Barnard increases highway budget, re-elects 10 town officers

By Aaron Rubin
Standard Correspondent

Approximately 100 residents packed into Barnard Town Hall for two hours on Tuesday morning, March 5 for the annual in-person Town Meeting. Voters approved all articles and even added additional funds to the highway budget.

Voters re-elected 10 town officers to their currently held positions. They include: Paul Doton for a 1-year term as Town Moderator; Bob Edmunds for another 3-year term on the selectboard; Diane L. Rainey for a 1-year term as Delinquent Tax Collector; Beth Finlayson for a 3-year term as Town Auditor; Wes Hennig for a 1-year term as First Constable; Edwin Cole for a 1-year term as Second Constable; Lee Resseguie for a 3-year term as Trustee of Public Funds; and Sue Lewis for a 5-year term as Cemetery Commissioner.

Susan Reynolds was elected as a new Library Trustee and will serve a 5-year term. She will replace Kassie Tibbott, who was not running for re-election, having resigned from her position in January.



Susan McNalty, Trustee and Treasurer of the Danforth Library, discusses Article 7, which will restore the windows in the Danforth Library at Barnard's Town Meeting on Tuesday.
Lauran Corson Photo

Voters approved Article 7, which asked for $16,500 to restore the 13 original windows on the main floor of the Danforth Library. Town Administrator Rob Ramrath said the funds will be used to continue the preservation of "the historic character, exactly, of the building."

Voters approved Article 8 — a transfer of $300,000 from accumulated budget surpluses into the Major Highway Projects reserve fund for the purposes of critical road repairs including culverts, bridges and bank slides.

Article 9, which asked voters to approve both the General budget and the Highway budget, was approved — with a small addendum. The FY25 General budget was approved as warned at $875,977.65, of which $589,462.65 will be raised by taxes. The budget is a 4.6 percent increase from the FY24 budget. According to Ramrath, with this approval, the town can replace the large front doors of the Town Hall building, a main reason for the increase. The budget will also support the renovation of a small room into suitable office space in the back of Town Hall, which is currently an "unfinished basement" used by the Town Clerk and her assistant; it will also support the introduction of new software for use in the Assessor's office.

TOWN MEETING At a Glance

BARNARD

Increased Highway Budget by $120,000

Selectboard
3-Year Term: Bob Edmunds

However, voters chose to increase the Highway budget by $120,000. The new highway budget totals $1,617,237 compared to the originally proposed budget of $1,497,237. The original budget represented a 17 percent cut from the FY24 budget of $1,774,329.

Lengthy discussion took place during the meeting as town officials expressed their desire to add a new member to the town's roadcrew so that more progress can be made on road repairs and to ensure a fair distribution of labor among current crew members. Voters eventually approved a motion made by town officials to add $120,000 to the highway budget. With this addition, Ramrath said the town has "more ability to be more attractive out in the marketplace for labor for the highway crew."



Barnard's State Representative Heather Surprenant asks questions of the selectboard regarding highway improvements and FEMA distribution.
Lauran Corson Photo

Reading chooses Hern Silvester for selectboard, declines return to in-person meeting

By Aaron Rubin
Standard Correspondent

The Reading Annual Town Meeting was held via Australian ballot on Tuesday. More than 300 residents voted, naming Lisa Hern Silvester as the newest member of the selectboard, rejecting a measure to return to in-person meetings in 2025, and approving the town budget and the purchase of a solar array.

Residents elected Hern Silvester to serve a 3-year term on the Reading Selectboard, defeating candidates Stacy Gallowhur and Dylan Rowlee. Hern Silvester garnered 153 votes, Rowlee claimed 93, and Gallowhur had 45. Hern Silvester will replace the outgoing Gordon Eastman, who ends a 15-year tenure on the board.

Gallowhur told the Standard on Tuesday, "I want to thank all the Reading residents who took the time and gave their consideration to vote today. I am honored, humbled and enlightened by this experience. My only hope and goal is that we come together and work towards a brighter future for our community."

Hern Silvester said after her win, "Thank you to my fellow candidates and to everyone who came to the polls today and voted in the rain. It was impressive to see such great turnout for issues that are important to our town. I am proud to serve Reading as a new member on the selectboard and I am looking forward to working with the current board members and our community."

Voters also elected multiple Town Officers. Rayna Bishop will serve a 1-year term as Town Moderator, Penny Allyn a 3-year term as Lister, Heather Evans a 5-year term as Library Trustee, and Adam Kozlowski a 3-year term as Cemetery Commissioner.

TOWN MEETING At a Glance

READING

Solar Array Purchase: Passed

Return to in-person Town Meeting: Rejected

Selectboard
3-Year Term: Lisa Hern Silvester

Voters approved the FY25 budget 257-41. The new budget is $704,949 — a 4% decrease from the FY24 budget.

Voters supported 189-97 an appropriation of $111,200 to support the purchase and installation of a town-owned, net-metered, ground-mounted solar array that will be positioned behind the Town Fire and Rescue Building.

Proposed by the Reading Energy Committee in early 2023, the array will take up approximately 1,966-square-feet and is expected to meet the current annual electricity consumption of Reading's public buildings, including the Fire and Rescue building, Town Hall, the Town Garage, and the Reading Public Library.

The array is expected to reap substantial cost-saving measures for Reading. The Energy Committee estimated that the array "would pay for itself in about ten years" with additional net savings if it lasts longer than the initial scope, as solar panels can last well beyond 25 years in use.

Committee member Brian Cali also said that with the solar array in place, the town could qualify for a 30% rebate on the value of the array with its investment.

Article 6, which asked voters to return to an in-person Town Meeting format starting in 2025, was narrowly voted down with 164 voters opposed and 125 in favor.

Finally, voters supported routine appropriations for regional health and wellness organizations. Those appropriations are: $1,000 to Aging in Place Reading-West Windsor, $707 to Health Care and Rehabilitation, $1,000 to the Ottauquechee Health Foundation, $750 to services at Spectrum Teen Center, $4,000 to Visiting Nurse and Hospice of VT and NH, $500 to Volunteers in Action, and $500 to Windsor County Mentors.