

**Special Town Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2013
New Haven, Vermont**

The legal voters of the Town of New Haven are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Town Hall in New Haven, Vermont on **Monday, May 20, 2013 at 7:00 PM** to act on Articles 1 and 4; and on **Tuesday, May 21, 2013 from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM** to vote by Australian Ballot on Articles 2 and 3.

Moderator, Lanny Smith introduced himself and Selectboard members, Pam Marsh, Kathleen Ready, Charlie Roy, Roger Boise and Town Clerk, Pam Kingman. Kathy Barrett was unable to attend tonight's meeting due to health reasons.

Moderator, Lanny Smith opened the meeting at 7:05 pm, asking all to be civil to each other, and stand and state your name when speaking.

Article 1. Shall the voters of the Town of New Haven vote to change the time of the Annual Town Meeting to 6:30pm, on the first Monday before the first Tuesday in March each year?

Tim Bouton made a motion to approve Article 1, seconded by Brad Bull.

Andy Dykstra – Asked why we are moving the time of the meeting, as it would only be a half an hour earlier.

Moderator, Lanny Smith – Town Meeting currently begins at 4:00 pm. This year both the School Meeting and Town Meeting were over by 5:10 pm. Many townfolk were very upset that they missed both meetings.

Lanny and the Selectboard received several phone calls. There will still be the benefit dinner, which will begin at 5:30pm. The benefit dinner is a fundraiser that usually is hosted by the Boy Scouts, Beeman PTO and occasionally the Girl Scouts. Suzy Roorda said it's open to all who may want to host a fundraiser dinner. John Madden – Article 3 we are going to vote on whether or not all monetary items should be voted on by voice vote. He is concerned that this may make the meetings run very late, he suggests moving Town Meeting to Saturday.

Several people thought Saturday might be a good option.

Pam Marsh – If John Madden wants to amend the Article, he may because it is germane to the topic.

John Madden – Made a motion to amend to Article 1, if Article 3 passes to move Town Meeting to the first Saturday before the first Tuesday in March, time to be determined by the Selectboard. There was no second to the amendment, the amendment failed.

There was a little further discussion re the time change, and the moderator put it to a vote.

Article 1 passed.

Article 2. Shall the voters of the Town of New Haven vote to appropriate a

Supplemental General Fund Budget in the amount of \$218,997.33?

Wendy Conant – Would like more information on the money requested in this article.

She met with Treasurer, Barb Torian and Clerk, Pam Kingman for an hour this morning.

She questioned why it has taken 6 months to let the public know that there was an unexplained surplus in the 2013 budget, when the Selectboard knew about it in November. She feels things could have been handled better. The paperwork she looked at today was missing date and time stamps, and she feels it leaves the door open to opportunities for fraudulence.

Pam Marsh – The surplus was discussed at several Selectboard meetings, and the board and the Treasurer tried to find the source. They thought maybe they owed

additional money to the school. Kathy Barrett asked the Superintendent's office in January if we owed them any more money, and she was assured that we did not. There was a follow up email confirming that New Haven did not owe the School District any more money. Generally there is a small surplus at budget time, but not this amount. Perhaps Ed Gorneau who is the business administrator at ANESU could explain it better.

Wendy Conant –She read the Selectboard meeting minutes, and she could find no reference to this surplus, specifically no dollar amount. She said if the dollar amount had been in the minutes people would have questioned this large surplus. She feels it should have been in the newsletter much sooner. It is such a large amount of money that now has to be reconciled with the voters. She has given some notes she typed up to Pam Kingman so that her concerns are documented.

Bev Landon – Requested Moderator. Lanny Smith to recuse himself from moderating this article because he is the Chair of the Mt. Abe School Board.
Lanny Smith recused himself to Board of Civil Authority Member, Susie Leonard.
Bev Landon – This money goes to both schools in our district. The Treasurer paid incorrect final amount of money. This money has already been voted on; she feels the question is moot. This is something the Town Auditors should have found, and they should be held accountable.

ANESU Business Administrator, Ed Gorneau –There is no missing money, no missing appropriation. The State government calculates the state wide school tax in July, then the Treasurer gets a report of what the Town owes the school. The Treasurer received a statement for Beeman and Mt. Abe called a preliminary Grand List. This told her what to remit to both schools after taxes are paid in October. The form the Treasurer received said FY2012 not FY2013. The \$218,997.33 bill from the schools was the final bill. In April, the State finalizes the amount of taxes that are due; this is the true-up. None of this changes the amount the Schools get; they get what is in their approved budgets.
Harvey Smith – What happens if Article 3 gets voted down? Can the Town withhold money from the Schools?

Ed Gorneau – It won't affect the schools, but will affect the town taxes next year.
Pam Marsh – Pam apologized for not finding the source of the surplus prior to Town Meeting. The school budgets have already been approved and have to be paid this year. We can pass this article and pay them now or deficit spend, and have increased taxes in the next budget year. It is difficult to know how the additional \$218,997.33 in this article will affect individual taxes.

