

**WESTFIELD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING
MINUTES**

MARCH 3, 2020

The legal voters of the Westfield Town School District are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Westfield Community Center, 59 North Hill Road, on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 10:00 A.M. to transact the following business:

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Selectman Jacques Couture who began the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

WESTFIELD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING:

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

Selectman Couture said if there were no objections from the body we would elect a moderator who would serve as both the School and the Town Moderator. No one objected.

Mike Piper nominated Pat Sagui. Hearing no other nominations, Pat was re-elected by voice vote to be the School and the Town Moderator for a term of one year (2021).

Moderator Sagui made some announcements including a reminder that there are four types of voting going on during the meeting: Primary voting; Australian ballot voting; paper ballots during the meeting; and voting from the floor. She said the Primary and Australian ballot voting take place in the back corner of the room. She announced the meeting was being recorded. She referenced the Town Meeting Procedures printed on the inside back cover of the Town Report. She said if someone would like to comment, they should stand and state their name for the record, after they have been recognized by the Moderator. She commented there have been three topics requested for discussion at the end of Town Meeting during Other Business: discussion about the Red Cross' Home Fire Campaign; updating of the Town Hazard Mitigation Plan; and the introduction of a new window insert program to improve energy efficiency.

Moderator Sagui said if no one objected House Representative Mark Higley would give a brief legislative update. Hearing no objection, Representative Higley addressed the body announcing that Governor Scott has just assigned a task force regarding the Coronavirus. The Town Clerk has an email with informational phone numbers. Representative Higley said the legislature overrode the Governor on the minimum wage bill. He stated by 2022 the minimum wage will increase to \$12.55 per hour. Representative Higley explained the following bills are being worked on by the legislature:

- Marijuana Tax: Out of the House creates a 14% excise tax and 6% sales tax.
- Global Warming Solutions Tax: Came out of the House recently establishing a 22 member Climate Committee creating a plan to reduce our carbon emissions by established deadlines. Following six weeks of testimony, Representative Higley had real concerns. He was one of two that voted no. This bill is now on to the Senate.
- Modernization of Act 250: Representative Higley stated there were public hearings around the state last year getting input about modernizing Act 250 which has been the same for the past 50 years. He stated there were six critical amendments made in committee. The Senate had already amended the elevation from 2500 feet to 2000 feet. The House put it back to 2500 feet. This is now going back to the Senate.
- Paid Family Leave Bill: This was sustained by a Governor's veto. The Governor is negotiating with the Vermont State Police to come up with an agreement.
- Cyber Security: This bill establishes protocols for municipalities to follow when using state operating systems such as the Listers use. There have been problems with cyber-attacks on municipalities by stealing information through ransomware.

Margaret Rowley thanked Representative Higley for updating the town each year.

Article 2. To elect one Westfield Town School District Board Member for a term of three-years.

Larry Berry nominated Kevin Amyot. Hearing no other nominations, Kevin was re-elected by voice vote for a term of three-years (2023).

Article 3. To elect one Westfield Town School District Board Member for a term of two-years to fill an unexpired three-year term.

Moderator Sagui explained this is to replace Janellen-Parker Goodwin who resigned due to moving out of Westfield. Justin Leyva was appointed by the School Board to fill this vacancy until Town Meeting.

Lara Starr nominated Justin Leyva. Hearing no other nominations, Justin was elected by voice vote for a term of two-years to fill the unexpired three-year term of Janellen Parker-Goodwin (2022).

Article 4. Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District appropriate the sum of \$1,566,191 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 \$521,307? **(Paper ballot to be commingled with Jay)**

Moderator Sagui explained this must be voted by paper ballot. There was a motion by Mike Piper and second by Laini Fondiller to bring the article to the floor. Moderator Sagui asked if there were any questions for the School Board or the Selectboard.

Discussion:

