

TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN

Annual Town Budget Meeting Tuesday, May 20, 2025 And Adjourned Referendum Tuesday, June 3, 2025

The electors and citizens qualified to vote in the annual town meeting are hereby warned that the Annual Town Budget meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at the Voluntown Elementary School, 195 Main St, in Voluntown, CT, at 7:00 pm for the following purposes.

1. To consider and act on the adoption of the proposed Parking Ordinance.
2. To consider and act on the adoption of the proposed Blight Ordinance.
3. To appropriate the additional funds necessary for implementation of the Blight Ordinance for the FY 25-26 budget in the amount of \$330,000.
4. To appropriate the funds necessary for the Board of Education Budget for the fiscal year 2025-2026 in the amount of \$7,449,998.
5. To appropriate the funds necessary for the Board of Selectmen's Budget for the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 in the amount of \$2,823,733.
6. To appropriate the funds necessary for the Capital Projects Budget for the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 in the amount of \$300,000.

At their special meeting held on May 6, 2025, the Board of Selectmen voted, pursuant to CGS § 7-7, that items #4-6 of the Call of the Annual Town Meeting be submitted to a referendum vote at an Adjourned Town Meeting to be held on Tuesday June 3, 2025 at the Voluntown Town Hall, 115 Main Street, in Voluntown, CT from 12:00 PM to 8:00 PM The question on the ballot label at said referendum shall read as follows:

4. SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$7,449,998.00.
5. SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,823,733.00.
6. SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 CAPITAL PROJECTS BUDGET in the amount of \$300,000.00.

Voters approving the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen will vote " Yes" and those opposing the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen will vote "No".

Absentee ballots for the June 3, 2025 referendum shall be available from the Town Clerk during its regular business hours.

Copies of the resolutions listed above are available at the office of the Town Clerk and on the Town of Voluntown website www.voluntown.gov.

Dated this 6th day of May 2025, at Voluntown, CT.

The meeting was called to order by Tracey Hanson with the Pledge of Allegiance and reading of the Notice of Town Budget Meeting.

Pamela E. Theroux, Town Clerk served as clerk for the meeting.

Call for the moderator by the Clerk. Motion by Ronald Millovitsch to nominate Scott Arseneault as moderator, which was seconded Jack Wesa. All were in favor of Scott Arseneault serving as moderator. Thank you, Scott.

The moderator asked for a motion to dispense with reading the call of the meeting again. Ronald Millovitsch made a motion to dispense with the reading of the call to the meeting again. Susan Choquette seconded it, and all were in favor.

1. Item#1: To consider and act on the adoption of the proposed Parking Ordinance.

Ronald Millovitsch made a motion to accept Item #1 and Kimberly Arseneault seconded it. Item #1 was opened for discussion.

The discussion rules were set, limiting comments to two minutes due to the number of attendees, with a one-minute rebuttal period later. Participants were asked to state their name and address for the record.

First Selectman Tracey Hanson explained the purpose of the ordinance is for enhancing road safety, ensuring emergency vehicle access, and facilitating plowing on narrow, curvy back roads. It puts a town law in place that can be enforced. The key provision is no parking on any town road between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. commencing November 1st and ending on April 30th for winter parking. Citations are town citations, not DMV violations. The discussion included questions about parking for businesses on dead-end streets (should be fine if it does not block traffic and is briefly parked) and parking in the Town Hall or empty lots (not a problem if in parking lots).

Ronald Millovitsch made a motion to close discussion and Walter Mitchell seconded it. The Moderator called for a vote to close discussion. All were in favor.

The moderator called for a vote on item #1. 89 were in favor and 20 opposed.
Item #1 passes.

