



GEORGIA VERMONT

Town Meeting Selectboard Special Meeting Saturday, April 20, 2024 Georgia Middle School Gym Minutes

Zoom Details:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6165843896?pwd=STduU2JzTmpiVmE1MXZSaWZWLzVadz09>

Meeting ID: 616 584 3896 | Passcode: 5243524

Dial by your Location: 1 929 205 6099 (New York)

1. CALL TO ORDER

10:15 AM

SELECTBOARD PRESENT

Brian Dunsmore
Paul Jansen
Devon Thomas
Carl Rosenquist
Kristina Senna

STAFF PRESENT:

Doug Bergstrom, Zoning Administrator
Cheryl Letourneau, Town Clerk/Administrator

MODERATOR:

Carolyn Branagan

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. TOWN MEETING:

- C. Branagan called meeting to order at 10:15 am
- C. Branagan went over the moderator's duties, Vermont State Law for Municipal meetings, and instructions for public comment.
- C. Branagan, went over the Warning:

- 35 - Article 1: Budget & Article 2: Adopt a Town Budget Article by Australian Ballot
36 - Voters can get further information on the Articles and voting in the Town of Georgia at the Town
37 Offices.

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39 **ARTICLE 1: SHALL THE VOTERS AUTHORIZE A BUDGET BY PAPER BALLOT**

- 40 - K. Senna made a motion to accept the budget as presented. Seconded by B. Dunsmore
41 - P. Jansen spoke for the Board regarding the Amendment to the article from March 5, 2024 to
42 use \$120,736 in available funds to reduce taxes. Since the Article didn't get approved, the
43 Amendment did not get approved (per Attorney & VLCT).
44 - There is no available \$120,000 in funds to reduce the taxes. The number came from the "fund
45 balance" showing an asset (though there were liabilities). The true number was \$113,617 as
46 noted in the 2023 Town Report.
47 - 2023 has a Deficit of \$12,000 and the Town used the fund balance to cover the deficit. Surplus
48 of \$31,450. The Town will not know where \$113,000 accounting belongs yet, so cannot put that
49 money towards a reduction in taxes. An audit is coming soon, so this will be addressed at that
50 time. Thus, cannot apply the funds toward the reduction of taxes because we don't know where
51 the money needs to go as well as overspending the budget in 2023.
52 - C. Rosenquist explained the Selectboard has reduced the budget by \$107,000 from the first
53 presentation in March, which calculated to taxes reduced from 9.13% to 4.01%- a significant
54 reduction.
55 - The Town took some Workforce Retention funds (ARPA) to pay off loans, eliminating those
56 future fees. The Town also utilized impact fees to reduce line item budgets and increased the
57 library budget by \$17,000 to expand hours & programming.
58 - 2024 Town of Georgia taxes will be increased by 4.01% over 2023 taxes.
59 - K.Senna explained the Town used Workforce Retention fees as instructed by VLCT.
60 - Police Coverage contract by Franklin County Sherrif Department will cost the Town \$180,000
61 for 40 hours/week police coverage in 2024. There is currently \$50,000 in the budget for police
62 coverage. Will need a motion to increase this amount by \$130,000.
63 - P. Jansen referred to pages in the new budget addendum to explain other budget changes.
64 Paving has been underfunded for a long time; the new paving budget was increased to catch up
65 with overdue paving projects.
66 - D. Frasier requested the public be notified in the future for clarification and resolution of the
67 \$113,000 accounting.
68 - S. Brown questioned the paving budget, there are 42 miles of paved road that should get paved
69 every 10 years, or 4.2 miles of road every year. 2023 paving budget includes just 3 miles of
70 paving that ARPA funds will cover, but where will funds come from to continue to upkeep
71 Georgia paved roads?
72 - D. Thomas responded to S. Brown's paving questions, the Town will use ARPA funds to offset
73 money charged in taxes.
74 - K. Grenier asked if the paving plan for 2024 included repaving or paving new roads? P. Janson
75 responded no new paved roads but repaving by Public Works department.
76 - N. Lavallee wanted clarification on police funding, is State police getting paid when they are
77 not covering the Town. No, the Town does not pay for any hours that are not covered. State
78 police contract expires April 30th and Milton police contract expires July 1st, 2024.
79 - K. Mink spoke on Conservation Commission, member for 30 years, spoke of a few things the
80 Commission has done over the years. Conservation Commission had submitted 5% budget

