MEETING OF THE TOWN OF FAYSTON

March 4, 2025, 9:30 am

Fayston Elementary School

Chuck Martel, Chair of the Selectboard, called the meeting to order at 9:32 am

Chuck welcomed everyone to the 220th Fayston Town Meeting and introduced everyone to the members of the Selectboard (himself, Mike Jordan, Ron Graves), as well as Madi Vasseur (Town Clerk and Selectboard Assistant), and Eve Silverman (Minutes taker)

Chuck provided some history about Town Meetings in Fayston. The Town was chartered February 24, 1782. It was named after Joseph Fay, who was President of the Council on Safety, which protected the Town from the British. Lynde Wait was the first settler. In1804 Waitsfield expressed a desire to annex us, but the Town was settled independently, and the first Town meeting was held in 1805. In 1800 there were 18 people in Town, five of them serving on the Selectboard. By 1860, there were 800, by 1960 the number had dropped to 158. Today there are 1364 residents. In 1805, Montpelier became the capital of Vermont. Some of the issues the legislators considered included a vote to end the slave trade, an appeal of a man fined for forgery, a bill that would make it more difficult to get a divorce, and a location for a prison. At that time, UVM had 1 building, 50 students, and the first class graduated in 1804. If you're interested in history, there is a need for members of the Fayston Historical Society, see Patti Lewis.

Moment of silence for those who passed away in 2024.
Alan Menard
Judith DiMario
Robert Vasseur
Rosetta Weber
Kaleb Bates-Wolcott
Juliet Pease
Lynda Johnson
Jonathan Shea
Janet Hubbard-Brown

Article 1. To elect a moderator for the year ensuing. Rick Rayfield's term expires.

Freddie Graves moved to nominate Rick Rayfield; Kathy Cadwell seconded. Roger Porter cast the ballot. The motion passed.

At this point, Rick took over moderating the meeting.

Article 2. To hear and act upon the reports of Town Officers for the year ending 2024.

Chuck Martel took the podium and referred everyone to the Selectboard report on page 6 of the Town Report.

He drew everyone's attention to the dedication to Stuart Hallstrom, who retired after 30 years of service. Josh Livingston is the new road foreman. Tony Long will be celebrating 25 years as a road

crew member. There is a new road crew member, Adam Brooks. We are looking for another road crew member, starting part-time, possibly becoming full-time, to replace Mike Quenneville during the summer season.

Madi Vasseur and Sarah Stavraky, thank you for all the work that you put into the Town Report.

Patti Lewis retired at the end of last year, and Madi Vasseur and Sarah Stavraky are doing a wonderful job. Madi Vasseur has taken over as Town Clerk and Selectboard Assistant. Sarah Stavraky took over as Town Treasurer and Delinquent Tax Collector. There is also a possible opening for an Assistant Town Clerk (part-time position).

We have used ARPA funds to put a new roof on the Town office and install a new boiler and new lights in the parking lot. We bought a new grader to replace the 25-year-old road grader using reserve funds so that we didn't need to take on debt. We replaced the road signs with reflective green signs. We did a lot of drainage work on Tucker Hill Road and culvert work all around town -- there were 30 culverts replaced after the flood, 11 of which were on Dunbar Hill Road. As a result of the flood, 19 roads were damaged, and 2 bridges were destroyed; these bridges will be $1.3MM and $1.6MM to replace. We are hoping FEMA funds will cover this. One home was deemed unfit to live in. 1,690 road crew hours were spent toward flood recovery. 17,490 yards of material were hauled in. The Town has had over 13 meetings with FEMA and continues to meet with them weekly; 250+ hours of Town Office work has been dedicated to flood relief. There were several outside companies who also helped the Town during the flood as well.

We continue to evaluate the gravel pit to determine its remaining life span. We haven't given up on the Town Garage; it needs to be done, but due to impacts on the budget we haven't yet put it on the front burner. Albert Coccagna: is there a contingency plan if FEMA doesn't come through with money? Chuck: We may have to take loans; at the moment, these loans are intended to take us through until we get the money. We know that they pay late, so we have to consider borrowing for that.

Doug Mosle, Town Lister, came to the podium and referred everyone to the Listers' report on page 8. The listers are assessors, assessing the fair market value of the property (they are not Tax assessors). The Board of Listers is comprised of Doug Mosle, Kirsten Andrea, and Kim Laidlaw. Kim Laidlaw will not be running again; thank you to Kim for your service.

Act 68 (2023) was intended to streamline the Statewide Assessment Practices. In the last four years, most of Vermont has been required to reassess, due to declining CLAs across the board. This has created a backlog of available appraisers. The legislature tried to fix this problem by attempting to eliminate the role of the lister and instead assess property by region rather than by town; this hasn't yet been implemented. It does remove local control; I don't think this is a good thing, but it will take a few years to figure out.

