

Minutes of the Annual School Meeting March 4, 2013

The legal voters of Ripton met at the Community House on Monday March 4, 2013 to act upon articles 1-5 of the 2013 School District Warning; approximately 42 people attended. Moderator Timothy Hanson called the meeting to order at 9:12 p.m. School board members present were Carol Ford (chair), Michael Hussey, Laura Murphy McIntosh, and Willem Jewett.

Article 1: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize its Board of Directors, under 16 VSA 562 (9), to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenue for the school year.

The article was moved and seconded by Warren King and Bryan Alexander. Carol Ford explained that as mentioned last year, this is “boiler plate” language recommended by the district business manager that allows the school board to borrow money if for some reason there is a shortfall of revenues; it is not anticipated to be necessary.

The moderator asked if the group was ready to vote, and Article 1 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 2: To see if the voters of the Town School District will approve the sum of \$808,931 to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing school year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.

The article was moved and seconded by Laurie Cox and Richard Ruane. Carol Ford explained changes in personnel that caused ups and downs in related budget lines, and this information is detailed in the budget narrative on page 59 in the town report. Responding to a question from Charles Billings regarding how much employees contribute to the cost of health insurance, Ms. Ford stated that in the current year, teachers contribute 13% and will contribute 13.5% in the proposed budget year; a single plan is offered to non-professional staff and they pay 7%.

A big change in the budget is in Transportation because of the cost of running a bus to Hancock and Granville to transport tuitioned students. The total cost for running the bus is shared with the school district; the budgeted amount is Ripton’s share. Four tuitioned students are anticipated next year and tuition payments from these students will exceed the cost of transportation. Charles Billings asked if running the bus has increased the number of tuitioned students for Ripton school, and Willem Jewett said that it’s not evident now that there is an effect but expects it will cause an increase over time.

Carol Ford pointed out some alternative estimated figures on page 66, the “Estimated Finance” page. Action by the state legislature increased the Base Homestead Equalized Tax Rate from 92 cents to 94 cents and also increased the “Base Per Pupil” from \$8915 to \$9151. However, the way the numbers work out, the net result is actually a reduction to our estimated tax rate by about three tenths of a cent. Ms. Ford also noted that although the overall proposed budget is 4.3% higher than previous, anticipated receipts are higher so that estimated spending is less by 0.62%, which is the number upon which tax rates are based.

Ripton school principal, Tracey Harrington, responded to questions from Bryan Alexander and Michele Fay about the iPad initiative. Ripton school is the only school in the district participating in this pilot program. The cost of the iPads is reflected in the Technology section of the budget and some grants funds helped with the purchase. The iPads have a lot of applications, yet are less costly and complicated than laptops, which will be phased out. The program has been very successful; the cost perceived to be very reasonable for the amount of return.

The moderator asked if the group was ready to vote, and Article 2 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 3: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the Board of Directors to spend up to \$100,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund (of \$121,954) for roof replacement.

The article was moved and seconded by Barry King and Richard Ruane. Carol Ford explained that for many years, a portion of the Unassigned Fund Balance has been set aside in the Capital Reserve Fund to be used for physical improvements to the school building, and can only be spent with voter approval. Following questions from Charles Billings, Dick Collitt and Bill McKibben, it was further noted that the actual vote to replace the roof will be done by Australian ballot the following day (March 5) because state law requires Australian ballot voting for anything that is to be bonded. A “yes” vote for this article will reduce the amount needed to bond for roof replacement.

The moderator asked if the group was ready to vote, and Article 3 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 4: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the Board of Directors to transfer \$25,000 from the FY 2012 Unassigned Fund Balance (of \$69,511) to the Education Reserve Fund.

The article was moved and seconded by Laurie Cox and Barry King. Carol Ford noted that in the past, voters were often asked to set aside funds from the Unreserved Balance Fund to the Capital Reserve Fund, and this year the board is asking to put those funds into an Education Reserve Fund instead. Responding to questions from Jeremy Grip, Liz Walker and Susan Hanson, Ms. Ford further described each fund. The Unreserved Balance Fund receives money at the end of a fiscal year (June 30) when there is a surplus, generally due to unanticipated revenues; the money “waits” in this account until the budget process and town meeting when the school board has the opportunity to request the use of it. Historically, the board chooses to use some of the surplus to reduce taxes the following year and asks voters to set aside the remainder (an amount often ranging between \$10-30,000) to put into the Capital Reserve Fund. This fund was set up when the school was built and has been the logical receptacle for some excess funds. This year, on recommendation from the central office, the board is requesting to set aside an amount to a new fund called the Education Reserve Fund. The difference between these two funds is that the Capital Reserve Fund can only be used for capital improvements to the school and the Education Reserve Fund can be used for anything. It is more flexible and less targeted, though its specific use must still be brought to voters to approve. The discussion concluded with the suggestion that all future requests for setting aside unreserved funds have the money go into the Education Reserve Fund, and an article at next year’s town meeting could request that the remainder of funds in the Capital Reserve Fund (which could be about \$22,000 if the roof replacement article passes) be transferred there.

The moderator asked if the group was ready to vote, and Article 4 was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Article 5: To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting.

Andrea Chesman said she was surprised to read in the paper that the supervisory union board suggests that ACSU continues to pursue the idea of participating in a Regional Education District (RED) because it seemed to her that during the examination process last fall, fellow participants were negative about it. Carol Ford explained that the “study committee” is a sub-committee of the supervisory union board, and is the group that ran the series of discussions about REDs last year in district towns with the ultimate goal of having each town vote whether it wants to be a part of an RED or not. It is her sense that the study committee has not done enough in past months to answer questions raised during those discussions, and so is now talking about holding more informational meetings this fall toward the goal of having towns hold the vote at their 2014 town meeting. Currently, there doesn’t seem to be much enthusiasm from towns about REDs, but there’s also a lot of information lacking. Barry King asked for clarification about what a “yes” vote would mean in terms of whether our school would close. Ms. Ford responded that all towns in the district would have to approve to create a RED, and if that happened a new governing board would be created to replace all the individual school boards. Then, that new board could decide to close the school after five years. Willem Jewett added that as a member of the state legislature, it was his vision that the bylaws of a RED could provide some measure of protection so that schools could not be closed without community approval, for instance. He commented that one reason people may be reluctant to respond to the idea of a regional district is because they perceive it as a slow way to close local schools.

Bryan Alexander asked what effect the “sequester” will have on ACSU in general and our school in particular. Ms. Ford said she has not been given any information about that, but assumes fewer federal grant funds will be available and believes the district budgets were designed with the expectation of a reduction in grant funds.

The meeting wrapped up with thankful acknowledgement of two departing school board members, Willem Jewett (member since 1999) and Mike Hussey (member since 2010). Perry Hanson is running for one of the positions, and no petition received in time for the second open position. Bryan Alexander announced that he would like to be considered as a write-in candidate for that post.

Barry King and Warren King moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting and by unanimous voice vote, the school annual meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m. The meeting will recess until 7:00 a.m. Tuesday, March 5, 2013 to vote at the Ripton Town Office by Australian ballot for school directors and moderator, for warned articles regarding a school roof project, and for warned articles from the UD#3 district and Hannaford Center. Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Timothy Hanson
Moderator

Sally Hoyler
Town Clerk

Carol Ford
School Board Chair