

TOWN OF MARLBORO, VERMONT
~ MINUTES ~
SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING - MARCH 7, 2017

Moderator Steven John called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM and read out the warning:

The legal voters of the Marlboro Town School District are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Marlboro Town Hall in said Town of Marlboro on March 7, 2017, between the hours of **10:00 AM**, at which time the polls will open, and **7:00 PM**, at which time the polls will close, to vote by Australian ballot on the following articles:

Article I: Shall the Town of Marlboro School District, which the State Board of Education has found advisable to include in a proposed new unified school district, join with the school districts of Wardsboro and Dover, which the State Board of Education has found necessary to include in the proposed new unified school district, for the purpose of forming **the River Valleys Unified School District** as provided in Title 16, Vermont Statutes annotated, upon the following conditions and agreements.

The Unified District shall be formed and the terms hereby voted shall become effective on the date this article is approved by a majority vote of the electorate of at least two “necessary” districts of the Forming Districts and said votes become final per 16 V.S.A. 706g, provided that votes approving this article shall not become effective unless and until the voters of other Windham Central Supervisory Union (WCSU) town school districts (Brookline, Jamaica, Newfane, Townshend, and Windham) vote to approve formation of a unified district and said vote becomes final thereby forming a Supervisory Union with two Unified Districts (a “Side by Side”).

(a) Grades. The **River Valleys Unified School District** will offer pre-kindergarten through grade six (6) education to all students in the unified school district and will pay tuition for students in grades seven (7) through twelve (12) pursuant to Vermont statutes.

If the Marlboro Town School District votes to approve the Unified School District and the District is established, then the Marlboro Elementary School will cease operating school for grades seven (7) and eight (8) on June 30, 2019.

(b) Board of School Directors. A town school district’s representation on the unified district board will be closely proportional to the fraction that its population bears to the aggregate population of the Unified District. Initial Board composition will be based upon the year 2010 Federal Census and shall be recalculated promptly following the release of each subsequent decennial census. The Board is authorized to reapportion the Board, including increasing or decreasing the number of school directors. However, at no time will a town school district have less than one board member on the Board. Subject to the previous sentence, each proportionality calculation shall be rounded to the nearest whole number.

(c) Assumption of debts and ownership of school property. The unified union school district shall assume the indebtedness of forming districts; assume all operating deficits and/or surpluses or reserve funds of the forming districts; acquire, maintain, and pay for the school properties of member districts; all as specifically identified and provided for in the Final Report. The complete provisions of Articles 7, 8 and 15 regarding special funds, indebtedness, real and personal property and continuity of school buildings are set forth in the Final Report and are incorporated in their entirety by reference herein.

(d) Final Report. The provisions of the Final Report approved by the State Board of Education on December 20, 2016, which is on file in the Town Clerk’s office, shall govern the unified union school district.

Discussion:

- Tyler Gibbons of MacArthur Road clarified that the above question is to be voted by Australian Ballot in the Town Office.
- Sharon Tappan of Adams Brook Road, asked if voting No buys us time? Lauren Poster of Moss Hollow Road answered there were two sub-committees of the Act 46 study group and the alternative structure group. Voting No would allow us time to see what is our best way forward.
- Celena Romo of Route 9 clarified that voting No would negate any tax relief incentive provided by the State.
- Haley Elisha of South Road had a question about the small school grant. The Board states we should keep our small schools grant since we have been identified as geographically isolated.
- Suzanne Whitehouse of South Road asked if voting Yes would automatically close the Junior High, and the answer is yes.
- Tyler Gibbons rebutted to Sharon Tappan's question earlier, stating we have one year to re-enter the merger, which we would be able to join, but without the tax incentive from the State. Celena Romo said that Wardsboro and Dover are likely to continue ahead with the merger. We are the only K-8 structure in the district according to Douglas Korb of South Road.
- Erik von Ranson of Ames Hill Road posed a question about the timeline, and the Board acknowledged that the exact timeline is not clear but Lauren Poster is confident that there would be time to make the necessary adjustments to flow with the legislation. There are consultants who the board can turn to for help in getting support with all the details.
- Keely Eastley of North Pond Road asked about the tax rate incentive, Celena Romo answered but how the three towns' merged budget would work is not clear.
- Rachel Boyden of Lucier Rd said her students in the Junior High would like it to remain but had many questions about the expanded educational opportunities that might be available to them.
- Casey Deane of MacArthur Road spoke to former Junior High students, and read his son's account of the education he got at Marlboro Elementary School.
- Peter Mauss of Cowpath 40 asked Steven John what a Yes vote might mean, as the information is so opaque. Steven said that the town is going to need to make changes no matter what, but how that will play out is going to be difficult to predict, but this is a necessary juncture because of legislation.
- Steven John briefly stepped down as Moderator. Contingencies were discussed for what might happen in the future.
- Celena Romo spoke about her experiences as a board member and spoke to the question that Peter Mauss asked above.
- Jen Carr of Ames Hill Road wondered about the tax savings, and Douglas Korb spoke to the few small savings that some districts are seeing.
- Andrew Richardson of South Road, commented that to base the quality of education on money alone is dangerous, and if schools in the area have very different educational opportunities from Marlboro? The Board spoke broadly about the other schools.
- Carol Ann Johnson of South Road spoke about the programing in other area schools and the mutual admiration between the potentially merged schools of Wardsboro, Dover & Marlboro.
- Charlene Morse of Church Hollow Road spoke about the budgeting issue with the unknown cost of the Junior High students being educated elsewhere and our lack of control over what those costs might be. Lauren Poster stated that it is just not clear what the future budget will be, so it is dangerous to make any assumptions.

