

MINUTES OF THE LOWELL ANNUAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING 2026

The legal voters of the Town of Lowell, Vermont are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Lowell Graded School on **TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.** to act on the following articles of business:

Note: The Town of Lowell has a checklist of 796 eligible voters. The number of votes cast for the North Country High School Budget was 53 total votes: 20-Yes , 32-No, 1-Blank

- The School District Meeting was called to order at 1:27 p.m.
- Before going forward with the annual school meeting, the Moderator announced that Mark Higley would like to have a word with the town's people. Thank you. All right well I'm changing my lineup here because I went to Eden, Westfield, Jay, Troy, and now back here I'm going to change my lineup a little bit just after hearing the discussion before lunch it sounds like you're pretty upset with some things and before i get started though i just want as sounds like it was already mentioned but i want to give a shout out to the road crew as far as uh keeping the roads up this winter i heard there was a mention already but i think they've done a great job especially with this winter so like i said i usually end up with a couple of positive things that we've done but I'm going to start out with them for those who don't know for years we've been trying to exempt military pensions and survivors benefits we're one of the only states that continue to tax these we're trying to keep these younger retired military folks in Vermont so they'll have a reason to stay in Vermont and they'll have a reason to stay in Vermont so they'll have a reason to stay here and actually go back to work we got that accomplished last year so anybody who retires making up to 125 000 or less is uh totally exempt from Vermont taxes which is huge and that actually goes up to 175 000 of graduated deduction from there um the other thing is uh for veterans any veteran that makes under twenty five thousand dollars there's a 250 refundable credit uh for low-income veterans uh that's new uh the Vermont child tax credit those of you that take advantage of that uh the maximum age to qualify was five now it's up to six year olds so an additional year and that's a fully refundable credit provides up to a thousand dollars per child the earned income tax credit expanded to workers without qualifying children is to now match 100 of the federal earned income tax credit the was previously 38 percent and finally uh those of you that are on social security it looks like a bunch of us here um we've increased the eligibility limits for that for exempt from uh taxation and it went from 50 000 to 55 000 for single filers and head of household 65 000 to 70 000 for a couple's filing junk so those are a few things that we got accomplished last year and i certainly think they're positive for the program I don't know. Another issue that came out that schools are supposed to have a policy in place this year, and that's the use of cell phones by your students. There's certain requirements of some that could still possibly use them for some educational purposes, but again, schools are supposed to have a policy not allowing students to use cell phones during school time. Another issue that the Senate is working on initially, you may have heard that New Hampshire did away with their vehicle inspections. They're having a little bit of an issue, I think, with some of the air quality standards, but Vermont is trying to, and I think it's bipartisan, looking at right now maybe an every-other year option. Currently, \$8 out of your inspection goes to the state, and that's a lot. I mean, whatever amount you pay for your inspection from your dealer or your garage is in the garage's pocket. So again, it's talking to state police, sheriff's departments, municipal police that really aren't enforcing that because there's just so many folks that haven't been doing it, and talking to constituents about having a plow truck or whatever it might be, that they have a rusty fender, and having to spend \$400, \$600, \$800 to just bundle that up is getting a little ridiculous, and the rules that DMV are going to have to come up with are going to be safety-related and not so much, you know, rust in certain areas that doesn't have a safety issue. And I guess Act 73, that's the big bill on which we've been working. That's the education reform bill. I certainly support aspects of it. The foundation formula, I think, is huge. When it comes to Vermont, it's the only state now, really, that has all the towns put together their budgets, send the budgets to the state. The state uses the total grant list and comes up with that amount for our property taxes. And the property taxes is where the bulk of the money comes from to pay for education. So, I'm hoping that'll help resolve some of that. My concerns around it is there are a couple of provisions. There's... what they call RADs, Regional Assessment Districts, which are going to be created around the new municipal districts or the new education districts. It's going to take away our Board of Civil Authority and have a Regional Board of Civil Authority for appeals. There's going to be an equalization study for that RAD, that Regional Assessment District. that's a concern and then there's a category change right now we have homestead category and non-homestead category, so homestead is for all you folks who live here and file your homestead declaration the non-homestead is for businesses and any second homes in the life now they want to have a third category which is non-homestead residential and that's for all second homes and Airbnb's and that sort of thing. The concern I have is a lot more work on the Worcestershire part, as well as the possibility of a factor of two to multiply by the homestead rate. So, it could be very extreme for a lot of Vermonters as well, because not all out-of-state folks own second homes or camps in the state.

