

**SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING
AND PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 2, 2015
Draft Minutes**

The Annual School District Meeting was held at the Westford Elementary School on Monday, March 2, 2015. Approximately 75 registered voters present as well as the news media. Moderator Edward Chase called the meeting to order at 8:02 p.m. The Moderator read the warning.

Article I: Shall the Town of Westford School District authorize the school directors to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenues for the next fiscal year?

Frank Howrigan made a motion to accept Article I. Seconded by Becky Roy.

There was no discussion. The Moderator called for the vote.

Article I was voted in the affirmative as written.

Article II: To transact any other business that may lawfully come before this meeting.

There was no discussion.

The School District Meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

The Public Hearing for Australian ballot articles was called to order at 8:04 p.m. School Board chair, Mark Drapa, gave a presentation on the proposed budget.

Article III: Shall the Town of Westford School District appropriate the sum of \$5,091,651 to be spent during the 2015-2016 school year for school purposes?

The proposed budget reflects a decrease of 1.21% from the current budget. Salaries are decreasing by 3.2% due to staffing adjustments and tutoring fewer students. Increases in the budget include benefits (0.4%), direct instruction (0.1%), high school tuition due to increased rates (3.3%) and Special Education due to maintaining in-house preschool accreditation (3.3%). Non-property tax revenue is expected to decrease by 7.52%.

Mark reviewed the student/teacher and student/staff ratios. Westford's K-8 average is above the state average. The average class size in Westford is 19.9 students. The student to teacher ratio is 12.1 and the student to staff ratio is 5.59.

Mark advised that Westford has been held harmless on the Equalized Pupil rate for 5 years however there is a bill to remove the clause which will affect Westford. Westford's per pupil spending is \$14,815. This figure drives all the numbers in the grids presented in the budget presentation.

For residents who pay education taxes based on their income, education taxes will increase by \$26.00 per \$10,000 of their income, which is a 9.35% increase. For residents who pay education taxes based on their homestead, their taxes will increase \$73.00 per \$100,000 of assessed value, which is a 4.97% increase. The increases are based on estimated base tax rate that will be set by the State, which is expected to increase), and includes loss of revenues, a reduction in the Common Level of Appraisal and Equalized Pupils.

Seth Jensen pointed out that the tuition to Essex is less than the tuition to private schools. He expressed his gratitude for public education.

Bob Bancroft asked if the school board has compared the student/teacher and student/staff ratios to comparable schools. Judy Denova referred Bob to page 82 of the 2014 Annual Town Report. The report compares the Westford School to similar sized schools.

Janet Franz asked how Westford compares to national averages. Mark advised that the average student/teacher ratio in New England is 15. The national average is 16 or 17.

Jeremy Berger voiced his concern with the results of the NECAP test results in science. Mark advised that Westford has an improvement plan in place and is incorporating inquiry based science into its curriculum to increase test results.

Jeremy expressed his concern in cutting programs such as arts and language. Andre Roy explained that the same programs are being offered. Teacher time has been reduced due to a declining student population. He feels Westford prepares its students well for high school and college while being sensitive to the burden on the tax payers.

Ira pointed out that Vermont is the second oldest state. Potential earnings for the majority of older people will decline. How will Vermonters pay for education? A more efficient and effective method is needed.

Bob stated that younger people want to come back to Vermont however they run up against the economy. Employers are having difficulty attracting young people due to the cost of living in Vermont.

Bob asked when negotiations will occur for the next teacher's contract and asked if the School Board is aware of the Cadillac tax on overly generous health insurance policies. Mark advised the negotiations will begin in the fall and yes, the school board is aware of the tax. He added that teachers will be affected by this tax and it presents a huge problem.

Article IV: Shall the Town of Westford School District also appropriate \$50,000 to the Capital Fund for capital improvement items contained in the Westford School District Capital Plan?

Mark Drapa covered this item in his budget presentation. The funds will be used to repair the roof over the Common Area with PVC Duro-Last roof and replace 17 single-pane windows..

Becky Roy made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Bob Bancroft. Motion passed unanimously.

The public hearing adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Chase
Moderator

Mark Drapa, Chair
School Board

Nanette Rogers
Town Clerk

**Results of Australian Ballot Articles
Voted on March 3, 2015**

Article III: Defeated the Westford School District Budget of \$5,091,651 for the 2015-2016 school year.

Total ballots cast: 446
211 Yes
233 No
2 Blanks

Article IV: Voted to approve \$50,000 to the Capital Fund for capital improvement items.

Total ballots cast: 446
253 Yes
188 No
5 Blanks

Article V: Elected a school moderator and two school directors.

School Moderator 1 year term – Ed Chase

School Directors 3 year term – Kim Phinney
2 year term – Mark Drapa