

We have come together in civil assembly, as a community, in a long-standing tradition. We come together to make decisions about our community. As we deliberate, let us advocate for our positions, but not at the expense of others. Let us remember that our neighbors with whom we may disagree are good people with hopes and dreams like ours. And always let us remember that, in the end, caring for each other, in this community, is of far greater importance than any difference we may have.

Based on a Civil Invocation used in Vermont Town Meetings



GETTING INVOLVED IN TOWN GOVERNMENT

Some Qs and As

- ❖ How does the Town of Shutesbury run its \$ 6.2 million dollar business?
- ❖ What is the Town's Business?
- ❖ How can I have input into decisions about how money is spent and decisions made?
- ❖ What do I need to know about Town Meeting?



This booklet was prepared by the Town Moderator
In May 2013 and updated
In May 2017

❖ How Do We Run Our Business?

A **Board of Selectmen**, made up of three members each serving a three year term, is the administrative arm of our government. They oversee a **Town Administrator** who is responsible for working with the Selectboard, Town Departments and Committees/Boards to assist with their work.

Town employees are hired to provide professional expertise and run the day-to-day operation of town departments (inc. Highway, Fire, Town Clerk, Treasurer, Tax Collector).

Much of the Town's work is done by Committees and Boards all made up of **volunteers - town residents**. There are 24+ such Boards/Committees. To name a few: Finance Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Energy Committee, Zoning Board, CPA, Assessors, School Committee.....

❖ What is the Town's Business?

The Federal and State governments provide for national defense, social programs etc. We receive revenues of approximately 22% of our budget from local receipts, grants and from reimbursements from the State for some highway, school and other programs. The rest is up to us.

The Town provides for local roads, fire and police services, education, Town salaries, and health insurance. Our property taxes cover 78% of the budget.

❖ How Can I Have Input into Decisions About How Money is Spent and Decisions Made?

- You can participate in the work of a Committee/Board where work goes on year-round. You can attend Public Hearings when they are held to discuss proposals that are being developed.
- You can attend Selectboard meetings to hear what is under discussion. You can ask to have items put on their agenda and you can raise questions. The Town Administrator provides weekly reports posted on the web of what is happening and the Town website includes minutes of meetings of committees and a calendar of events.
- You can attend meetings of the Finance Committee which is charged with presenting a budget that balances income and expenditures. That Committee meets year round and monitors expenditures, keeps track of revenues, and is responsible for monitoring the overall financial health of the Town.
- You can attend Town Meeting to hear recommendations from the Departments/Committees who have worked on the subject matter/issues and are charged with bringing them forward to be discussed and possibly amended. Town Meeting is where you VOTE.

❖ What Do I Need to Know About Town Meeting?

The Annual Town meeting has several main functions:

- To appropriate money to pay salaries of elected officials
- To raise and appropriate money for operational costs
- To act on policies and by-laws brought forth by committees
- To hear reports from departments and officials

A Warrant is prepared by the Selectboard and posted. It contains Articles to be discussed and voted on. It serves as the legislative branch of our Town government and provides a forum, an "Open Town Meeting," for all townspeople to be heard.

Financial Articles

The **Budget** is prepared by the Finance Committee following discussion with town departments, committees and Boards. You will see its recommendation next to each article on the warrant. The Schools (Town, Union and Regional) account for 60% of the Budget.

The **Capital Planning** Committee meets to review the needs for capital items (which include police cruisers, trucks, building projects e.g.). It studies our current debt and develops a long-term plan to fund projected items.

Routine items include: annual adjustments to revolving accounts; authorization for the Treasurer to take care of business; the acceptance of funds from the State and other sources.

Other Articles

These may include: Proposed New By-Laws or By-Law changes; Special Projects; Petitions from Citizens; Reports from Committees.