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# TOWN OF BURLINGTON

## Meeting Minutes

Email minutes to [meetings@burlington.org](mailto:meetings@burlington.org) or Bring to the Clerk's Office. Thank you

Minutes need to be posted within 30 days or 2 meetings of the board – Draft minutes can be posted and revised at a later date

DEPT./BOARD: Ways and Means Committee

DATE: September 20, 2023

TIME: 7 pm

PLACE: Town Hall – Main Hearing Room

### MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Iler, Chair  
Doug Davison, Vice Chair

Shayan Bhattacherya  
Frank Monaco  
Steve Morin  
Rob Neufeld  
Roger Riggs  
David Tait  
Ed Parsons  
Sonia Rollins

### REMOTE:

Chris Campbell

### ABSENT:

Brad Bond  
Michael Hardy  
Meghan Nawoichik  
Chris Delaney

### GUESTS:

Paul Sagarino, Town Administrator  
John Danizio, Assistant Town Administrator

Julie Faulkingham, Recording Clerk was present.

### Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

1. Pledge of Allegiance.
2. Public Participation: N/A.





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Note: since one Committee member participated remotely, all votes were taken as roll call votes.

### 3. September Town Meeting Financial Articles

#### Article 3

Recreation Department Subcommittee Representative Roger Riggs reported on the Will of Marshall Simonds. Roger discussed how the amount of the will is \$74,907.15. This is the second reading of the proceeds of Marshall Simonds. Roger did speak to the Parks and Recreation Director Brendan Egan and asked him what projects were on the list this year. Brendan did mention that last year they built a treehouse and used part of the funds from Simonds to build that. Brendan said that they were going back to the list prior to that to continue funding projects at Simonds Park from the Trust. The potential list of the use of funds includes the accessibility improvements on walkways leading to the lower tennis and pickleball courts, additional therapeutic recreation staff, a fund for the modular trailer route used for the summer therapeutic recreation program, funds for special events and a scholarship fund for programs in the park. Roger discussed how the subcommittee can decide on their own whether they are in favor.

Motion: A motion was made by Sonia Rollins for a favorable vote for Article 3. The motion is seconded and approved with a vote of 10-0-0. Chris Campbell arrived on Webex after the vote.

#### Article 12- Hybrid Meetings

Chair John Iler read Article 12 which states in part, “. . . Town meeting or any public meeting by any board, committee, or department shall be accessible by all who wish to attend either in person or via electronic communications platform. This communications platform will allow users to connect via video, audio, phone, and chat using internet connections for the device. Members of these meetings shall be able to be recognized by the moderator or Chair and to vote where applicable, be recorded via an electronic communications platform or to act in any manner as in relation there to.” Chair Iler discussed how this is applicable to boards, committees, and departments but understands this also applies to subcommittees although it does not explicitly say that.

Chair Iler suggested to the committee to discuss if it is appropriate for committees and subcommittees to be required to have hybrid meetings.

Shayan discussed how hybrid meetings are fine for larger groups but with subcommittees with 2 or 3 people, it might be harder to get a hybrid subcommittee meeting going. Shayan discussed how subcommittee meetings are a lot more informal in general.

Chris Campbell was joining remotely. Chris discussed how he currently has Covid and this instance of him being remote is a perfect example as to why a hybrid meeting is good as to not come into contact with other committee members and get them sick. Chris gave an example of how last year he had a meeting end at 6:30 pm and then another began right at 6:30 pm. He discussed how he was able to join remotely until he got physically to the meeting in person. He discussed how Burlington has seen greater participation from Town Meeting members due to the use of remote access. He also pointed out how hybrid access allows flexibility for members to continue to do their jobs on these committees.

Roger discussed generally hybrid meetings are a good idea, but wonders about the burden on the infrastructure on the committees. He asked when does someone decide they can join remotely? Can it be last minute or 2 days before? He is concerned there will be set up infrastructure that will not be used in many cases. He discussed the Town will be burdened with having the task to set up more conference rooms with accessible remote equipment. Roger discussed the fact that we have to spend money to support hybrid meetings isn't a bad thing since it is a necessity to have the appropriate equipment in order to hold hybrid hearings. Roger asked if the Chair has discretion over allowing Hybrid meetings and Chair Iler answered, yes.

Rob Neufeld is the Chair of the Library Trustees and discussed how they can have hybrid meetings anytime they want because they have the infrastructure to do so. He discussed how people have gone away and people could access the meeting from hotel rooms. He





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discussed how many people are still working remotely and are used to remote work and meetings. Where he used to work, he had remote meetings all over the world every single day and this is more prevalent everywhere. Rob does not think subcommittees need a hybrid meeting set up and discussed how it would be very hard to do for subcommittees. Chair Iler reiterated the wording says “committees” and he is strictly going from previous discussions where the implication was that subcommittees were intended to be covered by this and is not sure how it is to be interpreted.

