

Special Town Meeting Minutes
Wednesday June 18, 2025
6 pm, Town Hall conference room

Meeting was called to order at 6 pm by Town Clerk Danica Hartman. Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

There were 15 resident voters and 2 non-voters present.

ART. 1 It was moved and seconded to nominate Jordan Beaulier to preside over said meeting. Three written ballots were handed to the clerk electing Jordan Beaulier. Mr. Beaulier was sworn in.

ART. 2 **It was moved and seconded to appropriate up to \$8,500 from Fire Department Equipment Reserve to repair the radiator and associated parts & labor for the 2005 Peterbilt pumper.** No discussion. **Motion carried.**

ART. 3 **It was moved and seconded to raise and appropriate 16,464 for Portage Lake user fees for the Ashland Recreation Center.**

Discussion:

Arthur Routhier: How is that broke down as far as...how did you come up with the number?

Michelle Johnson: It's per capita, still. So, both of those dollar amounts are 2024 figures. So, when we initially vetoed the amounts at our March meeting, and then we met and came back to the table, they proposed 2024 figures, still on per capita. So, they used the per capita rate from 2024.

Arthur Routhier: Is it reflective of what the per capita is now?

Michelle Johnson: Well, they use the census number. And then they did provide us with a true breakdown of where each dollar is spent for each department. I don't have that here tonight...I might have it in my book. So, we had provided them at the meeting that we met with them...is it right there Corrine? Um, a copy of the Mapleton, Castle Hill, Chapman breakdown. So, it shows each town, how much they pay in each line item, meaning like how much Mapleton pays for supplies, Castle Hill pays for supplies, Chapman pays for supplies. Because the big thing is clarity and transparency. So, they did provide us with that, if anybody wants to see it. This is not reflective of the same numbers, though, because they did this up before they agreed to the 2024 numbers. So, this is a 2025 budget. Does that make sense? Am I making sense? Ok.

Steven Dempster: You're just describing the allocations.

Michelle Johnson: Yeah. The other thing I was going to say is in the meeting that we had with them we did really stress the user fee, but after the meeting they determined that they were not able to go to user fees and this is the way they'd like to proceed forward.

Corrine Routhier: They are offering us a seat at their budget table.

Michelle Johnson: Yes.

Corrine Routhier: So, we won't have a vote, but we will have a say. And I think they are offering the same thing to the other towns, but I'm not positive. I know that for us---that's what they're offering us. So, we will at least have a say in how their budget is put together.

Michelle Johnson: My understanding is Masardis is completely out as of yesterday.

Arthur Routhier: Will they come back with a different number then, to offset Masardis being out?

Michelle Johnson: I would say, based on Masardis being completely out, we lock in our numbers before they decide to change it.

Arthur Routhier: That was my question. If we lock in tonight, are they going to be bound by that or are they going to come back next week and say we have a different number here?

Michelle Johnson: And that's where we say no.

Serena Bonville: What do they have for phone and internet there?

Michelle Johnson: I have no idea.

Bruce Laveway: What's the price?

Serena Bonville: \$3,300 plus a separate cell phone bill of a grand. That's phone and internet at the Rec.

Corrine Routhier: Yes, there's internet there because they have the Access Point there. As far as who they have, I don't know.

Michelle Johnson: And they have a new key system.

Arthur Routhier: Was it brought up with their rental fees for birthday parties and whatnot? How does the rental fees get disbursed back into the general fund that they put it back into, or does that get reimbursed to the towns?

Michelle Johnson: It's supposed to go back into the budget line, just like we had talked about. It's a revenue for that item.

Corrine Routhier: We didn't really discuss that at length with them, though, their rental fees. We did suggest that they...

Arthur Routhier: I mean its revenue for them. Most weekends its rented out to people. But if it's just going to Ashland to offset what Ashland's paying, that's not right either. That's what I'm getting at. Whether it be \$10 or \$500.

Michelle Johnson: I think that's where that seat at the budget table gives us that other point of view.

Sandy Bartlett: How does that...We don't have any voting power. We can talk all we want with whoever is on that Board.

Michelle Johnson: You are correct.

Sandy Bartlett: I mean the Warrant says "user fees," if this is.... not that it matters. It's the amount that's the issue. But it went from subsidy to user fee.

Bruce Laveway: I think if someone was on the budget committee and they weren't taking anything into consideration, that's when next year that budget committee person suggests that we cut ties and no longer vote for it.

