



**Special Town Meeting
September 23, 2024
7:00 pm
Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School
Auditorium**

At the close of registration on September 13, 2024, there were 5765 registered voters. There were 122 present.

Precinct 1 - 64
Precinct 2 - 58

William Bowler, Town Moderator, stated that the Warrant for this Special Town Meeting had been properly posted and that a quorum was present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mr. Bowler introduced the following officials who were sitting at the front of Town Meeting: "Lauren Goldberg (KP Law, Town Counsel), Carin Kale (Town Clerk), Joe Domelowicz (Town Manager), Wendy Markiewicz (Finance Director) who was not present, the Select Board and Finance Committee."

Mr. Bowler spoke about Town Meeting procedures: To bring an agenda item before the meeting, he would recognize a member of the sponsoring board, committee, or individual so they could make a motion. If the motion was seconded, he would recognize the proponent to speak. When done, he will open discussion. He asked that voters wishing to speak be standing at the microphone and when recognized, state their name and street address. He said the rules are those used at every Town Meeting. Voters will have three minutes to make comments or ask questions about the motion. Comments and questions must be within the 'the four corners of the motion.' Mr. Bowler asked that there be no applause or any other conduct that will disrupt or delay the Meeting. All motions to amend must be submitted to the Town Clerk in writing and Town

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Counsel is available to provide some assistance. No more than one amendment may be pending at the same time. A vote is first taken on the amendment and then on the main motion.

Mr. Bowler spoke about the voting procedures: Votes will be counted using the electronic voting clickers. In the unlikely event that there is trouble with the technology, votes will be counted by raising paper voter cards. He will decide visually whether there is the necessary majority or two-thirds vote. If in doubt, or seven voters question the vote immediately after the outcome is declared, he will have the vote counted by tellers.

SECTION 1: ELECTIONS, REPORTS, PROCEDURES

ARTICLE 2024/9 1-2 Reports

To hear reports of Town Officers and selected committees and to take action thereon or relative thereto. Town Moderator recognized Joe Domelowicz to make a presentation on the purpose of the meeting.

Joe Domelowicz presented the Town Hall Building Project via a slide presentation. In 2020, 2021, and 2023, the project had been approved by Town Meeting. In 2020 and 2021 the debt exclusions did not pass at the ballot. Bids had been received that were \$2M over the budget for general construction. The low bidder agreed to hold their estimate until the Special Town Meeting. The increased budget would not create a tax increase as it would be funded through the Community Preservation Fund and Free Cash. In addition, the Town is receiving a grant for decarbonization efforts. Slides were shown of the proposed project.

SECTION 2: FINANCIAL ACTIONS

ARTICLE 2024/9 2-1 Community Preservation – Town Hall Project

Town Moderator recognized Jay Butler.

Motion made by Jay Butler: “I move that the Town vote to approve Article 2024/9 2-1 as printed in the Warrant.

[To see if the Town will vote, pursuant to G.L. c.44B, to appropriate \$1,500,000 for the restoration, rehabilitation and preservation of the historic Town Hall located at 577 Bay Road as set forth in an application dated August 8, 2024 approved by the Community Preservation Committee and on file with the Town Clerk, including but not limited to design, project management and construction costs, and all incidental and related costs, i.e., those project costs designated by the Community Preservation Committee as eligible to be funded under the Community Preservation Act; such sum to be added to the amounts previously appropriated under Article 2020/11 2-7, Article 2021/5 2-14 and Article 2023/11 2-2; and to meet said appropriation, the Treasurer, with the approval of the Select Board, is authorized to borrow said amount under G.L. 44B, §11, G.L. c.44, §§7 or 8 and/or any other enabling authority and to issue bonds or notes of the Town therefor, and while these will be general obligation bonds of the Town, it is anticipated that they shall be repaid through the Community Preservation Fund; provided, however, that the expenditure of these funds shall not be authorized if the Town Hall project fails to commence by September 23, 2026; and further, to amend the votes taken under Article 2020/11 2-7 and Article 2021/5 2-14, as amended by the vote taken under Article 2022/10

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3-2, and the vote under Article 2023/11 2-2, to extend the period of time when construction of the Town Hall project must commence from November 15, 2024 to September 23, 2026, or take any action thereon or relative thereto.]