2. Item#2: To consider and act on the adoption of the proposed Blight Ordinance.

Ronald Millovitsch made a motion to accept Item #2 and Susan Choquette seconded it. Item #2 was opened for discussion. Selectman James Robert Thevenet explained the purpose and rationale for this ordinance came from properties like the former Methodist meeting house and other derelict properties in town. The ordinance is intended as a "lever" to pressure owners to remediate or sell properties that are decaying, not to target neighbors for minor issues (like grass height or car washing frequency) but to address properties that are decaying. The proposed ordinance involves issuing a citation. The property owner would have 60 days to address the condition. If they did not, they would have a chance to appeal and receive another 60 days. After this 120-day period, if nothing has happened, a lien would be placed on the property. The lien could range from \$10 to \$100 a day, with the idea that \$25 a day would accumulate \$9,000 a year in liens, encouraging the owner to correct the condition or sell the property. Selectman Mark (Skip) Oulton showed pictures of examples of properties that have been derelict for 10+ years, and explained that condemned properties, like the one on Church Street, create town liability. A question was asked about the town's ability to tear down blighted properties if they were able to tear down a historical building. First Selectman Tracey Hanson explained that this is why she is not for this ordinance. She feels that this opens the Town up to liabilities and costs could far outreach the proposed \$330,000 in Item #3. The town would have to pay for demolition if the owners did not and will need to include funding for two staff members (a Blight enforcement officer and another staff person). She noted that costs could increase even more with asbestos or lead issues. A resident whose property on Church Street (mentioned as condemned by the town) spoke about previous attempts to get permits for demolition being denied, hiring an engineer who found the building safe, and personal hardships (loss of job, husband's surgery) preventing immediate remediation. They felt that imposing liens would be "ridiculous" given their situation. Questions were asked about how blight is defined and who makes the determination. While proponents stated the ordinance included definitions and agricultural carve-outs, concerns were raised that the definition could be subjective and extend beyond buildings to debris, trees, fences, potentially turning into an HOA-like situation or an "attack" on neighbors facing hardship. Questions were raised about why letters hadn't been sent to these

derelict properties. Tracey Hanson explained that the Town had been informed by legal counsel and building officials that this would open the Town up to liability. The question was asked as to whether alternatives like tax incentives or state aid for seniors had been considered. Skepticism was expressed about the effectiveness of liens, particularly if they grew to exceed the property's value after demolition, making the property unsellable. Concerns were voiced about the \$330,000 budget increase and adding two employees, suggesting that bureaucracy might lead them to seek out minor issues to justify their jobs once the initially targeted properties were addressed.

Ronald Millovitsch made a motion to close discussion and Walter Mitchell seconded it. Moderator calls for a vote to close discussion. All were in favor.

The moderator called for a vote on item #2. 5 people were in favor with the majority opposed.
Item #2 Failed.

3. Item #3: To appropriate the additional funds necessary for implementation of the Blight Ordinance for the FY 25-26 budget in the amount of \$330,000.

Since Item #2 (the Blight Ordinance) did not pass, there was no need to vote on Item #3, and it was automatically removed from the agenda.

4. Item #4: To appropriate the funds necessary for the Board of Education Budget for the fiscal year 2025-2026 in the amount of \$7,449,998.

Joseph Miller made a motion to accept Item #4 and Clifford Schwery seconded it. Item #4 was opened for discussion. Kate Beauparlant, the Chairperson for the Board of Education, presented the budget proposal of \$7,449,998, representing an increase of \$148,523 or 2.03% over the previous year's budget. Adam Burrows the Superintendent reviewed highlights, noting the budget meets student needs and includes adjustments for five teacher retirements. He mentioned an unexpected state-required cost for a student (\$225,000) which necessitates flexibility. The budget includes four new buses, HVAC updates for the library and art room, asbestos abatement, contracted technology management services (a savings), and contracted services for special education needs. The special education budget is being reduced by 8.8%. He stated the goal for the current year's budget is to return 4 cents to the town. Many thanks were given to Adam Burrows for his work over the last 20 years and best of luck in his retirement.

Clifford Schwery made a motion to close discussion and Water Mitchell seconded it. The moderator called for a vote to close discussion. All were in favor.

In accordance with section 7-7 of the CGS, the Selectmen have elected to move item #4 to a referendum vote, and the question will read, "SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$7,449,998.00."

