

February 13, 2021, Special Select Board Meeting, Draft Minutes  
Candidates Forum

Present: Emily Grube, Steve Chamberlin\*, Scott Woodward\*, John Peters &, Chuck Gundersen\*, Ellen DesMeules, Cynthia Hewitt, Jim Potter

(Note: \* indicates Select Board Candidate; & School Board Candidate; + Organizer of Forum)

Public: Tom Ayers, Alan Blackmer, Annie Bower+, Ben Brickner, Ona Chase, Vern Clifford, Bob Crean &, Dottie Deans, Phil Dechert, Billy Emmons+, Geri Fields, Kevin Geiger (Moderator), Amber Geneva, Nancy Griffin, Alice Gundersen, Dennis Grady, Diane Grube, Jon Harrington\*, Robert Hatfield, Jane, JJ, Laura Kent, Nancy Matthews, Ted Matthews, Mike, Nelson Lamson, Neil Lamson, Ty Lanahan, Joanna Long, Norwood Long, Richard Martin, Monica Noether, Bob O'Donnell, Greg Olmstead, Scott Pearce, Michael Perkins, Frank Perron\* (Bonanza jelly bean), Cathy Peters, Pam Pickett, Christian Randles, Ann Reynolds, Lynn Rauch, Kevin Rice, Elizabeth Ricketson, John Ricketson+, Betsy Rhodes+, Sue Scheuermann, Betsy Siebeck+, Francine Uptegrove, Marge Wakefield, Sean Williams

1. John Peters called the meeting to order at 4:02 pm, as a Select Board meeting on the recommendations of VLCT re: Town Business; it is also a Special Meeting – Candidate Forum, and will be turned over to the moderator, Kevin Geiger.
2. Public Comment: Kevin Rice asked to read a statement by Candidate Tim Reiter. After discussion, John Peters stated that Public Voices should be heard and then granted Kevin permission to read the letter from Tim:

*I am writing this letter as a listed candidate on the ballot for a 1-year term on the Town Select Board, but more importantly as a resident, and as the General Manager of Suicide Six Ski Area. In the past 5 years, as the trusted steward of the largest business and employer in the town and as a new resident for the last 18 months I have been offered a unique perspective on our local government.*

*In my dealings with various boards and processes within, I have observed the workings - for better and for worse – of our dedicated local officials. On most occasions, thoughtful and temperate discourse in pursuit of the best possible outcome is the fundamental that shines through as the guiding light by which these public servants operate. I have also seen and experienced the unfortunate outcome when what starts as passionate but respectful debate devolves into petty bickering, airing of grievances, or a general lack of foresight for the best interest of the greater good. These are precisely the instances that led to my acceptance of the call to serve, voiced through my own experiences, and at the urging of close friends and neighbors.*

*As many of you that know me would attest, and for those of you who may not, I am a firm believer in the principles of servant leadership. For more than 25 years as a leader and innovator across a broad range of industries, as well as operating my own business consulting for local, national, and global organizations, the methodologies of servant leadership are central tenets that have always helped me to exceed expectations, lead by example, and inspire others to achieve a higher standard.*

*These ten core values are **listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building of community.***

*After learning what other candidates are on the ballot for this race, I would formally like to recuse myself from receiving your valued votes. I instead urge you to support the candidates that I believe will offer the brightest possible future for our blessed town. It is my opinion that Chuck Gundersen and Jon Harrington, both with distinct perspectives and experiences, have the most to contribute to our shared greater good. Their reputations both within the borders of, and well beyond our community speaks volumes about their personal and professional integrity. I am certain that when and if the right time presents itself for me to serve in the future, I will gratefully enlist. Until that time, I implore you to think about those principles that I mentioned earlier. Chuck and Jon are the right choices for the future of Pomfret, and exemplify those values which we all should hold most dear.*

*Sincerely, Tim Reiter*

*P.S. I have included a copy of this letter, and some additional resources on an informational website at [www.OnePomfret.com](http://www.OnePomfret.com)*