Seconded.

Jay Butler said the \$1.5M grant request had been unanimously approved by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), Select Board, and Finance Committee. The grant would be processed as a 20 year municipal bond to be paid for from the CPC surcharge and would have no effect on the tax rate. The combination of this article and the next would allow the project to begin. \$6,475,000 in total grants had been issued by the CPC.

Town Moderator recognized John McGrath (FinCom Chair). John McGrath said the FinCom supported the project, especially as the Town was financially strong and the tax rate would not be affected.

Lee McCoy (56 Lois St.) was concerned with low bids and asked if the bid was from a reputable vendor. Town Moderator recognized Tim Olson (DPW Director). Tim Olson said he and architectural consultants reviewed the bids. The low bidder was a well-qualified contractor that had done similar projects.

John Despic (195 Woodbury St.) said he and his neighbors did not understand the charts and asked where Free Cash comes from. Joe Domelowicz explained that Free Cash is funding left over due to underspending in the previous year, which could be spent on non-recurring costs such as capital projects. John McGrath added that Free Cash was in the 3% to 5% range every year and that a Town Meeting vote was required to spend any of the funds. The Town had \$4.5M in Free Cash. The plan is to use \$500,000 to fund the article. Mr. McGrath explained that there is a small surcharge on the tax rate to fund the CPC. Approximately \$700,000 a year comes in. This project will consume \$400,000/year of that revenue stream for the next 20 years to pay for the bonding.

Patrick Norton (Planning Board but not speaking as a Board member) wondered about the many other projects that cost money and how this project fell in the line of priority projects. Caroline Beaulieu (Select Board Chair) noted that the project is smaller than the original plan and required a creative source of funding that did not affect the tax rate because voters twice voted against funding it via a tax increase. John McGrath said the Town Hall was the bedrock of the Town and improvement projects were typically deferred due to spending concerns. The decarbonization part of the project was being paid for with a \$500,000 grant.

Town Moderator recognized Jay Butler. Jay Butler said the CPC looked far into the future and met with the Capital Committee regarding potential projects. With no expensive projects on the horizon, the CPC saw the Town Hall renovation as the most important project.

Jeff Austin (Planning Board member but speaking as self) commented that \$4M in free cash seemed high and that the project seemed expensive. He said that maybe we should not do it all at the same time. Joe Domelowicz explained Free Cash accumulates from year to year and that our policy is to hold 5% of our operating budget in free cash. He stated that the lowest bid was considerably lower than the other bids.

Rick Mitchell (36 Rock Maple Ave.) spoke in favor of the article.

David Lash (73 Lakeshore Ave.) spoke in favor of the article.

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Town Moderator noted that a 2/3 majority vote was required to approve the Article.
Electronic Vote: 101 in favor; 17 opposed. A 2/3 majority in favor was established. Motion carries.

Senator Bruce Tarr was present to address Town Meeting attendees. He commended Town officials for including a decarbonization component in the project.

ARTICLE 2024/9 2-4 Town Hall Project

Town Moderator recognized Rosemary Kennedy.

Motion made by Rosemary Kennedy: "I move that the Town vote to approve Article 2024/9 2-2 as printed in the Warrant."

[To see if the Town will vote to transfer \$500,000 from Free Cash for the purpose of funding the Town Hall Renovation Project, including all incidental and related costs, or take any action thereon or relative thereto.]

Seconded.

Rosemary Kennedy commented that there was no increase in the tax rate. A total renovation had not been completed since Town Hall was built in 1897.

Electronic Vote: 100 in favor; 15 opposed. Majority in favor. Motion carries.

ADJOURNMENT

The Moderator said: "I will now accept a Motion to dissolve." So Moved. Seconded.

Voice Vote: Unanimous in favor. Motion carries.

This Annual Town Meeting is now dissolved at 7:44 pm on September 23, 2024.

A True Copy Attest:



Carin A. Kale, CMMC
Town Clerk