

**Town Informational Meeting
March 2, 2026
Town Of Burke
212 School Street
West Burke, Vermont 05871
802-467-3717
Email: burke@burkevermont.org
Burke Community Building**

Jen Barone called the meeting to order at 6:30. She introduced herself as the town moderator of the open town meeting. The meeting is being recorded and is available via zoom. She explained the Australian ballot will be Tuesday, 03/03/26. Polls open at 8 am and close at 7 pm. Discussion tonight is nonbinding. She asked for a volunteer to lead The Pledge of Allegiance; James Sullivan did so. She then read the names of 15 Burke residents who passed away last year and asked for a moment of silence on their behalf.

Jen reviewed the format for comments on the articles and any discussion after the meeting. After the 29 Articles are discussed, the floor will be open to discuss any other non-binding business pertinent to the town. Jen then asked for a motion to allow Senator John Morley and Representative John Kascensksa to address the group. Representative Kascensksa is on the Appropriations Committee; this is a focused group charged with managing the state budget. He is asking the state for relief for towns affected by storm damage last year as FEMA funding has been denied. School redistricting is a large concern; small schools make up the fabric of the community and most agree that we do not want to lose them.

Senator John Morley III was appointed by the governor and sits on the Health and Welfare committees as well as Operations. He is working on a pilot program to regionalize sheriffs' departments; the state police cannot manage the entire assignment of patrolling towns and responding to emergencies. There is also a lot of effort directed to the state's health care services and delivery which are increasingly costly. He stressed that he and Rep. Kascensksa are happy to answer questions and do what they can to help.

Article 1: Shall the voters of Burke accept the Town Report?

No discussion

Article 2: Shall the voters of Burke authorize the Selectboard to have all taxes paid into the Treasury as provided by law and if so, to establish Friday, November 6, 2026, by 4:00 p.m. as the due date?

No discussion

Article 3. Shall the voters of Burke vote to authorize the Selectboard to borrow money in anticipation of revenues?

No discussion

**Article 4. To elect all necessary Town Officers as required by law (Australian Ballot)
Town Moderator / Selectperson/ Constable/ Agent to Convey Real Estate?**

Ms. Barrone noted that this is her 9th year as Town Moderator; her goal is to run the meeting efficiently, while striking the balance for citizens to air questions and concerns. She will appreciate your vote on Tuesday. Selectman Joe Allard stated that he is a lifelong Burke resident; the only time he was away from Burke was during his service in the Coast Guard. He has been on the board for over a decade. He loves Burke and would appreciate your vote.

Robert Brooks introduced himself as a candidate for Selectboard. He noted that his name is misspelled on the ballot; he is a lifelong Burke resident and wants to be able to give back to the town.

Ms. Barrone noted that there was a write-in candidate for the school board; she asked for a point of order re: Guy Herman, it was suggested that he speak during the open-floor portion of the meeting. Ms. Barrone further stated that the Selectboard is the agent to convey real estate.

Article 5. Shall the voters of Burke vote to accept the proposed 2026 Town Budget Of \$3,309,180.87 for the ensuing year to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town and to authorize the Selectboard to set a tax rate to provide the same?

Selectman Jerry Booth explained the article; we are up \$208,000 from last year's budget. The town garage added \$270,000 to the current budget. He then explained line items from the town budget, breaking out administration and highway expenses.

Article 6. Shall the Town of Burke establish a reserve fund to be called the Capital Road Projects reserve fund to be used for future road projects in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 2804?

Article 7. Shall the town raise and appropriate the sum of \$200,000 to fund the Capital Road Projects reserve fund?

Article 8. Shall the town raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000 to fund the Village Infrastructure reserve fund?