We are coming to the end of the town-wide 5 year reappraisal; booklets will come out in June and this may or may not raise taxes.

Pam would like to see the Town switch to a fiscal year to match the schools. She feels using the same fiscal year would increase clarity and decrease the chance of error.

Pam states that there was a proposal to switch from a calendar year budget to a fiscal year budget several years ago and it was voted down.

We recently had an outside audit done to coincide with the Town Report and the professional auditor did not find this mistake.

Brad Bull – This was originally discovered by the Selectboard in November, and Kathy Barrett asked about it, and was told it was paid.

Ed Gorneau – The Superintendent's office wasn't concerned because many towns withhold their delinquent taxes. The numbers don't always "true up" because the number is always changing. The State told the Treasurer the amount to pay in mid-October, and that's when she sent the payment in. The taxpayers have paid all their taxes to the school for this fiscal year. The difference now is the budget has been reduced by the \$218,997.33. Now the town has to find that money somewhere else or come back to the voters.

Fabian Bourgeois – It sounds like the error falls on ANESU.

Ed Gomeau – The Town Treasurer receives the town taxes, the town pays the ANESU. It is the State who decides the amount the town pays the school.
 Dawn Livingston – There is a set amount New Haven paid on the preliminary bill, and New Haven held back, is this a new practice? Why does the money get absorbed back into the General fund when we knew we'd get another bill?

Pam Marsh – The Selectboard approves a budget, but not an actual tax rate. There are a number of complex calculations involved in setting and paying for the school taxes. The state calculates what the school tax rate is for each town based upon the town's common level of appraisal and the number of students. When the state does this the town does not know what the final amount is going to be until the state does the "true up" in April. The Grand List is not set until April 1st, the Town sets the tax rate in July, so the Selectboard does not know what the tax rate will be when the budget is set in late January.

Further discussion showed that the voters that spoke agreed it is better to pay now than to pay later.

Mike Sweeney – What safeguards have been put into place to prevent this from happening again?

Treasurer, Barb Torian - said she was very sorry that this happened: the problem is a miscommunication between the Town and ANESU.

She has spoken with the Superintendent's office to ensure better communication. She has also called area Town Treasurers to discuss the issue and to get suggestions on how to prevent this from happening again. The voters did approve the budget and we are now asking the voters to approve the ability to raise the taxes to cover the budgeted amount.

Pam Marsh – In response to the question what safeguards are being put in place to prevent this from happening again, Pam states that in March the voters voted to eliminate the Auditor positions. The Auditors requested this because they were uncomfortable with what the State statutes required of them. In July, she and Charlie Roy will be working on job descriptions to create a financial oversight committee. The Selectboard is willing to post the budget on the town's website. The Treasurer gives the Selectboard monthly reports which are public information and can easily be posted. She will take into account the minutes issue, they knew they had a surplus, minutes show approved General Fund budget. She invited all to the Selectboard meetings and encouraged anyone with suggestions for the oversight committee to email her or Charlie.

No further discussion.

Lanny Smith returned to the podium.

Article 3. Shall the Town of New Haven vote all monetary items for the General and Road funds including outside agencies by voice vote? By Australian Ballot.

Ed McGuire – 1) Town Meeting should be just like tonight with lots of discussion. People here tonight have become very informed about Article 2, and now we can vote, but not until tomorrow. But we are the most informed. Others haven't heard all the discussion tonight. 2) Ed circulated the petition for this Article. The signatures he got on the petition is the primary reason folks signed it, because they couldn't make it here tonight.

However, technology does allow those who can't make it to stream video into other cities and into homes.

Bev Landon – Refers to article on Front Porch Forum written by Pam Marsh, about the involvement in town meeting decreasing. She spent time in the Town Office looking up the attendance numbers for Town meeting from 1972 – 2013. She would be happy to share with everyone.



Wendy Conant – Travels a lot, physically impossible to attend all Town Meetings; she feels she would be losing her voice if it goes to voice vote only. If Article 3 should pass, then there should be a maximum threshold for amount of money.

Steve Dupoise – The last few years he has not been in Vermont in March, we could use Skype, but we would still have to use absentee ballots. Would like to see things stay the way they are.

John Madden – Town Meeting day used to be just that, it was a full day of the meeting. Voice vote allows voters to amend the articles. That doesn't happen with Australian ballot. But he does agree with Steve Dupoise. He would like to go back to meeting on Saturday.

Article 4. To transact, vote and act upon any further non-binding business which may legally come before this meeting.
Rick Shappy – Suggest we get a microphone system for use at the Town and School Meetings.

Harvey Smith made the motion to adjourn at 8:45pm, seconded by Steve Dupoise. Meeting adjourned at 8:46 pm.

Attest: 
New Haven Town Clerk