

**North Branch Fire District #1
78 Dorr Fitch Road
West Dover, VT 05356**

Website: <https://www.northbranchfiredistrict.com>

Phone: 802-464-7560 x 110

Fax: 802-464-3040

E-mail: administration@nbfddwwt.com

**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 12, 2024.

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

Members Present: Steve Montello and Ken Westby.

Also Present: Representing Nbfd#1 were Deana Covieo-Clarke, Bartholomew Howes and Helen Krzeminski. Members of the public were also present.

Moderator, Ken Westby, 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. He stated that Articles 2 through 4 would be voted on from the floor.

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

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

Westby introduced **Article 2.** To see if the Fire District will accept the Annual Budget. Westby asked the members of the public if they had a copy of the budget Jon Prial made a motion to accept the 2024/25 Annual Budget, as presented. Seconded by Paolo Cugnasca. The article passed.

Article 3. Prial 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 Tom Ferrazza. The article passed.

Article 4. Other non-binding business. Montello opened the floor for any questions of discussion.

- Westby summarized work the Prudential Committee had accomplished over the past year. Westby stated that over the past several years, the Prudential Committee has been able to lower rates for customers and was able to maintain that rate this past year. Westby explained that to supplement the income lost by lowering the rates, the PC has used excess cash, half of which was related to the Capital Reserve Fund and this was invested in treasury bills and treasury notes. Westby stated that these notes generally yield in the 5% range. He stated that \$76,000 has been earned over the last 11 months. 2.3 million has been invested in these treasury notes and bonds with one-year terms, currently.
- Westby updated the PC and the public on negotiations to expand the Fire District to include a tract of land in Wilmington. A developer wants to develop the land, but Wilmington has no more capacity for wastewater treatment, so they have approached North Branch. Westby added that the PC is also looking at expansion in other areas to spread costs to the users, over a bigger user base.
- Westby stated that collections had been implemented to approximately a dozen users who were found to never have installed a meter and had service without paying, for years. Their fees include an estimate of past use.
- Westby explained the recently implemented “excess use charge” for those customers who have gone over their allotted gallonage (for their property) during three peak periods. He further explained that this excess use puts stress on North Branch’s by possibly exceeding its permitted capacity.

Steve Montello added the following to Westby’s comments:

- Montello stated that the treatment plant and administration were fully staffed, he wanted to thank the staff and that they are doing terrific job.
- Montello stated that air conditioning had been added to the administration building and that the heating system had been replaced with a more efficient one.
- Montello stated that the Town of Dover planning commission had invited North Branch to be on a committee to study putting in a community water system. He further explained that it is a long-term project, but it is felt that economic growth will be stunted if one is not put in place over the next five to ten years. He stated that North Branch will be on the committee to investigate the possibility of this system.
- Montello reported that Jon Prial and Ken Westby have been actively engaged in discussion on North Branch’s involvement with the solar fields that were installed at the Dover Elementary School, years ago. The intent is to take advantage of savings and credits that previously were not used. Jon Prial further explained the system of credits and how it can reduce costs to North Branch and other parties invested in the solar field.

Tom Ferrazza made a motion to allow Bartholomew Howes to speak and give the Chief Operator’s report. Seconded by Prial. Motion passed. Howes reported the following:

- Annual flows are slightly higher than in previous years, but still only using 47% of North Branch’s capacity.
- He reported that this is the first time in four years that peak periods have been under 400,000 gallons. He stated that it may be impact of the excess use charge and customers are more aware of the amount of water they are using. He also

stated that it could be that people just weren't coming up during those holiday times.

- Howes also reported that a full facility generator is being installed to ensure compliance during weather events. He stated that in recent events, staff had to work around the clock, using inefficient equipment to maintain the holding ponds and system. He stated that it was a "logistical nightmare" and prompted the PC to approve the addition of the generator. Montello added that a smaller generator will be installed at the administration building.
- Howes reported that North Branch has an excess of \$50,000 in the Capital Reserve Fund, as was originally reported in the independent reserve study. He noted that this was after the purchase of the generator.
- Howes reported that annual engineer's report came back with stellar performance. He noted that this was a review of operations and water quality reports.
- Montello added that the administration building was painted, and fence repairs were made. Howes added that this year he will be focusing on the operations building as it is showing signs of needing repair.
- Westby thanked Howes for running an efficient plant.

Other comments from the public included:

- Jon Prial asked the Prudential Committee to explain what was implemented with the master meter program. Westby explained a master meter charge will be given to those customers who have one meter for many units. This is to offset the loss of a minimum charge, that is currently at \$115.00 per billing period, if those units were to have individual meters. These customers were given the option of installing individual meters at each unit. Westby reported that Kingswood installed individual meters and that Seasons already had individual meters, but that North Branch will now be taking over those individual accounts. For other customers, it was not feasible to install individual meters, so they have opted to receive the master meter charge. Westby stated that careful investigation and calculation were done to make sure that single family units are no longer absorbing the cost that the multi-unit condominiums are benefiting from currently. Westby stated that the income received from these charges and minimums will be used to reduce the minimum charge overall. He stated that this is fairer and more equitable for all customers.
- Paolo Cugnasca asked to explain how the customers who were not metered, but had service was handled. Westby summarized as was stated earlier in the meeting, adding that it was a lack of follow-up, previously, and that those costs were absorbed by paying customers.
- Jon Prial asked if noncompliance was addressed in the ordinance. Westby explained that it is in the ordinance and stated that North Branch now has two enforcement officers to handle violations of the ordinance.

Elisabeth Prial made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:22 a.m. Seconded by Jon Prial. Motion passed.

[Voting Results Elections:935 registered voters; 37 ballots cast.](#)

Prudential Committee for a three-year term; Jon Prial with 25 votes.

Clerk, one-year term; Scott Stein with 27 votes.

Respectfully Submitted:

Helen Krzeminski
Assistant Clerk

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