

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

**TOWN OF WESTFIELD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND ANNUAL SCHOOL MEETING
MARCH 4, 2025**

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 4, 2025, 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.

WESTFIELD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING:

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

Connie LaPlume nominated Pat Sagui to be the moderator for both the town and school meeting; 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 (2026).*

Mark Higley spoke on some of the things being worked on in the state government. Education finance reform involving changing the number of school districts is in the beginning phases. Public Safety Reform, tougher bail laws, housing, Act 250, Affordable Climate Action changes are some other things being worked on. Clean Car Standards is an item Mark is working on changing. He would like to go to the federal guidelines revolving this and move away from the current state guidelines that are much stricter. Anne Lazor questioned what the state will do regarding federal grant money that has been rescinded recently. Mark explained that there are no answers yet, they have no concrete numbers or an idea of how much the state will be losing. School Board Chair Mary Gagne questioned tax rates regarding school education tax. Mark noted the Governor is setting aside 77 million dollars from the general fund to try and hold property taxes level to last year.

Moderator Sagui read through the rules for the meeting.

Article 2. To elect one Westfield Town School District Board Member for a term of three years: **Will Young nominated Andrew Emery. Hearing no other nominations, the motion passed by a voice vote.** *Andrew Emery was elected to a three-year term (2028).*

Article 3. To elect a Union School Board director for a term of three-years: **There were no nominations. The position remains vacant.** School Board Member Andrew Emery explained that this position is to represent Westfield on the Junior High and High School boards.

Article 4. Shall the voters of the Westfield Town School District appropriate the sum of \$2,228,334 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 \$913,710? **(Paper ballot to be commingled with Jay)**

Marc Olhoeft questioned why school supplies decreased by 50% (\$11,000) yet the principal salary increased. School Board Member Andrew Emery explained that the school board follows recommendations regarding what was spent in previous years and what may be needed for the following year. Budget projections are done on a 3–5-year average. He also noted that the decrease in the budget for that line item does not mean supply requests from teachers would be denied. Marc Olhoeft questioned why the principal salary increased to \$103,000 this year. School Board Chair Mary Gagne explained that the school board is supplied with salaries of all principals in the state along with other information regarding the school they work at like school size and whether or not they have an assistant principal. They use that information to come up with the

salary for the principal. School Board Chair Mary Gagne welcomed Elaine Collins, the Superintendent of North Country Supervisory Union, to speak regarding this. Superintendent Collins noted that Westfield's taxes are going up more than any other town in the Supervisory Union. Statewide funding determines how much needs to be raised at a local level and the number of students and student weighting determines tax rates. Westfield lost some students, and that changed the weighting. Westfield has a lower-weighted student number this year, and that increases the per pupil spending. The projected tax increase for Westfield is \$338 dollars a year on a \$200,000 home. This does not take into account the 77 million dollars the Governor has set aside which would lower the tax amount. Marc Olhoeft questioned the line item of board expenses that went up about \$64,000. He also wondered why contracted expenses had gone up. School Board Member Andrew Emery explained that the principal's original offer was lower than typical for a principal. As he has gained more experience, they increased his salary to be more on par with other principals. Superintendent Collins explained that the contingency line is because they are still going through negotiations. The projected increase in salaries was placed on the board expenses line until negotiations are finalized. She also explained that contracted services is for a School Based Clinician. There are students who are required to see a School Based Clinician based on their IEP. Marc Olhoeft questioned the extracurricular transportation line. School Board Member Andrew Emery explained that budget line covers field trips and the pre-k has outdoor classroom at Jay Recreational Center which also requires transportation.

Mark English questioned how the new proposals from the governor would affect Jay/ Westfield Elementary School. Superintendent Collins noted that it depends on what plan they go with. The Jay/ Westfield Elementary School currently has 80 students. Derby is the only elementary school in our Supervisory Union that meets the standards being discussed as far as classroom sizes. Lots of plans are being floated, and the effects on Jay/ Westfield Elementary will all depend on what plan they end up going with. Superintendent Collins also explained that she is concerned with the expansion of school choice. More money going to private schools could lead to less money for public schools.

School Board Member Andrew Emery noted that they decided not to cut any staff from the budget this year. This has helped during the recent bouts of sickness that went around as the paraeducators could fill in when other staff were out. He also explained that cutting more money out of the budget would not have a direct effect on the town's tax rates. Other factors including home sale prices affect the tax rate.