- Noreen Shapiro-Berry: Asked for an update on new changes at the school since last year. Moderator Sagui said as long as it is related to the budget, it can be discussed. School Board Chair Kevin Amyot said there was nothing budget related but he will discuss other changes later during the meeting.
- Theresa McAvinney: What is the comparison of our equalized pupil within our supervisory union and within the state? Chair Amyot said in Westfield we are pretty comparable to the state. A school with more students will have a lower equalized rate but we are comparable to others in the state.
- Mary Brenner: How much of the budget is state mandated and how much does the School Board have control over. Chair Amyot stated he estimates the local board can control about 10% of the budget.
- Larry Berry: He stated he's been here about 18 years and it seems the budget goes up about 5% each year. How much is it going up this year compared to last year? Chair Amyot said it is going up about 8%. The main drivers are: overall staff-salary increases to the staff. There was a new teacher added to replace one from a few years ago that was not replaced at the time. The new teacher was hired at a lower rate. She is a quality teacher but hired at entry level wages. They hired a full time nurse which wasn't budgeted for because there is a student with a need. Transportation had not been looked at for many years. It was put out to bid and the costs have gone up. The Special Education assessment from the Supervisory Union has gone up. Chair Amyot stated he sits on the Executive Board at that level and he voted for 6 more positions for the whole Supervisory Union. He said they need to address this when the children are young.
- Larry Berry: The 10% mentioned that is in local control, how much of that can the Board really control so this doesn't keep happening every year? Chair Amyot said he honestly doesn't think they can really control that. Heating costs had gone down with new heating system and fuel costs have gone down. They can't control the cost of benefits or teachers' salaries. They are assessed out a certain amount for special education services. He feels this is a good thing. Larry Berry said it seems like we are powerless. Chair Amyot said he wouldn't say that. He feels our voice matters. He was recently elected to the Vermont School Boards Association in Montpelier. We

did not have a representative and he made the commitment to attend the meetings in Montpelier to give us a voice. In his mind the state does have control over a lot of what is spent but he said please don't feel like you don't have a voice because you do. He is always open to hearing from people and getting their thoughts to make improvements at the local level. At a state level Chair Amyot felt we challenged Act 46 and made great gains. He said it was a lot of work but we are lucky enough to not have to be part of that. Principal Kristy Ellis spoke and said on December 24, 2019 a study was released that was completed by UVM and the Department of Agriculture. She said this would benefit us. She encouraged people to talk to their legislators about this.

Paper ballot vote results: **WESTFIELD: YES – 40 NO – 8**
 JAY: YES – 29 NO – 0
(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 \$533,299 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$17,946 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 8.49% higher than spending for the current year.

There was a motion by Mike Piper and second by Carrie Glessner to bring the article to the floor.

Discussion:

- **Larry Berry:** Can you please account for the 8.49% increase? Chair Amyot stated they hired a nurse and they are actively searching for a new principal. The salary has been increased for the principal position because they did not feel they would be able to hire a principal for the current pay. Transportation was another big area as well as the special education assessment. The difference in the amounts in Article 4 and Article 5 is the amount that Westfield is solely responsible for. This includes Westfield bookkeeping, Board expenses and an audit. Moderator Sagui said a breakdown of expenses can be found on page 64 in the Town Report.
- **Dianne Laplante:** Is the \$17,946 for special education? Do we have any special education students we are paying for? Chair Amyot explained the \$17,946 is the equalized pupil cost. He further stated our special education is assessed to us by the Supervisory Union. They hold the contract amounts for the special education teachers. We're assessed a dollar amount on what our needs are. He said the number would vary, based on the need.
- **Rob Brewster:** Are some of the special education funds paid by the Supervisory Union? Chair Amyot said the Supervisory Union aggregates those amounts and they assess the costs to each school in the district.
- **Danny Young:** How does the Supervisory Union allocate the special education costs between contributing schools? Chair Amyot said it is based on the need of the school.
- **Noreen Shapiro-Berry:** She said she is confused on the amount being voted on between Article 4 versus Article 5 and what this amount includes. Chair Amyot explained the paper ballot in Article 4 is the combined Jay/Westfield budget. Article 5 is just Westfield's portion which includes bookkeeping, the Ski Program for Westfield students (he thought), the Board expenses and an audit.
- **Larry Berry:** How much of an increase in the Principals salary are you looking at? Chair Amyot said they don't know for sure because they have not hired a principal yet but they anticipate approximately \$8,000 bringing the salary to \$85,000 per year.

Article 5 passed by voice vote.

Article 6. Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District approve the school board to place up to \$25,000 of prior year fund balance into a capital construction reserve fund?

There was a motion by Dianne Laplante and second by Mike Piper to bring the article to the floor.

Discussion:

- Yves Daigle: Every year we put money in the construction reserve fund. How much money is currently in the fund? Chair Amyot said they haven't asked for this money for a few years. Currently there is no money in this fund. For clarification he stated, if there is an expense it is split 50/50 between Westfield and Jay. Each town shares the capital expense equally.
- Noreen Shapiro-Berry: Is the \$25,000 embedded in the \$533,299? Chair Amyot stated it is not. The \$25,000 is left over from prior years.