The Town Budget Articles (Articles 6,7,8) were further addressed by Zoning Administrator Mike Harris; he presented the Capital Projects line items; there is a capital projects fund for road projects (roads that need engineering, etc.) that is set up annually. There are several lines for various capital projects. Mike explained that the intent is to have the funds set up in advance (these go from 5-8 years' worth of improvements and necessary maintenance.) These all start with engineering and an assessment for the scope of the work. There is an advantage to the town to be "shovel ready" when applying for grant funding. This also lends transparency to the projects before the town (including equipment replacement) and as a place to modify as necessary. Mike asked for questions; Ford Hubbard had a question about the East Burke crosswalk. That is scheduled for this spring. Mr. Hubbard also asked about the sand - salt shed; Mike explained there are 3 projects at that site; the sand - salt shed, the town garage and the wastewater project are all treated as separate projects for the purpose of bidding and funding streams. Mike gave more details about the actual sand / salt structure. George Wagner had a question about how some repairs seem to fail quickly and asked what can be done differently to add to the longevity of these projects. Mike noted that engineering designs and scope of work proposals are meant to address this issue specifically. Mr. Wagner wondered about long term fixes to the road base rather than just adding another layer to a poor road base. Mike explained that the theory behind the capital budgets is to tackle the major and underlying issues for our roads and bridges. Mike mentioned East Darling Hill as an example of redoing the entire road base and setting the road up for long term serviceability.

Jen Barrone did note a 2-minute limit to discussions. Mr. Hubbard also asked about the life span of the fabric for the sand - salt shed, this has a 30-year life expectancy per panel.

Town Administrator Jim Sullivan then came before the assembly to discuss the grant request process. He noted that the engineering and "scope of work" data is instrumental in getting grant requests submitted and approved in a timely fashion. Jim stressed that he is always looking for grants and funding opportunities. Unfortunately, some projects just cannot move forward. The recent storm series have hit the town very hard. There are big dollar numbers associated with these storms. Jim noted that the town crews and boards are diligently working to prioritize and make the town better and more liveable. He invited anyone to ask questions and review the budgets; he also noted that Burke was able to work through the FEMA paperwork and

documentation necessary to secure this federal assistance. Joe Allard noted that Jim worked hard and did a great job getting through the long and involved process.

Lisa Patridge asked for explanation of the legal fees in the budget; the Town of Burke spent \$46,000. She noted that neighboring towns Sutton and Lyndon each spend under \$2000. Selectman Mark Daigle explained that there are 7 towns in Vermont experiencing similar expenses and situations with individuals bringing charges against town boards and the town. Jerry Booth noted that one individual is causing this expense to the town. Valerie Desmarais asked about billing the individual responsible, can this be done? Mr. Kevin Blais then spoke via zoom stating that he is the individual being discussed and stated that he is not receiving equal participation. He asserted that he is prevented from public access to records and that his only option is to move through the courts.

Article 9: Shall the town raise and appropriate the sum of \$25,000 to fund the Village Infrastructure reserve fund?

No discussion

Article 10: Shall the Town of Burke establish a Town Forest Expense reserve fund to be used for infrastructure expenses for the town forests in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 2804?

Christine James asked about this article, Town Treasurer Cathie Feeley explained the process; you can vote for the fund but not necessarily fund it. The Town Forest budget could reap benefits as a savings account.

Article 11. Shall the town appropriate the unexpended funds from the Conservation Commission Budget into the Town Forest Expense reserve fund?

No discussion

Article 12. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$50,000.00 to The East Burke Volunteer Fire Brigade?

No discussion

Article 13. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$50,000.00 to the West Burke Volunteer Fire Department?

Treasurer Feeley explained that the goal is to fund the fire departments at the same rate as Lyndonville Rescue. Georgia Gould spoke on behalf of the fire departments and noted that they are underfunded and in need of many upgrades.

Article 14. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$93,817.76 to Lyndon Rescue, Inc?

Andy Otto asked about last year's request: this request is up \$10,875.78. Lynn Norris spoke and noted that emergency services are not eligible for grants. They billed out 2.2 million and got less than half of that back. An ambulance takes 3 years to build and costs 350k before anything is built onto it.

Article 15. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$2,250.00 to help support the services of Caledonia Home Health Care?

No discussion

Article 16. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$500.00 to help support the services of Catamount Arts?

No discussion

Article 17. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$2,000.00 to the Cobleigh Public Library?

No discussion

Article 18. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,571.00 for the operation of the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium?