We were ordered to reappraise. After sending out two RFPs for appraisers, we received one bid, which was competitive and which we accepted. The reappraisal by the outside company will cost $110,000. How will it affect your taxes? In theory, if the Town spends the same amount of money and properties double in value, the municipal taxes for each property will remain the same. The biggest impact on your taxes is the Education Budget, and the Town has very little control over this.

Albert Coccagna: If the CLA doubles, will the Education tax double? Doug explained the CLA calculation and how it impacts the education tax rate. Roughly, as CLA goes down, the education tax rate goes up. Darlene McCormick: Why are different Towns are paying more than their fair share and some paying less? Doug explained the COD (a measure of equity). When our CLA is 100% (i.e. when the properties are appraised at market value), our COD is 5%, meaning our sales are about 5% off the median. Darlene: Where did we come up with the idea that we reassess and raise everyone's value? Doug: We don't reappraise to raise values; we do it to make their values reflect the fair market value. Darlene: Lower priced properties are brought up to market value and are being treated unfairly. Jared Cadwell: Thank you Doug for all your great work, it is hard to explain this very complicated system of taxation. Darlene, you should be talking with your Representatives, who starting tomorrow are considering education tax reform. They need to hear from you about the unfairness of this system.

Rick: I would urge you all to attend the Harwood Board meetings; the last one was the night before this meeting.

Rick: If Candace White and Dara Torre show up, I would suggest we suspend the order of the agenda to allow them to speak. (There were no objections to this.)

Kim Laidlaw: I urge you to vote to support our Education Budget. Not supporting the budget will not make your taxes go down.

Article 3. To elect a Town Clerk to fill the remainder of Patti Lewis' term ending in 2026.

Jared nominated Madi Vasseur, Patti Lewis seconded. No further nominations. Rick moved to elect Madi, Candace Porter seconded. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 4. To elect a Treasurer to fill the remainder of Patti Lewis' term ending in 2026.

Ed nominated Sarah Stavraky; Patti Lewis seconded. No other nominations. Rick made the motion; Cynthia Seckler and Danielle Dukette seconded. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 5. To elect a Delinquent Tax Collector for the year ensuing. Sarah Stavraky' s term expires.

Cynthia Seckler nominated Sarah Stavraky; Woody Duggan seconded. No other nominations. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 6. To elect a Selectboard Member for a three-year term. Chuck Martel's term expires.

Ed Read nominated Chuck Martel; Jared Cadwell seconded. No other nominations. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 7. To elect a Lister for a three-year term. Kim Laidlaw's term expires.

Kim agreed to serve again. Mike Lorraine made the nomination of Kim. Candace Porter seconded. No other nominations. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 8. To elect a Second Constable for a one-year term. Chris Griffin's term expires.

Patti Lewis nominated Chris Griffin; Mike Quenneville seconded the nomination. No other nominations. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 9. To elect a Cemetery Commissioner for a three-year term. David Koepele's term expires.

Candance Porter nominated David Koepele; Patti Lewis seconded. No other nominations. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 10. To elect a Cemetery Commissioner to fill the remainder of Ken Amann's term ending in 2027.

Candace nominated Karen Sauther. Jared Cadwell seconded. No other nominations. No objections to Rick casting the ballot for the whole room. Rick cast the single ballot; motion passed.

Article 11. To elect a HUUSD School Director, Danielle Dukette's term expires. Article to be voted by Australian ballot.

Article 12. Shall the Town of Fayston approve an amended "Mad River Valley Recreation District Agreement" to allow admission of municipalities as partial members as is posted on the Town and MRVRD websites at https://faystonvt.com/, mrvrd.org, and available for viewing at the Fayston Town Office and polling location. Article to be voted by Australian Ballot.

Karen Sauther: How many people from each town are represented now? Patti Lewis: Two. Molly Bagnato: there is a third, at large member. Jared Cadwell: What would the financial obligation be for Moretown? Molly: As a one-half member, they would have half the obligation of ours, $10,000, and they would have one representative.

Article 13. Shall the Town pay the Selectboard expenses in the amount of $1,000 each?

Patti Lewis made the motion; Kathy Cadwell seconded.

Casey Murphy: I support the Selectboard. We all know what happened on July 11th. We were stuck. The Road Crew showed up with a loader, neighbors showed up with chainsaws. The community we live in really showed up for us. What was missing that day was our Selectboard (except Chuck, who was not in Town). I would ask that being on the Selectboard means showing up. I do support paying their expense. Mike Bishop: What is current expense? Rick $1,000.

The vote was taken, the motion unanimously passed.

Article 14. Property taxes are due 30 days from the generation of the bills and become late after that date. Taxes not paid by November 1, 2025, are delinquent (postmarks (not metered mail) accepted). Delinquent taxes will incur a one-time penalty of 8% and interest of 1% per

month for the first three months and 1.5% per month thereafter. Shall November 1, 2025, remain the date that taxes become delinquent?

