

Special Town Meeting Minutes
Tuesday August 5, 2025
6 pm at Portage Lake Town Hall

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

There were 30 resident voters and 4 non-residents in attendance.

ART. 1 It was moved and seconded to nominate Susan Rogers as Moderator to preside over tonight's meeting. All in favor. Three written ballots were cast per State Statute. Ms. Rogers was sworn in by the Town Clerk

ART. 2 It was moved and seconded to appropriate \$14,000 from Surplus for Portage Lake's subsidy for the Ashland Recreation Center.

Discussion:

Arthur Routhier: What are they proposing going forward after this one year?

Michelle Johnson: May I answer that, Sue?

Moderator: You may.

Michelle Johnson: Thank you. The Town Manager and the Select Board in Ashland have agreed and voted upon for the 2026 year and forward we will be charged a reduced per capita rate. These are fake numbers! This is just an example! I do not want anyone to take away the numbers I'm giving as verbatim. But they have proposed a reduced rate as in the sense of—let's use 100 as an easy number to work with. They own the buildings and they have more people, so they are saying they would pay 60% and you would pay 40%. So, their per capita rate might be 60 out of every 100 dollars and ours would be 40. Those are fake numbers, though. I'm not saying that's the percentage they are offering, but they have said that is the way they will do business moving forward.

Arthur Routhier: Will that be negotiable amongst our Board and their Board?

Michelle Johnson: Our rate? That is not a question I've asked.

Herb McPherson: Is that 40% for all of the area?

Michelle Johnson: I believe that is the way it will be done. So, like Masardis, Garfield, Portage will be offered a rate of—that's a fake rate, Herb! —but a lower per capita rate. Yes.

Herb McPherson: It's going to be split by the surrounding towns.

Michelle Johnson: Correct.

Unknown: What was it?

Michelle Johnson: It was all split equally. So, like before they used to say: The bill is \$100,000 and there's 100 people so everybody pays \$1,000. But now they are going to say, moving forward, the bill is \$100,000, 500 of them are from Ashland so those people are going to pay \$60,000 and the other 500 people are going to pay the remaining \$40,000. Does that make sense? The per capita rate is going to be distributed differently.

Steven Dempster: Is that more like a tax as opposed to a user fee?

Michelle Johnson: Well, it would be a subsidy.

Steven Dempster: It's calculated almost the same.

Michelle Johnson: It would be a subsidy, not a user fee. A subsidy.

Trena Soucy: Do we have any numbers on children eligible for Rec services and what percentage of them are from each town? No? We don't have that data. How many children are eligible from Portage, do we know?

Michelle Johnson: How many kids do we tuition to the school?

Corrine Routhier: 32, but that's pre-K to grade 12. So, they age out at what, 5th grade, I think?

Michelle Johnson: 7th. Depending on the activity, 7th grade. But the Rec is open for all grades. Like, high school kids play ball there.

Corrine Routhier: But it isn't just for kids.

Michelle Johnson: Correct. There's pickleball, there's volleyball, there's softball.

David Pierce: In the past, there was talk of having a non-voting member....is that still?

Michelle Johnson: Yes, that is still part of their proposal.

David Pierce: So, will that be for all three? I know, I'm incorporating that because it has to do with...

Michelle Johnson: Actually, Dave, I know that we would be able to sit in on the budget process for the subsidies we pay, so I would assume that would be part of the ambulance. However, these two have obviously been focused on Library and Rec. I would assume that, but you know what that does.

Steven Dempster: Are they still proposing the Library turn into a non-profit?

Michelle Johnson: I don't know if they are moving forward with that. I know they had a meeting on it.

Corrine Routhier: But this is about the Rec Center, so we'll talk about the Library on the next one.

Michael Violette: So, this year we are proposing to pay \$8,000?

Michelle Johnson: \$14,000.

Michael Violette: Is there a chance it will be more next year?

Michelle Johnson: Yes. Because it's going to be based on per capita.