Marc Olhoeft questioned where the school ranks against other schools in the state regarding per pupil spending. School Board Member Andrew Emery explained the number of students shifts year to year and the state will penalize schools that spend over a certain amount of money per pupil. Westfield is under that number and will not be penalized. He is not aware of a comparison between all the towns in the state regarding per pupil spending.

Marc Olhoeft attended the Derby town meeting and noted that their per pupil spending is \$5,000 less per pupil than Westfields. Superintendent Collins explained that they have more students than Westfield and tuition students from Morgan and Holland which helps lower that number.

Carrie Glessner wanted to thank the school board, teachers and Hunter Couture for the quality education they provide for the students.

Mary Gagne also has two students in the school, and they are doing great academically. There is lots of support for students emotionally. She moved to Westfield specifically so her children could attend Jay/ Westfield Elementary School.

Paper Ballot Vote Results: Westfield: YES - 28 NO - 11
Jay: YES - 30 NO - 2

(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 \$932,449 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? The District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in per pupil education spending of \$15,073, which is 16.52% higher than per pupil education spending for the current year.

School Board Chair Mary Gagne explained that Article 5 is about an \$18,000 difference from Article 4. These are expenses that are only for Westfield School District.

Marc Olhoeft questioned why \$500 was allocated for the ski program last year but no money was allocated for it this year. School Board Chair Mary Gagne explained that Medicaid puts funds towards the school and that covers the cost of the ski program. The older kids go to Jay Peak around twice a month throughout the winter.

Marc Olhoeft noticed the Small Schools grant last year and questioned if there were any grants this year. School Board Member Andrew Emery explained that in previous years they had ESSR funds that showed up as grants. The ESSR funds were related to covid relief. That money is no longer available.

A voice vote was taken. Article 5 passed by voice vote.

Articles 6 through 11 voted by Australian ballot: Moderator Sagui read each article. The results of the Australian ballot voting were reported after the polls closed at 7pm.

Article 6. To elect a Jay/Westfield Joint School Treasurer for the school year 2025-2026.
(Australian ballot to be commingled with Jay)
Westfield: Tara Morse - 51 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 2 Write-In - 0
Jay: Tara Morse - 43 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 0 Write-In - 0
(Jay Results: reported by Lynnette Deaette, Jay Town Clerk)
Tara Morse was elected to a one-year term (2026) in Westfield and Jay.

Article 7. To elect a Westfield Town School District Treasurer for the school year 2025-2026.
(Australian ballot)
Lisa Deslandes - 53 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 0 Write-In - 0
Lisa Deslandes was elected to a one-year term (2026).

Article 8. Shall the voters of the North Country Union High School District approve the school board to expend \$23,213,400 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? The North Country Union High School District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in per pupil education spending of \$12,788, which is 8.34% higher than per pupil spending for the current year. **(Australian ballot)**
Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 31 No - 22 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 0
Article 8 passed.

Article 9. Shall the voters of the North Country Union Junior High School District approve the school board to expend \$6,955,800 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? The North Country Union Junior High School District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in per pupil education spending of \$13,391, which is 6.36% higher than per pupil spending for the current year. **(Australian ballot)**
Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 31 No - 22 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 0
Article 9 passed.

Article 10. Shall the voters of the North Country Union Junior High School District approve the Board of School Directors to place \$225,000 of undesignated FY2024 fund balance from the general fund operations in the Building Maintenance Reserve fund? **(Australian ballot)**
Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 37 No - 16 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 0
Article 10 passed.

Article 11. Shall the voters of the North Country Union Junior High School District approve the Board of School Directors to establish and place \$250,000 of undesignated FY2024 fund balance from the general fund operations to an equity fund? **(Australian ballot)**

Marc Olhoeft questioned if Articles 10 and 11 were an either-or item. Moderator Sagui explained that they are two different things.

Votes by Australian ballot: Yes - 34 No - 19 Spoiled - 0 Blank - 0
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. Carrie Glessner motioned to adjourn at 11:03AM; Denny Lyster 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: **Carrie Glessner motioned, and Will Young seconded to approve Article 2.**

Carrie Glessner spoke regarding the CUD, Communication Union District, NEK Broadband. She noted that the cable system is owned by the member towns. Some addresses near Lowell are available for connection already and almost everyone should be able to connect by the end of this year. She explained that there may be added costs if your power goes underground from the pole to your home or your home is a long way from the last electrical pole. Laura Emery and Carrie Glessner are the two representatives of the CUD from Westfield. She also noted that NEK Broadband is hiring, and one of the jobs they are looking to fill is linemen.

