

Minutes of 2012 School District Meeting

March 5, 2013

The legal voters of the Town of Peacham met at the Peacham Congregational Church in Peacham on March 5, 2013 at 2:30 PM.

Rob Ide, Moderator, was absent. Joanne Post, Chairman of the School Board called the meeting to order.

Article 1 To elect a Moderator to conduct and govern the meeting.

Kathy Corcoran nominated Tm McKay. Mel Reiss seconded. There being no other nominations a voice vote was taken. McKay was elected

The Moderator announced that due to a problem with the Warning this year, the School Board would like to speak to that issue. School Director, Wynne Browne, admitted that the Warning for the meeting was posted late. She said that she had spoken with Kathy Scheele at the Secretary of State's office where she was told that a number of towns find themselves in the same position every year. Kathy told Wynne that the State Statute Title 17, §2662 provides the procedure for dealing with this issue. The Statute allows the School Board to validate the meeting at next year's School District Meeting or hold a special meeting prior to then. The School board has decided to take direction from the voters as to how they wish to proceed. Kathy Schauer questioned the legality of the meeting considering that the Warning was posted ten days late. She questioned whether the actions taken at today's meeting would be legally binding since there are some very important items in the Warning that need to be decided upon. Wynne responded by reading the text of VSA Title 17 §2662. She explained that the Vermont Supreme Court ruling states that the actions are binding and that a technical correction needs to be made. Further, that as long as the meeting proceeds in good fashion the action of the meeting will be legally valid. Cher Monteith made a motion to amend the Warning and to place Article 10 after Article 4 and before Article 5 on the Warning. The Moderator explained that this is a motion to suspend the rules to reorder the items, which is in order and requires a two thirds vote. The Moderator repeated that a motion has been made to suspend the rules to move Article 10 up in the Warning to after Article 4. Ray Morton seconded. A voice vote was held and the amendment to the Warning passed.

Article 2 To elect a School Director for a term of three years.

Anna Rubin nominated Mark Clough.
Kathy Corcoran nominated Joanne Post. Post declined the nomination.
Les Morrison moved that nominations be closed and the Town Clerk cast one ballot. An affirmative voice vote closed the nominations and the Town Clerk cast one ballot for Mark Clough. Clough was elected as School Director for a term of three years.

Matt Kiley thanked Joanne Post for her years of service on the School Board. Post received a standing ovation.

Article 3 To elect a School District Clerk/Treasurer.

Mike Bruton nominated Bruce Lafferty. There being no further nominations, an affirmative voice vote closed nominations. Les Morrison moved to have the Clerk/Treasurer cast one ballot for Bruce Lafferty. Rick Scholes seconded. A voice vote in the affirmative instructed the Clerk/Treasurer cast one ballot for Bruce Lafferty. Bruce Lafferty was elected School Clerk/Treasurer.

Article 4 To hear a Report of the Board.