3. Candidate Forum – Moderator Kevin Geiger stated the forum was being recorded on a non-town Zoom account, and thanked John Ricketson for use of his account. He explained that each Select Board candidate would be given 3 minutes for an introductory statement. This would be followed by Questions from the public; each School Board candidate would then introduce themselves and answer questions. As time allows, further questions would be asked. Mr. Geiger explained only positive comments would be allowed, no response to other candidates, no endorsements, and no debates. Gundersen, Harrington, and Woodward are running for a 1-year Select Board seat. Chamberlin and Perron for a 3-year seat. Crean and Peters are running for School Board.
- A) Jon Harrington – “My decision to run for Selectboard did not come lightly, I recognize that the job is a big commitment. So, I gave it a lot of thought and consideration and as I do with all my big decisions, I talked it over with my wife, and after considering her advice, I decided to run any way. But thankfully I have her support and I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude to her as well. My motivation to run for Selectboard is centered around my desire to serve the Town with my fellow citizens, to set an example for my two boys, and also to honor my family’s history and legacy of public service. For those who don’t know me, I would like to just provide a quick summary of my life: I was born in Germany where my family was stationed while my father was in the service. Settled in Pomfret in 1977 where I grew up I attended the local schools, finishing up at Woodstock Union High School. Attended Norwich University and received a degree in Civil Engineering. After traveling and living in New Hampshire and Maine - Pomfret called me back and I purchased Steve Vanwie’s house on Caper Street where I have lived for almost 20 years and where I now live with my wife Emily and our two sons, Alden, age 6 and Henry age 10. Have spent 25 years practicing engineering in Vermont and New Hampshire. I currently own a civil engineering business here in Town I believe that I have skills and attributes that make me a good fit for the Selectboard position. As a parent of two young boys attending the local schools, I have a strong vested interest in the health and viability of the community and school, and I feel that will bring a welcome perspective to the Board. Throughout my engineering career I have worked with Municipalities and Selectboards throughout Vermont in providing my expertise in addressing their failing infrastructure. Closer to home, I have worked with Pomfret on culvert and bridge projects, and recently I worked closely with the Town of Pomfret and Sharon Selectboards on the Howe Hill Rehab and culvert project, from the project scoping through construction. Should I be

elected, I can use my engineering skills and previous professional experience in my role as Selectman. If elected, I would welcome new ideas and will always be open to sensible change at a local level. In fact, I think change is necessary as we adapt to outside forces that are beyond our control. Being new to the Board, I anticipate there may be a learning curve on some things but will work with others to get up to speed and I expect that will go smoothly by drawing from all the knowledge and talent that we already have. If elected, I will work hard as a Selectman to contribute with my expertise and I will do my best to live up to the requirements and expectations of the job.”

