

**MINUTES FROM TOWN & SCHOOL MEETINGS
WITH ELECTION RESULTS**

**TOWN OF WESTFIELD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND ANNUAL SCHOOL MEETING
MARCH 5, 2024**

The legal voters of the Town of Westfield and the legal voters of the Westfield Town School District are hereby notified and warned to meet (in-person) at the Westfield Community Center, 59 North Hill Road, on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at 10:00 A.M. to transact the following business:

The meeting was called to order at 10am by Selectman Jacques Couture who began the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

WESTFIELD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING:

Article 1: To elect a moderator for a term of one-year:

Mike Piper nominated Pat Sagui to be the moderator for both the town and school; Shelley Martin seconded. No other nominations were made. *Pat Sagui was elected by voice vote to be the town and school moderator for a term of one-year (2025).*

Selectman Couture thanked Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn for all her work on the town report and everyone who has any input on the report. He also thanked Roger Gosselin for taking the drone photos of the farms used on the front and back covers of this year's town report. He then congratulated Town Clerk Dunn on her Town Clerk of the Year Award.

Moderator Sagui went through the rules and regulations regarding voting. She then asked if anyone objected to hearing from Westfield's State Representative, Mark Higley. There were no objections.

Mark Higley first spoke about factors driving increases to school budgets throughout the state. Universal school meals, health care premiums, student to staff ratios, general inflation, new student weighting formula, special education reform, teachers' pension cost increases, ESSR funds ending, capital construction costs, and PCB testing are some of these factors. He noted that there are three things that Governor Scott is focusing on. The first being affordability. An increase in government fees and larger school budgets has an increasingly cumulative effect on taxpayers. Second is drugs and crime. The recent murders in our area related to drug cases is one sign of the effects of drugs and crime in our neighborhoods. There were also over 14,500 pending court cases at the start of this year, a backup from COVID. His third focus is housing. Act 250 changes are being considered to help with this. Representative Higley is working on saving the Salisbury Fish Hatchery. He noted that it brings money and jobs to that area. The hunting and trapping guidelines are also being worked on. S258 is being considered and it would reconfigure the Fish and Wildlife board. That bill would also ban hunting coyotes by using hounds.

Hunter Couture, principal of Jay/Westfield Elementary School, introduced himself. He talked about some of the things going on at the school and some of the areas being focused on including a strong academic progress, COVID learning loss, and a math and literacy focus. Some of the extracurricular things happening at the school are a theater program, skiing at Jay Peak Resort, spending time at Siskin/Coutts camp, Hazens Notch, and spending time at the Jay recreation trails. He emphasized that the school is a very important part of the community in a small town, and they are working to bring back the community focus.

Article 2. To elect one Westfield Town School District Board Member for a term of three years: **Julia Smith nominated Jessica Kennison. Hearing no other nominations the motion passed by a voice vote.** *Jessica Kennison was elected to a three-year term (2027).*

Article 3. To elect a Union School Board director for a term of three-years: **There were no nominations. The position remains vacant.**

Article 4. Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District appropriate the sum of \$2,145,310 to defray the expenses and liabilities for the Jay/Westfield Joint Elementary School for the ensuing year with a net assessment to the town of \$826,390? **(Paper ballot to be commingled with Jay) Motion by Sue Scott and seconded by Anne Lazor to bring the article to the floor.**

Paper Ballot Vote Results:	Westfield:	YES - 29	NO - 18
	Jay:	YES - 27	NO - 3

(Jay results: reported by Lynnette Deaette, Jay Town Clerk)

Article 4 passed in Westfield and Jay.

Article 5. Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District approve the school board to expend \$843,998 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year?