Joanne Post spoke about what has transpired at the school over the past year. She reviewed the history of where the school has been and where it is headed. She referred to the community study survey conducted by Ray Proulx, a professional school educator, completed in early 2012. Joanne reported on Ray's findings which are paralleled in this year's school report. The main message of the report was to take time to take a collective breath and consider as a community what were the values and aspirations for the school children and how this could be put into effect. Ray reported that the best interests of the children were being clouded by acrimony. The School Board launched a series of community forums that were organized around the theme of what you, the community, want to see in the school and bring the discussion to positive themes as opposed to negative ones. The school principal and superintendent from the template provided by the community meetings put together an action plan that would make the vision for the school actually happen. Eight themes were the principle guide for the action plan. They were: academic excellence, effective leadership, school climate, good communication, community outreach, social education, professional development, and integrated art. Joanne turned the meeting over to School Board member, Jenny Mackenzie, who gave some specifics as to the positive actions that have taken place. These eight actions and their results are on the school website as is the community report that was generated which gives an update on the activities at the school. Jan Eastman asked how many students there are in the Peacham School, both K-6 and those tuitioned out for grades 7-12. Joanne replied 49 preK-6 at the elementary school, 46 are tuitioned out for grades 7 through 12. 3 or 4 students are tuitioned to independent schools, and 2 or 3 are homeschooled but also use some elementary school programs. Wendy Mackenzie spoke about her student counts which were different. She mentioned that due to numerous circumstances there could possibly be twenty additional students, however the families have chosen to educate their children elsewhere. Karen Joyce spoke about the initial issue of the late posting of the school warning. She summarized by saying that ultimately the superintendent, Martha Tucker, has oversight of other schools and it is curious that those other schools all posted their warnings on time. Karen reported that she also had contacted the Secretary of State's office and had been told that the planned second meeting to vote on the school warning ratification could be voted down. As a result, it is more than a minor glitch but a very important issue, not just a technicality. Wynne Browne agreed that the meeting to validate the warning can be voted up or down. She reiterated that many other towns go through this process and, according to the Secretary of State, if legally done, ratification has never been voted down. She was told that a court would go out of its way to validate a legally managed meeting. Dina Danielson stressed that she homeschools her children because she likes to not because she dislikes the Peacham School. Kathy Corcoran reminded people that this is not the first time school closure and community action plans have been discussed. She urged tolerance and pointed out the community's responsibility to the school. Margaret McLean, a non-registered voter, was allowed to speak by the assembly. She reminded people that she was the Peacham principal for a number of years. She spoke to the school's issues and how they can be positively dealt with. Erin Neary, a school parent, felt that the parents had become the leadership in the school. There being no further discussion, the Moderator moved on to Article 10.

Article 10 Shall the Peacham School Board be directed to close the Peacham Elementary School prior to July 1, 2013 and to provide for the elementary school education of the elementary school pupils (grades K through 6) residing in the District by paying tuition in accordance with law to one or more public elementary schools in one or more school districts, to an approved independent elementary school, or to an

independent school meeting school quality standards, to be selected by the parents or guardians of the pupil, within or without the state?

Richard Scholes moved the article. Cher Monteith seconded. Discussion from numerous voters took place. Joanne Post responded by questioning the legality of the wording of the petitioned article. In particular, the words "within or without the state". John Marshall agreed with Joanne by stating that elementary school students cannot be tuitioned out of the state. Annette Lorraine made a motion to amend the article by deleting the words "within or without the state". The Moderator confirmed that the person who seconded the original motion agreed. A voice vote was taken and Article 10 was amended by removing the five words. Annette Lorraine spoke of the tragic situation of the current manner of educational funding. She stated that fewer than 50 students in a school incur the same charges as larger schools. She reminded people that the issue is about offering the best education but there can be too much sentiment for a school while the concern for taxpayers is forgotten. Joanne Post distributed a handout titled Peacham School District FY2014 Budget Tax Rate Calculations: Revised Base Rate and Statewide Tax Rates. The report compares per pupil cost rates with such towns as Kirby which has no school with those like Peacham. Kirby shows a greater increase than Peacham since 2005 and is currently the same as Peacham for 2014. The report dispels the idea that student population has decreased. The problem is that the School Board has no idea how many students will be tuitioned out. Wynne Browne disagreed with the negative remarks about the school. The Community Goals Program encourages community input and the School Board needs to hear people's concerns. Browne indicated that the direction of the school has changed and that things are going well. She expressed the Board's desire to continue the forward motion and to keep the school open. Ray Morton spoke regarding his experience as a teacher in Ohio. His point was that schools that are too large or too small are unsatisfactory. Peacham, he feels, is too small and that a larger school exposes students to greater socialization and experience opportunities. Beth Comerchi stated that closing a school can create problems in that other schools may not accept additional Peacham students and she questioned whether moving students would work. Increased costs may occur by closing the school. Barbara Grey asked how the State decisions will affect the Peacham School. Joanne Post explained that other school alternatives are available. Simply opening or closing the school is not the only option. Act 153 and 156 provide numerous possible avenues for collaboration between school districts. Rick Scholes stated he was pleased that this process has produced valuable discussion about how school children are treated in this town. Scholes said the fixed financial number for the school removes any control by the residents. The residents have no legal authority except to vote down the budget or close the school. Scholes felt that the school principal was an expensive factor in the budget as well as the recent law suit costs. Scholes said a cost benefit analysis was excluded from this meeting, in particular, a cost per pupil analysis. Discussion continued concerning the Town itself and how people are unable to afford to live in Peacham. Dawn Wright asked why basic facts were not being discussed and asked if other schools could accommodate our students. Jane Woodhouse said it was not fair to students to get booted from school to school. Kirk Williams described his child's experience in the Peacham School and ultimately was told his child needed to conform to get a proper education. He stated that because his child was so bright he would have to enroll in another school or be homeschooled. Judith Markey had just the opposite experience with her children who are very bright, and has found that the school provides the education her children need. Jim Minichiello moved the question to close the debate. Les Morrison seconded. An affirmative voice vote closed the debate. Gloria Tillotson moved to vote on Article 10 by paper ballot. The Moderator read the article. The Moderator counted more than seven