Carrie Glessner also spoke regarding the Hitchcock Memorial Museum and Library. They are averaging 63% more visitors over the last year. Jennifer Johnson, the librarian, has been bringing in lots of new books. There are events ongoing at the library and The Palace Project is available for eBooks and audio books. There are also programs for the visually impaired. The library is looking for volunteers to organize more events at the library like book clubs or a game night, etc. Selectman Couture noted that the Selectboard has been working through who is responsible for what regarding the library between the Selectboard and the Library Board of Trustees.

Article 2 passed by a voice vote.

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

- a. 1st Constable - One-year term: **Selectman Degre nominated Mike Jacobs.** *Mike Jacobs was elected by voice vote to a one-year term (2026).*
- b. 2nd Constable - One-year term: **Selectman Vincent nominated Mike Piper.** *Mike Piper was elected by voice vote to a one-year term (2026).*
- c. Library Trustee - Five-year term: **Carrie Glessner nominated Rebecca Velazquez.** *Rebecca Velazquez was elected by voice vote to a five-year term (2030).*
- d. Library Trustee - One-year of an unexpired term: **Karen Blais nominated Carolyn Lyster.** *Carolyn Lyster was elected by voice vote to one year of an unexpired term (2026).*
- e. Lister - Three-year term: Sue Scott nominated Shelley Martin. Will Young motioned to instruct the clerk to cast one ballot; Sue Scott seconded. Motion passed. *Shelley Martin was elected to a three-year term (2023).*
- f. Lister – Two years of an unexpired term. There were no nominations. *The position remains vacant.*
- g. Selectperson - Three-year term: **Maurice Doyon nominated Jacques Couture. Sue Scott motioned to instruct the clerk to cast one ballot for Jacques Couture; Maurice Doyon seconded. Motion passed by voice vote.** *Jacques Couture was elected to a term of three years (2023).* Selectman Couture noted that at the end of this new term he will have been a Selectman for 50 years.

Article 4. Shall the voters approve \$29,802 for the following appropriations? **Will Young motioned, and Sue Scott seconded to bring Article 4 to the floor.**

- 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. **\$1,000** to Jay Food Shelf:
- h. **\$500** to Jay Peak Post No. 28-American Legion
- i. **\$300** to Missisquoi 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. **\$17,485** to Orleans County Sheriff's Department: Maurice Doyon noted that the department raises their prices every year. Lowell voted to no longer pay for the Sheriff last year. Maurice proposed amending the amount to \$10,000. Jeannot Landry seconded the amendment.

Farzana Leyva, States Attorney for Orleans County, noted that she sees the cases they deal with firsthand every day. Lowering the rates raises the ability for the Sheriff's Department to no longer operate in this area. Marc Olhoeft wanted to hear from the Sheriffs Department. Moderator Sagui noted that they submitted a report on pages 55 and 56 of the Town Report. Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn clarified that the contract with the Sheriff's Department is based on an hourly rate. Reducing the amount appropriated reduces the hours-of-service Westfield receives. Yvan LaPlume noted that they only see them patrolling in January and February just prior to the town meeting. Carrie Gessner wondered what happens if a crime is committed and we have used all our hours for the year. Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn explained that the State Police would cover then. School Board Member Jessica Kennison questioned how many hours are in the contract. Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn noted that it is about 23 hours a month. Kelli Dean wanted people to be cautious by depending on the State Police as they are not always in the vicinity and cannot always get here in a timely manner. School Board Member Andrew Emery noted that there was a security incident at the Troy Elementary School and the response time was delayed because of the position of the State Police. Superintendent Collins spoke with the Sheriffs Department and tried to get them to be the point person if there is a school incident and the State Police are out of the area. Farzana Leyva noted that the State Police are short-staffed and have nobody available during certain hours of the early morning. Marc Olhoeft requested a paper ballot vote on this article. Connie LaPlume noted that the \$7,000 difference being proposed does not translate to very much of an increase in our taxes.

Marc Olhoeft motioned to vote on this article by paper ballot, there was no second. Motion does not pass.

A voice vote was taken to amend the amount of the Orleans County Sheriff's Office appropriation to \$10,000. Amendment did not pass by voice vote.