Paul Sipple moved; Candace Porter seconded.

Paul Sipple: Is this the current language of the delinquent Tax policy or is something changing? Patti Lewis: It is the same language.

Doug Mosle: Taxes are due 30 days after they are mailed out (August). If you pay on November 2nd, they are far more than one day late. The Board doesn't have permission to forgive this (the State has a list of reasons that are accepted, we have to go by this). Helen Whybrow: This extra two months is very helpful because it takes the State a while to process the homestead tax rebates. Chuck: We do make an appeal for early payments, which will improve our cash flow, especially since we are trying to determine if we need to borrow money. Karen Sauther: If we have to borrow money, our taxes will be affected by that. Mike Bishop: Has the Town thought about offering a discount for paying taxes on time? Patti Lewis: We have, but this puts a greater burden on those who cannot. Mike Bishop: Is there a number that would make a sense to offer the discount that would cut down on how much is needed to borrow. Mike Jordan: The only consideration for borrowing is for the outlay on flood expenses. We don't typically borrow. Freddie Graves: The schools do that; they don't give a discount, but they can use the money that is brought in as their budget is very large. Our budget isn't nearly that big. Sarah Stavraky: Paying earlier may not prevent having to borrow but will help us to pay the loan off sooner. Woody Duggan: How about a stick rather than a carrot; can we move the delinquent tax date closer to the due date? Danielle Dukette: How many people are late? I think it's a small number. Sarah Stavraky: about 75-80 out of 1200 properties; now we're down to 20 properties. Ed Read: 85% of our tax bill goes to state education. If we give a discount, we still have to pay the state. Paul Sipple: We should pay late; it's a lot of money.

A vote was taken. The motion unanimously passed.

Article 15. Shall the voters authorize a sum of money $1,843,877.08 to pay debts and expenses of the Town of Fayston for the year ending December 31st, 2025?

Jared Cadwell moved; Freddie Graves seconded the motion.

Michael Jordan spoke about the budget. Our municipal budget increase is actually 0.4%. The budget for 2025 starts on page 18 of the Town Report. Delinquency has been going up over the last couple of years. I will go through each line, highlighting those that show differences. State Highway: We are not anticipating a payment from the state this year. We are taking in more interest and penalties due to the delinquencies. We are doing well with General Fund interest. Overall, revenues haven't changed much.

The big changes are in expenses. Legal expenses have come down. Benefits are stable, based on salaries. Elections expenses are reduced, as we have received a grant to cover this. Highway equipment is reduced due to our reserve funding mechanism, which has permitted us to replace the older equipment, so that costly maintenance expenses are covered by warranty. Highway garage expenses are relatively unchanged. We are looking at maintenance and repair, and possible long-term replacement. Highway crew and supplies are fairly level. Insurance has seen some increases in salary-related expenses. We have added some maintenance funds to the municipal

buildings line. Computer expenses have reduced as we are transitioning to newer systems which helps us work efficiently. There are no more seminars and dues as we have moved online. Planning budget: We are funding the Fayston Conservation Commission differently; we are switching to a line-item account, and some changes are reflected as we transition to that approach. Salaries have changed as we have different positions. "Taxes": We have funded MRV Ambulance with a new line item, as with the Mad River Path. If we pass the MRVRD article to include Moretown, it will not affect our contribution to the Rec District. Reserves: This means that we don't have a budget line item that needs to be funded. This is a great example of the forward thinking of the Town. The Waitsfield Fayston Contract has gone up a bit as we have recently changed the formula, but we are reexamining this arrangement. The amount in the report for flood expense is the amount that we have outlaid; the Fed will match 75% and State 17% but we only get it when the projects are complete, and even then, there is a wait. This is why we are looking at loans. We are tracking this closely. Last year at this time we had a surplus that we were going to use to reduce taxes, but our deadline for doing this was just after the flood. So, we used it to help offset these expenses.

Jared Cadwell: What is the expectation of the life span of the temporary bridges? Mike Jordan: Best case scenario is that the temporary bridges would be in for 2-3 years, after that, permanent bridges would go in. Jared: Maybe they can last longer (so we don't have to put in new permanent bridges as soon)? Mike: We pay a monthly rental on them, so we need to get them replaced asap.

Freddie Graves: Doesn't all the spending have to happen before FEMA pays? Mike Jordan: the permanent replacement of the bridges is not part of the emergency claim to FEMA.