voters in favor of a paper ballot and directed voters to vote yes if they wanted to direct the School Board to close the school prior to July 31, 2013 and to vote no if they wanted the school to remain open. The Moderator announced the voting results on Article 10. 186 votes were cast, 94 votes were needed to pass. 58 votes yes, 128 votes no. Article 10 was voted down.

Article 5

Shall the voters of the Peacham School District vote to adopt an expenditure budget as presented for the school year ending June 30, 2014 including an appropriation of a sum of money for the support of schools with provisions for current expenses, capital improvement, a deficit if any, and for other lawful purposes?

Dick Browne moved the article. Liza Browne seconded. Joanne Post discussed the article. Post clarified budget figures on pages 59 to 62 in the Town Report. The total amount being voted on today is \$1,662,631. Post explained that state wide and region wide school budgets are increasing this year. Peacham's school budget was down last year. Looking back at several past years you see a more accurate read. Expenses that were held down due to the recession, tuitions, and health care, are now rising. Program costs that drove up the budget were special education, pre-school instruction, student support, and increases driven by the supervisory union. Cost increases are also due to the State legislature transferring a lot of functions previously done locally to the supervisory union, audits must now be done annually rather than bi-annually, the principal's office has two salaries and two benefits packages, and bus service costs have increased. The previous hand out of budget charts show that costs per student are over \$14,000 this year when all schools are averaged. Judy Chypra wanted to know what the Capital Fund was used for. Wynne Browne responded that asbestos removal was the main capital project his year. Next year the school will need new ovens and school heaters. Jan Eastman suggested that capital funds be accounted for. For fiscal transparency, the amount in the capital fund, and what it was spent on, needs to be more specific in terms of fund balances and expenses. Bruce McLean asked where in the budget one would find the amount of money spent for the Kathy Crum settlement. Joanne Post and Wynne Browne explained that part of the settlement included a non-disclosure clause so that the school board legally cannot discuss it. Melody Morrison asked whether the school can once again have a teaching principal. Post answered that there are limits in the available principal applicant pool and also that you cannot cut out an existing position in order to make up for the difference in costs. Browne explained that the School Board has a number of things to work on indicated by the community forum. A number of changes that are scheduled could not be accomplished by a teaching principal. Julie Hansen asked about where in the budget the Crum settlement was. Dave Stauffer asked if any money was paid from outside of the budget for the Crum settlement. Post answered that no money outside the of the school budget was used for the settlement. Rick Scholes asked what the principal's salary is. Joanne answered that the amount was around \$58,000 a year. Jan Eastman stated that the exact amount can be found on page 66 and is \$58,446. Rick Scholes moved to amend the current article by adding to the end of the article the words "in the amount of \$1,598,000". That cuts the budget by the principal's salary and his 8% annual increase. Bruce McLean seconded. Post said there was not an 8% increase for the principal or for anyone. Jenny Mackenzie referred to the leadership needed to make the community plan work so the principal must stay. Wendy Mackenzie stated that the principal was the biggest handicap the school has. Kirk Williams asked about the principal's two year contract and the manner in which a rolling contract like the Peacham principal's works. The terms of the rolling contract were discussed. Julie Hansen supported the vote to keep the school open and that any strings attached to that vote are not appropriate

