

**NORWICH TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNUAL MEETING, MARCH 2, 2015**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Moderator Warren Thayer. Rules of the meeting were reviewed. A request from the Moderator for a voice vote to limit the time for speakers for two minutes or three. Vote passed for two minutes.

The Moderator read the next five articles to the public. There was no discussion on these articles.

Article 1. *Elect a Moderator of the Town and School District meeting for one year.*

Article 2. *Elect Town and School District Officers for terms starting in 2015.*

Article 3. *Hear and act on the reports of the Officers of the Town and Town School District.*

Article 4. *Authorize the Board of School Directors to borrow money by issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenues for the next fiscal year in accordance with the provisions of 16 VSA § 562(9).*

Article 5. *Shall the voters of the Norwich Town School District determine and fix the salaries of the School Board members in the sum of \$500 each per year in accordance with the provisions of 16 VSA § 562(5)?*

Article 6. *Shall the voters of the Norwich Town School District appropriate \$5,238,720, necessary for the support of its school for the year beginning July 1, 2015 and ending June 30, 2016?* Neil Odell of the Norwich School Board spoke to this article. Odell began by explaining how the budget, State of Vermont, Property Valuations and enrollments play into setting the tax rate. Odell also spoke of the importance of not exceeding per pupil spending and trying to keep this down.

This year even though the budget is down by 2.22% we will be seeing an increase in the tax rate. Part of this is due to enrollment projections being down. There will be a reduction of one classroom teacher.

The Homestead tax rate is expected to rise by 3.29% from \$1.8059 to \$1.8654. The non-residential rate is expected to increase 2.88% from \$1.5252 to \$1.5692. The biggest increase is the two cent rise in the Homestead in the statewide education tax rate. Without this increase the local rate would increase about 1.23%.

Between 2011 and 2013, enrollments increased to 305 students, but next year's projection is 291. Next year the school will go from 19 Regular classroom teachers to 18 with a 0.6 FTE addition to support the foreign language initiative moving a French teacher down to the Kindergarten level.

The board works with two union groups, one for the teachers and one for the support staff.

This year the CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) has dropped to 97.82%, which is also a factor driving up the tax rate.

Staff development is up \$15,000 for additional learning, the SAU is up 2.9%, there is a decline in debt service relating to the bond. Odell stated that the school is Energy Star Certified and is rated in the top 20% for efficiency in the nation. This year there is no

additional transfer to the reserve funds. Salaries are up \$60,000; tutors and remedial and homebound are down \$34,084; regular education payroll tax and benefits are up \$35,609; tuition – Pre-K are up \$100,000; school administration and payroll tax and benefits are down \$12,602; and custodial services payroll tax and benefits are down \$21,119. These changes produce a total decrease of \$119,044.

Significant budget changes are: special education teacher salaries up \$35,280; special education assistants down \$47,219; payroll tax and benefits down \$18,149; purchased professional & technical services down \$66,550; out of district tuition down \$180,530; special education transportation is up \$12,906; and all other special education is down \$3,100. These changes produce a total decrease of \$262,362.

Tuition revenue is up \$11,800; interest on investments is down \$1,200; and other local revenues are down \$1,580 -- showing that revenue from local sources up \$9,020. Vocational aid is up \$11,716, transportation aid is down \$13,914; special education block grant is up \$9,403; special education expense reimbursement is down \$57,808; special education extraordinary aid is down \$105,750; and essential early education is up \$2,413. The result is that total state revenues are down \$153,941.

Odell noted that the Marion Cross School is ranked the second- best elementary school in the state of Vermont by SchoolDigger.com. It is ranked the sixth best public elementary school nationally by TheBestSchools.org. The school is rated 10 out of 10 by Education.com, and given a grade of A by K12.Niche.com. It is certified as an Energy Star building and is recognized with the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in 2015.

Article 7. *Transact any other business that may legally come before the annual meeting of the Norwich Town School Board.*

Reports by State Representatives:

State Rep. Jim Masland introduced Tim Briglin as our new state representative. Tim is serving on the Health Care Committee. Both representatives are working on reform in baby steps. They are looking towards cost shifting on Medicare and for more resources to allow all Vermonters to have access to Primary Care. Briglin also noted that the legislature is working on the issue of guns, vaccines for children and the legalization of marijuana. There was a proposed bill on the budget and education the previous Friday that could change the way we pay for education.

Masland serves on the Ways and Means Committee and noted that the education bill will make a big difference is how we educate and pay for education. Masland said the legislature is working on new taxes and going through many difficult cuts. In spite of cuts to the budget, we are beginning to see revenue increase very slowly. The federal government has cut funding to Medicare by \$30,000,000. We are still suffering cuts from the sequester, and the state loses \$40 million to \$50 million a year in tax revenue due to internet sales.

Tim and Jim are both working on legislation to help Norwich rebuild the town pool, which was destroyed by Tropical Storm Irene.

