

ANNUAL TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING MINUTES MARCH 2, 2015

The legal voters of the Cornwall Town School District met at the Anna Stowell Sunderland Bingham Memorial School in said Cornwall, Vermont on Monday, March 2, 2015 at 7:50 PM, with approximately 65 people in attendance and transacted the following business:

Prior to the call to order, John Eagan, board Chair spoke for a few moments. He expressed thanks to Abi Sessions for stepping in as Interim Principal. John welcomed Jennifer Kravitz, who is the new Principal starting in July of 2015. John indicated that two long time teachers, Janne Giles and Dawn Mayer, left the school during the school year and have been replaced by Mindy Harvey and Emily Hoyler, who are doing an excellent job. John talked about the budget briefly and indicated that the increase of \$46,000 is a 3% increase. There is an Education bill working its way through the legislature (H361). Some of the items being discussed in the bill are: creating consolidated school districts using education systems and placing a 2% cap on budget increases per pupil.

The meeting was called to order at 7:50 PM.

ARTICLE 1: *To elect a Moderator for a term of one year.*

John Eagan called for nominations for School District Moderator. David Donahue nominated Cy Tall for a term of 1 year. Sherry Johnson seconded the nomination. There being no further nominations, the Chair proceeded to the vote and Cy Tall was elected Moderator for the Cornwall School District for one year.

ARTICLE 2: *To see if the Town School District will approve the Town School District Meeting Minutes of March 3, 2014.*

Cindy Peet/Dave Donahue moved to approve the Town School District Meeting Minutes of March 3, 2014 as printed. There was no discussion. The motion carried on voice vote.

ARTICLE 3: *To see if the voters of the Town School District will vote to authorize its Board of Directors, under 16 VSA 562 (9), to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenue for the school year.*

John Roberts/Tracy Isham moved to authorize the Board of Directors, under 16 VSA 562(9), to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenue for the school year. There was no discussion. The motion carried on voice vote.

ARTICLE 4: *To see if the voters of the Town School District will approve the sum of \$1,497,298 to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.*

Dave Donahue/John Roberts moved to approve the sum of \$1,497,298 to defray current expenses of the Town School District for the ensuing year and to pay outstanding orders and obligations.

Alicia Romero asked what the increases in the budget were. John Eagan went through the budget and gave an overview. John thanked Abi Sessions for looking at each line item to see where any adjustments could be made.

Bjarki Sears mentioned the Technology budget and indicated that the amounts seemed low to him. He wondered if we were meeting the Technology needs of the students.

Liz Marino asked about enrollment and wondered if multi-age classrooms were being discussed. There are fewer children forecasted to come into the school. The school has been holding at around 78 students. Multi-age classrooms are on the table for discussion.

David Donahue talked about the facility and wondered about the increases in the budget there. Abi Sessions pointed out that \$14,000 of the increase is budgeted to seal the roof, which hopefully will increase the life of the roof for another 10 years.

Raph Worrick mentioned the issue of declining student population and the fact that maintaining all of the Elementary schools in our area is not sustainable. He wondered where the board stood on consolidation. John E. indicated that the state is looking at various options. Regional schools are being discussed. The board is waiting to hear what the options will be once the legislature has completed work on the bill.

Sherry Johnson suggested that the School Board be proactive and not necessarily wait for mandates from the state. She thought it would be good for the board to have a plan in place before something is forced on the school. John E. indicated that the board would like to let the process play out and then be proactive. The VSBA is working in the legislature on behalf of the local school boards as much as possible.

Rick Greene reminded those present that the school board had gone through an exercise looking at consolidation several years ago. He felt that it would be best to wait for an indication from Montpelier as to what direction will be suggested, particularly if they have a plan to reduce the districts from 200 to 60. There will be another or continuation of the study committee from several years ago.

Chris Kramer indicated that he had been in town for a year, and was wondering what coordination and collaboration had been done. Peter Burrows and the VSBA are both working with the legislature to bring about reasonable change.

