

2004 INFORMATIONAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY MARCH 10, 2004 AT 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Note: *This set of minutes will be the last recorded for the annual Informational Town Meeting as the requirement for this meeting was removed from the Town Charter by the voters of Durham on Tuesday, March 9, 2004. However, annual election results will continue to be recorded in all future Town Reports.*

I. Introductions of Public Officials by Town Moderator

- **Members of the 2003 Town Council**

Moderator Anne Valenza introduced the 2003 members of the Town Council.
(Councilors Paine and Samuels were not present)

- **Newly elected members to the Town Council 2004**

Moderator Valenza introduced the members of the 2004 Council, including new members Karl Van Asselt and Gerald Needell and Peter Smith, who had been re-elected. The votes for the office of Town Council (3-year terms) are as follows:

Karl Van Asselt	707
Gerald Needell	541
Peter Smith	536
Richard Kelley	521
C.E. "Mac" McLean	209
Scattered (write-in)	13

- **Election results of other Town Officials**

Moderator Valenza read the results of the election concerning other Town officials under Article 1 of the election ballot as follows:

For Public Library Trustee (3-year term):

Judith Moyer	678
Julian Smith	666
Luci S. Gardner	646
Scattered (write-in)	5

For Public Library Trustee (1-year term):

Cynthia Cote	785
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For Moderator (2-year term):

Anne F. Valenza	805
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For Supervisor of the Checklist (6-year term):

Ann R. Lemmon	777
Scattered (write-in)	3

For Town Clerk-Tax Collector (1-year term):

Lorrie L. Pitt 830

Scattered (write-in) 6

For Trustees of the Trust Funds (3-year term):

Craig Seymour 797

Scattered (write-in) 2

- **Charter Amendments**

Moderator Valenza read the results of the election concerning amendments to the Town Charter as follows:

Article 2 – To eliminate the Informational Town Meeting held annually in March following the Town Election

Yes: 503

No: 406

Article 3 – To memorialize in the Charter the Planning Board’s ability, in accordance with NH RSA 673:6, to have not more than five alternate members and to memorialize the appointment of an alternate Council member.

Yes: 783

No: 106

Article 4 – To memorialize in the Charter the Conservation Commission’s ability to have up to three alternate members who can vote in the absence of regular members.

Yes: 777

No: 127

Article 5 – To memorialize in the Charter the Library Board of Trustee’s ability to have up to three alternate members in accordance with RSA 202-A:10. All references to an “interim” Library Board of Trustees are obsolete since there is now an established Board of Library Trustees and are therefore being stricken from the Charter.

Yes: 812

No: 72

Article 6 - A newly inserted section. This change will ensure that it is the newly elected Council each year that makes appointments of citizens to the various Town boards, commissions, and committees.

Yes: 803

No: 100

Article 7 – To allow the newly elected Council more time to carefully consider appointments of citizen members to the various Town board, commissions and committees

Yes: 784

No: 118

Article 8 – Adding a new section 11.5 “Vacancies in Elected or Appointed Office” in Article 11. This will be inserted as a new section to maintain the numerical sequence of the sections.

Yes: 825

No: 40

I. Remarks

Town Council Chairman Sandberg

Chair Sandberg congratulated and welcomed new Councilors Karl Van Asselt and Gerald Needell, as well as returning Councilor Peter Smith, for their successful campaigns. He noted that Mr. Needell had sent his regrets that he could not be in attendance because of a long-standing prior commitment. Chair Sandberg thanked everyone who had run for elected office, whether contested or not, and thanked all the volunteers who had given their time for the betterment of the community.

Chair Sandberg noted the various committees in Durham that were involved in various efforts, and said the Town should be very proud of them. He said there was still plenty of work to do, and welcomed all who wished to join in the collective effort that made Durham such a special place.

He said that typically there were 30-40 vacancies on committees each year, which provided opportunities for interested citizens with fresh ideas.. He explained that the Town Council would begin the process of filling vacancies the following Monday, and would continue with this process for several meetings. He said as they began this new post election year, he wanted to encourage fellow citizens to consider choosing to be involved in some important and rewarding work.

Chair Sandberg said that with the passage of Town Charter amendments at the election, the Town Council would have several weeks to make appointments, and invited citizens to submit applications within the next week or two, noting these applications were available in the Town Administrator’s office.

He said the Town Annual Report for 2003 had been produced with great skill by the Administrative Assistant Jennie Berry, and included a comprehensive review of work accomplished the past year by the professional staff and by volunteer boards and committees. He noted each section of the report also included proposed goals and objectives.

Chair Sandberg said the Informational Town meeting was meant to provide time for citizens to share, in a less formal way than regular meetings, their thoughts about goals and objectives, and to learn more detail about work in progress. He said this conversation would be welcomed later in the meeting.

Chair Sandberg asked Town Administrator Selig to speak about his role in helping the Town achieve its goals, and to offer guidance from his professional perspective, as the Town moved forward, in maintaining a prosperous and healthy community.

Town Administrator, Todd Selig

Town Administrator Selig noted the various issues and challenges facing the community, including, but not limited to local zoning regulations, recreational issues, school funding, open space preservation, support for Durham's downtown area, budgetary constraints, economic development, downtown services, scenic bridges, a new library, local water supply, and rental housing issues involving the University of New Hampshire.

He said however that time, funding, and human resources were finite, so it was important as the Town moved forward in 2004 that each of the Town boards and departments, as well as local interest groups and citizens, carefully define their goals. He said achievable objectives should be the overriding theme for everyone involved in local government in 2004. He said the issues that were most important to the community should be determined, well defined, and packaged in a manner that was strategic, reasonable, and achievable within a definitive period of time, regardless of the time scale. Administrator Selig encouraged citizens, once objectives were defined, to be actively engaged, so the many perspectives existing in Durham would be considered, and brought to the forefront of public debate.

