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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Howlett, North, Hall win Selectboard races in
2 Rockingham

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3 Voters approve 8% town budget increase, vote to save
4 school surplus for future repairs

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5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 In Australian voting Tuesday, with a large turnout of more
7 than 500 voters, Rockingham citizens delivered a clear message:
8 The town is looking ahead, not back.

9 Eight candidates ran for three Selectboard seats, one of
10 the most contested in recent town history.

11 Amy Howlett defeated William Crowther 391 to 73, a
12 more than 5-to-1 margin for a three-year seat on the board.

13 In the race for the one-year seats, incumbent Bonnie
14 North and Dalila Hall won handily with 315 and 251 votes,
15 respectively.

16 They defeated David Barrett, Charlie Jarras, Larry White,
17 and Deborah Wright.

18 Barrett, Crowther, and White made it clear that they were
19 running on two main issues: stopping a major town project and
20 reversing last year's merger of the town's three fire departments
21 into one unit.

22 Crowther said publicly at an earlier candidates' forum
23 and at Town Meeting that, if elected, the three would end the
24 town project to restore the historic train depot on The Island into
25 a functioning, commercial property in the village's historic
26 district.

27 The depot restoration project is seen by town officials as
28 a key element in future commercial and residential development
29 for the Bellows Falls downtown district through the next decade
30 or more.

31 Barrett, Crowther, and White, all former members of the
32 now-dormant Rockingham Volunteer Fire Department (RVFD),
33 also said they would restart the department, which was merged
34 along with the Saxtons River department and town emergency
35 services into the Rockingham Fire and Rescue Department
36 (RFRD) near the end of last year.

37 At last year's Town Meeting, voters overwhelmingly
38 supported consolidating the town's three fire departments into
39 one unit.

40 Jarras and Wright, who have both served in many town
41 positions in past years, received 99 and 88 votes, respectively.
42 White received 102 votes and Barrett 79.

43 Voters on Tuesday also approved \$11.5 million for the
44 Rockingham town school budget (341-111).

45 The Bellows Falls Union High School budget of \$9.2
46 million, was passed, 369 to 125.

47 The town's share of the River Valley Technical Center
48 School District budget, \$3.5 million, also passed, 412–77.

49 In uncontested races, voters elected:

- 50 • Paul Obuchowski, town and school moderator
- 51 • Paul Noble, town lister
- 52 • Carol Blackwood and Virginia Massucco, Rockingham

53 Free Public Library trustees

- 54 • Jerusa Contee and Christine Demasi, Rockingham

55 school directors

- 56 • Ben Wallace, director for the Union school district

57 **Town budget up 8%**

58 On Feb. 28, 100 Rockingham voters approved a \$7.3
59 million town budget at Town Meeting, held for the second year
60 on a Saturday afternoon, this time at the town Opera House.

61 The town budget is up 8% and includes equipment
62 purchases for the town highway department and the newly
63 consolidated RFRD. Selectboard members explained that wages,
64 health insurance, and electricity costs accounted for most of the
65 increase.

66 Voters defeated two conflicting amendments to the
67 budget. Paul Reis proposed adding \$500,000 to the budget to
68 reimburse the village of Bellows Falls for police expenses, and
69 another motion was made by Crowther to decrease the budget by
70 \$500,000.

71 There was considerable discussion about funding for the
72 Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) and Senior Solutions.

73 Despite doing most of the work previously performed by
74 the VNA, Senior Solutions is getting a much smaller
75 appropriation. Voters decided the funding disparity will be more
76 effectively worked out with the Selectboard at future board
77 meetings.

78 Voters also passed \$436,000 for the Rockingham Free
79 Public Library, \$22,000 for the Meeting House Capital Reserve,
80 and \$131,000 for maintaining town cemeteries.

81 **School budget**

82 The Rockingham School District Meeting approved
83 \$11.4 million on Tuesday during Australian balloting, and on the
84 floor of Saturday’s meeting, voters approved adding a \$710,000
85 surplus from the 2025 budget to a reserve fund for future school
86 renovations.

87 Rockingham School Board Chair Caitlin Deschenes-
88 Desmond explained the budget has an increase of 2.08%, but
89 that overall school taxes are expected to decrease by 2.85%. She
90 said this is much less than expected statewide.

91 While some attendees believed the \$710,000 would be a
92 lot of money to be held in a reserve fund, Rockingham School
93 Board member Christopher Kibbee said that it wasn’t a lot of
94 money when addressing repairs and renovations.

95 Noting “there are no small repairs anymore,” he said that
96 the board believes the reserve fund is the best use for the funds
97 after lengthy discussion.

98 Rockingham School Board member Priscilla Lambert
99 proposed an amendment to put the surplus into a tax relief fund.
100 After much discussion, that amendment was defeated (74–26),
101 and Article 3 was passed as written, 93 to 9.

102 **Non-binding votes**

103 Voters also strongly supported a non-binding resolution
104 condemning the actions of ICE and calling for its dismantling.

105 They also approved another article condemning the
106 news that same morning from the Trump administration that the
107 U.S. military joined with Israeli forces in attacking Iran.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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