

Greensboro Selectboard

January 14, 2025 Special Meeting

MINUTES

[This was a hybrid meeting held at the Collier Room at the Town Hall]

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Bobbie Nisbet, David Kelley, Eric Hanson

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Ellen Celnik, MacNeil

OTHERS PRESENT in person: Kim Greaves, Josh Karp

OTHERS PRESENT remote: Peter Romans, Margaret MacLean, Davis Barnett, Gary Circosta, Christine Armstrong, Elissa Mackin

CALLED TO ORDER: 10 AM

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Peter proposed discussing 1) a 1% local option tax, 2) the bill for a new beaver deceiver on Whetstone Brook Rd., 3) the road crew union contract.

Eric asked board members which of these they'd like to add to the agenda. The board agreed to add discussion of the local option tax.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL ALLIANCE

David said he was part of a group that appealed Act 46 to the VT Supreme Court on behalf of over 30 small communities who were being forced to merge with other districts, and possibly close their small rural elementary schools. Their appeal effort failed and a number of small schools have been forced to close.

Margaret MacLean is director of the Rural Schools Collaborative and has 50 years experience in education. She said with the perception that property taxes are out of control, the state is looking at further school consolidation and enrollment thresholds. A consultant recommended that the state consider a school enrollment threshold of 120 students, below which a school would be forced to close.

Margaret said many understand that schools and communities are intertwined and believe local communities should be able to make their own decisions about their small schools. One size does not fit all, Vermont has diverse geography and decisions made in Montpelier can result in long bus rides for kids. For example, the Roxbury school was forced to close and now students have to ride the bus for two hours and 20 minutes a day. Who wants to live in a town where your kids are bussed hours every day to a faraway school?

Roxbury now has an empty school building. The Montpelier town school district owns the building and while they're willing to sell it to Roxbury for \$1, the building costs \$60k a year to maintain. Selectboards are an important part of these discussions because they may be the ones with empty school buildings to manage.

Margaret is reaching out to communities with school enrollments under this threshold about forming a new organization called the Community Schools Alliance (CSA). If enough communities join a steering committee will be formed and the group will work together to bring their voices to the legislature. If the state continues to propose mergers and forced closures, the group will ask that this be done with due process. Margaret said it was a mistake that the state forced Greensboro into a merger against the wishes of the electorate. She asked the selectboard to support the formation of the CSA.

Eric asked whether members of the CSA would be asked to contribute funds. Margaret said while this would initially just be an alliance, if the steering committee decided to hire a lobbyist, funds might be needed.

David said when he was working to appeal Act 46, financial contributions from communities were voluntary and most attorneys who were involved worked for free. David made the following motion:

The board agrees to join the Community Schools Alliance.

Bobbie seconded the motion. She asked if the town needs to appoint members to the CSA and if so, what the time commitment would be. Margaret said they just need one town contact and David volunteered.

The vote was held, and the motion carried unanimously. Margaret said Greensboro is the first selectboard that's voted to join. The Peacham and Craftsbury school boards are in favor of joining, and she hoped these town selectboards will follow Greensboro's lead.

REVISIONS TO TOWN MEETING WARNING

Peter said town meeting would be the perfect time to hold a public vote on the 1% local option tax, and asked that it be added to the warning. The recent planning commission survey indicated that many were supportive of enacting this tax, which would be an ongoing source of revenue and would alleviate some of the tax burden on residents. It is thought that this tax could raise \$10k annually and increase over time. Peter volunteered to speak about the local option tax at town meeting.

David said Vermont is the third most heavily-taxed state, and asked who would be paying this tax. Peter said it's paid by consumers of rooms, meals, and open-cap alcohol.

David asked about the unlicensed rentals in town who would be avoiding this tax. While Peter agreed there are some of these, he said figuring out the exact amount of revenue to be generated is not so important, what is known is that this would be an ongoing revenue stream.

Gary felt there hasn't been enough public discussion about this tax to hold a vote at town meeting.

Bobbie said it was premature to put the option tax to a vote this year, and suggested a discussion could be had at town meeting under other business. She also asked why this wasn't included on last year's town meeting warning.

Eric said he's opposed to placing this on the warning as it has not been discussed in depth. He suggested the planning commission facilitate conversations on the issue.

Christine said the planning commission has been in favor of this tax for years, and if it was added to the warning the planning commission could provide voters with all the background information before town meeting. She said for an open-cap beer the consumer would be paying 1% additional tax; on a \$2500 weekly rental the 1% tax would be adding just \$25, is this amount onerous?

David said while he's fine with people voting on the tax, he asked Christine to write op-eds in support of the tax to encourage public discourse. He asked whether the selectboard can enact the tax on its own or if this must be brought to a community vote. Peter said he felt it should come before the voters.

When Eric asked if any selectboard members would like to add the local option tax to the warning, none spoke up. Gary thanked selectboard members for their decision.

Discussions of two changes to the town meeting warning.

First, Eric said he will be stepping off the board prior to town meeting, so his selectboard seat will be added to Article 5, noting that it will have one year remaining of a three-year term.

Second, wording on Article 11 will be changed from “*Shall the voters approve the proposed budget in the amount of \$...*” to “*Shall the voters approve the proposed expenditures budget in the amount of \$2,385,453...*”

Davis asked whether the RuralEdge vote will be included in the warning. Eric said this will be an Australian Ballot vote and warned separately. Bobbie made the following motion:

The board accepts the 2025 town meeting warning as amended.

David seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Davis said in 2024 a petition with over 100 names was submitted, requesting that town meeting be held at Lakeview school. He said many people expected this location to be used going forward, adding that some people won’t set foot in the HCA, so holding town meeting there means these residents will be excluded.

Regarding the 2024 petition, Bobbie said the group saw what was happening with Lakeview school, with that year’s sixth grade being the last class to graduate from there. Many who signed the petition had kids who attended the school and were nostalgic about it being a vibrant place all these years, and the group wanted to bring attention to the school and to its uncertain future. Bobbie said holding town meeting at the school was only intended to be a one-year thing.

She said it’s just a handful of folks who don’t want to enter the HCA, and while there may be some downsides to that location you have to look at our demographics, we have to consider the accessibility needs of older folks, the HCA has better chairs, nicer restrooms.

Gary agreed with Davis. There are more than a handful of people who will avoid the HCA, he said, and it’s ironic that the selectboard just voted to join the Community School Alliance yet won’t meet at the school. The school is much more of a town building than the HCA is, meeting there would help keep its future top of mind.

Eric said the town meeting location was discussed and voted on at the last selectboard meeting and the HCA was chosen. Regarding the straw poll about location that Eric held at that meeting, Elissa said those who joined remotely were excluded from the poll. She agreed that there are many folks in town that don’t want to meet at the HCA.

Eric asked board members if the town meeting location should be reconsidered. David said no, we’ve made a decision for this year.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:45 AM.

Respectfully Submitted, Josh Karp, Selectboard Clerk

AMENDED 2/13/25 J.K.