Sandy Bartlett: I'm at the point where I don't believe we should give them this much. I mean Presque Isle has the highest user fees, and this is way over.

Michelle Johnson: I will tell you I spoke with.... This is...so the very last line of the letter that was provided to us by their Select Board says "if Portage does not wish to fully support the Rec and Library programs based on the per-capita rate, we will be forced to exclude your residents from utilizing them." From my understanding, that was done yesterday to Masardis. Masardis mailed letters to their residents—they are not allowed to use the facilities. So, they are holding firm.

Rick Lyons: Corrine, is that legal?

Corrine Routhier: Yes, they can do whatever they want with their own facilities.

Rick Lyons: You can deny the public to a public institution?

Corrine Routhier: MMA has no...there's no say on that.

Steven Dempster: I would think that if they have grants or other types of funding coming in that are subject to whatever the stipulations are, they are just setting themselves up for a legal lawsuit. I can't see how they can deny the public—and you can say it's a public library—when everyone else in

the County is going through a user fee. And I also look at like, some of the programs they have at the Rec. Those are funded by ACAP or whatever. They can't deny you if they are funded by an outside source. So, I think they are walking on eggshells right now. I can just see a big lawsuit.

Serena Bonville: I think they are trying to call your bluff.

Steven Dempster: I do, too. I think...I'm positive these are way out of line. The amounts.

Bruce Laveway: I believe it's bad budgeting over many years.

Sandy Bartlett: Yes. I do to. But that's not our issue.

Bruce Laveway: Right. But at this point, if they don't get the budget in order they will be forced to close down the library and the rec center for everybody, I'm pretty sure.

Steven Dempster: I think they are just saying that. Because I think a lot of that library is funded. Like Irving donates \$15-\$20 thousand dollars to many of these places. All they have to do is--- they've got a list of donors with a plaque on the wall. Re-visit all of those donors. I'm sure a lot of them would be willing to put money up.

Rick Lyons: Um, Corrine, I think I asked this—this question has been asked before but I can't remember if it was answered. Did we ever determine the fund balance in each one of these accounts.

Corrine Routhier: No.

Rick Lyons: We never have. So, we don't know whether they are in the plus or the minus. Or going back on Arthur's question...

Corrine Routhier: Their book says that they took in the amount of revenues that they budgeted for so it's kind of a wash.

Rick Lyons: My follow-up question is if there is a positive fund balance, does that go into another account or their general fund?

Corrine Routhier: Now, this year, they are.... well...

Michelle Johnson: It's supposed to be.

Corrine Routhier: Yeah, we don't have proof that it did. It's supposed to go into its own line item...

Rick Lyons: In its own cost center?

Corrine Routhier: Yes, for library, for rec.

Michelle Johnson: It was one of the agreements that was made last year.

Rick Lyons: That they would put it in that cost center.

Francis Karlson: What's the usage?

Corrine Routhier: Um, the library I think they said was about 55.

Sandy Bartlett: There were 55 with cards and we had 32 students going to the Rec.

Corrine Routhier: But Rec is also...you have adults too. We don't have a definite figure of the Rec.

Michelle Johson: It's a little gray.

Serene Bonville: And the 32 students is a little gray, too, because most of them are aged out at this point.

Sandy Bartlett: For Rec there was 9.

Serena Bonville: Right. There's no softball team; there's no little league team. Our kids are going to Mapleton and Presque Isle for almost everything.

Corrine Routhier: I mean, they do have a new Rec Director, so maybe things will be turned around. But I do have to say, we are not done with this. Like, this isn't where we are ending this. If we can get through this year—yeah, it's not much of a savings...

Steven Dempster: But we said that last year.

Corrine Routhier: I know, and we're still.... It's not a one-year thing. This is going to take us a couple years to get where we really need to be.

Michelle Johnson: But ultimately, it's up...and I stressed this when we met with them and they proposed the 2024 numbers. We pushed back and we said we wanted user fees, and they said it's this or nothing. And we flat out told Ashland, we said we will bring it to our people because that is our job. So, we have brought it. Whether or not we agree with those numbers...But they are at a standstill, and so ultimately tonight we have to like Serena said call their bluff or make our stance.

Arthur Routhier: Has Ashland in any way in good faith actions, like "ok, the library we'll pare down..."

Moderator: I will remind and recommend that this Article only pertains to the Recreation Department.

