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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Vernon voters approve change to appoint town treasurer

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 At Annual Town Meeting, voters approve town and
3 school budgets, celebrate their firefighters, and consider the
4 balance of power between Selectboard and residents

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

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6 Vernon voters at Annual Town Meeting on March 2
7 approved an almost-level-funded school budget and added funds
8 to the municipal budget for fire department recruitment.

9 Voters approved a final amended town budget of
10 \$2,539,970. In its proposed budget, the Selectboard also decided
11 to use \$100,000 from the general fund to offset taxes.

12 Town Meeting also approved the Selectboard’s proposal
13 to appoint the town treasurer — a move that town officials have
14 described as a precaution due to “liability issues” — but rejected
15 a call to do so for the collector of delinquent taxes.

16 **School budget passes**

17 The School Board started the meeting with a quick
18 presentation on the school budget that was on the ballot.

19 The Vernon Town School District asked voters to approve
20 the school board’s expenditure of \$7,933,289 in the upcoming
21 fiscal year. This budget reflects per-pupil education spending of
22 \$15,762, a 0.1% increase over FY2025.

23 School Board Member Daniel Amidon said the board
24 worked hard to keep budget increases to a minimum. Health
25 insurance increased by more than 8%, he said.

26 He added that the board still managed to keep the
27 FY2027 budget’s overall increase to 1.8% and achieved these
28 savings by cutting five positions at the school.

29 Moderator Kerry Amidon warned voters that despite the
30 board’s efforts to keep the budget — and therefore education
31 taxes — low, they may still see tax increases depending on how
32 everything shakes out at the state level.

33 **‘Important and foundational’**

34 The only budget item to change considerably was the
35 Vernon Fire Department’s.

36 Voters amended the General Fund budget upwards by
37 more than \$60,000 to include extra funding for the Vernon Fire
38 Department (VFD) to recruit and pay more firefighters.

39 Russ Rosinski, who moved the amendment, called the
40 department’s work “important and foundational” and praised
41 firefighters as examples of the people who show up for all sorts of
42 incidents — no matter what.

43 He added that the department lacked the volunteers it
44 needed, and if the town doesn't support its firefighters, then it will
45 lose them.

46 "Do the right thing here," he said.

47 Town Meeting also approved setting up a fund to dredge
48 and clean out the town's fire ponds and seeding it with \$10,000.

49 Voters also rejected a proposal to establish a town event
50 fund to pay for community events such as the town picnic and
51 harvest festival after some raised the point that the town already
52 has a reserve fund for the town picnic.

53 **Getting down to municipal** 54 **business**

55 The evening started with a flurry of confusion. According
56 to the Selectboard, staffing changes in the treasurer's office,
57 including the resignation of the elected treasurer, had led to
58 delays in the Annual Town Report. As a result, audience members
59 needed to sort through several pages of updated budget
60 information.

61 This early bout of confusion highlighted frustrations some
62 voters expressed through the rest of the evening: that the board
63 was not managing the town in a transparent way. For example,
64 several times during the night Munson Hicks and Katherine
65 Baldwin raised concerns that voters were ceding too much power
66 to the board.

67 Under this umbrella of frustration, voters passed a
68 motion to divide the municipal budget so that each department's
69 line items could be considered individually. The original budget
70 question, Article 4, had asked the audience to vote on the
71 General Fund as a whole.

72 As they worked through the department budgets, several
73 in the audience zeroed in on Town Administrator Shelly Walker's
74 salary.

75 Walker's current contract with the town stipulates a
76 salary of \$108,116. Voters who proposed lowering the amount to
77 \$75,000 were dismayed to learn that they couldn't do so without
78 breaking an employment contract.

79 Selectboard Vice-Chair Brandon Bucossi told audience
80 members they have more power to influence the budget when
81 the board builds it in the fall rather than attempting changes at
82 Annual Town Meeting.

83 **Elected vs. appointed positions**

84 Voters approved changing the treasurer's position,
85 currently an elected office, to an appointed one, but they rejected
86 an article, initiated by citizen petition, to appoint the collector of
87 delinquent taxes as well.

88 "An Elected Treasurer can have full access and control
89 over the Town's finances without any experience or training,"
90 town officials wrote in an annotated version of the Town Meeting
91 warning. "An Appointed Treasurer would be required to have
92 experience and training."

93 Going forward, the treasurer will have the professional
94 qualifications to serve as a finance director to handle the majority
95 of the town's finances.

96 Voters expressed frustration and confusion about the
97 question, given that the Selectboard has already hired a finance
98 director, despite the treasurer position still decided by Australian
99 ballot.

100 Voters also defeated a proposal to authorize the
101 Selectboard "to appoint a collector of delinquent taxes who may
102 be the Town Treasurer appointed by the Selectboard."

103 This item was placed on the ballot as a result of a
104 petition organized by Melissa Allen, who shared concerns that
105 the current elected delinquent tax collector lacked the
106 independence and ethics required for the job.

107 She said after the vote that she wrestled with
108 transitioning the position from an elected office to an appointed

109 one. However, she said the town attorney had provided the
110 necessary wording to make the petition proper.

111 Other audience members argued that making the
112 delinquent tax collector an appointed position would take
113 another piece of power from voters and handed it to the
114 Selectboard.

115 A marathon session

116 This year's Annual Town Meeting began at 6:30 p.m. and
117 ran until after midnight.

118 Amidon opened the meeting, paraphrasing her
119 predecessor, former Town Moderator Tim Arsenault.

120 "We all enter as neighbors, let's all leave that way," she
121 said.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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