

**Minutes of the Annual Ripton School District Meeting
February 28, 2011**

The legal voters of Ripton met at the Community House on Monday February 28, 2011 to act upon articles 1-4 of the 2011 School Warning. The Town School District meeting followed the Town Meeting, and was attended by approximately 38 people.

Moderator Joyce Dicianna called the meeting to order at 9:23 p.m.

Article 1: To see if the voters of the Town School District will approve the sum of **\$722,946** to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing school year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.

Moved: Barry King

Second: Richard Ruane

Discussion: School Board Chair Carol Ford described staffing changes and the budget. The Board advertised for a new principal for a 60% position, as the position has been the past two years. The paraprofessional staff is reduced by 8/10ths; continuing reduction of the paraprofessional staff as enrollment declines. The salary line for teachers is less than the previous year because two new teachers are at a lower salary scale than those who left. There are no 4-year-olds identified for pre-K contracted services as in past years. Shared personnel contracts such as for art and music were explained. Spanish language instruction was paid for by FORS in 2009-10, but is budgeted for 2011-12.

Michael Seligmann asked where the change in the paraprofessional line appears in the budget and for number of positions. Carol Ford clarified, described how the paraprofessional amount is determined, and that the change is from 3 to 2.

Mac Cox commented that the Spanish program is a great idea and asked how Spanish was chosen over other languages. Ms. Ford responded that Spanish was selected because it is the most widely used foreign language in our country; that the FORS funded program employed college students who did not always reliably get to the school; and staff asked for a real teacher with a contract to provide consistency. David Disque asked which grade levels participate, with Ms. Ford answering all, and adding that in the middle school foreign language instruction is offered in 8th grade.

Carol Ford answered Justin Malzac's question about pre-school. Pre-school is available to 4 year olds in Ripton, but Ripton 4 year olds may also be partially subsidized if they attend one of three eligible pre-schools in Middlebury with application made through ACSU.

Much discussion ensued about the elimination of a paraprofessional versus the addition of a one-day Spanish teacher, the merits of a day-per-week Spanish program, student enrollment numbers, and how to fund budget items. The Moderator emphasized that the budget is voted as a whole, only the School Board decides line items. Carol Ford, Mia Allen, Michael Seligmann, Amy McGlashan, Jane Phinney, Barry King, Cindy Seligmann, Tom McElhaney, Andrea Chesman, Lisa Whitman, Laurie Cox, Laura McIntosh, Jerry Shedd, Richard Ruane, Dick Collitt, Wendy Leeds, Mac Cox, Alison Joseph Dickinson, Lawrence Miller, Willem Jewett, Bonnie DeGray, Chuck Martin, Tracey Harrington, Joyce Dicianna, and Mike Hussey contributed to the discussion.

Mia Allen questioned adding \$10,000 to the budget for Spanish instruction in light of eliminating a twenty-year, dedicated paraprofessional, and asked how much is saved by cutting the paraprofessional

position. Carol Ford responded that \$23,000 in salary and benefits is saved, and explained that ACSU recommended the reduction because based on the number of students the number of paraprofessionals is excessive. Asked if the Board agrees, Ms. Ford responded that she is not in the school and not in a position to judge. Board member, Amy McGlashan, stated that Spanish is offered as a curriculum enhancement not a choice over a paraprofessional; that the Board tries to do what is best for the students.