5. Item #5: To appropriate the funds necessary for the Board of Selectmen's Budget for the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 in the amount of \$2,823,733.

Clifford Schwery made a motion to accept Item #5 and Scott Davidson seconded it. Item #5 was opened for discussion. First Selectman Tracey Hanson presented the town budget. Factors affecting the budget include changes to the grand list due to real estate revals (increases up to 54%), a state change decreasing motor vehicle tax (leading to a decrease in the town's motor vehicle tax revenue by 19.75% and shifted to property tax), and a new state-passed veterans exemption on taxes (decreased the town's grand list by over \$2 million, also shifting this cost to other property taxes). The biggest increases are in public safety (adding paid fire staff for

weekends) and elderly services (funding for a senior van with a DOT matching grant). A significant threat to town revenue is a cut to the ECS grant (\$114,566 this year), which we will not know until the state votes on the budget. Ongoing projects mentioned include a fully grant-funded study for a community well, the state/federal funded Forge Hill bridge replacement (starts April 2026) and Trip and CIF grants totaling \$1,750,111 will fund downtown pedestrian walkways and sidewalks. The mill rate is anticipated to decrease from 29.24 to 22.06 due to revaluation (if the ECS grant is not cut 21.72), but the mill rate cannot be set until after the referendum. Questions were asked including clarifying the total budget increase (~3.1%). Who is responsible for sidewalk cleaning responsibility (Public Works). The impact of the reval and mill rate decrease on individual tax bills was discussed, with the anticipation that average taxes will likely go up despite the mill rate decrease due to property value increases. Examples for estimated tax increases on houses with different assessed values were provided, but it is difficult to estimate because everyone's revaluation is different. On average a \$100,000 assessed value house in 2023 (paying \$2,924 annually) could see its assessed value increase to \$153,000 in 2024, resulting in an estimated annual tax of \$3,327 with a 21.72 mill rate.

Kimberly Arsenault made a motion to close discussion and Hiedi Mitchell seconded it. Moderator calls for a vote to close discussion. All were in favor.

In accordance with section 7-7 of the CGS, the Selectmen have elected to move item #5 to a referendum vote, and the question will read, "SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,823,733.00."

6. Item #6: To appropriate the funds necessary for the Capital Projects Budget for the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 in the amount of \$300,000.

Stephen Stephanski made a motion to accept Item #6 and Kim Arseneault seconded it. Item #6 was opened for discussion. First Selectman Tracey Hanson explained that this money comes from the general fund, not new taxes. The allocation is: \$200,000 for roads (potential match for a STEAP grant for Congden Road or other repairs), \$40,000 for a school fire alarm update, \$40,000 towards an ambulance, and \$20,000 for computer upgrades. The total is \$300,000.

Walter Mitchell made a motion to close discussion and Stephen Stephanski seconded it. Moderator calls for a vote to close discussion. All were in favor.

In accordance with section 7-7 of the CGS, the Selectmen have elected to move item #6 to a referendum vote, and the question will read, "SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 CAPITAL PROJECTS BUDGET in the amount of \$300,000.00."

Stephen Stephanski made a motion to adjourn to referenda Stephen Stephanski and Clifford Schwery seconded the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:48 P.M. and will be reconvened at the close of polls on June 3rd.

The Moderator called the meeting back to order at 8:25PM PM June 3, 2025.

The referendum was held on Tuesday, June 3rd, between the hours of 12:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

Pamela Theroux, Clerk, read the vote totals as follows:

1. SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$7,449,998.00.

Number of “Yes” votes 148

Number of “No” votes 289

Item #1: Failed

2. SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 BOARD OF SELECTMEN’S BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,823,733.00.

Number of “Yes” votes 101

Number of “No” votes 335

Item #2: Failed

3. SHALL THE TOWN OF VOLUNTOWN APPROVE A FY 2025-2026 CAPITAL PROJECTS BUDGET in the amount of \$300,000.00.

Number of “Yes” votes 136

Number of “No” votes 301

Item #3: Failed

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 P.M., June 3, 2025.

Attest:

Pamela E. Theroux, Town Clerk