Article 6 passed by voice vote.

Article 7. Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District approve the school board to establish a tax stabilization reserve fund with prior year fund balance?

There was a motion by Theresa McAvinney and second by Carrie Glessner to bring the article to the floor.

Discussion:

- Larry Berry: Can someone clarify what this means? Chair Amyot explained right now there is a fund balance. They are asking the voters for permission to use fund balances to stabilize taxes.
- Theresa McAvinney: Would this ultimately reduce our tax liability? Chair Amyot said yes.
- Mary Lou Jacobs: Is there money from other years that is sitting there not being used? Chair Amyot said yes. Mary Lou asked will this be a total of all of those funds? Chair Amyot explained the voters are giving permission so the Board doesn't have to hold a special meeting later to do this. He feels it is good to keep a little bit of a fund balance because you never know what might happen. They are asking for the taxpayers blessing, to take a portion of the fund balance, to reduce taxes at the Boards discretion.
- Danny Young: Asked if the fund balance being discussed is the \$40,483 referred to as FY 20 Previous Years Surplus Budget, on page 64 in the Town Report, in the Westfield School District Budget? Principal Ellis said she does not have Westfield Treasurer, Rita Petzoldt's, budget amounts on hand but she believes it is from the tuition for the Junior High students. Chair Amyot said he would be happy to get the exact figure if anyone wanted it.

Article 7 passed by voice vote.

Articles 8 through 11 voted by Australian ballot: Moderator Sagui read each article during the school meeting. The Australian ballot election results listed below were provided after the closing of the polls.

- **Article 8.** To elect a Jay/Westfield Joint School Treasurer for the school year 2020-2021.
(Australian ballot to be commingled with Jay)
Westfield: Tara Morse – 134 Spoiled – 0 Blank – 17 Write-in – 0
Jay: Tara Morse – 93 Spoiled – 0 Blank – 3 Write-in – 1
(Jay results: reported by Lynnette Deaette, Jay Town Clerk)
Tara Morse was re-elected to a one-year term (2021) in Westfield and Jay.
- **Article 9.** To elect a Westfield Town School District Treasurer for the school year 2020-2021.
(Australian ballot)

Westfield: Rita Petzoldt – 142 Spoiled – 0 Blank – 9 Write-in – 0
Rita Petzoldt was re-elected to a one-year term (2021).

- **Article 10.** North Country Union High School and North Country Career Center: Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend \$16,927,700 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$16,511 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 6.12% higher than spending for the current year. **(Australian ballot)**

Discussion: None

Votes by Australian ballot: Yes – 106 No – 33 Spoiled – 1 Blank – 11

Article 10 passed.

- **Article 11.** North Country Union Junior High School: Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend \$5,052,800, which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$17,074 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 6.12% higher than spending for the current year. **(Australian ballot)**

Discussion: None

Votes by Australian ballot: Yes – 103 No – 34 Spoiled – 0 Blank – 14

Article 11 passed.

Article 12. To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting.

- Noreen Shiparo-Berry: Asked about updates that happened at the Jay/Westfield Joint Elementary School during the past year.
- Chair Amyot asked the body if he could give a five minute update. All were in agreement. He said it is with much regret that the School Board announces that Dr. Kristy Ellis will not be returning to the Jay/Westfield School next year. She has decided to move on to different employment. He wanted to stress that Kristy's leadership is second to none. He said that we are very fortunate to have one of the better staffs in the Supervisory Union. With that dedicated staff you have to have a strong leader. Kristy has been that leader for the past nine years. She comes from a long line of educators. Kristy's dad was an educator. Chair Amyot said he was his teacher and was a great guy, always there for his students. Kristy's mom was also always there setting up for concerts, shuttling kids to basketball games as well as refereeing them. He said Kristy's absence is going to leave a big hole. He wanted to reassure everyone that Jay/Westfield will continue to be a model school because of the excellent, dedicated staff. He said he wanted to thank Kristy from the bottom of his heart and wish her the best in her new endeavor. He asked the community to join him in a standing ovation to thank her and honor her for her service. There was a long and hearty round of applause offered to honor Kristy.


Article 13. To adjourn.

There was a motion by Mike Piper and second by Will Young to adjourn the meeting at 11:07 a.m. The motion passed by voice vote.

Submitted by: LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk

Dated at Westfield, Vermont this 13th day of April, 2020.


Kevin Amyot
Westfield School Board, Chair


Pat Sagui
Moderator