdrew the nomination for Christian Snow. Rusty Barber withdrew the nomination for Andrea Kane.

Ballot results: 97 total votes, Molly Willard-72 votes, Dave Edwards-25 votes.

Molly Willard was elected as Selectboard member for a term of three years by a ballot vote.

**Article 13:** If Article 11 passes, to elect a Selectboard member for a term of two years.

Adam Kane nominated Andrea Kane. Peter Craig nominated Christian Snow. Karen Lewis nominated Dave Edwards. Rusty Barber nominated Will Kempton.

Rick Scholes moved to close nominations. Seconded by Diana Senturia. The motion passed by a voice vote.

Christian Snow introduced himself and Adam Kane introduced Andrea Kane, who was not present.

Ballot results: 94 total votes, Andrea Kane-58 votes, Christian Snow-16 votes, Will Kempton-14 votes, Dave Edwards-6 votes.

Andrea Kane was elected as Selectboard member for a term of two years by a ballot vote.

**Article 14:** If Article 11 passes, to elect a Selectboard member for a term of one year. This term will increase to two years beginning at the 2025 Town Meeting, in order to properly stagger the terms.

Mark Simakaski nominated Christian Snow. Karen Lewis nominated Dave Edwards. Rusty Barber nominated Will Kempton. Johanna Branson nominated Wendy Morgan. Wendy Morgan declined the nomination.

Peter Craig moved to close nominations. Seconded by Jane Alper. The motion passed by a voice vote.

Ballot results: 92 total votes, Will Kempton-44 votes, Christian Snow-32 votes, Dave Edwards-15 votes, Kristin Wood (write-in)-1 vote.

No candidate achieved a majority of votes so the vote had to take place a second time.

Ballot results for the second vote: 91 total votes, Will Kempton-59 votes, Christian Snow-26 votes, Dave Edwards-6 votes.

Will Kempton was elected as Selectboard member for a term of one year by a ballot vote.

**Article 15:** To elect a Lister for a term of three years.

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Nathan Colpitts nominated Sarah Lydon. Rick Scholes moved to close the nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Sarah Lydon. Seconded by Peter Craig. Sarah Lydon was elected as Lister for a term of three years by a ballot vote.

**Article 16:** To elect an Auditor for a term of three years.

Beatrice Ring nominated Charlotte Mooney. Rick Scholes moved to close the nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Charlotte Mooney. Seconded by Jock Gill. Charlotte Mooney was elected as Auditor for a term of three years by a ballot vote.

**Article 17:** To elect an Auditor for a term of one year to complete a vacated three-year term.

Jill Hurst nominated Beatrice Ring. Peter Craig moved to close the nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Beatrice Ring. Seconded by Karen Lewis. Beatrice Ring was elected as Auditor for a term of one year by a ballot vote.

**Article 18:** To elect a First Constable for term of one year.

Peter Craig nominated John Sheehan. John Sheehan was elected as First Constable for a term of one year by a voice vote.

**Article 19:** To elect a Second Constable for a term of one year.

Peter Craig nominated Joe Layn. Joe Layn was elected as Second Constable for a term of one year by a voice vote.

**Article 20:** To elect a Delinquent Tax Collector for a term of one year.

Peter Craig nominated John Sheehan. John Sheehan was elected as Delinquent Tax Collector for a term of one year by a voice vote.

**Article 21:** To elect a Trustee of the Peacham Library (to represent the Town) for a term of three years.

Barb Schoolcraft nominated Charlotte Mooney.

Barb Schoolcraft thanked outgoing Library Trustee Craig Harrison for his six years of service.

Charlotte Mooney was elected as Trustee of the Peacham Library (to represent the Town) for a term of three years by a voice vote.

**Article 22:** To elect a name for the 2024 Town of Peacham plow truck for a term of three years.

Moderator Tim McKay moved to suspended the rules to delay this vote until after article 23. The motion passed by a voice vote.

**Article 23:** To transact any other non-binding business that may legally come before the meeting.

Rusty Barber explained that the 2024 Farm Support Grant applications were available on the back table.

Jock Gill explained that NEK Broadband has started hooking up customers who are along the backbone. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, a bundle of internet and phone will be offered. Karen Lewis spoke about the great experience she had with the team who connected her house.

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Dave Stauffer said that the cemetery took a big hit with the snow storms over the winter and that there will be a community cleanup scheduled in April.

Betsy McKay thanked Dick Browne for his service on the Selectboard.

Greg Lockhart referenced page 99 of the Town Report and spoke about the efforts of the Peacham Democracy Committee and their focus on getting more community members engaged. Members of the committee have been knocking on doors with surveys and the survey is available on the back table or as a Google doc. One of the issues under consideration is to move the time of Town Meeting to allow for more participation. Andrea Otto spoke about trying to get more community members to participate in the process of Town Meeting and encouraged everyone to fill out the survey.

Jeff Berwick explained that the Fire Department received a \$203,000 grant for new fire fighter equipment and that a new rescue truck cab and chassis was purchased with ARPA funds.

Jock Gill said that the Energy Committee is looking for one more member and that there is also the need for an NEK Broadband alternate representative.

Tim McKay explained that one of the things that came out of the Democracy Committee workshops was the idea of changing the time and/or date of Town Meeting. State statute allows for towns to meet on any of the three days preceding the first Tuesday in March. Many towns meet on other days and it has been successful in some towns and not in others. He encouraged everyone to fill out the survey. Mercy Browne pointed out that the committee should try to reach those people who were not at Town Meeting. Tim McKay responded that the survey group has been working on reaching those people as well.

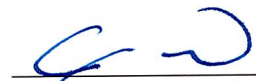
**Article 22 (revisited):** To elect a name for the 2024 Town of Peacham plow truck for a term of three years.

Anna Carvalho nominated Snow Buster, as chosen by the 3/4 grade class at the Peacham School, and Evermore, as chosen by the 5/6 grade class at the Peacham School. Snow Buster was elected as the name for the 2024 Town of Peacham plow truck for a term of three years by a hand vote.

Jill Hurst moved to adjourn. Seconded by Diana Senturia. Meeting adjourned at 3:33pm.

The foregoing is approved and attested by:

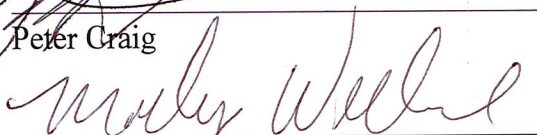
**Peacham Selectboard:**



Alfred Dedam



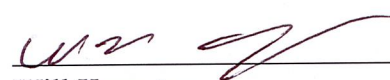
Peter Craig



Molly Willard



Andrea Kane



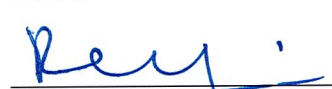
Will Kempton

**Moderator:**



Timothy McKay

**Town Clerk:**



Rebecca Washington