Mike Piper motioned, and Sue Scott seconded to approve Article 5. Bill Salmon questioned what the budget covers. School board member Andrew Emery explained that the overall budget has an 8.37% increase. He then explained some of the things the school has updated using already available funds, these things did not need to be added to the budget, which included building and grounds improvements, a new lock system, remedying the oil tank which had several inches of an oil water mix in the bottom of it, fixing a mold issue in the janitor closet, and HVAC issues which involved no air circulation, and an inconsistent air temperature throughout the school. He also noted the articles Superintendent Elaine Collins has put in The Chronicle recently regarding increases to schools' budgets and challenges schools are facing currently. School board member Mary Gagne noted some of the increases and decreases in this year's budget, including reducing the guidance position to .4 from 1.0, using the previous year surplus to help bring down the tax rate for this year, health insurance up 16.4%, and staff wages increasing by 4%. She also clarified Article 5, noting that it is not asking to raise another \$843,998; it is authorizing the school board to spend the money voted on in Article 4, plus the Westfield School Budget. Theresa McAvinney questioned what the current student to teacher ratio is at the elementary school. Principal Couture noted that for certified staff it is 13:1. He explained that small schools have fluctuating enrollment, and they try to combine some classrooms to combat this. Theresa McAvinney noted that she is concerned with the tax rate increase, and questioned if the school board is pushing back against state mandates. School board member Mary Gagne explained that Superintendent Collins goes to advocate for the supervisory union in Montpelier often. She also explained that the decrease in the CLA (common level of appraisal) is causing the large increase in the tax rate. Lister Danny Young explained how the CLA is calculated and that it is used in the formula to calculate the education tax rate. He noted that in July the town will receive an order to reappraise due to the COD. He also explained that the reason for the CLA jumping so drastically is because it uses a 3-year average and all three years being averaged now are COVID years, where real estate has been selling for overly high prices. **A voice vote was taken. Moderator Sagui then asked for a show of hands.** *The show of hands indicated that Article 5 passed.*

Article 6. Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to revise the joint school agreement to reflect the law changes by replacing Equalized Pupils with the phrase Long Term Weighted Average Daily Membership (LTW ADM)? **Mike Piper motioned and Sue Scott seconded to approve Article 6.** There was no discussion. *Article 6 passed by voice vote.*

Articles 7 through 11 voted by Australian ballot: Moderator Sagui read each article. There was no discussion. The results of the Australian ballot voting were reported after the polls closed at 7pm.

Article 7. To elect a Jay/Westfield Joint School Treasurer for the school year 2024-2025.
(Australian ballot to be commingled with Jay)
Westfield: Tara Morse - 94 Spoiled - 1 Blank - 9 Write-In - 0
Jay: Tara Morse - 84 Spoiled - Bank - Write-In -
(Jay Results: reported by Lynnette Deaette, Jay Town Clerk)
Tara Morse was elected to a one-year term (2025) in Westfield and Jay.

Article 8. To elect a Westfield Town School District Treasurer for the school year 2024-2025.
(Australian ballot)
Lisa Deslandes - 95 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 9 Write-In - 0
Lisa Deslandes was elected to a one-year term (2025).

Article 9. Shall the voters of the North Country Union High School District approve the school board to expend \$21,553,800, which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? **(Australian ballot)**
Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 62 No - 38 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 4
Article 9 passed.

Article 10. Shall the voters of the North Country Union Junior High School District approve the school board to expend \$6,538,700, which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? **(Australian ballot)**
Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 64 No - 36 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 4
Article 10 passed.

Article 11. Shall the voters of the North Country Union Junior High School District approve the Board of School Directors to place \$280,000 of undesignated FY2023 fund balance from the general fund operations in the Building Maintenance Reserve fund? **(Australian ballot)**
Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 68 No - 32 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 4
Article 11 passed

Article 12. To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting. There was no discussion.

Article 13. To adjourn. Mike Piper motioned to adjourn at 11:03AM; Pauline Couture seconded. *Motion passed by voice vote.*

WESTFIELD TOWN ANNUAL MEETING:

Immediately following the School Meeting, the Town Meeting was called to order.

Article 1. To elect a moderator for a term of one-year. *The body voted to elect Pat Sagui to the position of Town and School Moderator during the school portion of the meeting.*

Article 2. To hear the reports of the Town Officers: **Shelley Martin motioned and Will Young seconded to approve Article 2.**