and that we should vote to approve the budget as is. Jenny Mackenzie reiterated that a budget cut would only harm the kids and the flow of the school towards educational excellence. Post announced that the State legislature recently revised the state wide tax rate and as a result the School Board should be using the new legislative figure not the previous one in the Town Report. The net result will be to lower the tax rate slightly. A motion was made to call the question which requires a two thirds vote to cease debate on the amendment. An affirmative voice vote closed debate. The Moderator read the article as amended. A voice vote was called on the amendment. The voice vote was in the negative and the amendment was defeated. Joe Alper explained the rolling contract as it applies to the principal. Sam Kempton spoke to the issue by saying he voted to keep the school open but that this was not a validation about the school. He said he was disappointed in the school leadership and added that the school had a lot of work to do and that otherwise he might vote to close the school at the next meeting. Jean Dedam moved to call the question to end debate on the article. An affirmative two thirds voice vote closed the debate. The Moderator read Article 5 as originally written. The Moderator called for a voice vote. The Moderator was in doubt and called for a standing count. The Moderator announced the results of the standing count vote on Article 5. Total votes cast 73; 52 in favor, 21 opposed. Article 5 passed.

Article 6 Shall the voters of the Peacham School District approve the transfer of \$6000 to the Capital Fund?

Charlie Browne moved to approve Article 6. Betsy McKay seconded. There being no discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote to end discussion. An affirmative voice vote closed discussion. The Moderator called for a voice on Article 6. Article 6 passed.

Article 7 Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize the board of directors to reserve the remaining FY12 surplus, amount to be determined by the FY12 audit by Certified Public Accountants, for tax stabilization in future years?

Richard Browne moved to approve Article 7. Charlie Browne seconded. Diana Senturia called the question. The Moderator called for a voice vote. Article 7 was passed with an affirmative voice vote.

Article 8 Shall the voters of the Peacham School District grant authority to the school board to incur interest-free debt through the Green Mountain Power Evergreen Fund in an amount not to exceed \$12,000, to be financed over a period not to exceed 5 years, for the purpose of financing the following electricity efficiency project:

Peacham School Lighting Efficiency Project

The financing mechanism that the district will use is the Green Mountain Power Evergreen Fund, which allows school districts to borrow at 0% interest over as much as five years for the purpose of financing energy efficiency projects. The estimated savings from the lighting efficiency project are projected to save the school approximately \$2,213 in annual electrical costs at the current utility rates; this amount is more than the debt service payments will be on the loan. The lighting efficiency measures have a life expectancy of at least 15 years.

Richard Browne moved to approve the article. Diana Senturia seconded. Discussion was held. Kirk Williams asked if the energy efficiency project was an interior and exterior project, since any outside lighting would have to be considered due to the effects on the nearby observatory. Matt Kiley assured everyone that it was an interior project only. Rick Scholes asked for an explanation of the financing figures. Kiley explained the financing

questions by indicating that any difference in the figures is covered by grant funds for the project. There being no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote. Article 8 passed.

Article 9 Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize its Board of Directors to borrow money to pay its lawful debts and expenses for the fiscal year which ends June 30, 2014 in an amount not to exceed 90% of the anticipated collection of taxes and receipts of other funds to be used for those purposes?

Richard Browne moved to approve the article. Diana Senturia seconded. No discussion was held. The Moderator called for a voice vote on the article. Article 9 passed.

Article 11 To transact any other non-binding business that may legally come before the meeting.


Becky Jensen urged the School Board to schedule the ratification meeting for the school warning to be held as soon as possible while all the topics are fresh in people's minds. Wynne Browne thanked all of the voters for their participation.

Les Morrison moved to adjourn. Melody Morrison seconded. So voted.


The meeting adjourned at 5:50 PM.

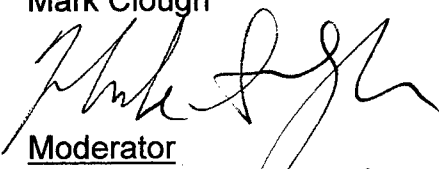
The foregoing is approved and attested by:

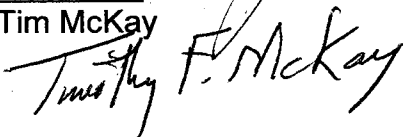
Peacham School Directors


Wynne Browne

Jenny Mackenzie


Mark Clough


Moderator
Tim McKay


Timothy F. McKay

Clerk to the School District
Bruce Lafferty

