

ANNUAL WESTFIELD TOWN & SCHOOL MEETING

MINUTES from MARCH 7TH, 2023

The legal voters of the Westfield School District are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Westfield Community Center, 59 North Hill Road, on Tuesday, March 7th, 2023, at 10:00 A.M.
to transact the following business:

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 am 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 asked if there were any objections to electing a moderator for both the School and Town Meetings. There were no objections.

Anne Lazor nominated Pat Sagui. Hearing no other nominations, Pat was elected by voice vote as the School and Town Moderator for a term of one-year (2024).

Moderator Sagui went over the rules and regulations of the meeting including turning cell phones off and where paper ballots and financial reports were located. She also let everyone know that Australian Ballot voting would be taking place throughout the day. She asked everyone commenting or asking questions to first state their name for the record and to keep initial comments/questions to two minutes.

Article 2: To elect one Westfield Town School District Board Member for a term of three years. **Rollande Amyot nominated Mary Gagne. No other nominations were made. Following a motion by Mike Piper and a second by Scott Dean, the Clerk was instructed to cast one ballot for Mary Gagne for a three-year term (2026).**

Selectman Couture thanked School Board Chair Kevin Amyot for his 12 years serving on the Jay/Westfield Joint Elementary School Board. He also thanked Selectwoman Anne Lazor for her six years serving on the Selectboard. Anne Lazor thanked her fellow Selectboard members for helping more during her time away from the Board over the last 6 months. Selectman Couture also thanked Rita Petzoldt for her many years serving as the Westfield Town School District Treasurer.

Article 3: To elect a Union School Board Director to fill the remaining one-year of a three-year unexpired term. **Andrew Emery nominated Kevin Amyot. No other nominations were made. Following a motion by Mike Piper and a second by Sue Scott, the Clerk was instructed to cast one ballot for Kevin Amyot for the remaining one year of a three-year term (2024).**

Article 4: Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District appropriate the sum of \$1,979,596 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 \$648,810? (Paper ballot to be co-mingled with Jay).

Motion by Mike Piper and second by Sue Scott to bring the article to the floor. Mike Piper asked for the amount to be clarified. Moderator Sagui explained that this amount is Westfields share of the total cost to run the school. Bill Salmon asked if the amount covers all costs to do with the school including bussing. School Board Chair Amyot explained that the \$1,979,596 is to run the

entire school. The total increase in the school budget for the year is 6%, Westfields portion of the increase is right around \$45,000. Bill Salmon asked what the reason for the increases are. School Board Chair Amyot explained that the increases are mostly inflation type costs including health insurance, teacher salaries, support staff salaries, administration salaries and heating fuel. Theresa McAvinney questioned how the students at the elementary school were doing as far as testing scores since covid. School Board Chair Amyot let her know he could pass her question on to the principal, Hunter Couture, as he did not have a direct answer. The School Board did look at testing scores at the last meeting and Kevin felt students are doing well.

Paper ballot vote results:

WESTFIELD:	YES - 41	NO – 9
JAY:	YES - 18	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 \$664,688 which is the amount the School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year?

Motion by Sue Scott and second by Kitty Edwards to bring the article to the floor. School Board Chair Amyot explained the difference between the two numbers. The \$664,688 includes expenses specific to Westfield including things like the treasurers pay, auditing costs, ski program, etc. There was some confusion as to whether the amount in Article 4 was added to the amount in Article 5, however, Kevin explained that the amount in Article 5 includes the amount in Article 4.

Article 5 passed by voice vote.

School Board Chair Amyot thanked the residents of Westfield for their support of the Jay/Westfield Elementary School. Kevin stated he has had a great 12 years serving on the School Board.

Articles 6 through 9 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 7 pm.