Appropriation stays at \$17,485.

- q. **\$2,500** to Orleans Essex Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) and Hospice, Inc.:
- r. **\$500** to Pope Memorial Frontier Animal Shelter, Inc.:
- s. **\$950** to Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RCT):
- t. **\$100** 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. **\$200** to Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force - Vt. Assoc. of Conservation Dist.:

Will Young questioned where the appropriations for the Troy and Montgomery Fire Departments were moved to. Selectman Couture noted that those expenses were moved into the General Budget.

Article 4 passed by voice vote.

Article 5.

Shall the voters approve general government fund expenditures of \$434,553 of which \$152,859 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$281,694 shall be raised by municipal taxes? *This amount does not include appropriations.* **Will Young motioned to approve Article 5 and Carrie Glessner seconded.** **Article 5 passed by a voice vote.**

Article 6. Shall the voters approve highway fund expenditures of \$479,240, of which \$77,380 shall be raised by non-tax revenues and \$401,860 shall be raised by municipal taxes? **Will Young motioned to approve Article 6 and Denny Lyster seconded.**

Selectman Vincent noted that Road Commissioner Eric Kennison does an excellent job and always keeps the roads plowed and sanded.

Marc Olhoeft questioned the paving expenditures budget line. Selectman Couture explained that last year a paving grant was used to do quite a bit of paving. To keep the cost of the budget in line this year they decided not to budget for the typical paving budget of \$40,000 and to set that budget line to \$0 for this fiscal year.

Marc Olhoeft questioned whether there are more ARPA funds. Selectman Couture noted that the ARPA funds have all been expended. The town was able to fund many different projects with that money and the last item remaining to be finished is installing the electronic sign at the Town Garage. He also noted that the town received a MERP (Municipal Energy Resilience Project) grant for almost \$470,000 and these are all funds that the town does not have to raise in taxes.

Marc Olhoeft questioned the Hired Equipment budget line and wanted a breakdown of where that money goes. Selectman Couture explained that the cost is for anytime Eric Kennison uses one of his trucks to work on the town roads. The only piece of equipment the town owns is the grader, all the other heavy equipment used on the roads belongs to Kennison & Son. Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn let Marc Olhoeft know that Kennison & Son provides a rate sheet each year showing how they charge for the hired equipment, and he is welcome to come to the office to look at the rate sheet if he would like.

Article 6 passed by a voice vote.

Article 7. Shall the voters authorize the Treasurer, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §4791, to collect current taxes? **Danny Young motioned to approve Article 7 and Katherine Edwards seconded.** *Article 7 passed by a voice vote.*

Article 8. 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? **Danny Young motioned to approve Article 8 and Carrie Glessner seconded.** *Article 8 passed by a voice vote.*

Article 9. To transact any other non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting. **Carrie Glessner motioned to bring Article 9 to the floor, Will Young seconded.**

Denny Lyster helps run the Troy and Area Lions Club senior meal site at the Westfield Community Center and they are looking for volunteers. They could use help with serving food, washing dishes, cooking, etc. He also noted that he has a friend who volunteered to plant flowers at the Community Center, and he is looking for volunteers to maintain the weeding after the planting is done. If you let Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn know you would like to volunteer she will pass the information on to Denny. Selectman Degre would like Denny to let the Selectboard know prior to the planting being done and they will have fabric put down first to help keep the weeds at bay.

Town Clerk LaDonna Dunn thanked the members of the Westfield Congregational Church for their donation to the pickleball courts and to the Hitchcock Memorial Museum and Library.

Kelli Dean questioned if there was any funding for upkeep at the cemeteries. The Westfield Cemetery on Cemetery Road needs the tar fixed and there are some stones falling down. Selectman Vincent noted that there are funds for the cemetery in the town budget. Selectman Couture noted that the town repaired some stones at the Westfield Cemetery a few years ago, but they can look at it again this year. Yvan LaPlume noted that a few stones are broken, laying

down or leaning. Selectman Couture thanked Yvan LaPlume for the great job he does maintaining the Westfield Cemetery.

Article 10. To adjourn. **Danny Young motioned to adjourn at 11:55AM and Sue Scott seconded.** **Passed**
by a voice vote.

X

Jacques Couture
Selectboard Chair

X

Mary Gagne
Westfield School Board Chair

X

Pat Sagui
Town Moderator

DRAFT