And I've heard from a lot of people that their Airbnb that they have is something they have to have to pay the taxes and keep living here in Vermont. So that's a concern. And I guess, just finally, if I could, another big issue for me has always been the number of bills down there that is trying to tie up rural land. Gordon mentioned one of them a little bit. That's Act 181. It was supposed to eliminate some of the Act 250.

There are three guidelines for construction in village centers and downtown areas. Part of it, I believe, is good, but they moved out into the rural areas, and they're having a road rule. Anything over 800 feet long, if you put it on a road, will require Act 250 permits to get where we're getting to. And then there's Tier 3, which is the state mapping out wild crossings. Wild crossings. Wild crossings and things like that, with really no input from property owners. We're trying to adjust some of that so that if that really goes through, that land that's being tied up would only be assessed at a use value. And then finally, the 30 by 30 and 50 by 50. That's conserving 30 percent of our land by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050. Again, I just had four folks come up and testify from the Forest Products Association and loggers and individual property owners that are in the current use program how important it is to keep that program alive and how it should be considered in the 50 by 50 conservation land in Vermont.

It's 2.5 million acres out of the 5.9 million acres statewide in forest land. They already have 1.6 million acres conserved the way they want it, but they don't consider current use of land protected, fully protected, in other words, in permanent duty forever. And that's a concern for me as many others, and we've got to keep our forest products industry alive and our agriculture industry alive, and we're not going to do it if we tie it down this way in Vermont. So, I appreciate that. There's certainly a lot more going on.

- There were a few questions after Mark Higley's updates, and they were answered accordingly.

SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING:

ARTICLE 1: To ELECT SCHOOL MODERATOR for the ensuing year.

- Alden Warner nominated: voice vote/carried.
- **ALDEN WARNER – ELECTED**

ARTICLE 2: To ELECT A SCHOOL DISTRICT DIRECTOR for a three- year term.

- Jenna Delva was nominated; voice vote/carried.
- Moderator asked the Clerk to cast one ballot for Jenna Delva. The Clerk then verified that one vote had been cast and put in an envelope for the record.
- **JENNA DELVA-ELECTED**

ARTICLE 3: To ELECT a UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT DIRECTOR for a three-year term.

- No one nominated
- Someone asked to have the job description explained for this job. Steve Mason, who had the job in prior years, spoke to this and stated: So, it means going to meetings for the Union High School and voting on issues, just like a school board member, except there are more meetings.
- The Moderator stated that since no one was nominated or elected that the School Board would need to find someone to fill this position.
- No one elected

ARTICLE 4: SHALL THE VOTERS OF THE LOWELL TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVE THE SCHOOL BOARD TO EXPEND **\$2,487,317**, WHICH IS THE AMOUNT THE SCHOOL BOARD HAS DETERMINED TO BE NECESSARY FOR THE ENSUING FISCAL YEAR? THE DISTRICT ESTIMATES THAT THIS PROPOSED BUDGET, IF APPROVED, WILL RESULT IN PER PUPIL EDUCATION, SPENDING OF **\$12,231**, WHICH IS **4.49%** LOWER THAN PER PUPIL EDUCATION SPENDING FOR THE CURRENT YEAR.

- Motion made and seconded.
- Motion was made to amend the budget back to last year's amount of \$2,387,126.
- The next question was how they arrive to this amount with the low number of students. Shauna Richardson, School Board Director Chairperson answered: so, the calculation for the per-pupil spending is determined by this. The calculation is determined by the State. Every school in the state uses the same formula to determine what their per-pupil spending is. So that's where that \$12,000 comes from. It's based on what the state says is included in how you calculate the amount of student rights. So, there's an adjustment for like preschoolers who are on a partial day and that sort of thing. So, there's a long-term weighted daily average that's used as part of that calculation and it determines what the per-pupil spending is. We're locked into the formula. We just plug in the numbers that they say to plug in and that's how you get to that \$12,000 that we're talking about. Which is a decrease of almost 4.5%. from last year you know yes there's a slight increase in budget