He said it was his goal as Administrator to insure that Town departments were actively working in the service of the Town and to accomplish goals and objectives outlined by the Town Council. Administrator Selig thanked current members of the Council for their work, and noted in detail the various crucial ways in which they acted on behalf of the Town. He said that most importantly, it was the Council's task, week after week to provide decisions on issues where there was not always a right or wrong answer. He said it was his great privilege and pleasure to serve the Council, staff and citizens as Administrator.

III. Service Recognitions for Elected Officials and Town Staff

Chair Sandberg said at this time of year the Town liked to look back and remember the efforts of people who had served them well the past year. He said the Council wanted to express their appreciation by the issuance of Certificates of Appreciation for Councilors Katie Paine and Patricia Samuels, for their commitment and contributions to the Town.

Chair Sandberg presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Town Clerk-Tax Collector Linda Ekdahl in recognition of 38 years of service. He said that Linda was a very special person, and the Certificate noted her faithful service to the Town, with dedication and commitment to the citizens of Durham, and her knowledge, wisdom and sound judgment, all of which would be sorely missed. The Certificate also said that as she began her retirement, the Town hoped she would remember with fondness those citizens she had worked with along the way, and would take with her the knowledge that her service to the Town was very much appreciated and highly regarded.

Ms. Ekdahl said it had been a pleasure, noting she had served with a lot of wonderful people over the years, and said she didn't know where the time had gone. She said her

deputy, Lorrie Pitt, would take good care of the Town, and thanked everyone for the Certificate of Appreciation.

IV. Conversation with Representatives of Town Departments and Town Boards, Commissions and Committees

Mac McLean said that at the previous Town Council meeting, it was noted that a Town meeting could be held if the Council decided to have one, regardless of whether this was authorized in the Town Charter. He noted that *Fosters Daily Democrat* had indicated in a cavalier tone that the Town had now thrown out the traditional Town meeting. He said he would like to look at this as a temporary phasing out, and asked if enough citizens wanted to have this Town meeting, how they would go about getting one as each year went by.

Chair Sandberg explained that when the Informational Town Meeting was put in the Charter in 1988, there was a lot of sentiment behind this, because this was when the Town went from the selectman and annual Town Meeting to the Town Council form of government. He said the sentiment expressed at that time was that it would be good if citizens could continue to meet once a year informally in order to share ideas and ask questions.

He said the Informational Town meeting had its ups and downs over the years, noting that sometimes the only people who came were staff, who had worked for weeks putting together wonderful presentations, when the only people who came to the meeting were the Councilors and a handful of citizens who were already involved at other meetings. Chair Sandberg said the Council offered the opportunity for members of the public to address it at every regularly scheduled meeting, and noted that many members of the community took advantage of this opportunity, and Councilors listened with great interest to the input provided.

He said there had been several discussions over whether it was worthwhile to continue the Informational Town meeting concept, and noted there was now cable access television, email, the weekly newsletter, and the wonderful involvement of citizens at regularly scheduled meetings. He said the Council had decided to put the question of whether to continue the annual meeting to the citizens so they would have the opportunity to answer the question themselves.

In answer to Mr. McLean's question, Chair Sandberg said that any citizen could come to the Town Administrator's office and ask for a spot on an agenda, who would evaluate the dimension and scope of the question, as well as where it might best fit on the agenda. Chair Sandberg also noted that it was not out of the question for a group of citizens to put together an agenda and ask for a special public meeting to address this. He said the request would come to the Council, which would determine the appropriate date and time to hear these issues.

Chair Sandberg said the Town had voted by a margin of 90 votes to not mandate the meeting for the day after election, stressing the difference now was that the meeting was not mandated. But he said if there was a groundswell of support for a meeting, he

imagined that Councilors would give due consideration to the request in hope that there would be a substantial turnout, which would justify the time and effort that went into such an event.

Mr. McLean said he was one of the citizens who had not attended the meetings recently. He asked if there was any way to get the Informational Town meeting back as a mandatory meeting the day after voting, and said if the meeting came back, it could be part of the citizens' checks and balances procedures.

Chair Sandberg said this would require a Charter amendment, which would require a petition by the citizens, and noted that the petitioning process was outlined in the Charter.

He also provided clarification that the Informational Town Meeting was not meant for the conduction of business.

V. Other business

Chair Sandberg explained that under state law, there was a window of opportunity to challenge the counts from election day, and the appeal period ran until Friday, with Town Councilors sworn in before the meeting the following Monday.

Councilor Morong thanked the citizens of Durham for the new Council chambers, which he described as a great improvement for the Town. Chair Sandberg pointed out that the real thrust of this effort had been undertaken by former Councilor Scott Hovey.

Council Peter Smith noted it must have taken Mr. Selig weeks to come up with one good thing to say about each of the Councilors. He said that when he ran for Town Councilor three years ago, his most important goal was to find a top-notch Town Administrator, because he felt a Town could not run properly without such a person. He said it would be impossible for the Town to fully appreciate what it had in Administrator Selig, and said he would defy anyone in the State to find someone with the competence and abilities that he had demonstrated. Councilor Smith said the Town was very lucky to have him, and hoped he would be around for a long time to come.

Tom Merrick lamented the loss of this kind of meeting, and said they were helpful, and created a warm feeling. He said he would work with Mr. McLean to see if they could have another one, whether it was the day before or after the vote, or any other time of year. He thanked the Council for its work.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm

Victoria Parmele, Minute Taker