- 81 increase, the budget as presented is less than half what was submitted. Motion to Amend
82 the budget in Article 1: move \$5000 to the Conservation Commission. Seconded by Diane
83 Duranleau, to preserve our woodlands & wetlands.
- 84 - S. Brown explained the \$5,000 in reserve funds from 2023 had not been paid to Conservation
85 Commission in 2023.
 - 86 - J. Denton spoke on the educational benefits the Conservation Commission has brought to the
87 children in town.
 - 88 - Vote on this amendment by paper ballot. 179 votes, Yes 126 and 53 No. Motion is carried.
 - 89 - New Total for the Town of Georgia Budget: \$2,789,510.
 - 90 - D. Frasier questioned the Clerk budget 20% due to discrepancy with calculation. Treasurer jump
91 in 75% pay is due to the part time position moving to full time.
 - 92 - Ken Minck had some questions on the expenses/liabilities of the town. K Senna responded and
93 referred to pg 12 of the packet, added in the transfers, which gives the total number.
 - 94 - J. Hood questioned why the budget did not include the \$1,000 donation to the Voices Against
95 Violence domestic shelter as it has in years past. C. Letourneau said the nonprofit did not
96 request funds this year.
 - 97 - D. Frasier made a motion to put the \$1,000 back in the budget for the domestic shelter. S.
98 Brown seconded. J. Hood explained the \$1000 will help the Voices Against Violence to support
99 services for Domestic Abuse survivors and support the volunteer shelter.
 - 100 - Floor vote, Yes vote was louder, motion to amend the budget by \$1,000. Passed.
 - 101 - New budget: Tax raised \$2,790,510.
 - 102 - K. Heinlein Grenier: motion to add \$130,000 for police services. M. Hanbury seconded.
 - 103 - P. Jansen explained the Franklin Co. Sheriff coverage is the best option for police coverage in
104 Georgia. The Selectboard looked at surrounding areas and State police.
 - 105 - J. Denton reminded it is the dollar amount is what is to be approved and not who they hire.
 - 106 - Kyle Grenier is in favor of police coverage, but the Sheriff department has had a bad reputation
107 working with Town of Georgia, hopes the Town of Georgia will be able to safeguard their
108 contract. In favor of passing the budget for police coverage.
 - 109 - B. Richards- made a motion the vote to increase the budget for police coverage is done via
110 paper/ballot vote.
 - 111 - J. Cota clarified the circumstances for last Sherrif contract, there is now a different Sheriff and
112 administration.
 - 113 - G. Rainville asked for more information for the 40 hrs a week Sheriffs coverage and how it is
114 allocated. This will be determined by the Selectboard if the motion passes. If no additional
115 funds, the town is only left with \$50,000 for the year.
 - 116 - S. Jenkins asked if the 40 hours is guaranteed by the Sherrif station. The board responded they
117 have the staff, and the Town will not pay if there is no coverage.
 - 118 - L. Cramer commented on the Franklin County sheriff videos of the current Sheriff kicking an
119 individual. Town of Georgia needs to be certain we have appropriate coverage.
 - 120 - N. Gosselin is in favor of Sheriff department coverage and asked for a vote by paper ballot.
 - 121 - Voting by paper ballot: 178 votes cast yes 79, no 99. Motion failed.
 - 122 - Article 1 on the floor, vote by ballot. \$2,790,510 tax increase.
 - 123 - Results: 182 votes cast Yes 123 no votes 59, so the budget passed.

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125 **ARTICLE 2: MOVE THE TOWN BUDGET VOTE TO AUSTRALIAN BALLOT IN 2025**

- 126 - C. Rosenquist explained putting the budget on Australian ballot would change the voting for
127 future elections, but Town Meeting would still occur.

- 128 - Motion to move Article 2 made by J. Nye, J. Cota seconded.
129 - N. Volatile-Wood questioned why the town is asking to adopt Australian ballot again after it
130 was voted down at the last election.
131 - K. Meilleur said voting is a right, we should make it as assessable as possible for everyone to
132 vote. If the Town adopted the Australian ballot method then more people can vote. People who
133 work, are deployed, have medical issues or are home-bound, etc. Town Meeting is not the most
134 assessable method to hold the vote.
135 - T. Wells-Lahaie- only 3% of the town showed up for the vote, there would be more
136 participation with Australian ballot.
137 - K. Minck requested to make one addition to the Article, to amend to "for 1 year" language. C.
138 Branagan indicated it would be a germane change that cannot be made on the floor for the
139 protection of those taxpayers who are not here.
140 - J. Marshall spoke on town participation, on March 5th there were 1,100 people who came out to
141 vote by Australian Ballot. Only 182 people voted on this budget in person.
142 - F. Grimm there is no option to change the budget when there is an Australian ballot; thus
143 putting the 5 Selectboard members in control of the budget, townspeople will only say yes or
144 no.
145 - P. Warn stated the Town Meeting is a reason Georgia is such a good town, allows people to
146 come together and talk out decisions for the town. Town Meeting should not be thrown out.
147 Article 2 should be voted down and Town should continue to gather.
148 - M. Bechard would like to call for a vote by paper ballot.
149 - Article 2 Results: 173 votes, Yes 111 and No 61. Article 2 passed.

150 C. Rosenquist Thanked everyone for coming out today and passing Articles 1 and 2.

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152 4. ADJOURN

153 C. Branagan- Meeting Adjourned at 12:25pm.

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Posted to the Town website.

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Signed: Cheryl Letourneau, Town Administrator

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