Paul Sipple: You're paying rental expense on the bridge? Sarah Stavracky: $5,000/mo. Mike Jordan: We also had to remove the wreckage and then remove and reset abutments (part of the line 5088 f lood expense). Karl Klein: If the new ones are washed out in a future flood, would that be funded by FEMA? Mike Jordan: That would be on the Town. Albert Coccagna: Can we buy the temporary bridges? Mike Jordan: I'm not sure they're for sale, and they can't really be used for a permanent use. Albert Coccagna: Can the town build their own bridge? Mike Jordan: We have to meet state regulations for infrastructure. Danielle Dukette: When the bridges are replaced, will they take into account future flooding? Mike: Yes, there will be a new hydraulic study so they will take larger volume. David Koepele: What is the weight capacity of the bridges? Josh Livingston: About 68,000 pounds. Danielle Dukette: I want to acknowledge our road crews. Mike Jordan: We don't have any f lat spots on the Fayston roads, it's not an easy town to maintain.

Rick re-read the question. All in favor, none opposed. Motion is carried.

Candace White approached the podium. She and ***Dara Torre*** are the two representatives to the State. Candace: We represent Fayston, Warren, Waitsfield, Moretown and Duxbury. Our session started in early January. The first vote is the Budget Adjustment Act; we are trying to work across party lines, it has been passed out of the House, and it is at the Senate. 98% in agreement shows good collaboration.

Education was our loudest calling; we need to address education funding. I have been meeting weekly to talk about education reform. The Governor came out with a "Stronger Students, Stronger Schools" plan that includes consolidating down from 119 districts to 5 districts. Each district would have one board with advisory groups. We are ready to dive into the details on what might work. We

are also discussing a formula for how funds would be assigned to schools. We are hosting an education reform discussion on March 24th 6-8pm at Harwood.

Regarding Transportation: I'm on the Transportation Committee; our funding is going down. Much of it is from gasoline tax, and with EV's this is going down. We have an additional registration fee for EVs, and a mileage-based user fee, to ramp up revenues. We are looking at other ways to bring money back into the municipalities. The website, vtransparency.vermont.gov, talks about everything transportation in Vermont.

Dara Torre approached the podium. This community is inspiring and has survived a lot. We need to minimize risk and invest in things to keep us safe. On the energy and digital infrastructure committee we discuss telecommunications and broadband. The state has invested a lot into digital infrastructure. Climate action: the Governor has asked us to consider whether we need to be less ambitious on climate action. My committee will take a look at this question. We have concerns about energy costs; we might be looking at future price spikes in our energy use. We are trying to meet the need for our whole state where we have rural pockets. We are facing an uncertain future regarding funding from the Feds.

Karen Sauther: Can you speak about how state and federal funding regarding energy might impact us? (and tariffs) Dara: the utilities have been able to access some infrastructure funds to build more resilient grid – those funds might now be at risk. However, this probably won't impact your rates. Regarding tariffs: there will be a 25% increase for people who get natural gas. We have a lot more control over electricity than propane and fuel oil. Candace: The NEVY funds $12MM; the state has installed one level 3 charger and plans for more. That money has been rescinded.

Kim Laidlaw: Right now, there are high-need students that are costing four times as much as other students. I question that they cost this much; I would ask for a redistribution of student weights. Places like Burlington with a large number of these students can hire more people, whereas Harwood has to cut 30 positions. Dara: We have an opportunity to look at this as we examine the funding formula for education. We are trying to leverage shared resources to bring down the cost of special education. Candace: Please come to the meeting on March 24th. Dara: Act 127 was based on real numbers at the time, but things have changed.

Don Simonini: What is your current philosophy on the Clean Air Act? Dara: It is the "Clean Heat Act". At the beginning of this session, we were looking at transitioning people off of fossil fuel onto electric heat, but this may not be able to be implemented. 20 states have goals around climate, many of them are stumbling around implementing them. Propane and heating fuel carry a lot of risk. Albert Coccagna: In Vermont many people use wood heat, there are additional regulations on woodstoves. Perhaps we could consider removing wood stove restrictions. Dara: I will look into that. Someone asked: How many people in the room are driving an EV?

Freddie Graves: We have seen greater consolidation and state control of education, resulting in greater costs, and reduced benefits for the kids. Do you really believe further consolidation is a good idea? Candace: We need to see data that consolidation will result in cost savings. Danielle Livingston: I'm very concerned about transportation; how long do they have to sit on the school bus? There are already problems with transportation, and now there is more consolidation planned.

The max allowed time on a bus is already an hour. Candace: We are looking to be more efficient with school buses.

Rick: Thank you for being here and for your service in Montpelier.

Article 16. Shall the Town vote to start next year's Town Meeting on March 3rd, 2026, at 9:30 o'clock in the forenoon at the Fayston Elementary School?

Casey Murphy moved, Charles Martley and Tom Jeffrys second. All in favor, none opposed. Motion passed.

Rick declared the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Eve Silverman

Approved by:

Chuck Martel, Chair, Fayston Selectboard