

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL SCHOOL MEETING

MARCH 3, 2003

The legal voters of the Town of Ripton met at the Community House in Ripton on Monday, March 3, 2003 at 8:35 p.m. to act upon articles one through four of the 2003 School Warning. There were about 66 people in attendance.

This is a summary of the minutes—a complete version can be reviewed at the Town Office.

**ARTICLE 1: To see if the voters of the Town School District will approve the sum of \$689,896 to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing school year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.**

School Board Chair Carol Ford briefly reviewed the budget. She noted an increase from 60% to 70% time for a PreK-Kindergarten teacher and for a Kindergarten teacher. The goal is to have a full-day Kindergarten, a goal being reached incrementally. Ms. Ford pointed out a significant increase in aide salaries. She explained this was due to elimination of a special education aide and moving this position to one of regular aide status—expenditure being the same but differently categorized. She briefly mentioned expenditures in the categories of salaries/benefits, supplies, and professional services. Ms. Ford then asked for questions from the Meeting.

Ed Sullivan inquired about salary increases. Ms. Ford stated that the increase was about 4%, with new money based on the current year contract. Mr. Sullivan noted an increase of 19% in staff health insurance, and asked what percentage of costs is paid by staff. Ms. Ford replied that staff pay 7% of their health insurance costs, a figure expected to rise to 10% as a result of ongoing negotiations. Mr. Sullivan made the point that the increase in health insurance benefits seems excessive and more than the Town can afford.

Cathy Braun asked if the 7% staff contribution to health care costs is a change from last year. Carol Ford replied that the

figure has been 7% for a number of years and commented that we are now in a group of schools seeking to standardize benefits within the District. Ms. Braun stated that we are all aware of the crisis in health care costs, but that the Town cannot afford the percentage of health costs paid to school staff.

Joyce Dicianna noted a \$4,000 salary increase in 2001-02 as opposed to an \$11,000 increase in 2002-03—she asked why the salaries had jumped in the recent budget. Carol Ford thought it might be due to a change in personnel but did not have figures in front of her and could not be specific. Ms. Dicianna asked if the increase was related to ongoing negotiations and Ms. Ford responded in the negative.

Ms. Dicianna recommended deleting insurers' names from contracts to allow the School to shop around for health insurance providers in an effort to obtain better rates.

Eric Warren asked whether the increased health insurance costs reflect an increase in benefits, or just an increase in cost for the same benefits. Ms. Ford responded that the increase was in cost for the same benefits.

Ms. Ford returned to her review of the budget, noting the summer program at the School. Middlebury College rents the building, and rent money is then used to pay

for summer tutorials. The net expense is zero but the summer program shows as an expense in the budget.

Ms. Ford noted the large increase in Early Essential Education (EEE) costs. This is due to three students being identified for the program next year. Ms. Ford explained that the program provides remedial work for three- to five-year-olds who are 18 months behind in their development.

Ms. Ford noted that reducing one paraprofessional from Special Education to regular education resulted in reducing the Special Education budget. She also noted the items for “shared personnel” in areas such as nursing and media services who are provided through ACSU contracts.

Ms. Ford noted there has been an increase in workers compensation insurance, and in fact in insurance rates across the board. She commented on the efficacy of ACSU assessments, mentioned principal’s office expenditures, and noted that we have a full-time custodian.

Ms. Ford noted that we are not eliminating food service, but that the way of accounting for it has changed; it has been netted out. This change in accounting procedure is advantageous to us under Act 60.

In summation, Ms. Ford noted the overall 7.3% school budget increase. She said this was higher than the Board wanted, but given the 3.3% increase last year perhaps the expense balances out.

**ARTICLE 2: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the Board of Directors to use \$9,995 of the FY 02 Unreserved Fund Balance (estimated at \$20,587) to cover the unpaid balance incurred during the summer 2002 building project renovations.**

School Board Member David Disque reviewed building renovations, showing “before and after” pictures of the School as well as pictures taken during the repair work. The photographs showed the

Ed Sullivan inquired what deductible staff must pay on their health insurance. Ms. Ford replied that she thought there was no deductible. Richard Ruane, who works for the Lincoln School, stated that there are deductibles and some small co-pays.

It was observed that the EEE tuition seems very high and asked if there was another way to meet these needs. David Disque, Board Member, replied that although the Board itself had trouble with the expense, it is federally mandated and they cannot do much about it. Sally Buteau commented on the EEE expense, praising the efficacy of the program. She stated that the program saves money in the long run, preparing children for school who would otherwise not be ready. She feels EEE is an effective means of equalizing opportunity for children from disparate towns.

Ann Barker inquired whether the voters had to vote the whole budget up or down—whether voters could reject one portion of the budget. It was explained that an amendment could be put forward.

It was asked if School staff received dental and life insurance. Ms. Ford responded that paraprofessionals receive health insurance; teachers receive health, dental and life insurance.

Voting was done by paper ballot, and Article 1 passed by a vote of 43 in favor, 19 opposed.

improvements—eave extension, gravity ventilation, insulation repair, and window and siding repair.

The Board took the lowest bid, from E.F. Wall, who worked over the summer of 2002. They performed the work as contracted and did a good job in a timely manner.

Mr. Disque noted that there was leakage around the flashing on a roof vent on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and that the contractor would be returning during the week to fix the problem.

Mr. Disque pointed out several unexpected benefits of the renovation work. So much siding needed replacement that the building required repainting; 30% of this repainting was paid for by the State. Another benefit is that the newly overhanging eaves have lessened the solar overheating experienced in some classrooms.

Mr. Disque then reviewed the renovation costs. The cost estimate had been \$185,000.

The bid came in at \$117,000. The final cost was \$139,882 (approximately \$121,300 being construction costs and \$18,500 being the costs for the architect, legal fees and the like). The final reconciliation of project costs is as follows:

Final Cost:	\$139,882
Capital Fund:	\$64,385
2001 Unreserved Fund Balance:	\$23,538
State Aid:	<u>\$41,965</u>
Balance Due:	\$9,995

In 2002 the Town had approved borrowing \$90,000 for School renovations. Instead of having to borrow this money, the School Board is asking the Town to approve spending the balance due of \$9,995 from the 2002 Unreserved Fund Balance.

Article 2 passed on a voice vote.

**ARTICLE 3: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the Board of Directors to place \$10,592 of the FY 02 Unreserved Fund Balance (estimated at \$20,587) into the Capital Projects Fund.**

Carol Ford stated that, having used the Capital Projects Fund to good effect last year, the Board wants to build it up again. These funds cannot be spent without voter approval. Cathy Braun inquired whether the Capital Projects Fund earns interest. Tim

Hanson replied that it does, albeit a very small amount.

Article 3 was voted in the affirmative on a voice vote.

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

Joyce Dicianna raised the issue of the failed vent on the School roof. She asked if the contractor would repair all the vents or just the one that had leaked. Mr. Disque replied that they would meet with the contractor shortly and believes all the vents will be repaired. Ms. Dicianna recommended the Board get a written guarantee to ensure the contractor returns to repair any future failures, if in fact all vents are not replaced or otherwise repaired.

Barry King requested that the Meeting show its appreciation of Freeman Allen's long service as Moderator of the Annual School Meetings, upon which Mr. Allen received prolonged and enthusiastic applause.

Cathy Braun asked the Meeting to express appreciation for David Disque's presentation in 2002 and for his presentation this evening. Mr. Disque received applause.