No discussion

Article 19. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$500.00 for the support of the Kingdom Animal Shelter?

No discussion

Article 20. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,000.00 to the Lyndon Youth Baseball & Softball?

No discussion

Article 21. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,000.00 to assist the Northeast Council on Aging?

No discussion

Article 22. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,650.00 to the Northeast Kingdom Human Services, Inc.?

No discussion

Article 23. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,000.00 to the Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, Inc.?

No discussion

Article 24. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$750.00 to the Northeast Kingdom Youth Services?

No discussion

Article 25. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$750.00 to the NorthWoods Stewardship Center?

No discussion

Article 26. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,000.00 to Powers Park/Village Improvement Society?

Dan Tanner noted that the money is appreciated, there is an active campaign to improve Powers Park.

Article 27. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,750.00 to RCT (Rural Community Transportation, Inc.)?

No discussion

Article 28. Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,200.00 to Umbrella Inc.?

No discussion

Article 29: Shall the voters of Burke vote to appropriate the sum of \$30,000.00 to Burke Fire District #1?

Gary Leach spoke regarding the design and replacement of the East Burke water system and the ensuing sidewalk repair. The water users have paid for the project. Mr. Otto had a question about the sidewalk; Mr. Leach clarified the location. Mr. Otto then asked about the sidewalk by the church; Mike Harris stated that he is constantly looking for money for the sidewalk, it will be getting resurfaced this spring. Deb Hale asked about reimbursement, the bills would not go back to the customers. Mr. Tanner asked about water meters, Mr. Leach clarified that this request is for the sidewalk. Kevin Blais asked for clarification re: the organizations and clarification on the expenses, which Mr. Leach explained.

The articles being done, we moved to discussion of any non-binding business. Mike Harris noted that 20k was requested for the parks in East and West Burke and thanked George Wagner for all his help.

Cathi asked that Gail Weed and Linda Hackett-Corey receive appreciation for their efforts in creating the town reports.

Alyssa May had a question about the Darling Fund: \$1000 was given to "Hand to Hand". Ms. May wondered about the protocol for accessing these funds for children. Chris Manges asked too, what is the purpose of this fund? Treasurer Feeley stated that Elmer Darling bequeathed the fund and the selectboard is entrusted with the disbursement of these funds. Des Hertz also asked about this and noted the dollar discrepancy in the line items. Ms. Feeley stated that the town cannot touch the principal, only the interest.

Dan Tanner spoke about the 4 -wheeler ordinance and stated he has plans for asking for more roads to be opened. He noted that an email to the town would be helpful identifying more roads to open. Jim Olsen spoke with reference to this: can snowmachines use the town roads? Yes, town roads are open, the state roads are not. Dan Tanner noted that these recreational vehicles need to be registered and inspected.

Alyssa May reported on the Kingdom East school budget meeting; she has been a school board member for 8 years. She feels the budget is wise and fair: the education budget is under immense pressure. There are write-in candidates for Burke and voting is for candidates across the district. Alexander O' Reilly had a question about the Elmer Darling funds; Cathi noted that appropriations have been disbursed. Ms. O'Reilly also asked about how to access these funds, it was reiterated that these requests go through the selectboard.

Kevin Blais questioned how many students are in the district: There are 1,100 students in the district. He questioned the math on a per student cost. Ms. May clarified that the expenses include staff and all the adjacent expenses. She referenced the Kingdom East website for the details. Guy Herman spoke about his experience in public service and noted the importance of taking care of the students; he is running as a write-in for the school board.

Diane Wells spoke to recognize all the volunteers that make Burke so special.

John Kascenska stated that this is an election year, he asked for signatures and votes.

Cathi Feeley asked Representative Kascenska about public hearings re: open meeting laws and public records requests. He will research this.

Lynn Welsh commented that the appropriations for the NEK Council on Aging supports the Senior Meal Site and support is greatly appreciated.

Jessica Carvello made a motion to adjourn, Esther Agnew seconded, no objections, so moved.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20.

Respectfully Submitted,

Valerie Desmarais, Minutes Clerk