Article 6: To elect a Jay/ Westfield Joint School Treasurer for the school year 2023-2024.
(Australian ballot to be commingled with Jay)

Westfield:	Tara Morse – 57	Spoiled – 0	Blank – 3	Write-In – 0
Jay:	Tara Morse – 38	Spoiled – 0	Blank – 3	Write-In – 0

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

Tara Morse was re-elected to a one-year term (2024) in Westfield and Jay.

Article 7: To elect a Westfield Town School District Treasurer for the school year 2023-2024.
(Australian ballot)

Lisa Deslandes (write-in) – 10	Other Write-Ins – 5	Blank – 43	Spoiled – 2
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Lisa Deslandes was elected to a one-year term (2024).

Article 8: Shall the voters of the North Country Union High School District approve the School Board to expend \$19,475,500, which is the amount the School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? **(Australian ballot)**

Votes by Australian ballot:	Yes – 47	No – 13	Spoiled – 0	Blank – 0
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Article 8 passed.

Article 9: Shall the voters of the North Country Union Junior High School District approve the School Board to expend \$6,211,900, which is the amount the School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? **(Australian ballot)**

Votes by Australian ballot: **Yes – 46 No – 14 Spoiled – 0 Blank – 0**

Article 9 passed.

Article 10: To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting.

There was no discussion.

Article 11: To Adjourn.

Motion by Pauline Couture and seconded by Mike Piper to adjourn the meeting at 10:41 am.

The motion passed by voice vote.

WESTFIELD TOWN ANNUAL MEETING:

Immediately following the School Meeting, the Town Meeting was called to order at 10:41 AM.

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.

Selectman Couture thanked Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn for putting together the Town Report.

Sue Scott wanted to hear more about the church possibly being donated to the town. She wondered who currently owns it. Selectman Couture let her know that the current members of the church own it and they do not see it re-opening for church services in the future and will not have the funds to continue with upkeep. He noted that on page 25 of the Town Report there is a list of pros and cons to receiving the church as a donation. Some of the pros are that the town could hold events there, or they could sell the building and use the funds towards upkeep on other town buildings. Some cons would be that the town already owns four buildings and it would increase building upkeep costs. The building also has hardly any land with it so there is essentially no room for parking. There would also be additional costs to bring the building up to code. Selectman Couture asked Denny Lister, a member of the church, to speak regarding the church and whether the members are okay with the town selling the building if that is the route they decided to go down. Denny Lister gave a brief history of the building. He said there are currently six members and they have all discussed gifting the church to the town. They recently spent \$40,000 on repairs to the building. There is still a small foundation issue, although it is not going to cause the building to come down and the furnace will need to be replaced. The building also is not currently handicap accessible. He personally would hope that the town does not decide to sell the building and encourages townspeople to let the Selectboard know their thoughts regarding the use of the building. He went through a list of different events that could be held at the church. Sue Scott wondered if there were any stipulations regarding giving the church to the town. Denny Lister let her know that at this time there are no stipulations. Selectman Couture noted that when he spoke with Denny Lister regarding possibly selling the church it was noted that the money should go to upkeep/restoration of the other town buildings

and not just be used to offset general expenses. Jennifer Grace wondered if there were any grants available for upkeep. Denny Lister let her know that he has not looked into it but there may be grants available. Theresa McAvinney asked what would happen to the building if the town decided not to accept the gift. Denny Lister let her know that the members would then take other actions, although he feels that since the town originally came together to fund the construction of the church that the building should go back to the townspeople. Moderator Sagui asked if there would be interest in forming a study committee to look into possible costs, uses, etc. regarding the church. A few hands went up and a sign-up sheet was sent around the room. Selectman Couture welcomed a study committee being formed. He noted that no matter the decision made, it will affect the town, and the more people involved in the decision-making process the better. Selectman Richard Degre agreed that having more people involved would be better, as this could come at a large cost to the taxpayers down the road depending on the decision made. Pauline Couture noted that all the uses Denny Lister mentioned that the church could be used for are all things the Community Center can currently be used for. She wondered if it was necessary to have both buildings. Selectman Degre also noted that Library has space for events also. Theresa McAvinney agreed that those spaces are already available for these types of events but thought it would be great to get a health clinic, eye doctor, etc. in there so that people from town don't have to travel so far for those services. Jennifer Grace does a lot of Christmas festivals and noted that other towns use their church buildings for those types of events. She thought it may be a good idea to get information from those towns regarding how they use the buildings.

