

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL SCHOOL MEETING

MARCH 6, 2001

Moderator Freeman Allen called the Annual School Meeting to order at 9:15 p.m., after the conclusion of the Annual Town Meeting. About 40 voters were present. Without objection, Moderator Allen dispensed with reading the whole Warning and proceeded to Article 1.

Article 1: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the sum of \$623,686 to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing school year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.

Article 1 was moved by Brad Braun and seconded by Richard Kimler.

Ms. Ford, School Board Chair, began with a review of the budget. She said that the budget proposal is clearer in the Town Report than it was in the letter mailed to the voters in January. The changes were made after comments at the budget hearing.

- There is no increase in teaching time for the professional teaching staff, but there is an increase in the budget to allow for an increase in the time the administrative assistant works.
- The Board has included in the budget the cost to provide health insurance to support staff.
- The School has already spent more than double the technical support (computer) budget of \$1,600.00. Ms. Ford said that computer technicians are very expensive. The amount included in the budget is a more accurate estimate of the needs of the School and the costs expected next year. The technicians are hired by the ACSU and the Ripton School pays a percentage of their salaries and benefits.
- The School is required to have an outside audit every three years, so funds are in the budget to pay for an audit for 2001-02.
- Ms. Ford said that it took a long time to fill the teaching positions that were open this year. There is an increased cost associated with advertising these positions. There were not that many positions open—it's just that it took a long time to get the few open positions filled.
- The budget line for professional staff has been increased 4% over the amount actually contracted in the 2000-01 budget year. The support staff budget is proposed to increase 7%. Ms. Ford explained that in today's economy, the School found that it could not compete with McDonald's and other local businesses when it came to hiring support staff without an increase in salaries. Many of the support staffers have more than six to ten years experience, and have taken extensive additional training to make them very valuable members of the teaching team. They still are not paid very much. A full time teaching aide makes about \$14,000.00 per year.

At this point the discussion was opened up to questions from the floor.

Barbara King said that she found the footnote explanation in the Town portion of the Annual Report was very helpful, and asked if the School would consider doing the same. She asked specifically if the 'in-kind' income and expenses are included in the School Budget report. Ms. Ford said that it is not included. Ms. King asked if this should be included so as to reflect more accurately what is being spent.

Gracile Lord spoke about health insurance. She said that one of the largest items in the budget is health insurance. Said that she had called Carol Ford before the meeting to ask what percentage of the health insurance bill the teachers paid, and was told 7%. Not everyone gets health insurance. A non-professional employee has to be an employee of the School for two years to be eligible.

Costs: A family plan costs \$10,600.00, with the teacher paying \$705.00.

A two-person plan costs \$9,961.00, with the teacher paying \$524.00.

A single-person plan costs \$3,531.00, with the teacher paying \$266.00.

Gracile Lord noted that in Middlebury there are two different plans available to the teachers, one a Blue Cross plan; and one which pays lower benefits. Middlebury teachers pay 11% of the cost of the BCBS plan. Carol Ford said that both plans available in Middlebury are Blue Cross plans, one of which is a managed care plan for which the teachers do not have to pay anything out of pocket.

Mrs. Lord asked what percent teachers in other districts pay. Carol Ford said that according to the Vermont Department of Education, the percentages of the cost of health insurance teachers pay are all over the map in the state, but the range is in the 5% to 10% range. Gracile Lord said that she felt that the Ripton teachers should pay a higher percentage than the current 7%. She said this should be increased to 12-15%. Retired teachers have to pay 50% of health insurance costs, and there is nothing for dependents. She said that she felt that working teachers should be able to pay a higher percentage.

Kim Kimler said that State Representative Ward Mann said that retired teachers will be getting an increase in their retirement benefits, and this would perhaps help retired teachers like Gracile. He asked if the 11% of health insurance referred to High School teachers or to Mary Hogan teachers Carol Ford said that the 11% is the High School percentage. At Mary Hogan, the School picks up 100% of a single person policy, and the managed care policy. The teachers have to pay 10% of a multi-person policy. Mr. Kimler asked if the Ripton School offered a JY (full benefit) or VEHI (managed care) policy. Carol said that Ripton offers the JY policy.