- Act 46 Study Committee members Dan MacArthur & Celena Romo stated that the individuality for each of the three schools involved is important to all three towns.
- Julia von Ranson of Ames Hill Road said if we vote Yes, we won't be having this discussion here next year.

Further comments by:

Judy Robinson, South Road

T. Hunter Wilson, Butterfield Road

Ani Schaeffer, Woods Road

Jean Boardman, South Road

Amy van Loon, Lucier Road

Lauren MacArthur, MacArthur Road

Catharine Hamilton, Ames Hill Road

Aidan Salasin-Deane, MacArthur Road (not a registered voter) noted differences between Marlboro School and Brattleboro Union High School.

Kate Morgan, Cowpath 40

Richard Dror, Piney Brook Way

Jess Weitz, Route 9

Gail MacArthur, MacArthur Road

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 Motion made by Clarence Boston to suspend the discussion for Emily Long, our State Representative, to speak. Seconded by Brent Seabrook.

So voted by unanimous voice vote.

Emily Long takes the dais at 11:24 am and spoke to the following points:

- Details from Montpelier: there is much hesitation in Montpelier as federal funding for ALL agencies is unknown, and very little legislation has been passed.
- The legislature defeated the measure put forth by the Governor to level fund education. She serves on the Education Committee, and detailed some of the issues under discussion including funding, not raising property tax, and the inequity throughout the state schools because of lack of money.
- Windham County is the highest spending county in the state on education costs. Education spending is difficult to contain, and as the number of pupils statewide declines, the costs are not reducing. Affordability is a big issue to be grappled with.
- Property Tax issue, 66% of owners pay on their income right now, Emily spoke to the reliability of property tax versus income tax as means of paying for education. Revenue is not keeping up with spending. The State budget has been balanced every year, however.
- Discussion of including pre-K under the education agencies overall. Statewide there are not enough daycares for working families.
- Support of bill that limits powers of local law enforcement against the federal profiling of immigrants
- Marijuana legalization, how to support local producers to do this the "Vermont way" but the pressure is all around us in surrounding states of Massachusetts and Maine as well as Canada to legalize.
- Local voice in impeachment of Trump. Further discussion.
- Question to Emily from Robin MacArthur of MacArthur Road regarding our chances of being granted an alternative structure for the school. Emily applauded the board and community for our engagement on Act 46. She said that

modifications are in the works and the many proposals should hopefully allow for alternatives, especially for very rural schools. Act 46 is not going away. Flexible Pathways legislation and performance standards.

- Applause for Emily Long 12:22 pm

**Motion made and seconded to adjourn for lunch and suspend the meeting until reconvened at 1:25 pm**

**So voted by unanimous voice vote.**

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Reconvened at 1:26 pm, Moderator urges discussion limited to unheard aspects of Act 46.

- Lucy Gratwick of Lyman Hill Road, who is on the Act 46 Study Committee, spoke that this is an opportunity to move the school forward, and regardless of the outcome of the vote.
- Steve Giard of Hughes Road, spoke about the formation of Marlboro Elementary School in 1954 from the one room schoolhouses, and how one size does not fit all, and we all pay taxes and questioned how much more can we absorb in taxes.

Motion made by T Hunter Wilson & seconded by Jean Boardman to adjourn the Special School District Meeting.

So voted by unanimous voice vote.

Special School Meeting adjourned at 1:31 pm.