Moderator Sagui (Planning Commission Chair) spoke regarding the bylaw update. She noted that the Planning Commission has been working on updating the bylaws for two years and there will be notices going up soon for public hearings. They have also been looking at using ARPA funds to hook the village up to the Troy sewer system.

Sue Scott motioned to accept the town reports, Connie LaPlume seconded.

Article 3: To elect all necessary town officials required by law.

- a. **1st Constable – One-Year Term:** Mike Piper nominated Jerry Bouchard Jr. No other nominations were made. **Jerry Bouchard, Jr. was elected by voice vote for a term of one-year (2024).**
- b. **2nd Constable – One-Year Term:** Bill Salmon nominated Mike Piper. No other nominations were made. **Mike Piper was elected by voice vote for a term of one-year (2024).**
- c. **Delinquent Tax Collector – One Year Term:** LaDonna Dunn nominated Joyce Crawford. No other nominations were made. **Joyce Crawford was elected by voice vote for a term of one-year (2024).**
- d. **Lister – Three-Year Term:** Connie LaPlume nominated Danny Young. No other nominations were made. **Following a motion by Mike Piper and a second from Sue Scott the Clerk was instructed to cast one ballot for Danny Young for a three-year term (2026).**
- e. **Selectperson – Three-Year Term:** Mike Piper nominated Dennis Vincent. Anne Lazor nominated Jennifer Grace and Shelley Martin. As Shelley Martin is already a Lister she was not eligible to hold the position of Selectperson at this time. Sue Scott asked to hear from Jennifer Grace as to whether she wanted to accept the nomination. Jennifer Grace said she

felt honored and accepted the nomination. Dennis Vincent remarked that he recently built a house in Westfield and has been involved in the community in other ways throughout the years.

Voting was done by paper ballot: Dennis Vincent – 38 Jennifer Grace – 13

Dennis Vincent was elected as Selectperson for a term of three-years (2026).

While votes were being counted for the Selectperson election, Representative Mark Higley spoke regarding what is going on in the legislature. He first let everyone know that the district has now been combined with Irasburg, Coventry and Newport Town and there are two representatives for the district now. The Cannabis Control Board is just getting off the ground and they are looking at introducing some more regulations. An online sports betting bill has passed the House. S5, The Affordable Heat Act has been brought back after the Governor initially vetoed it. They are looking at doing a two-year study to investigate costs. Different increases have been quoted ranging from \$.70 per gallon to \$4.00 per gallon increase on all heating fuels, so the study is necessary to get a better idea of how this will affect costs. Paid Family Leave is now looking at increasing from the originally proposed 6 weeks and up to 60% of an employee's wages to 12 weeks and up to 100% of an employee's wages paid. There are concerns regarding the cost of this program. Putting all four-year-olds into school statewide is being looked at and would come with a very large price tag. They are also looking at increasing wages of all childcare workers and bringing them more in line with teachers' salaries. H165 is the free school lunch program. This costs around 29 million a year to fund and is no longer being funded by federal money, which was being used during covid. There is a 64 million surplus in Education Property Taxes. If this is used to draw down education taxes there will still be an overall increase of 3.7%, and if it is not used the increase will be 8.3%. Representative Higley stressed that all these programs have high price tags that will affect all taxpayers. He put in a bill to repeal the Global Warnings Solution Act. The state is looking at following California and not allowing any vehicles to be sold after 2035 that are not electric. Theresa Rudolph asked where they expected to get all the electricity to support this. Representative Higley said there are other forms of energy we could be looking into outside of electric energy.