Town Clerk Dunn first spoke about the Selectboard/ Town Clerk report. She thanked Bill Salmon and Normand Piette for helping on the common during Christmas, and she also thanked the road crew for all their work during the FEMA event in 2023. She noted that they were out on the roads all night getting them ready and no roads needed to be closed. She then discussed the digital displays purchased using grant money through MERP (Municipal Energy Resilience Program). This program allowed the town to have an energy audit done on all the town buildings and the town can then receive money to make energy efficiency changes to the town buildings. Selectman Degre thanked Roger Tetreault for being the town handyman and helping whenever needed. Carrie Glessner and Laura Emery are the town representatives for CUD (Communications Union District). The CUD is working to get fiber internet across the region and has been doing this for the past 5 years. It is in Westfield now and connections to residences will be starting within the next few months. Areas of Balance Rock Road and Buck Hill Road will not be started until 2025-26, the money for these more rural areas will become available in the next two years. They urged people to sign up, noting that the more interest an area has, the faster they will build that area. Selectman Couture then spoke about the village wastewater project assessment. He explained that this cost the town nothing and would cover mostly the homes in the village that are currently on the water system. The town will hold public meetings and will have information available at the recycling center, town website and the town clerk's office on the progress of the project. Selectman Couture also noted that the town can walk away at any point, there is no obligation to go through with anything. He also wanted people to know they will be asked to mark where their septic pipe comes out of the house and where their septic tank is so they can calculate what is required to do the work. The company needs to collect this data to determine the work involved in engineering the system. He also explained that there is a lot of federal grant money available to address wastewater issues. With homes in the village so close to the water table, future home sales may be affected by septic issues if no wastewater system is put into place. Pat Sagui spoke as the Planning Commission Chair. She noted that the planning commission is very close to finalizing the new zoning bylaws. The March 18th meeting of the Selectboard will be the final vote on the bylaws. All comments and changes made are on the town website, with hard copies at the town clerk's Office and The Hitchcock Museum and Library. Sue Scott thanked the Planning Commission for all their work on the bylaws. **Article 2 passed by a voice vote.**

Article 3.

Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to appoint a collector of delinquent taxes pursuant to 17 V.S.A. §2651d(a)? **Pauline Couture motioned and Shelley Martin seconded to approve Article 3.** Selectman Couture explained why the Selectboard wanted to make this change. With changing times most of this work is done within the town clerk's office by the Treasurer and Town Clerk. Moving this position in office would also allow the revenue from late fees to be added back into the town budget as revenue. Town Clerk Dunn explained that most people call the office, and they walk them through how to pay online. Shelley Martin questioned if this is only for property taxes or if it is also for things like dog licenses. Town Clerk Dunn noted that it is just for property taxes. Selectman Degre noted that Joyce Crawford has held this position for the last 35 or so years, and she did a great job. He feels that it is just time to move this position in office. Danny Young questioned if this article passed would Article 4C no longer need to be voted on. Moderator Sagui explained that if Article 3 was approved, then a motion to postpone indefinitely would be needed on Article 4 C. This motion would require a 2/3rd vote to pass. **This article requires 2/3 majority to pass. Article 3 passed by voice vote.**

Article 4.

To elect all necessary town officials required by law.

- a. 1st Constable - One-year term: Selectman Couture nominated Mike Piper. Mike Piper declined the nomination. **Selectman Degre nominated Mike Jacobs. Mike Jacobs was elected by voice vote to a one-year term (2025).**

- b. 2nd Constable - One-year term: **Bill Salmon nominated Mike Piper.** *Mike Piper was elected by voice vote to a one-year term (2025).*
- c. Delinquent Tax Collector - One-year term: **Mike Piper motioned to object to consideration, Theresa McAvinney seconded.** *Passed by voice vote.*
- d. Library Trustee - Five-year term: **Connie LaPlume nominated Carrie Glessner.** *Carrie Glessner was elected by voice vote to a five-year term (2029).*
- e. Library Trustee - One-year of an unexpired two-year term: **Connie LaPlume nominated Carolyn Lyster.** *Carolyn Lyster was elected by voice vote to one year of a two-year unexpired term (2025).*
- f. Lister - Three-year term: Sue Scott nominated Scott Dunn. He does not want to hold the position any longer. **LaDonna Dunn nominated Luke Backus.** Luke declined the nomination. *The position remains vacant.*
- g. Selectperson - Three-year term: **Jacques Couture nominated Richard Degre.** **Mike Piper motioned to instruct the clerk to cast one ballot for Richard Degre; Shelley Martin seconded. Motion passed by voice vote.** *Richard Degre was elected to a term of three years (2027).*
- h. Town Clerk - Three-year term: **Shelley Martin nominated LaDonna Dunn.** *LaDonna Dunn was elected by a voice vote to a term of three years (2027).*
- i. Town Treasurer - Three-year term: **Richard Degre nominated Lisa Deslandes.** *Lisa Deslandes was elected by voice vote to a term of three years (2027).*

Article 5.