Arthur Routhier: Ok, the Rec then. Have they pared it down where they've cut costs, or...

Michelle Johnson: That's not something we've talked about.

Corrine Routhier: We don't know.

Arthur Routhier: Because, this is going to be an on-going process to get them back up to snuff.

Corrine Routhier: This is where a seat at the budget table would help.

Michelle Johnson: Correct.

Arthur Routhier: If they're not showing a good faith effort and trying to pare down their finances and their budgeting, then this is a waste of our time. If it can continue down the road budgeting the way they budget, we are just chasing our tail.

Michelle Johnson: And like Corrine said, that is the purpose of the seat at the budget table because we don't know what they've done already. They might have started out with a \$50,000 per.... you know, we don't know how much they've trimmed or if they've trimmed none at all and said "oh, we're just going to spread it out." We don't know.

Arthur Routhier: That was my question, because it would be in good faith on their part in trying to cut back.

Michelle Johnson: If we have...if we do go forward, though, and we have that seat at that table, that's information that we'll have. So then at town meetings we could say 'this budget actually started at \$40,000 higher and these are the things that were cut'. But we just don't know that right now.

Bruce Laveway: I think this is an important paragraph from the Ashland town manager: (reading from letter) "The Town of Ashland has experienced a shift in staffing and is committed to continuing to enhance the services offered by the Library and Recreation Center. Unfortunately, due to our limited tax base we are not able to do this without the financial support of our neighboring towns. The Library and Rec Center offer programs that bring members of our respective small towns together as one community; this sense of community is part of what makes our area unique. I am in hopes that we can continue working together to fund these programs ensuring that future generations continue to experience the sense of community that has traditionally been alive amongst our neighboring towns. As always, feel free to reach out to me directly with any additional concerns. Sincerely, Alicia Burby, Ashland Town Manager."

Serena Bonville: So, that being said, can we send a bill to Ashland for the porta-pots, the trash pick-up, the mowing for our public beach?

Bruce Laveway: We've talked about that, actually.

Corrine Routhier: If we did it to them, we would have to do it to Limestone, Washburn, and Eagle Lake. Like, all of the people that come. There's no way to tell...

Serena Bonville: How are they going to count who goes into the library?

Corrine Routhier: A library card. That's how they tell how many people from our town go there. There's no way for us to tell how many people from Ashland go to our beach.

Bruce Laveway: I honestly don't want to keep funding this. I mean, I don't want our taxes to keep going up. But at the same time, if we don't give them a chance to get their budget in order, its going to be done. We'll never get it back.

Sandy Bartlett: We can stop now so that they get their act together. Or, your way. Either way. I mean that's going to force them to do something.

Bruce Laveway: Hopefully. Hopefully they do and it just doesn't fold the doors up there and never get it open again.

Steven Dempster: I don't picture that.

Michelle Johnson: I will say, if we are going to play both sides, I will say to your point of view, in years we've heard they were going to close the police department because they don't have any money to fund it, they don't have any money to fund it, and they bought all kinds of new vehicles and hired all kinds of new staff, so...

Bruce Laveway: That is true.

Michelle Johnson: I do see your point of view.

Sandy Bartlett: That's where I'm at.

Motion denied. Article does not carry.

ART. 4 It was moved and seconded to raise and appropriate \$18,518 for Portage Lake user fees for the Ashland Public Library.

Discussion:

Arthur Routhier: What was that figure again:

Moderator: \$18,518.

Arthur Routhier: What is that compared to last year?

Michelle Johnson: That is last year's.

Sandy Bartlett: I find it interesting that the library they want more than for the Rec.

Arthur Routhier: What are the hours of the library? Does anyone know?

Michelle Johnson: Three days a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Arthur Routhier: So, it's a part-time library to begin with, and their total budget is...?

Michelle Johnson: About \$100,000.

Arthur Routhier: \$100,000. And they only have one librarian?

Michelle Johnson: It's like one-and-a-half. Sometimes there's a second person there, and sometimes there's not.

Arthur Routhier: So, they are part time employees. Are they getting benefits from the town?

Moderator: I think most of the time they funnel from the town office.

Michelle Johnson: Right.

Rick Lyons: Jordan, if I may. The salaries on the sheet I'm looking at, the salaries this year are \$58,310. Health insurance is \$15,480. Total budget is \$113,240.