Selectwoman Lazor took a moment to explain the Library Trustee positions before nominations were made. She felt there was concern within the community that the library was not being used to its full potential. The State of Vermont has minimum standards for libraries and Westfield has a long way to go. She noted that the Selectboard took over running the library about 15 years ago when they could no longer find enough people to be on a Library Board. She also expressed that Mary Lee Daigle has been doing a great job with the children's activities that she has been holding there. She would also love to have people volunteer to help to organize the library. A survey was sent out with property tax bills and about 15 were returned with about ten people saying they were either willing to serve on the Library Board or volunteer at the library. Selectman Degre wanted to make it clear that for now this will be more of a committee and that the Selectboard will still control the finances for the library until the Library Board of Trustees is more established. Selectman Couture said to look at this as a transition. Selectwoman Lazor noted that once the Library Board of Trustees is established then the Vermont State Department of Libraries will work with them on training. The first thing they should do is look into hiring a Librarian and they will need to negotiate with the Selectboard on the rate of pay for the Librarian. Selectman Degre noted that running the library full-time would increase expenses to operate it.

- f. **Library Trustee – One-Year Term:** Sue Scott nominated Theresa Rudolph. No other nominations were made. **Theresa Rudolph was elected by voice vote to a term of one-year (2024).**
- g. **Library Trustee – Two-Year Term:** Laini Fondiller nominated Jennifer Grace. No other nominations were made. **Jennifer Grace was elected by voice vote to a term of two-years (2025).**
- h. **Library Trustee – Three-Year Term:** Joseph Berchick nominated Elizabeth Berchick. No other nominations were made. **Elizabeth Berchick was elected by voice vote to a term of three-years (2026).**
- i. **Library Trustee – Four-Year Term:** Pauline Couture nominated Karen Blais. No other nominations were made. **Karen Blais was elected by voice vote to a term of four-years (2027).**
- j. **Library Trustee – Five-Year Term:** Anne Lazor nominated Jenn Stelma. No other nominations were made. **Jenn Stelma was elected by voice vote to a term of five-years (2028).**

Article 4: Shall the voters approve **\$60,343.77** for the following appropriations?

- a. \$500 to American Red Cross. **Discussion: None**
- b. \$250 to Big Heavy World. Connie LaPlume motioned to amend this appropriation to \$0 as this is not a local program. Mike Piper seconded. **By voice vote appropriation was amended to \$0.**
- c. \$100 to Feline and Friends Foundation. **Discussion: None**
- d. \$1,200 to Green Mountain Farm-to-School, Inc. **Discussion: None**
- e. \$50 to Green Up Vermont. **Discussion: None**
- f. \$250 to Jay Focus Group & The Jay Focus Group Children’s Halloween Party. **Discussion: None**
- g. \$500 to Jay Area Food Shelf. Laini Fondiller motioned to amend the appropriation to \$700. Kitty Edwards seconded. **By voice vote appropriation was amended to \$700.**
- h. \$250 to Jay Peak Post No. 28-American Legion. **Discussion: None**
- i. \$300 to Missisquoi River Basin Association. **Discussion: None**
- j. \$4,000 to Montgomery Fire Department. **Discussion: None**
- k. \$100 to North Country Friends of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. **Discussion: None**
- l. \$300 to Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging. **Discussion: None**