Sonia Rollins reiterated she has no issue if Town Meeting or meetings like this (Ways and Means meeting) wanted to be hybrid. She discussed how with subcommittees it is nearly impossible due to the fact that there are far too many subcommittees and there are no formal votes that are not also voted on at a full Ways and Means meeting.

David Tait discussed how he thinks the article should be clarified. He discussed how the world has changed and work life has involved more Zoom meetings and we will find out in the long term if that’s good or bad. He discussed how it is hard to communicate in that environment where people are both in person and remote and prefers doing the hybrid method only at bigger meetings. He discussed how some discussions may be missed in hybrid meetings as well since there are so many moving parts.

Chris Campbell agrees in person meetings are important, but this is something Town Meeting needs to decide. He discussed how the really good work gets done in person. He also discussed on the other hand, how being a young parent like himself or how a disabled person can join remotely, and that is a good thing. He discussed how legal counsel could weigh in on this matter.

Rob asked what financial aspect the committee is voting on with this article. Chair Iler discussed how this article is not financial, but it does affect the committee and subcommittees so he thought the committee would discuss whether they take a position of whether to be in favor or not from a committee point of view. Vice Chair Doug Davidson discussed how he thinks it is reasonable for the committee to vote on this article as it affects the committee, and thinks all committees should vote on this article.

Ed Parsons discussed how he thinks in person meetings could be intimidating for some people. He discussed some may have an easier time speaking online rather than in person. He discussed how it takes all kinds (in person/remote meetings) and how one of the problems committees face is more participation, so allowing hybrid meetings would be a good thing to promote more participation. Chair Iler asks the Ways and Means Committee to cast their vote with the mindset of whether this is a good thing for the committee or not. He discussed how the Zoning Bylaw Committee is in favor of Article 12.

**Motion:** Roger Riggs made a motion that the Ways and Means Committee supports Article 12 if it applies to just the full committee and not subcommittees.

There is further discussion about the wording of the motion. Sonia discussed how the word committee should be struck completely and believes the wording is a bit too vague. Chair Iler leaves it up to individuals to bring up their positions of the matter at Town Meeting. The motion does not go forward.

Other articles – no other articles to report.

#### 4. Potential Large Town projects, financing, and debt scheduling, financial dashboard

Town Hall 1- Chair Iler discussed how Town Hall 1 has been working with the administration regarding large projects coming up including debt scheduling and a concept of a financial dashboard. Frank Monaco discussed how back in April the administration, as part of Ways and Means budget planning, put up a dashboard of the debt schedule and capital projects. He discussed how there is a lot of deliberation going on with capital projects and several members of this committee have expressed either concerns of ideas of how to get through that whole process better. Frank discussed how these have morphed into an idea that maybe we just need an upgrade to the dashboard that includes quite a bit more in terms of the levy, the levy limit, tax impact from projects, and a more accurate capital





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plan. Frank discussed how we are in a new age and need to get the capital plans really scrubbed up the best we can and roll that into the debt schedule. He discussed that behind the debt schedule, there should be a dashboard put up that includes more information about average cost payer tax for the debt, impact on the operating budget itself, and where the levy is going.

Frank discussed there were 2 Town Hall 1 subcommittee meetings with 3 topics of discussion. These topics included an upgrade of the dashboard, an update to the capital budget plan, and the Police Station and school project plans. Frank discussed how with all of that going on, the capital budget plan can become more meaningful and the dashboard can be upgraded to better see what is going on. A debt memo is displayed on the screen to the committee and there is also a paper copy supplied to the committee that shows what a new dashboard would look like. Assistant Town Administrator John Danizio has worked to build out an example of what a new dashboard would look like.

Frank discussed how the new dashboard gives a real clear picture of the operating budget, taxes, and what the capital projects do to the debt schedule. There are new thumbnails added to base of the dashboard which shows the average tax impact for every million dollars on the levy. The new dashboard also adds a thumbnail of the average tax impact for every million dollars that is added to the bond. The last thumbnail added is one of new growth. Frank spoke about the impact of the tax payer and that the average is gray. Frank discussed how capital projects could have more impact on small business than we're aware of and how it would be nice to get dashboard material on that. Frank discussed how the TOB needs to consider at some point what is enough money for stabilization, thinking about a guidepost of stabilization, and how much debt we should have in any given year.

