

**North Branch Fire District #1
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**THESE MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED BY THE
PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the North Branch Fire District #1, Prudential
Committee, June 8, 2022

This Meeting, having been duly Warned, was called to order at 10:00 a. m. by Moderator,
Sarah Shippee.

Members Present: Steve Montello, Bob Stone, Pere Edwards, Jon Prial, Ken Westby

Also Present: Representing Nbfd#1 was Bart Howes and James Valente. Members of
the public were also present

Moderator, Sarah Shippee, read the Articles and reminded the audience and members
that voting for Article 1 will be by Australian Ballot between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and
7:00 p.m. at the same location. She stated that Articles 2 through 4 would be voted on
from the floor.

Article 1. To elect two members to the Prudential Committee and one Officer as
follows:

1. One Prudential Committee Member for a three-year term.
2. One Prudential Committee Member for a three-year term.
3. One Clerk for a one-year term.

*Note: The results of voting for Article 1 are posted at the end of the minutes of this
meeting.*

Shippee stated Steve Montello would like to make some remarks.

- Montello introduced himself and the other board members. He noted their varies
experience, skills and credentials that have benefited North Branch Fire District.
He acknowledged existing and new staff that has brought the Fire District to
being fully staffed.
- Montello stated that the Prudential Committee had developed an employee
handbook with health and retirement plans.
- He stated that North Branch's payroll management is now automated through
ADP Services.
- Montello stated that there had been six complaints filed and that 4 had been
resolved, while two were still working, the PC expected a resolution soon.

- Montello noted that in 1998 a piece of property, in Wilmington, was bought by North Branch, that is not accessible, and the committee was working on options for that piece of property since it has been a tax burden for North Branch.
- Montello stated that the annual engineer's report came back that North Branch is in good standing. He stated that NB had undergone a Reserve study to confirm that the committee is putting enough money to support the plant over the next 30 years. He noted that North Branch has 45% capacity left to sell and that there has been work with the State to clarify what should remain in reserve.
- Montello noted the fence is being repaired and a project was started to camera sewer lines, to see where there might be excessive infiltration into the plant.
- Montello reported that there had been some claims that the board was not being transparent. He noted that every meeting is announced and recorded according to Vermont law. He stated even though a member of the public could attend in person or via Zoom, that the same, one, person had attended the meetings.
- Prial continued with the issue of transparency noted that there has been updates on the website, including FAQ's, an update letter was sent to customers, ordinances have been updated.
- Prial noted that all board members will have email addresses associated with NB only, instead of using personal emails.
- Prial stated that the implementation of paperless billing has started. Cathy Kauffman stated that she didn't think it was fair to charge ten dollars to people who didn't have internet.
- Prial said that a camera system will be installed for staff safety along with the new policy that no cash payments will be taken.
- Stone explained the transition from charging for "sleeping spaces" to the more equitable and fair system of charging for excessive use.
- Westby wanted the voters to know that North Branch had been looking for a bookkeeper since February. He announced one will start on June 9. He also stated that the switch from a calendar year to a fiscal year will start on July 1, 2022, noting that there was a 6-month budget to cover January 1 to June 30, of this year.
- Westby reported to the public that, although, North Branch does not currently charge a bond tax to non-users in the Fire District, they can do that if it was needed.
- Westby summarized the solar project that is being studied by the board and its benefit to North Branch Fire District. He noted there may be a need to bring in other participants to maximize the potential, financial savings.
- Member of the public, Michael Garber, asked if the rate for new construction had changed. Montello responded that they had not and was still 40 dollars/gallon. Garber asked if the present board was aware of his situation and the previous board's decision to extend his contract for 5 years. Montello stated that they were aware and would be honoring that decision by the previous board.

Moderator, Sarah Shippee, asked the public if they would allow two meeting attendees, Bartholomew Howes, and James Valente to speak as non-residents of the Fire District as they had information to relevant to the meeting. The vote passed unanimously allowing them to speak.

Shippee continued with meeting and articles on the Warning.

Article 2. Geraldine Golet moved to see if the Fire District will accept the Annual Budget, with the total cost of operations being \$1,735,000. Seconded by Rebecca Snow. Motion moved to the floor.

Discussion:

- Westby explained any variances from the 2021 calendar fiscal and calendar year actuals to the Fiscal Year 2023 budget.
- Golet asked to explain the \$25,000 increase in the plant expenses utilities for the 2023 budget. Montello explained that the report consolidates all utilities for North Branch, which previously had been broken down under different line items. Westby also noted that the CPA had done separate audits for change from calendar year to fiscal year.
- Westby stated that there was three million dollars as of June 1 in cash and receivables. He stated that the availability of cash would be used to maintain low rates. Montello noted that accounts receivable was down, significantly, from \$210,000 in 2021, to \$16,000.
- Golet asked about plant expenses and wanted a clarification of the variance for sludge actuals and budget. Howes responded with explanation. Resident of the Fire District, Richard Marra, asked if operations had considered upgrading the belt press as opposed to replacing it with a centrifuge. Howes responded with the analysis of the efficiency of the current centrifuge.
- Randall Johnson asked about the significant increase in usage rates and why the bond amount no longer appeared on the bill. Montello responded with how the current rate structure is set up and moving forward, how the committee is working to make it more stable from spring to fall billing. He explained how currently, the May bills reflect a charge of 60% of the budget and the November bills are at 40%. Johnson wanted clarification on what percentage of the sewer charge is going towards the bond repayment and how 52.23% was arrived at for the bond repayment charge on November's bill. Westby responded that it was unclear what percentage of the sewer bill is used to cover the bond payment. He stated that there is no specific allocation of which items are used to pay which expenses and of what income is attributed to sewer vs. hookup fees, etc. Westby stated that of last year's budget, 21% represented the bond.

Shippee repeated the motion for Article 2. The vote had one opposed. The article passed.

Article 3. Steve Montello moved to see if the Fire District will vote to collect taxes, and any other charges deemed essential by the Prudential Committee, by the Treasurer, pursuant to Title 32, V.S.A., Section 4791. Seconded by Rebecca Snow. The article passed.

Article 4. Other Business:

- Cathy Kauffman stated that she would like to see the bond repayment charge be separated from the sewer usage fee, on the bill.

Golet made a motion to adjourn at 10:50 am. Seconded by Snow.

Voting Results Elections: 959 Registered Voters; 65 ballots cast.

Prudential Committee for a three-year term; Jon Prial with 39 votes.
Prudential Committee for a three-year term; Ken Westby with 42 votes.
Clerk, for a one-year term; Scott Stein with 35 votes.

Respectfully Submitted:

Helen Krzeminski
Assistant Clerk

Posted: North Branch Fire District #1, Wastewater Treatment Facility &
Administrations Building, Dover Town Office and at www.northbranchfiredistrict.com