- m. \$1,072 to Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS). **Discussion: None**
- n. \$250 to Northeast Kingdom Learning Services (NEKLS). **Discussion: None**
- o. \$700 to Old Stone House Museum (Orleans Co. Historical Society). **Discussion: None**
- p. \$500 to Orleans County Citizen Advocacy (OCCA). **Discussion: None**
- q. \$500 to Orleans County Fair Association. **Discussion: None**
- r. \$15,602 to Orleans County Sheriff's Department. Mike Piper motioned to amend the amount to \$0. Dianne Laplante questioned why Mike Piper would like to amend the amount to \$0. Mike Piper stated that they do not work nights or weekends and they call the State Police most of the time. Connie LaPlume said that she has seen them sitting across from her house at nights, sometimes until 2am, although never on weekends. Jerry Bouchard, Jr. stated that it is tough to be a cop in today's world and that fifteen thousand dollars doesn't get you very much coverage. He believes we get more than our money's worth and that they would probably sit down with the Selectboard and work out a schedule that better suits the town if that was requested. Theresa Rudolph questioned if taking the appropriation down by a few thousand dollars would be a better way to get their attention. Selectman Couture let everyone know that Sheriff Jennifer Harlow is very willing to come speak to the Selectboard and if anyone had anything they would like discussed with her that they welcome those comments. He also noted that presence is a deterrent, and it is not always about the number of arrests made. Jenn Stelma asked what the process would be to communicate any issues. Selectman Couture let her know that taking issues directly to the Selectboard would be the way to go. He also informed everyone that the coverage is based on a certain number of hours, the less money you pay, the less hours of coverage you receive. There was no second, so the motion failed to pass. **Appropriation stays at \$15,602.**
- s. \$2,500 to Orleans Essex Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) and Hospice, Inc. **Discussion: None**
- t. \$500 to Pope Memorial Frontier Animal Shelter, Inc. **Discussion: None**
- u. \$600 to Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RCT). **Discussion: None**
- v. \$500 to Troy and Area Lions Club to run the Westfield Senior Meal Site. **Discussion: None**
- w. \$28,974.77 to Troy Fire Department. **Discussion: None**
- x. \$400 to Umbrella. **Discussion: None**
- y. \$95 to Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL). **Discussion: None**

z. \$250 to Vermont Family Network. **Discussion: None**

aa. \$100 to Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force – Vermont Assoc. of Conservation Dist. **Discussion: None**

The amended total of appropriations was \$60,293.77, approved by voice vote.

Article 5: Shall the voters approve general government fund expenditures of \$353,628, of which \$171,594 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$182,034 shall be raised by municipal taxes? *This amount does not include appropriations.*

Pauline Couture motioned and Connie LaPlume seconded to bring the article to the floor. Theresa Rudolph asked to have non-tax revenue clarified. Selectman Couture explained that this money comes from grants, the State of Vermont, Agency of Transportation, and other things like these. Town Clerk Dunn indicated that on page 18 of the town report it lists all the non-tax revenues. Selectman Couture noted that the ambulance funds are now included in the budget and not as an appropriation and this is because the town is required to provide emergency services. He also noted that the cost is about the same as if the town had stayed with Missisquoi Ambulance. Selectman Degre gave an update regarding the switch to Newport Ambulance Service. They should have the building in Troy renovated and ready for 24 Hour service sometime around the 1st of April. Sue Scott wondered what would happen if service was needed at night before the building was ready. Selectman Degre said they would have people come in their personal vehicles and the ambulance will come shortly after. Selectman Couture noted that the funds for the building renovation are coming out of Newport Ambulance Services budget. He said it was a heart wrenching decision to stop using Missisquoi Ambulance but with all the financial hurdles it was time to do something different. He thanked Missisquoi Ambulance for their service and said they were great people to work with. **Motion passed by voice vote.**

Article 6: Shall the voters approve highway fund expenditures of \$481,056, of which \$140,620 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$340,436 shall be raised by municipal taxes?

Mike Piper motioned, and Sue Scott seconded to bring the article to the floor. Selectman Degre said that the roads are excellent overall and the town appreciates the job the Kennison family has done over the years. **Motion passed by voice vote.**

Article 7: Shall the voters authorize the Treasurer, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §4791, to collect current taxes?

