

**MINUTES
ANNUAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING
TOWN OF BARNET
MARCH 2, 2010**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. at the Barnet Elementary School gymnasium by Moderator Dennis McLam. The Barnet Elementary School band played the National Anthem. Moderator Dennis McLam led the salute to the flag. Moderator stated that only legal voters on the voter checklist of the Town of Barnet are able to participate by vote or speech in the School District and Town Meetings. Stated that the legal voters may vote to allow non-voters to speak.

1. To elect a Moderator.

- Moderator stated that one-year term of Dennis McLam is expiring.
- Dennis McLam nominated.
- Motion made that nominations cease. Seconded.
- Moderator instructed Town Clerk to cast one ballot for Dennis McLam.

2. To elect a School Director for a term of 3 years.

- Moderator stated that three-year term of Shannon Larocque is expiring.
- Shannon Larocque nominated by Benjamin Bean.
- Mona Marceau made motion that nominations cease. Seconded by Theodore Faris.
- Moderator instructed Town Clerk to cast one ballot for Shannon Larocque.

To elect a School Director for a term of 2 years.

- Moderator stated that two-year term of Lori Werdenschlag is expiring.
- Lori Werdenschlag nominated by William Biddle.
- Mona Marceau made motion that nominations cease. Seconded by William Biddle.
- Moderator instructed Town Clerk to cast one ballot for Lori Werdenschlag.

3. Shall the voters of the Barnet School District authorize the Barnet School Board to transfer \$70,000 from the fund balance reserved for tuition to the FY2011 Budget?

- Motion made to so move. Seconded by Elizabeth McFaul.
- Mona Marceau asked how much will be left in the reserve fund, and if passage of this article would leave the School District short.
 - Shellie Samuels responded: The passage of this article would entirely deplete the reserve fund. However, this fund has not been used since 2005 and the School Board thought this would be an appropriate time to make use of it.
- Passed by voice vote.

4. Shall the school district vote to adopt an expenditure budget as presented for the school year ending June 30, 2011 including an appropriation of a sum of money for the support of schools with provisions for current expenses, capital improvements, a deficit if any, and for other lawful purposes?

- Motion made by Shannon Larocque to amend the amount of this appropriation from the amount stated in the Town Report to accommodate the passage of Article 3.

- James Schenck responded that such amendment is not necessary, as Article 3 caused amendment to the Local Revenues budget, and only the Expenditures budget is voted on in this article.
- Amendment withdrawn.
- Shannon Larocque made motion to adopt an expenditure budget of \$4,235,325 for the school year ending June 30, 2011 including an appropriation of a sum of money for the support of schools with provisions for current expenses, capital improvements, a deficit if any, and for other lawful purposes. Seconded by William Douglas.
- Mona Marceau asked what the total expenditure budget was last year, and requested that the School Board explain the pros and cons of this budget.
 - Lori Werdenschlag responded: This budget is roughly \$10,000 less than last year's. The reduction was caused primarily by eliminating four positions (one teacher and three para-educators), cutting the supplies budget, and not replenishing the long-term maintenance fund. In cutting the budget, the Board did not cut any programs and upheld the School's Strategic Plan.
- John Cook asked why the estimated tax rate is higher than last year if the expenditures budget is lower.
 - James Schenck responded: This effect is caused by several factors outside the control of the School Board. The State of Vermont is not reimbursing the School the usual amount, causing local revenues to drop by \$16,000. This is why the Board introduced Article 3 to enhance local revenues. Changes in enrollment of Barnet students, the amount the State defines as its base rate, and in Barnet's Common Level of Appraisal all caused increases in the tax rate.
- William Graves, making reference to the Town Report, asked why Education Fund Payments are budgeted at \$900,000 less than last year, and if the Town can do anything about this.
 - With permission of the voters, non-voter Robinson Billings, Caledonia Central Supervisory Union Business Manager, responded: On page eighty-one of Town Report is the calculation for determining the tax rate. Part of this calculation, the education grand list, will not be certainly known until August. Only part of the amount listed as Education Fund Payments in the Town Report comes from local taxes. The remainder is payments received by the Barnet Treasurer from the State of Vermont.
 - Shannon Larocque responded: The School Board made "tough decisions" like the cutting of four staff positions. The Board will consider making further cuts next year, which projections indicate will be as challenging as this year. Further cuts this year would have drastically affected the School's strategic plan.
- Mona Marceau asked if there has been progress in negotiations with teachers since the Pre-Town Meeting Public Hearing, and if budget will be affected if the teachers don't take a raise.
 - James Schenck responded: While the School Board is optimistic and hopeful regarding the negotiations, the budget cannot be based on such hopes.
- Mona Marceau asked if a favorable result of negotiations will cause the School Board to bring back the four positions currently slated to be cut.
 - James Schenck responded: This is not the intention of the School Board.
- Kenneth Hammer asked if passing the budget would affect negotiations.
 - James Schenck responded that while this is a fair question, the Board does not feel it would be wise to base the decision regarding passage of the budget on such considerations.

