

TOWN OF MARLBORO, VERMONT
~ MINUTES ~
SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING - MARCH 3, 2020

Moderator Steven John called the meeting to order at 9:16 AM and read out the warning:

The legal voters of the Town School District of Marlboro, Vermont, are hereby notified and warned to meet in the Town House of said Marlboro on Tuesday, March 3, 2020, at 9:10 AM to consider and act upon the following Articles:

Article 1: To elect a Moderator for a one year term.

Steven John was nominated by Clarence Boston and seconded by Nora Wilson.

So moved by Sharon Tappan and seconded by Clarence Boston that the nominations be closed, and that the Clerk cast a single ballot.

So voted by unanimous voice vote.

Steven John elected Moderator for a one-year term.

The School Directors Douglas Korb, Dan MacArthur, Celena Romo, & David Holzapfel took the dais.

**Article 2: To elect : One (1) School Director for a three-year term ending 2023.
Two (2) School Directors for one-year terms ending 2021.**

Steven John noted the polls will be open on Tuesday, March 3rd, 2020 from 10:00 AM until 7:00 PM in the Marlboro Town Office for the purpose of electing the above School Director positions by Australian Ballot.

Article 3: To compensate the Directors of the Marlboro School District \$500 each.

So moved by Jonathan Morse and seconded by Beth McDermet.

No discussion followed.

So voted by unanimous voice vote.

Compensation for School Directors set at \$500/year each.

Article 4: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the School Directors to borrow in anticipation of revenue.

So moved by Bill Esses and seconded by Clarence Boston.

So voted by unanimous voice vote.

School Directors are authorized to borrow in anticipation of revenue.

Article 5: "Shall the voters of the Marlboro School District approve the school board to expend \$3,066,776 which is the amount the School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year." It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$21,584 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 9% higher than spending for the current year.

So moved by T Hunter Wilson and seconded by Nora Wilson.

Discussion followed:

- Chris Landin asked about the excess spending threshold on line 25 of page 58.
- Chair Douglas Korb discussed this budget, and why the homestead tax rate may go up as much as \$0.30 or 18%. We are not the only district with similar increases. A pamphlet that was distributed shows many of the tax rates from other surrounding towns which show we're in the middle of the range.
 - The school building needs many capital improvements and is at capacity right now. Marlboro is one of the few schools in the area in which enrollment continues to increase.
 - Doug talked about the pupil weighting study recently released which shows the inequity that has been applied State-wide as a result of Act 60. Doug urges people to write their legislators and that concern with the tax rate will turn to outrage the more they learn about the education funding system.
 - Student teacher ratio has gone up (more pupils per teacher). Transportation has gone up since we have leased a new bus, but it is always cheaper for us to have our own transportation.
 - The excess spending threshold penalty is around \$200,000 and the board looked at cutting all the specials which only reduced the budget by \$130,000, so this was not a prudent choice.
 - Many improvements are needed to the building (there are gallons of water pouring into some of the classrooms from the leaky roof) and fixing the deferred maintenance will make our tax rate increase.
- Michael Bills asked what the employee benefits are and since he is self-employed he pays his own so why should we pay for this. Dan MacArthur stated that the State law has mandated this change so the Board did not have discretion.
- Nora Wilson asked about the student weighting system. Doug responded that the legislature will be holding a hearing soon, and that the majority of southern Vermont schools are feeling these increases in tax rates, while state-wide increases were smaller.
- Jonathan Morse asked about the 25% increase in the school population. Doug said if we can increase the space available inside the school, we will likely be able to tuition in students which could bring revenue.
- Charlene Morse asked about the cost of bringing the Meeting House Pre-School over to Marlboro Elementary School. Principal Wayne Kermenski stated that in fact the renovations were all covered by the Meeting House board gift of money to the school upon their closing.
- Catharine Hamilton asked about the possibility of taking over buildings at Marlboro College. Celena Romo and Dan MacArthur submitted a request to the College to see about the use of five buildings on campus and started the process of comparing the cost of moving to the capital improvements needed at MES.
- Paul Butler wondered about the general state of affairs with the demographic changes in the town and the Marlboro College closure. He noted our cost per pupil is similar to Boston and other large eastern cities.
- Steven Giard appreciates the effort put forth by the board, and wondered if the Supervisory Union does enough to curtail costs? Doug said they have cut staff and Celena said that dues to the SU is mostly for administrative costs and special education.
- David Elliott wondered if it is a good idea to wait for the Legislature to change a law they haven't changed in 20 years. Doug said they will make hard cuts if necessary but is optimistic that the pressure is growing on the legislature to make changes to the pupil weighting system.
- T Hunter Wilson spoke about the pupil weighting system and is upset that the Legislature has mandated us to pay but have not held themselves to the same principal. Outrage with laughter. The inaction of the Legislature is troubling.
- Dan MacArthur responded to Lauren Poster's question about the income sensitivity program from the State, which allows taxpayers to pay Education tax based on their income.