LaDonna Dunn motioned, and Anne Lazor seconded to bring the article to the floor. Laini Fondiller asked for clarification on what the article meant. Town Clerk Dunn explained that this article authorizes the Treasurer, Lisa Deslandes, to collect the taxes. Otherwise, it would fall to the Constable to collect them. Kitty Edwards wondered what would happen if the Treasurer were not in when you go to the Town Clerks Office to pay your taxes. Town Clerk Dunn explained that the Town Clerk would collect on behalf of the Treasurer. **Motion passed by voice vote.**

Article 8: Shall the voters authorize payment of real property taxes on October 10, 2023, by physical delivery to the tax collector before 4 p.m. on that date?

Mike Piper motioned, and Connie LaPlume seconded to bring the article to the floor. Laini Fondiller questioned what this article meant. Town Clerk Dunn explained that all tax payments need to be at the Town Clerks office by the due date/time and that payments postmarked by the due date will not be accepted. This is due to mail delays. Any taxes not received by the due date/time are subject to 8% late fees. **Motion passed by voice vote.**

Article 9: To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting.

Sue Scott inquired about the pond that is very close to the roadway on Buck Hill. She wondered what would happen if the pond washed the road out and emergency service vehicles were unable to get through. Selectman Couture let her know that Zoning Administrator Will Young is working with the landowners to rectify the problem.

Jennifer Grace would like the Sheriff's Department to monitor the speeds on North Hill Road more closely. She sees a lot of vehicles going quite fast by her house. Jerry Bouchard Jr. noted that he has responded to quite a few people who claim vehicles are traveling at excessive speeds on North Hill Road, but it is not possible for them to tell how fast the vehicles are actually going. Scott Dean agreed that vehicles go way beyond the posted speed limit on North Hill Road. Selectman Degre said the Selectboard would let the Sheriff's Department know that they would like an increased presence on North Hill Road.

Connie LaPlume commented on how pretty of a town Westfield is and she thanked the Selectboard for all that they do. She feels we are very lucky to live in Westfield.

Selectman Degre thanked Mike Piper and Bill Salmon for their help anytime there is something that needs to be done in town. He noted that everyone donates time for various things, and it is appreciated.

Dianne Laplante inquired as to whether the Recycling Center could be opened a half-day during the week for people who are unable to get there on Saturday mornings. Selectman Couture explained that Saturday mornings work well for most people and adding another day would increase costs. They try to keep the costs of running the Recycling Center even with the revenues it takes in. It would also be difficult to find people to run it during the week. Dianne Laplante wondered if there were some alternatives that could be worked out. Selectman Degre let her know that you can always call the Selectboard and work something out if you cannot make it on Saturday mornings. He also noted that there is 24-hour a day surveillance there because of the problem with people dumping trash during the week when the Recycling Center is not open. Dianne Laplante asked if the Jay Recycling Center was an option for Westfield residents. Town Clerk Dunn said that Westfield residents can go to the Jay Recycling Center although she is not sure if they accept trash.

Selectman Couture wanted to thank all the community members for their help and said he is thankful for the pleasure of being part of this community.

Zach Leonard inquired about adding a 'Welcome to Westfield' sign at each end of town. He wondered what the process would be for going about getting that done. Selectman Degre noted that there were signs made some years back, but they never got put up and he is not sure what happened to them. He said the Selectboard can investigate getting some more signs made. Zach Leonard agreed with Connie LaPlume's comments about the town and thought it would be a nice way to help put Westfield on the map more. Some people don't know where Westfield is.

Moderator Sagui let everyone know that they are welcome to contact the Selectboard, either by phone or email, if anything ever comes up.

Article 10: To adjourn. **Mike Piper motioned to adjourn at 12:35 p.m. Kitty Edwards seconded.**

Westfield Town School District Annual Meeting:

X

Kevin Amyot
School Board Chair

X

Pat Sagui
Moderator

Westfield Town Annual Meeting:

X

Jacques Couture
Selectboard Chair

X

Pat Sagui
Moderator