Bruce Laveway: But we are not voting on next year's. We have the opportunity to vote that down as well next year.

Michelle Johnson: This \$14,000 is based off of a number that we proposed. I just want to make sure everybody is clear on that. That's a number we proposed to them, the Select Board and Corrine.

Michael Violette: Have they accepted that number?

Michelle Johnson: Yes. They accepted that amount. And that was based off of figures that we did using student rough numbers and calculating if they played sports in other towns how much would that cost us to reimburse residents.

Michael Violette: So, but if we are paying \$14,000 this year and it comes back at \$25,000 next year, what are going to do?

Corrine Routhier: We vote it down again.

Unknown: Do we know what percentage it is this year?

Michelle Johnson: This is not based on the per-capita rate. This is based on a number that we developed using, like I said, that formula. We took \$35 and multiplied it by 3, saying each kid or adult would participate in 3 activities at the Rec, and then we used roughly 100 people and we came to this number. These are numbers that we proposed to the town of Ashland as fair.

Gary Chance: I don't know why we are subsidizing the town of Ashland at all. They don't pay us to use our beach.

Michelle Johnson: Correct.

Gary Chance: That beach costs money to maintain.

Michelle Johnson: We don't have to vote these subsidies in. We only have to vote for them if we wish to use them.

Gary Chance: What is the expense...we are talking about the Rec Center, right? And you are wanting to give them over \$1,000 a month. What is the money being spent on?

Michelle Johnson: Transportation, um, athletic gear. Students go to other towns for activities. The other day they went to the Penobscot Trail. Our students weren't allowed to do that.

Gary Chance: Isn't all that stuff done by the school?

Michelle Johnson: No. None of that is done by the school. These are extra activities outside of the school.

Gary Chance: See, I grew up in a town with a library too. As far as I know, nobody from the surrounding towns was subsidizing the library in our town.

Michelle Johnson: We're not on the library. That's a different entity.

Gary Chance: Rec Center. Same issue. It's just more money being thrown. The problem I have with all of this is I live on a fixed income, and this is a town full of retirees. Very few kids in this town, and we've got more kid equipment all over town here that you could give one to each person for as many kids as we've got here. And the stuff seldom gets used. I do see them once in a while, I see kids use them once in a while. But we've got thousands, tens of thousands of dollars in tax money tied up in that stuff, and you want to give the town of Ashland more than \$1,000 a month for the Rec Center. And now we are going to get to the other one, that's another \$1,000 a month or more for the other one. People on fixed incomes are just that---fixed! And we can't keep going...my taxes went up 13% last year, it went up 13% again this year. I'm just quoting estimates, it's not perfect. It might be 13.5% or something, but it's about that. The point is, I'm looking down the road. And if that trend continues for another 10 years, I'm going to have to sell my house because I don't have the income to cover that kind of thing.

Michelle Johnson: So, I just want to clarify, the money this year is coming out of surplus because we did not vote on this during town meeting. So, nobody's taxes by today's vote will be affected. Your bill will not go up right now by this vote.

Gary Chance: What difference does it make whether it goes up today or next week?

Steven Dempster: But we are going to replenish that reserve that we are taking money out of, so ultimately our taxes are going to increase because of this.

Michelle Johnson: Possibly, eventually.

Steven Dempster: More than likely.

Michelle Johnson: Call for the vote.

Motion carries. Two opposition votes recorded.

ART. 3 It was moved and seconded to appropriate \$8,000 from Surplus for Portage Lake's subsidy for the Ashland Public Library.

Discussion:

Arthur Routhier: What's going to be the appropriation next year, or what are their intentions for next year? A membership basis? Or have they discussed that?

Michelle Johnson: No. The proposal is that there will be the reduced subsidy rate. I do know they are on a track to try to make the library non-profit and that nobody would pay to go to it. So that subsidy might be removed altogether. I don't know the trajectory of how long that takes.

Motion carries. Four opposition votes recorded.

Meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,


Corrine Routhier