Laureen Cox noted that the teachers still have to pay deductibles when it come to health costs. Cathy Braun said that everyone has to pay a deductible when they use health care, which Ms. Cox disagreed with. A true sense of the costs of health care cannot be arrived at without knowing these costs. She also pointed out that many schools pay higher salaries, which would make it easier for the teachers in that district to pay more of their health insurance costs. She asked if the Ripton teachers are the lowest paid in the district, and was told by Carol Ford that we were ahead of Bridport only.

Andrea Chesman said that as a parent on the teacher search committee she can report that qualified teachers who were interested in coming to the Ripton School would not come when they saw the salary structure and compared it to other schools in the district and the state. She

said the fact that the teachers only have to pay 7% of their health insurance costs compared to 11% at Middlebury does not compensate for the significantly lower salary package.

At this point Kim Kimler called the question, and was seconded by Warren King.

The vote to end debate was in the affirmative on a voice vote.

The vote on the question was in the affirmative on a voice vote.

Article 2: To see if the voters on the Town School District will authorize the addition of \$3,500 to the Capital Improvement Fund, said amount to come from the FY99 unreserved fund balance (\$6,634).

The question was moved by Warren King and seconded by Richard Kimler.

School Board Chair Carol Ford referred the meeting to page 60 in the Town Report where the fund balances are reported. She said that there is a balance of more than \$57,000 in the Capital Improvement Fund, and it has been the practice of past meeting to add to this fund from the unreserved fund balance. She said that looking ahead there are some serious problems that will have to be fixed at the School. We need a new roof, mostly due to a design flaw that had too little overhang, causing serious water problems. Ms. Ford said that she hopes to continue to add to the fund so that when the time comes to replace the roof, we will not have to borrow as much.

Richard Kimler asked what the interest rate is on the money in the Capital Improvement Fund. Clerk Hanson said about 5.5%. Mr. Kimler asked what the rate would be on money borrowed by the School for a roof. Mr. Hanson said about 5.5%. Mr. Ford said that he is aware of a 5.0% rate last August.

Mr. Collitt asked how much it would cost to replace the old roof, and when would it be done. Carol Ford said that preliminary estimates to correct the problems with the roof are in the range of \$100,000, although she is not confident that that estimate is accurate. Mr. Ford said that he believed that the final figure would probably be higher, but he believed the estimate was not seriously incorrect. As to when the work would be done, Principal Jane Phinney said that she hoped that the work could be done in the summer of 2002—she didn't want to go through too many more winters with the roof as it is.

Richard Collitt asked if we should put more money in the fund than is called for in this article, since the need seems to be there.

There was no further discussion on this article.

At this point Richard Kimler called the question and was seconded, and the vote to end debate was in the affirmative.

The voice vote to adopt the article was also in the affirmative.

Article 3: To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting.

Mr. Kimler rose to speak about pay and benefit discrepancies between teachers in the “valley” and the “hills.” Teacher reimbursement seems to be based on whether teachers teach at the elementary level in the outlying towns, or if they teach at the High School level. Mr. Kimler asked for the Town and the School to engage in a discussion on this issue and to provide a report to the Town at next Town Meeting as to why the differences are so huge.

Mr. Collitt asked what “huge” meant. Mr. Kimler said that the discrepancy is \$7,000.00 to \$10,000.00 per year. Carol Ford said that the base pay at the High School is \$30,000.00, whereas Ripton has no base. She said that if our four teachers were on the MUHS salary schedule they would be paid an aggregate \$29,000 more than we pay them currently.

Cathy Braun asked how our pay compared to Mary Hogan’s salary schedule. Mrs. Ford said that she did not have those figures.

Mr. Kimler said that he wanted to know why we as a town have basically said that one group of teachers is worth more than another one. He said he feels the need to explain that he is a kindergarten teacher in Salisbury and that he is working with the teachers in Shoreham, Bridport and Cornwall on agreements with their school boards about compensation. He said that Ripton is not part of this process. The teachers in this group are asking the basic question, why there is a distinction made between elementary school teachers and teachers of older students?

Carol Ford pointed out that that the Ripton School is not the governing body for the High School Board, nor do we make policy except through our High School Representative.

There was no further discussion, and the meeting adjourned after this vote at 9:40.

Carol Ford, Chair, Ripton School Board

Timothy Hanson, Ripton Town Clerk

Alison Joseph, Assistant Town Clerk

Minutes taken and recorded by

Timothy Hanson, Town Clerk

Alison Joseph, Assistant Town Clerk