of \$100,000 somebody asked where that came from we had to renegotiate both the support staff and the certified teacher contracts this year we cut as much as we possibly could out of the budget there's a long-term teacher who's retiring this year that position is not being backfilled we've ripped that for the moment because of the pupil count in the building as a way of saving money so you know we're looking to be as fiscally responsible as we possibly can there still continues to be a great deal of state mandated services and you can't not supply those things right so there's a lot that we have no real control over as far as what the value of that is because it's mandated that we must supply those services to our children.

- Question was asked: On salaries, it shows the principal going from \$100,000 to \$114,400. That's quite an increase for one year in your salary. I was just wondering what the reason for this. Shauna answered: So, district-wide, we have been very low on salaries for support staff, for certified teachers, for administrators. There's been a push to try to level that out a bit. It's hard to hire. We've had positions that are open for more than a year that we can't fill because we weren't paying competitive wages, and so there's been a push to try to make those wages more competitive, and that's part of the equalization on some of that.
- There was a question asked about the North Country School budget, and Shauna stated that the Lowell school has no control over the North Country school budget. Even though I'm on this school board and attend North Country meetings, there are a lot of things in the North country school that I am not privy to, so I can't speak to anything on the North Country Budget.
- Question was asked where does this school rank in education level standards? Answer was that they didn't have those numbers at this moment.
- Question was asked does the State offer special funding for stampeding programs and does the state cover these programs? Answer was that they utilize all the State funding they can, but it does not cover all the cost.
- Steve Mason Revisited a question and answered it to clarify: How does the NCSU budget get approved? In every town sends a representative to the supervisor union. Those representatives meet once a year to approve the supervisor union budget. So that budget is approved by a group of local school board members who not only are on the local school board but are also on the supervisor union board. Is that clear to everybody? There was a unanimous yes.
- The Moderator stated that is there are no more questions than we are back to the Question of all those in favor of Article 4 as written please say Aye, those opposed please say Neigh. The Aye's appear to have it, but if you feel that it is important to challenge the Moderator and important to show hands, which is up to you, but in my opinion the Aye's have it. No one challenged
- Article was passed by voice vote.

ARTICLE 5: SHALL THE VOTERS LOWELL TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT AUTHURIZE THE BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS TO TRANSFER TO THE BUILDING MAINTENANCE FUND \$150,000 OF UNALLICATED, UNAUDITED GENERAL FUND BALANCE FROM THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR?

- Motion made and seconded.
- Question was asked why? The answer was to have reserved money to help with the high costs of building maintenance of aging systems, you never know when something will fail and it can be very costly.
- Jenna Delva stated at the meeting that anyone who would like to come to a school board meeting are welcome anytime, so please come join us.
- Darren asked a question that was directed to Mark Higley: I hear a lot of talk about consolidating schools throughout districts, and obviously they're not doing anything, but if there's \$150,000, you're going to have \$300,000 in this account for the building. If they decided to consolidate schools and they haven't spent this money, where does that money go? Does that money come back to the towns, or does that money get allocated across the supervisor union? Mark answered: That's something that really hasn't been completely worked out yet, but it could be an issue as to where the money goes and who pays for it in the overall district.
- Questions was called.
- Show of 7 hands to vote paper ballot was requested by the Moderator, more than Seven hands were raised.
- The Moderator instructed the voters to vote by paper ballot, Yes to pass the Article, and No to not pass the Article. Total-66 votes, Yes-41, No-23, Spoiled-2
- Article was passed by Yes vote.

NOTE: There was no article for non-binding business, or to adjourn on this year's warning. Moderator allowed the meeting to adjourn.

- Moderator asked for motion to adjourn. Motion made and seconded. Voice vote carried.
- Meeting adjourned 2:17 p.m.

Attest:

MODERATOR: Alden Warner _____

SCHOOL BOARD DIRECTOR: Shauna Richardson _____

Received for recording in Town Proceeding Book

Attest: Christy M. Pion- Town Clerk