John Danizio discussed how Frank hit the nail on the head of how they got together and how they could put several documents onto one document, trying to merge all the documents. John explained how this dashboard isn't meant to be final and it is important to know it does not include the police station or school buildings in order not to skew the numbers. Frank discussed how the take away from this is that the dashboard presented today is a model and they are trying to make a more useful document.

Chair Iler thanks John for his work on this and how this will be useful going forward. John discussed how he will work on it to make the numbers more accurate and real. He discussed his interpretations of the dashboard and how the excess levy capacity has been a large number. John highlighted that because operating budget is increasing faster than levy limit, Burlington might sooner than expected eat up the levy capacity. Chair Iler discussed how it could make sense to require a debt override for any of the large projects coming up from the financial point of view so as not to use up the access capacity too soon.

Sonia reiterated it would be great to see the business impact on the dashboard. Sonia asked when there is talk of new growth, does that then get offset by if there are vacancies or abates that are put in? She gave an example as to when new growth calculation comes in. Paul Sagarino Town Administrator responded by saying no, that would be a calculation of new construction that results in new tax dollars. New growth and vacancy rates and such do not cross, Paul said. Paul discussed if commercial starts to decrease or stabilize, it has an impact on the residential side and how the residential side always picks up more.

Sonia discussed how the TOB prides themselves that they have not hit the levy, but the dashboard provided indicates that the TOB is not far from the levy so it is starting to get nerve wracking. Sonia discussed how the committee has never had to talk about headcounts, layoffs, or cuts. Sonia said it always made Burlington unique that they have never had to stick to 2 and half percent for the increase of the budget.

Frank discussed how this is just a model and there has been no discussion of what will hit when and where. He discussed how it is not known what big projects are after the 2 upcoming. Frank discussed how timing is important because growth could catch up and to not draw too many interpretations from this dashboard example.





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Paul discussed how the TOB uses \$1.5 million dollars for new growth as the conservative number. He discussed what has kept the TOB from bumping up against the levy is having better years than that. He said the TOB is more likely in the \$2 million-dollar range which is slightly better than the \$1.5 million. He discussed how it fluctuates with economic conditions and if the TOB is to use \$1.5 million, \$2 million, or \$3 million the TOB gets to the point whether it's in 5 years or in 7 years. Chair Iler discussed how the committee should not jump to too many conclusions yet. One might conclude that growing the budget at the current rate is not sustainable. He discussed how at the next meeting, the committee should be given more detail on more projects and be able to make a recommendation from a financial point of view if it makes sense to do exclusions, delay projects, or do them all now.

Ed discussed how he is seeing baseline projections, not a dashboard. He discussed even with excluding projects the TOB budget is getting tight and if anything were to be added, it would be very tight. He discussed how this is big news and how by using Excel, new estimates could feed into the dashboard and can determine if projects need to be moved around.

Chair Iler asked the committee if this dashboard gives the information they need to have a discussion, or would they like to see something different.

Paul wanted to point out the future capital projects for the town are not going to fit into the operating budget, but how this is not unique. He discussed how every other community in the state uses a debt exclusion to fund a capital project. Paul discussed how debt was very low when he first got to the TOB because the town was not investing in the infrastructure for quite a while so the operating budget was doing well. He explained how the TOB is getting back to normal levels of investment for a community of this size, but reiterated how it is not a unique situation and is how other communities fund buildings is with debt exclusions. Paul discussed how he doesn't want people to feel like we are going over cliff by using debt exclusions and it is a very common way communities build projects. He discussed how the TOB has been lucky to have excess funding.

John Danizio discussed how when he first started, these projects could fit because numbers were much smaller. He discussed how cost increases have made it impossible to stay within the 2 and half percent budget increase when prices have gone up so much.

Sonia discussed the topic of debt exclusion as an education process. She discussed the upside of debt exclusion is when a debt is paid off, that tax goes away. She discussed how it is critical to do improvements, but the dashboard is a great tool to show people that debt exclusion is not a bad thing.

Roger discussed with the debt exclusions, you get more for your tax dollars but are not trading off services versus capital projects.

Shayan suggested the town website needs an FAQ about debt exclusions. Chair Iler discussed obviously there are tax increases in new projects but the projects need to be done.

Chair Iler discussed committee members to look over the dashboard and see how it folds into Town Hall 1.

### 5. Approval of Minutes

Motion: A motion is made to approve minutes from July 12, 2023. The motion is seconded and approved with a vote of 9-0-2.

### 6. Adjourn

Motion: A motion is made to adjourn the meeting. Motion approved with a vote of 11-0-0.

Respectfully submitted by Julie Faulkingham, Recording Clerk.