Arthur Routhier: That goes back to my good faith thing with the town trying to trim up the fat. If that's the case, I would like to see what they offer these people for benefits? Is it the gold-standard insurance? Is it just a mediocre insurance? Is it... that's a pretty good salary for part-time employees. I mean, I'd take that job for three days a week.

Corrine Routhier: Again, we can't answer any of those questions tonight because we don't know any of that. But that's where the seat at the budget table...

Arthur Routhier: But the salary alone—that's way out of whack.

Rick Lyons: It went up about 6% from last year. Approximately 6%.

Michelle Johnson: What was salary again?

Rick Lyons: Last year's salary was \$52,751. Now it's \$58,310.

Michelle Johnson: For one-and-a-half people.

Rick Lyons: I don't know how many people, but that's the total salary. The year before was \$52,751 and now is \$58,310.

Arthur Routhier: So, it's a 7% increase.

Amy Collins: Yeah, it's a little over \$1,000 a week.

Michelle Johnson: She's making more than I am.

Corrine Routhier: But is it just one person, though? Is that just one person? The salary line could be...

Rick Lyons: That's for all of them. According to this budget I'm looking at here.

Sandy Bartlett: Well, there was one-and-a-half.

Michelle Johnson: To work three days a week. There's roughly one person there, open to close, three days a week. And there's...Tammy Donovan's there like an hour, I think. I think she covers lunch while she does mom things.

Sandy Bartlett: I think she's just Friday.

Michelle Johnson: Yeah, I don't know.

Rick Lyons: And I think someone said the number of users is 55? According to the number of \$18,518 that's about \$336 a person.

Arthur Routhier: And are those active users? Because out of those 55, I bet you some of them are probably dead and they're probably old cards.

Michelle Johnson: Well, like if you think about it. I have—my own family—has four cards there.

Arthur Routhier: I have one myself.

Michelle Johnson: Right. But like, we don't use four cards. Every time I check a book out, I use the number 141, who that actually belongs to in my family I'm not sure. But everybody gets checked out under 141. So, yes, 55 cards, but 4 of them belong to 472 Cottage Rd.

Elaine Dempster: And there are summer residents, too, that...

Steven Dempster: Live here part time.

Serena Bonville: For \$55 you can join the Presque Isle library, and that's the whole family. And you could have more choice.

Bruce Laveway: We also did talk about ordering online. You can do like...

Arthur Routhier: You can have it up here in a day and a half. Any books you want.

Francis Karlson: I know you like to make things available for local people, too, so I always like to think of those things as well. But I look at \$18,000—is there something we can do for our own community for that? I don't—and we go to Presque Isle every week—but to ask a local family to go to Presque Isle for those services. So, for me, it's how do we get the people who need these services the services. The mobile books for example: how do we get you the books or an alternate?

Michelle Johnson: Well, we have a book room here and to be honest, for substantially less amount of money we could figure something out probably in house.

Corrine Routhier: We can do Books by Mail right from here. And we have internet access here.

Michelle Johnson: But that's a whole other Warrant Article on a whole other day!

Steven Dempster: Doesn't the State still have a mobile library also?

Arthur Routhier: It's online, I think, Steve. You call them up and request and if it's there you get it within a day or two.

Moderator: They no longer have the travel library.

Steven Dempster: But you know, if you add Article 2 and 3 together and you multiply that by 10 years, you are talking \$400,000 that this town has given up. I mean we could build a building and put all kinds of books in it.

Arthur Routhier: My point is that...I mean, I'm not opposed to the library, by any means. But I'm opposed to their wasteful spending. The salaries alone, that kind of...when you said that Rick, that kind of baffled me that it was that much. I didn't realize it was that much. So, whether it's one-and-a-half employees or two employees, for a part time library, that's a substantial salary. The library is the best thing in the world for any age, but we should be paying...It shouldn't be such a cost because they have been such bad budgeters over the course of 25 years, 30 years. And it doesn't seem like they want to give any good faith where, ok, we'll cut the library hours to two days a week and the salary is going to be reasonable. Not \$60,000. I mean, I don't know what a librarian makes these days, but with that salary part time that's got to be near \$30 an hour.

Michelle Johnson: I don't see the point in reducing the hours. That library is heated 7 days a week regardless, so if you are going to heat it 7 days a week you might as well have a body in it.

Arthur Routhier: Well, turn it down. It doesn't have to be heated year-round.

James Collins: \$120 per employee.

Motion denied. Article does not carry.

Meeting adjourned at 6:26 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Corrine Routhier