- Alice Herrick pointed out some numerical difficulties in one of the handouts. Dan acknowledged his error.
- Pam Burke asked about the cost of 3 year olds at MES.
- Tim Whitney wondered about the potential savings of the Junior High going elsewhere and would that help with funding issues with the building. The board stated because we are not merged with other districts the board will need to make very hard decisions in the future about the Junior High.
- Wayne Kermenski spoke about tuitioning in students, with its pluses and minuses.
- Sophie Dennis wondered what would happen if the budget did not pass. Doug Korb stated they would look for places to trim programs but the \$130,000 saved from cutting all the specials would still not lower taxes.
- Lucy Tell spoke about the restrictions financially on passing this budget but appreciates the Board's work but further stated that taxes are getting more difficult to pay.
- Discussion about the salary of the school librarian and various pay rates.
- Andra Horton spoke about how the children would ultimately suffer the most from cuts to the current budget.

Nora Wilson called the question, seconded by Sophie Dennis.

So voted by unanimous voice vote to close discussion.

Dan MacArthur calls for a paper ballot vote on this article, followed by more than 7 hands in approval. The Justices of the Peace begin the process of distributing the paper ballots and explain the order of operation. Voters state their name to the Justices of the Peace and deposit their ballots by seating row, followed by a recess for counting the ballots. ~ *Called back to order at 11:01 AM* ~

Yes : 88
 No : 29
 Spoiled : 1

The voters of the Marlboro School District approved the School Board to expend \$3,066,776 for the ensuing fiscal year.

Article 6: To see if the voters of the Town School District will authorize the School Directors to spend any grants or other funds received by the District for school purposes.

So moved by Clarence Boston and seconded by Nancy Anderson.

So voted by unanimous voice vote.

School Directors are authorized to spend any grants or other funds received by the District for school purposes.

Article 7: To transact any other legal business that may come before the Meeting.

- David Holzapfel spoke to the pupil weighting issue and how the education tax is penalizing our town by a system which has been proven by the State's studies to be unfair. He pointed to a pamphlet distributed by the School Board which shows where to send your grievances with the current funding system.
 - T Hunter Wilson wanted to make clear that the issue of fairness is what is at stake, and that Act 60 was made to fairly distribute funds to rural schools. And the Legislature's inaction at keeping fairness over these last two decades is in question.
- David Holzapfel proposed specific language to be sent to the State. This is non-binding.

- Draft of a letter be sent by the School Board to the Legislature:

“To Whom It May Concern,

The 2019 Pupil Weighting Study demonstrates that the Education Taxes for the Marlboro School District have been unjustly calculated for well over a decade. This year the Town’s taxpayers are being assessed a penalty of more than \$200,000 because our school budget exceeds the spending caps placed upon it by a flawed, inequitable Weighting System.

Therefore, rather than add insult to many years of injury, the voters of the Marlboro School District petition that the penalty fee be removed from their Education Tax burden for this year and recommend that the Legislature will likewise hold harmless other Vermont towns.”

- More discussion regarding the above statement, including the actions needed by townspeople as well as contact with our legislators.

Clarence Boston called the question, seconded by Andrew Richardson.

Voted unanimously that the School Directors finalize the letter. The Board asks that voters send their letter by March 9, 2020. In addition, there is a petition circulating at Town Meeting lunch which states the same as the letter.

Motion made by Andrew Richardson and seconded by Nora Wilson to adjourn meeting.

School Meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Forrest Holzapfel, Town Clerk



Douglas Korb, Chair School Board



Linda Peters, Justice of the Peace & Treasurer