Shall the voters approve \$28,176 for the following appropriations? **Connie LaPlume motioned and Sue Newman seconded to approve Article 5.**

- a. **\$500** to American Red Cross:
- b. **\$500** to ConnectAbilities (formerly Orleans County Citizens Advocacy):
- c. **\$100** to Felines & Friends Foundation:
- d. **\$1,200** to Green Mountain Farm-to-School, Inc.:
- e. **\$50** to Green Up Vermont:
- f. **\$250** to Jay Focus Group:
- g. **\$750** to Jay Food Shelf:
- h. **\$250** to Jay Peak Post No. 28-American Legion: **Maurice Doyon motioned to increase the appropriation to \$500, Roger Tetreault seconded.** Sue Scott questioned what costs have increased. Maurice Doyon explained that the cost of flags and grave markers have gone up. *Motion to increase appropriation to \$500 passed by voice vote.*
- i. **\$300** to Mississquoi River Basin Association:
- j. **\$100** to North Country Friends of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra:
- k. **\$300** to Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging:
- l. **\$1,072** to Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS):

- m. **\$250** to Northeast Kingdom Learning Services (NEKLS):
- n. **\$700** to Old Stone House Museum (Orleans County Historical Society):
- o. **\$500** to Orleans County Fair Association:
- p. **\$16,409** to Orleans County Sheriff's Department: **Mike Piper motioned to vote on this article by paper ballot.** Moderator Sagui informed the voters that seven people would need to agree to vote by paper ballot for the motion to pass. *A show of hands indicated the motion to vote by paper ballot for Article 5P passed.* Connie LaPlume noted that the Sheriff has been across the road from her house a lot this year, not just prior to town meeting. Theresa McAvinney feels that with what has been happening in the area lately it is not a time to defund the police. Jennifer Grace felt they did a good job addressing the speed problems on North Hill. Selectman Degre noted that the Selectboard gets the sheriff's report every month, and the town doesn't collect hardly any money from fines. The town used to cover the cost of the sheriff through fines collected. Shelley Martin questioned if they could give the town a precise report. Selectman Degre explained they do give the town a report, but they are not pulling people over, and when they pull people over on Route 100 the town does not get the fine money. Andrew Emery questioned how much money the town is getting from fines. Selectman Couture noted the town received \$50 in fines last year. He noted that they are not trying to fund the sheriff appropriation completely with fine money and he does know it's a deterrent factor. Theresa McAvinney questioned how much it would cost the town to hire their own police fund. She feels this is money well spent. Anne Lazor questioned to what extent the state police cover Westfield. Selectman Degre explained that if you call them, they will come. He also explained that the town doesn't have to pay the state police.

YES - 26

NO - 12

Appropriation stays at \$16,409.

- q. **\$2,500** to Orleans Essex Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) and Hospice, Inc.:
- r. **\$500** to Pope Memorial Frontier Animal Shelter, Inc.:
- s. **\$600** to Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RCT):
- t. **\$500** to Troy and Area Lions Club to run the Westfield Senior Meal Site:
- u. **\$400** to Umbrella:
- v. **\$95** to Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL):
- w. **\$250** to Vermont Family Network:
- x. **\$100** to Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force - Vt. Assoc. of Conservation Dist.:

Amended amount of appropriations to \$28,426, passed by voice vote.

Article 6. Shall the voters approve general government fund expenditures of \$411,760, of which \$165,340 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$246,420 shall be raised by municipal taxes? *This amount does not include appropriations.* **Sue Scott motioned to approve Article 6 and Anne Lazor seconded.** *Article 6 passed by a voice vote.*

Article 7. Shall the voters approve highway fund expenditures of \$503,498, of which \$108,853 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$394,645 shall be raised by municipal taxes? **Sue Scott motioned to approve Article 7 and Shelley Martin seconded.** *Article 7 passed by a voice vote.*

Article 8. Shall the voters authorize the Treasurer, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §4791, to collect current taxes? **Mike Piper motioned to approve Article 8 and Theresa McAvinney seconded.** *Article 8 passed by a voice vote.*

Article 9.