Ms. Allen countered that stability is needed and that a paraprofessional is as or more important to the students and curriculum than the addition of foreign language. Jane Phinney did not favor eliminating a paraprofessional because of their importance in our multi-grade classrooms, and noted past Board support for keeping paraprofessional levels high. Barry King respected the decision to offer Spanish but asked if there is a way to keep all 3 paraprofessionals; if it was decided not to offer Spanish could its \$10,000 be put toward paraprofessionals. Cindy Seligmann questioned the goals and merits of the Spanish program, given that it is offered once per week and that there is no opportunity for continuation in 7th grade. Tom McElhaney asked if the person being cut lives and pays taxes in Ripton, which could not be answered, and expressed concern, wanting to be on record that this cut is a shame. Andrea Chesman asked if there is flexibility with multi-age grouping that would make aides more important, such as combining more grades, and asked for thinking outside the box about grouping and the model of a teacher/principal. Carol Ford responded that the Board is not ruling anything out regarding the principal; they hope to get a new principal to come in, take a fresh look and advise. Lisa Whitman explained that the Spanish program FORS funded was to expose students to another culture. It was not expected that they would leave speaking Spanish.

Discussion continued about Board versus ACSU control, Challenges for Change recommendations, and keeping the paraprofessional position. Laurie Cox's question of Board control or choice over special education personnel was answered that ACSU makes recommendations and only reimburses for special education needs, though the Board may add as many other paraprofessionals as they like. It was asked if the staff reduction is from district level special education recommendations or to try to meet Challenges for Change recommendations, and answered a combination. It was confirmed that if ACSU says to cut, the Board makes the final decision and may choose not to; and that Challenges for Change recommendations are just recommendations, and have been met. Suggestions were made that a new principal be allowed to assess staffing before cutting a paraprofessional; that foreign language instruction might be done within the technology budget rather than through a new hire; that FORS funds be used for some budget items to make funds available for a paraprofessional.

Wendy Leeds spoke of her concern of letting a 20-plus year paraprofessional go when we may need to hire in the near future, given the number of births shown in town report. She suggested using the \$10,000 for Spanish, plus the \$10,000 requested in Article 3 of the Warning to fund the paraprofessional position. She recognized that decisions are not made lightly by the Board but encouraged us to be creative and consider our values. Dick Collitt asked for the Board's recommendation about the \$10,000 in Article 3 and was told if voted down the \$10,000 unreserved fund balance is a receipt. When asked if we could change the budget by being specific, table it, or vote it down and amend it, or vote on Article 3 before Article 2, the Moderator indicated the minutes will reflect the intent, and encouraged attendance at the next School Board meeting. It was asked if the topic could be voted under Article 4, other business, and answered no.

Alison Joseph Dickinson asked if the Board ever considers using the unreserved fund balance toward the budget. Carol Ford responded they do not do that because it reduces per pupil cost one year, results in an increase in per pupil cost the following year, which Willem Jewett described as nice for one year, but a tax hike the next. Lawrence Miller offered that the intent of the question was not necessarily to decrease

taxes but to increase staff, and Ms. Ford responded that the Board attempts to keep per pupil costs fairly level from year to year.

Tracey Harrington suggested the paraprofessional position be restructured; part of the position could be used for an after-school-program that may draw new families to the community, and could charge a fee.

Charitable donations, ACEEF and other grants were discussed. All may be received, but the Board must work within the budget the voters approve. The Moderator reminded that we are voting on the sum of money, not individual budget items.

Laurie Cox asked for the amount needed to reinstate the paraprofessional. Carol Ford answered \$22,500. Ms. Cox stated the need to add only \$12,500 to the budget, with \$10,000 to come elsewhere. She praised the foreign language program offered for 20 years at the Neshobe School in Brandon where she works, and recognized the need to keep good personnel.

Ms. Cox moved to amend Article 1 from a sum of \$722,946 to a sum increased by \$12,500 to \$735,446.
Second: Barry King

Lawrence Miller asked for the effect on the tax rate. Carol Ford responded if the playground equipment (Article 4) was voted down its \$10,000 would remain in the budget and not change the overall education fund.

The Moderator called for a vote on the amendment to change the sum from \$722,946 to \$735,446.

Amendment of Article 1: To see if the voters of the Town School District will approve the sum of **\$735,446** to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing school year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.

The amendment passed by voice vote.

Discussion: Michael Hussey remarked that the discussion was important, but asked voters to please come to the budget hearing in January to save time.