Alicia Romero, a former Principal and teacher, spoke to the fact that there are only 6 students in the 4th grade class. She questioned whether it is worth paying for a teacher for 6 students. She encouraged the School board to examine everything and do what makes sense for both the students and the taxpayers.

Marc Lapin mentioned that consolidation with other small towns in our district could be a community building process, not necessarily a loss of local control.

Peter Conlon remarked that edicts will come down from Montpelier, when the local districts can't help themselves to manage budgets, etc.

Andrew Munkres would like to see some studies done that would show the costs associated with consolidation. He explained that no numbers have been presented to compare leaving the system alone vs. consolidation.

Jordan Young indicated that the multi-age classroom experience he had at Cornwall was not all bad. He feels that consolidation should be looked at. He felt that pushing students to go to a larger school with a higher cost per pupil may not be the answer to the budget issues. He also wondered about outcomes at the high school level, small school vs. larger school. Do the students from the small schools do better?

Bjarki Sears mentioned that Special Education services had been consolidated. He indicated that student outcomes are different at the high school level. He is concerned about Technology budgets and believes that Foreign Language at the Elementary level will be coming down the pike.

Chris Kramer wondered who was representing the schools. He is worried that only VSBA is representing the small schools. He wondered if there should be a group of local people that represents the schools in addition to the VSBA. John Eagan suggested that folks should contact their legislators to provide feedback and opinions related to education.

Dave Donahue reminded the voters that Montpelier will not be handing down mandates to maintain and fix the building. The building could be a community asset if school consolidation did take place. He felt it would be important to work with the Selectboard on capital funding for the maintenance of the building.

Marc Lapin mentioned that there was a great deal of education expertise in the room and in neighboring towns. He wondered if creating a subcommittee to discuss the various issues would make sense.

John Eagan pointed out that the ACSU is in the middle of developing a 5 year strategic plan. Alicia Romero commented that districts are always working on strategic plans, but John E. felt that Peter Burrows was not just going through the exercise, that he wanted to work on specific issues. Alicia R. offered to speak to Mr. Burrows about the possibility of creating a subcommittee.

Jordan Young/T Tall called the question. At least 7 voters were in agreement with ending discussion and proceeding with the vote. The motion carried on voice vote.

ARTICLE 5: *To transact any other business proper to come before said meeting. Upon completion of the transaction of the aforesaid business, or upon adjournment of the aforesaid meeting for any other purpose, said meeting shall be reconvened on Tuesday, March 3, 2015 at the Cornwall Town Hall for the purpose of voting on the following business of the Town School District by Australian Ballot.*

Abi Sessions reported that the 4th and 5th grade students are doing a unit on the history of schooling in Cornwall. She asks that anyone who has information or recollections of Cornwall school history to please be in touch with her or the students or teachers in 4th or 5th grade.

Gail Isenberg asked if there was WIFI in the building. There is public WIFI. The password is available from the Principal.

Bjarki Sears is associated with the Superintendent's strategic plan and indicates that this is more than just a 5 year event. They are talking about involving communities. Changes are coming.

Rich Isenberg and Richard Carpenter both talked about the energy in the room related to working on the school issues. What are the next steps, when are the school board meetings?

David Sears said that the ideas that had been thrown out were great, but he worries about state mandates and thinks we should wait and see what will be forthcoming.

Peter Conlon mentioned that the next school board meeting was Wednesday, March 4 at the high school.

Bill Johnson wondered if it was possible to reach out to the community with questions about the future of the Cornwall school. Would they be willing to think about Cornwall without a school and other such questions?

The RED study that was done several years ago produced a result of "don't touch our school".

ARTICLE 6: *To elect one Town School Director for a period of three years.*

ARTICLE 7: *To elect one Town School Director for a period of two years.*

ARTICLE 8: *To elect one Town School Director for a period of one year (unexpired term).*

No action was taken on Articles 6, 7 and 8 as voting will take place tomorrow at the Cornwall Town Hall.

David Donahue/Rich Isenberg moved to adjourn the School District Meeting at 8:54 PM. No discussion. The motion carried on voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Johnson, Town Clerk