- B) **Chuck Gundersen** – “I’m Chuck Gundersen. Having completed one year on the Pomfret Selectboard, and finding myself on the easier side of the learning curve everyone warned me about, I’m ready to commit to another year. For those who don’t know me, a quick bio pared down a bit from my website: [chuckgundersen.com](http://chuckgundersen.com): I grew up on the Jersey Shore in the small town of West Belmar. Graduated from Wall High School, spent two months at Monmouth College, just long enough to join the sailing team and become Freshman Champion in the 1962 racing season. I mention that in case you’ve been thinking it would be good to have a sailor on the Selectboard. Left college, set off on an adventure with a high school buddy, lived on West 92nd Street in Manhattan for the next year working as a file clerk in an office just off Times Square and exploring the great city east and west, uptown and downtown. Joined the Army in September 1963 and served three years. Spent a few years in the title insurance business, then the Culinary Institute of America. Became Chef at The Prince and the Pauper Restaurant in Woodstock in July 1976. Five years there, then five years manager of The South Royalton House, and thirty years owner of the Teago General Store until selling it in 2018. Alice and I moved from Woodstock to South Pomfret when we bought the old Rex and Martha Jillson place in 1984 and we’ve lived here ever since. Spent thirteen years as Auditor, going through Hazel Harrington’s handwritten ledgers (always, always accurate to the penny), the first nine of those years with Charley Jackson in the old Town Clerk’s office night after night in January, freezing because Charley refused to spend the town’s money on a little more heat. I’m shivering thinking about it. Served for ten years as a member of both the Pomfret Fast Squad and Teago Fire Department, and along the way, served a term as Library Trustee, and served once again this past year. For three years, from 1989 through 1991 I was the host of “Rock and Roll Memories” on radio station WKXE in White River Junction, from 8 to midnight every Friday night. Began writing for the Vermont Standard, 2001. Began weekly column—You Never Can Tell—2005. Published a collection of my columns in 2017. Elected Justice of the Peace some years ago and still serving in that office. I am able to find common ground with most anyone. I believe that ability to be an important attribute for a Selectboard member and it certainly helped me to succeed as owner of the Teago General Store over my thirty-year ownership, a period of time when the State of Vermont lost an average of four general stores every year.”
- C) **Scott Woodward** – “Good evening. My name is Scott Woodward and I’m running for reelection to the Selectboard. I’d like to share a little about my background, a few of the ways I’ve contributed to the Town, and a few of my thoughts about Town government. Over the years, I’ve worked successfully with a variety of different people in different settings. I started my career as an Army officer, having served on active duty in Germany and during Desert Storm. I then worked for Green Mountain Coffee Roasters. For the last twenty plus years, I’ve worked as a consultant, assisting customers in both the private sector and government. I moved to Vermont in 2009 to attend Vermont Law School. In 2017, I was appointed by Governor Scott as an advisor to his Modernization and Efficiency Team and served briefly as a Deputy Secretary in his administration. For the last two years, I’ve worked collaboratively with court staff, judges and Vermont Supreme Court justices implementing a new technology system for the Judiciary.

Outside of work, I'm passionate about dog rescue and work jointly with people in Vermont and Costa Rica to find homes for needy dogs. I have also served on a number of other volunteer boards, including the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Patient Advisory Board. I've been active in Pomfret government since 2012. I first served as a member of the Planning Commission, working with other commission members to draft what is now the current Town Plan. As a citizen, I worked with others to circulate a petition to create the five-member board we have today. Taking Orson St. John's idea and bringing it to reality, I also worked with community members to petition for the creation of the Capital Planning Committee. Improvements to the Town Hall and Old Town Clerks building are the direct result of the committee's planning. In 2019, I worked collaboratively with another board member and a team of people from Artistree to amicably resolve a legal dispute arising from a zoning decision. For a few years now, I've been working with Alan Graham of the Historical Society to update the roster of Pomfret's veterans and to come up with a design for a veteran's memorial. More recently, I've been working with the board and a human resources consultant to draft a new Employee Handbook. One of the strengths I bring to town government is that I see systems and entities in the big picture and look for ways to evolve them for the better. In terms of my role as a board member, I have always seen my main duty as being to the voters. After all, we are elected not as a group, but independently. The vast majority of the time, we all agree, but sometimes we don't. I'm not afraid to take issues to the voters when it's important, as recently occurred with reversing the decision to send out ballots to all active voters. I also believe in defining clear roles and responsibilities. We have not achieved that goal yet, but it's an important one as our demographics continue to change. I would also like to see us develop a culture that welcomes new and creative ideas. Change is all around us. I hope to speak more generally about this tonight, especially in relation to how the Town will pay for capital expenditures going forward, as they will likely have a big impact on near-term budgets. “

D) **Frank Perron** – Since 1977 Frank has been active with the Fire and Emergency Services in Pomfret. He has previously served on the Select Board for 4 years and was chair. He served as Cemetery Commissioner. Frank has some ideas of what needs to be done in town. He would like to finish the LaBounty Road Intersection Project. He is especially interested in working with the State regarding improvement of bike and pedestrian accommodations. Frank would also like to poll voters for their suggestions via the Listserve.

E) **Steve Chamberlin** – I grew up in Woodstock and graduated from WUHS in 1991. I moved to Pomfret in 1992, joined the Teago Fire Department in 1993, becoming a level 1 firefighter. I married Terri Lamson, now Terri Chamberlin, in 1994.