Article 1 as amended passed by voice vote.

Article 2: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the Board of Directors to place \$27,962 from the FY 2010 Unreserved Fund Balance (of \$37,962) into the Capital Improvement reserve Fund.

Moved: Chuck Martin
Second: Erik Eriksen

Discussion: Chuck Martin asked the purpose of this. Carol Ford explained that it is to save for infrastructure repairs so we do not have to borrow, and the funds may not be used without voter approval. Bill Ford and Jane Phinney commented on the age of the school and potential repairs.

Article 2 passed by voice vote.

Article 3: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the Board of Directors to use up to \$10,000 from the FY 2010 Unreserved Fund Balance (of \$37,962) for pre-school playground equipment.

Moved: Chuck Martin
Second: Barry King

Discussion: Chuck Martin asked if this would eliminate the money. Carol Ford answered that it would clear out the Unreserved Fund Balance. Jane Phinney asked about types of equipment and age ranges. Mike Hussey spoke about the playground's lack of equipment appropriate for pre-k children, his preliminary research about equipment, and hope for a community group to research the topic. Bill Ford noted that the Article says pre-K and an amount up to. Mike Hussey said there is equipment that can span ages including pre-k and older grades, though the emphasis is on pre-k. Jorene Doria has not noticed that pre-school students are lacking for things to do at recess. They enjoy the snow in winter and sandbox in warmer weather. She recommended further research and consideration of the long-term, and pre-K student numbers. Carol Ford stated upcoming numbers are about the same as present. Bonnie DeGray noted the value of the trees and natural features, and the best equipment: their imaginations. Jerry Shedd wanted to know if the recommendation for pre-k equipment was made by professionals and was told, yes. Questions from Mia Allen, Laura McIntosh, and Michael Seligmann clarified that we cannot move the money, amend the use of the Article, leave it for future use, or use it for something else if grant money is received. If it is voted it must be used for play equipment, if it is not voted for playground equipment it is a receipt. Jane Phinney mentioned the Capital Improvement Fund as a possible source for equipment projects. Richard Ruane questioned if use of this Unreserved Fund Balance amount would impact per pupil cost, as discussed in Article 1. Carol Ford said it would not make much difference.

Article 3 failed by voice vote.

Article 4: To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting.

Cindy Seligmann expressed appreciation to the Board and to try to understand the budget better next year and to attend the budget hearing, discussion is important.

Amy McGlashan read a press release about ACSU governance, upcoming study, and opportunity for public engagement. Copies of the press release are available online and at the town office. Mia Allen, Jane Phinney, and Barry King commented with remarks about concern for our school, the consolidation the ANWSU is considering, and publicity.

Barry King suggested a 2-step process to school budgeting. She attended the January budget hearing but needed time to process the information. Wendy Leeds agreed. Mike Seligmann remarked on the healthy discussion.

Mike Hussey thanked Chris Smith for his good work and for changing his snow-plowing patterns in response to the new fence.

Carol Ford invited all to participate in the process of searching for a new principal by attending a community potluck at the next FORS meeting, 6:15 p.m., March 16th. At 7:00 p.m., the ACSU associate superintendent will facilitate a discussion of what we are looking for in a principal. The Board will choose a couple of community members to serve on a search committee.

Willem Jewett was presented a certificate from the Vermont School Board Association in recognition of his 12 years of service.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

Moved: Bryan Alexander

Second: Erik Eriksen

The meeting would reconvene at 7:00 a.m. Tuesday March 1, 2011 at the Town Offices to vote by Australian ballot on election of officers and directors, Article 2 of the Town Warning, the ACSU UD#3 Warning, and the Hannaford Career Center warning.

Joyce Dicianna,
Moderator

Carol Ford,
Chair, Ripton School District Board of Directors

Michael Hussey, Willem Jewett, Amy McGlashan, Connie Trudeau, 2010-11 Ripton School Directors

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