



**TOWN OF COLCHESTER
ANNUAL SCHOOL MEETING MINUTES**

**COLCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
MARCH 2, 2015**

Moderator Jerry Flanagan reconvened the meeting at 9:40 p.m. In attendance were Larry Waters, Superintendent; George Trieb, Business /Operations Manager; Carrie Lutz, Director of Special Education; Gwen Carmolli, Director of Curriculum; Amy Minor, Colchester High School Principal; Dawn Gruss, Colchester Middle School Principal; Julie Benay, Malletts Bay School Principal; Chris Antonicci, Union Memorial School Principal; Carolyn Millham, Porters Point School Principal.

ARTICLE 10

To choose a moderator, if elected moderator is not present.

Elected moderator, Jerry Flanagan, was present. No action was required.

ARTICLE 11

To act upon the reports of the School District Officers.

MOTION was made by Caitlyn Sisler and SECONDED by Scott Barrett to adopt Article 11. There was no discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 11 was passed.

ARTICLE 12

To set compensation, if any, to be paid to the School Board Directors.

MOTION was made by Nadine Scibek and SECONDED by Scott Barrett to set compensation for the School Board members at \$1,300 each. There was no discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 12 was passed.

ARTICLE 13

To determine whether the District will vote to authorize the School Directors to borrow money for current and necessary expenses by issuance of notes not in excess of anticipated revenue for this school year.

MOTION was made by Nadine Scibek and SECONDED by Scott Barrett to adopt Article 13 as read. There was no discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 13 was passed.

ARTICLE 14

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

Mike Rogers, Chair, introduced his fellow School Board members Lincoln White, Lindsey Cox, Christine Shepard, and Craig Kieny. Christine Shepard will be stepping down from the School Board. In addition, Dick Pecor was recognized; he is in Florida after a health related event and recovering well.

Larry Waters began the review of the School Budget. The Colchester School Board member's goals were to

- Engage the community about budget challenges and meetings were hosted at the Community Center and Library.
- Keep expenditures low. This is the third lowest budget in ten years.
- Pass the budget on the first vote.
- Support kids.

Mr. Waters noted that there are no provisions for new personnel, projects, or programs in this budget, with the exception of a Pre-K program that is mandated by the State.

Colchester's per pupil spending is low compared to many other Vermont school districts and student enrollment has been consistent over the years, as Colchester is growing. There are also 65 students from the islands that pay tuition to attend school in the Colchester School District. Colchester High School ranks high in student performance and low in per student costs, according to the L.O. Picus & Associates report on Vermont schools' finances. Mr. Waters added the evaluation is available online for those desiring more information.

Colchester School District also meets the standards for student-teacher ratios. There was a discussion about the number of Core Full Time Employees. The primary driver for the budget increase was salary and benefits for personnel. Mr. Waters observed that Federal funds for schools are declining.

The district is asking for a property tax increase of 2 cents on the dollar. The Vermont Legislature is discussing the institution of a 2% property tax cap per year; the Colchester School District is already meeting this.

In addition, the District is considering the closing of two Colchester schools in the future to consolidate campuses and costs.

Mr. Waters closed by reminded everyone that polling for both voting districts will take place at the high school gymnasium.

A resident asked why the hourly increases for teachers were not more in line with those of Town employees. Lincoln White answered that the difference lies in the necessity of negotiating with the Teachers' Union. Per Vermont statutes, schools must negotiate with the Union and cannot hire outside

the Union. The School Board did not want to risk a teachers' strike as recently occurred in South Burlington. Colchester teachers perform well. Mr. White admitted that a 3.25% increase is higher than employees in many other businesses receive, but there is a salary step structure for years of service and degree of education that eventually levels off and then the increases drop to less than 2%. Additionally, the teachers in Colchester pay 20% toward their health insurance and took a reduction in sick days.

Dana Rushford inquired whether this was a three-year contract. The answer was yes. He also asked about the tuitions that were being paid for Colchester students to attend other schools. Carrie Lutz, Director of Special Education, answered that the students that are tuitioned to other schools have special education requirements or mental health considerations that Colchester Schools cannot address. Mr. Rushford noted that the tuition costs were extremely high and wondered how many tuitioned students there were. Ms. Lutz said there were twelve students, and the yearly tuitions could, indeed, be very expensive.

Janice Spargalotti is a teacher in another school district. She opined that voting down the school budget is a way of voicing the opinion that the teachers' increases are out of line with their own incomes, but it might be more useful for citizens to find another more productive way to speak to the social issue of pay inequity.

Kevin Marchand said he thought that a problem lies in the fact that there is no public discussion before the School Board agrees to the terms of the contracts. Christine Shepard pointed out that the Union and teachers opened the negotiations to the public, but no residents came to take part.

Tom Pendergrast asked how the constant increases are to be maintained. Another resident said it would be helpful to separate out budget items that benefit students, such as last year's proposed laptops and notebooks, from the other items because most residents do not want to eliminate items that affect the quality of children's educations. Mr. Pendergrast asked what would be cut if this budget did not pass the first time. Larry Waters responded that there was nothing extra in the budget to cut and the next step would be cutting out programs. Since teacher salaries cannot be cut they would have to cut positions. Lindsey Cox added that there is no place in this budget that could be cut without negatively impacting students.

Steven Moore related that he and his wife originally settled in Colchester because of the excellent schools. He attested to the quality of education that his children received. He urged the audience to bear that quality in mind when they vote tomorrow.

No other discussions followed.

ARTICLE 15

To adjourn said School District meeting and to reconvene at the Colchester High School, Laker Lane, in said Town on Tuesday, March 3, 2015, for voters in District 9-1 and 9-2 to vote for School Directors and to vote on the following propositions by Australian ballot with voting to begin at 7:00 a.m. and to close at 7:00 p.m.

Motion was made by Nadine Scibek and SECONDED by Scott Barrett to adopt Article 15 as read. There was no further discussion.

VOTING: The Ayes carried the Motion. Article 15 was passed.

Moderator Flanagan adjourned the meeting at 10:29 p.m.

ARTICLE 16

Shall the voters of the Colchester Town School District appropriate thirty six million four hundred twenty-two thousand four hundred twenty-four dollars, (\$36,422,424) necessary for the support of schools for the year beginning July 1, 2015?

Respectfully Submitted,


Linda Kingston, Recording Secretary


Karen Richard, Town Clerk


Jerry Flanagan, Moderator