I'm self-employed, doing logging, excavator work, snow plowing, maple sugaring and raising beef cattle. My extended family has a long history of working with oxen and you may have seen Terri and me at Tunbridge Fair in the ox-pulling arena or at the annual Pomfret Pull at Suicide Six as well as at other fairs and events around Vermont.

I have served on the Pomfret Selectboard for 2 years. I have worked closely with the Highway Department to lower costs and improve efficiency. We have just purchased our first 10-wheeler truck as we move away from 4-wheel drive dump trucks that are expensive to purchase and maintain. I am currently working closely with the highway crew on the purchase of a new grader.

In the last two years I have come to realize how important it is for the Selectboard to have a good working relationship with the highway crew, other elected town officials and the fire department. It is important to listen to all sides of issues rather than force my viewpoint on people. One thing I have learned is that the Selectboard is not going to always vote unanimously. But when I am “out-voted” I move on and

do what is best for the town. To do otherwise brings negative energy to Selectboard and the Town.

I feel that I bring valuable experience and knowledge to the Selectboard and I would like to continue working for the good of this small town of Pomfret, Vermont that we all love. I hope that if you have followed the activities of the Selectboard, you feel that I have earned your confidence and your vote. I will work to continue to deserve both.

4. Questions from the Public -- Bill Emmons – Thanked the candidates for their succinct introductions. What is your vision of Pomfret’s future?
  - a) Harrington – Being able to attract young families with children in order to renew the viability of the PVS. He also would like to address failing infrastructure
  - b) Woodward – Agrees with Jon and would like to open a community dialog to get voters’ ideas and concerns. He feels the future will involve consolidation of services between municipalities. Scott would like to address land use issues to hopefully encourage more affordable housing.
  - c) Perron – would like to circle back to the idea of polling the voters. He wishes to improve the infrastructure and accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. He would like to see the Town Hall renovated.
  - d) Gundersen - Feels we have lost some community activities which unified citizens in the past, i.e., Pomfret Days, Fireman’s Suppers, Pomfret Pull, Strawberry and Harvest Dinners, etc. He would like to reverse this trend and come together as a community, once we are physically able to do so. Many people are working from home which will likely become a trend.
  - e) Chamberlin – Agrees with Chuck. We need back to go back what we are known for – community identity such as fund raising for the school, community activities,

Question -- How do you hope to bring in affordable housing.

- a) Chamberlin - Hopes the Planning Commission via public meetings, can begin the process of affordable housing.
- b) Gundersen – What town is affordable? Young children make the community vibrant. We need bring back family involvement. He would not be able to afford a home in Pomfret today.
- c) Perron – Where would we put affordable housing. Frank noted the 50-acre plot next to his recently sold for \$700,000.
- d) Woodward – The biggest issue is land use policy. He referred to articles he has written on this subject in Vt Digger. The market is beyond our control. He would like to continue working with Ann Reynolds on this priority. He would like to create a project and proof of concept.
- e) Harrington -This is a huge challenge. We need more places like the “Harding Place” however, most of the land surrounding the school is in the flood plain.

Question -- Betsy Siebeck – What skills do you have that might otherwise not be on the board?

- a) Harrington – His engineering skills would be valuable in acquiring permits, grants, etc. He worked 5 years with VTrans and has experience with budgets and supervision
- b) Scott – Has a background in HR, management, technology, and business processes. The Town’s public records are a mess and need to be resolved. Scott feels the Town needs to define processes, roles, and responsibilities.
- c) Perron – Has the ability to “get his teeth” into a project and “get ‘er done.” He would like to be involved with highway projects.

- d) Gundersen – Appreciates the skill sets of other people. He has lots of history in dealing with the public, gets things done, is good at making decisions.
- e) Chamberlin – From his self-employment he knows the importance of keeping equipment up to date, with special expertise in road building and maintenance techniques

Question -- Dottie Deans – What one distinct Pomfret experience is meaningful to you personally?