Shall the voters authorize payment of real property taxes on the first Thursday in October, by physical delivery to the tax collector before 4 p.m. on that date? Theresa McAvinney motioned, and Mike Piper seconded to bring the article to the floor. Town Clerk Dunn explained that the tax deadline is usually around a holiday. Changing the date to a week earlier would eliminate the possibility of taxes being due on the holiday or payments being delayed in the mail due to the holiday. Danny Young questioned whether this applied to only physical delivery of tax payments or if it included electronic payments. Town Clerk Dunn explained that physical delivery means not postmarked on that date, it needs to be physically at the town office by that date and time. Selectman Couture thought it would help to add electronic delivery to the article. **Selectman Couture motioned to amend the article to read “by physical or electronic delivery” and Danny Young seconded the motion.** *Amending the wording for Article 9 passed by a voice vote. Article 9 passed with the new wording by a voice vote.*

Article 10.

To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting.

Jennifer Johnson, the new Librarian at the Hitchcock Memorial Museum and Library, introduced herself. She is very excited to be the new librarian and to get to know the town. She started a newsletter that includes information on changes and programs happening at the library. She noted that the book sale shelf is full right now and she would love people to check that out. She also updated on some changes happening including getting the library automated and the start of inter-library loan. There is a shipping cost to inter-library loan so any donations towards that are gladly accepted. She also discussed the ABLE library, which supplies books for visually impaired people and applications for that program are available at the library. Maurice Doyon wondered if the newsletter would be available to be emailed in the future. Jennifer explained that she will be asking people for their email addresses when they sign up for library cards and the newsletter will get emailed to you at that point. By giving your email address, the system will also notify you when you have books due back soon. Jennifer Grace wondered if the ABLE library information is available on the town website and Jennifer noted that she will get the information to LaDonna to get it put on there. Sue Scott had a question about whether donations are being accepted. Jennifer explained that she cannot accept them at this time as there is no space. In the future she will be looking at fiction and non-fiction from the past 5 years and she will post on Facebook when she is ready for donations. Carrie Glessner thanked Jennifer for jumping right in at the library.

Bill Salmon has some concerns regarding Rasputitsa, a bike race taking place in April. He is concerned with traffic safety, specifically where Buck Hill merges onto Route 100. Selectman Couture noted that the town heard about the race after it was all setup. The 4 towns the race will be going through then formed a joint committee to address these types of issues. VLCT, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, got involved to help the towns protect themselves. The biggest concerns were safety and road damage. VLCT suggested an insurance liability amount and the race organizers agreed to all the stipulations. They agreed to hire the ambulance service and ADA traffic control as well as put money in an escrow account to cover the fees for the attorney the towns hired. They are not releasing the race route until the night before the race; however they are letting the towns know about a week before. Sue Scott questioned whether they will have signs on Buck Hill notifying riders of the merge onto Route 100. Selectman Degre explained that they will have signs and traffic control people working at these intersections. He also explained that they are releasing 300 riders every half an hour with 1,500 riders in total.

Connie LaPlume spoke about the Lions Club Texas Hold em' tournaments. They are looking for places/organizations to donate the money from these tournaments to. So far, they have donated to the library, and local schools. The only requirement is that the organization needs to run the kitchen during the tournament. Two of the Library Trustees, Karen Blais and Jenn Stelma, along with Jenn's partner Zach, ran the kitchen to earn the \$462 donated to the library last month. They are also looking for volunteers to help with the meal site. The meal site is run each Thursday at the Community Center.

Jennifer Grace spoke about the Upper Mississquoi and Trout River Wild and Scenic Committee. They are holding a snowshoeing event at the American Legion in North Troy. She explained that they do a lot of work with the rivers, including runoff, erosion and flood prevention. Selectman Couture noted that the wild and scenic designation comes with around \$200,000 of funding each year.

Theresa McAvinney has some concerns regarding regular maintenance of the playground. She feels it is a reflection on the town and needs some weeding to be done. She would also like to see a trash receptacle put in if possible. Selectman Degre thought they could try having a trash receptacle and if people abuse it then it can be taken away. Selectman Couture noted that the mulch is being re-done this summer.

Article 11. To adjourn. **Mike Piper motioned to adjourn at 12:34PM and Theresa McAvinney seconded.**
Passed by a voice vote.



Jacques Couture, Selectboard Chair

Andrew Emery, Westfield School Board Chair

Pat Sagui, Moderator