- Shannon Larocque responded that the Barnet School staff has been very helpful and conscious during the budget development process. However the results of negotiations will affect other school districts besides Barnet.
- John Cook stated that \$500,000 in personnel benefits seems high. Asked if negotiations involve benefits and if the Board plans to level-fund teacher compensation in the next budget year.
 - Shannon Larocque responded: Salaries and benefits are always central to teacher contract negotiations. It is still early in negotiations, and would be inappropriate to comment specifically.
- Wayne Berge asked what the health care costs incorporated in this benefit budget are.
 - With permission of the voters, non-voter Robinson Billings responded: There was a three percent increase in health care costs over the previous fiscal year. The family premium is \$17,233, of which the School District pays \$15,501. Full-time staff pays ten percent of the premium.
- Wayne Berge asked the Board if they could address this expense, as ten percent is a low share comparative to state employees and employees of private businesses generally.
 - Shannon Larocque responded: Salaries and benefits are always discussed in contract negotiations. The Board has had some success in the past in increasing the amount of co-pay included in the health care package.
- William Graves stated that Kenneth Hammer's question was valid: Asked if the budget assumes increases in teacher contracts, and stated that it would make more sense not to include the increases in the budget, but to come back to the voters for more money if the result of negotiations demands it.
 - Shannon Larocque responded: Usually increases in contracts are built into the budget, but not specifically disclosed, as this would adversely affect negotiations. The last negotiations were long and eventually went into mediation.
- Marilyn Beattie asked how the cuts in staff would affect the student-to-staff ratio.
 - James Schenck responded: The Board has done a review of State studies of student-to-teacher ratios. According to the State, Barnet School's ratio is 10.79, as compared with a State average of 10.69.
- Mona Marceau asked for the names of the committee appointed to hire the new principal.
 - Louis Bushey responded that on the committee there are two Board members – Louis Bushey and Lori Werdenschlag; two teachers – Susan Roberts and Cindy Mosedale; two staff members – Angel Roy and Nedra Willard; and two community members – Sandra Mings-Lamar and Jeremy Roberts. The committee will have its first meeting tomorrow, March 3, 2010.
 - William Marshall, who is overseeing the committee, commented: There were between twenty-five and thirty resumes submitted. The committee plans to do eight interviews next week. Briefly reviewed the process for hiring.
- Passed by voice vote.

5. To see if the school district will authorize its Board of Directors to borrow money to pay its lawful debts and expenses for the fiscal year which ends June 30, 2011 in an amount not to exceed 90% of the anticipated collection of taxes and receipts of other funds to be used for those purposes?

- Susan Persson made motion to so move. Seconded by Mary Mallon.
- Catherine Hinchey asked how much the School District plans to borrow and if this is a usual practice.

- With permission of the voters, non-voter Robinson Billings responded: This is a usual practice that is necessary for cash-flow purposes. The School District borrows funds and invests any unused funds in an interest-bearing account by which they recoup much of the interest expense. Last year the School District borrowed \$1.2 million.
- Passed by voice vote.

6. To transact any other non-binding business that may legally come before the meeting.

- Susan Persson spoke concerning the Barnet Elementary School building's twentieth anniversary and various activities and community-involved retrospectives planned.
- Melissa Bushey spoke, also regarding aforementioned anniversary plans.
- Leah Benedict spoke concerning proposed legislation in the Vermont State Legislature that could include the restriction of school choice by Barnet high-school students.
 - Shannon Larocque responded: The Board has had discussions about this subject.
- State Representative Leigh Larocque spoke:
 - Concerning the proposed restriction of school choice, stated that he is not in favor of the proposed legislation. Mentioned that there are forms available at the Town Meeting by which residents could state their opposition to it.
 - Concerning various current issues in the Vermont State Legislature.
- Leah Benedict spoke regarding proposed legislation in the Vermont State Legislature that she states would take legislative discretion away from elected officials and give it to the appointed Commissioner of Education.
- Shannon Larocque spoke concerning an emergency generator grant recently received by the School District. The grant is in the amount of \$23,000 and the School District, thanks to a vote at last year's annual meeting, has matching funds available for the installation.
- Shellie Samuels expressed that the School Board wishes to formally thank the retiring principal Kerry Keenan for his years of service to the school.
 - A standing ovation was given for Mr. Keenan.
- Theodore Faris made motion to adjourn. Seconded. Passed by voice vote.
- Meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Dennis McLam, Moderator

Shellie Samuels, School Director

Attest: Benjamin Heisholt, Town Clerk