- a) Chamberlin– Working together as a community and helping neighbors
- b) Gundersen – The beauty of Pomfret
- c) Perron – His Town Hall experiences; and the history of the Fast Squad, he is humbled to go into homes at the worst times and help citizens.
- d) Woodward – Awesome neighbors and neighborhood
- e) Harrington – Growing up with lots of good memories of community activities and community support. Donkey Baseball, Fire Department involvement, etc.

#### 5. School Board Candidates

- a) John Peters – John grew up locally on his father’s dairy farm. He has served on the Selectboard for 4 years. . He has two daughters – one a Junior and one in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. John and his wife have decided to home school their children because of the inability of the school to accommodate his children. He feels the school has “dropped the ball” by “farming out” the process of at home schooling with no interaction from real teachers. He was told his children were “welcome to return to the in-school program. Because. His wife is immunosuppressed the family prefers to eliminate as much contact as possible He feels the 2/5 days a week of at home work is actually busy work, leaving the children unengaged and bored. Answers from the school board, at best, have been “we’re working on it” and worst is no answers at all. He would like to join the school board to ensure all children have real world resources needed to succeed . He would especially like to restore PVS to K-6, as before, when it was a far superior school to WES.
- b) Bob Crean – Bob’s two sons were educated at PVS and WUHS. One has a lifelong disability and has been afforded appropriate education. Bob would. Like to restore PVS as a K-6 school. He will continue towards this goal whether or not he is on the Board.

Question – Kathy Peters – Which superintendent candidate would you vote for and why?

- a) Crean – Sherry Sousa because he has worked with her for 4 years and doesn’t know anything about the other candidate. Does not have much information on the other candidate.
- b) Peters – Holcomb – She has a diverse background, former Director of the State Agency of Education, a high level of education, and fresh perspective.

Question – Would you like to see PVS as a K-6 or 5-6?

- a) Crean – Focused on opening the school. Only 45 children from Pomfret would attend K-6. As a 5-6, 80 children will be enrolled from Pomfret, Woodstock, Reading Bridgewater and Reading. This is the best and least expensive option.
- b) Peters – This is not an easy decision. 5-6 is best for the future of the school. A vibrant community would help restore K-6. If we had 100 children it would work.

Question – Frank Perron – If Pomfret had 100 kids would PVS return to K-6?

- a) Peters – John feels the 18-member School Board cannot move in the same direction. Pomfret residents need to contact as many School Board members to let them know your opinion, not just the Pomfret members.

- b) Crean – If we had 100 kids they would not fit into WES. The additional cost for K-6 would be four teachers.

6. Return to Select Board questions:

Amber – Winter of 2017-2018 there was infighting among the Board and Highway crew; the highway conditions were awful. Many road crew resigned; was this resolved? How would you diminish conflict in Town management? Kevin reminded us that no history was to be discussed. Chuck suggested at the time there were “too many cooks.” And we have now hired the best people on the road crew and we now defer to the experts. Frank stated that Amber arrived during on the worst recent winters with exceptional storms, lots of trees down, etc. . He feels the road crew now is able to separate egos from agendas. Scott stated there was some attrition in road crew. There is a new Employee Handbook and personnel management should tighten up. Steve stated he is in touch with Jim Potter on a daily or weekly basis. He brings needs back to the board. Jim also attends weekly Board meetings. The Crew is doing an exceptional job.

Question – Bob Ricketson – If you had a \$1 million unrestricted grant what would you do with it?

- a) Chamberlin – Ask the voters
- b) Perron – Renovate the town hall
- c) Chuck – Renovate the town hall
- d) Harrington – Fix failing culverts – poll the town for input from voters
- e) Woodward – Solicit public input. Acute issues such as culverts. Tax stabilization fund  
Future capital expenditures

Question – Ona Chase – If conflicts cannot be resolved by Select Board would you be willing to go to a Town Manager?

- a) Woodward – no
- b) Harrington – no
- c) Perron – no
- d) Gundersen – no
- e) Chamberlin – no

7. Scott moved and Steve seconded adjournment at 5:59 pm. Unanimous roll-call vote