Article 8. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich approve a gross spending General Town Budget of \$4,222,828 plus state and federal grants and gifts consistent with budgeted programs for the period July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016?* Chipper Ashley spoke to this article. He started by saying that three members of the board supported this article while two opposed. The differences are based on what they feel are Norwich's needs,

appropriate spending totals and town operations. Town Manager Neil Fulton has proposed a budget that maintains the current levels of service and current staffing with no new staff.

The most notable increases are \$22,973 for the continuation of the three-year property assessments, 4% salaries increases based on the estimated increase in the DPI and the grade and step schedule. Health Insurance has increased by 3.62%, which is less than the estimated 5.7% increase. Employees will be paying a larger percentage of their health insurance. The justices of the peace will receive and increase from \$5.00 per hour to \$8.75 per hour-- the first increase for the justices in more than 22 years.

Ashley mentioned that there were seven public meetings on the budget in November, December and January as the board discussed various items with little or no attendance from the public.

Other increases to the budget are: \$25,000 for professional services; VLCT membership \$361; Two River Planning Commission \$273; Emergency Management \$5,000 for repairs and replacement for town generators; Solid Waste \$5,000 to explore ideas for solution for the disposal of regional household hazardous waste in the towns of Norwich, Hanover, Hartford and Lebanon; Property and Casualty Insurance is up \$4,832; worker's compensation insurance is up \$46,477; and \$1,540 to the Energy Committee which will allow us to appropriate money to S.E.R.G. The increase in VLCT, Two Rivers, Property and Workers Comp increases all came after the proposed budget was considered.

Decreases in the budget are; \$15,000 in professional services; \$500 in the designated fund for the tennis courts; VIBRS \$1,550; dust control \$5,000; other projects \$5,000; repairs and maintenance is down \$500.

Overall town expenditures are up \$61,274 or an increase of 1.5% without other articles.

We have a four-year bargaining agreement and future health insurance increases will be shared between the town and employees.

Revenues have been dropping for both the Recreation Department and in the Solid Waste Department.

Moran spoke in favor of this budget saying that it is a very difficult process and expressed that 44% of our budget is related to the compensation and benefits for the employees.

Cook spoke against this budget saying that they could have done better and that each year through the hard work of the department heads we give back about \$100,000.

Ashley spoke in favor of the budget explaining that the money returned either goes towards reducing the tax rate in the next year or it goes into an undesignated fund and is used in emergencies such as Tropical Storm Irene.

Article 9. *Shall general obligation bonds of the Town of Norwich in an amount not to exceed Three Million Dollars (\$3,000,000), subject to reduction from available state and federal grants-in-aid, be issued to finance the cost of public safety buildings and public works buildings improvements, the aggregate estimated cost of such improvements being Three Million Dollars?* Steve Flanders spoke on this article. This project has been discussed since 2000. This will replace the existing police station and combine space with the fire station. There is a tentative proposal to replace the existing fire apparatus bay sometime in the future. The current police station was built in 1957 as a ranch house. It

does not have adequate space to interview people, for training personnel, or for secure evidence storage. The project includes the removal and disposal of the existing police station, an increase the parking area, new septic system with storm drains and a six inch waterline.

Fire Department needs include more training space, more parking, showers and space for gear and equipment storage and decontamination.

The bond would repair and enlarge the highway building including: repairing the roof and fixing structural problems; providing heated storage for the plow trucks; adding a shed; and installing solar panels on the roof with a solar tenant which will offset the cost. This will also allow for: more space for the maintenance of town vehicles; an office for the DPW director; and a locker room and break room for the employees. This will help give storage for the 1.2 million in town equipment. Currently we cannot keep the plow trucks covered, there is no office for the department head and there is no locker room or conference room for staff. The garage was built in 1976 and has a rusted leaky roof and other safety issues.

Flanders noted that at this time bond rates are historically low and expected to be 3.1% for 30 years. The tax required/\$100k for FY 2015: \$18.60 per hundred, FY 2017 \$35.20 per hundred and FY 2027 \$20.90 per hundred and interest of \$1.6 million.

Costs for police and fire would be for an administrative building and repairs to the fire station of \$2.3 million. This would encompass an 8500- square- foot building costing \$1.5 million, at \$175 per square foot for the building only. Site work would be \$409,000, \$223/square foot. Other costs would be \$151,000 for A/E; \$150,000 for contingency; \$103,000 for owners' costs such as permitting fees and rent to house the police department.

For Public works, costs would be \$0.7 million for the garage repair and expansion and shed. Cost of the shed will partially be offset by the solar panel.

During the budgeting phase the Selectboard identified the functions required and the amount of space needed to perform them. A conceptual design was done for the site, and estimates were made on cost per unit such as area and equipment. The board prepared a budget for the bonding. The design/construction phase will come after the Selectboard finalizes the functions, and approves a design. Then a bid package will be prepared with detailed drawings.

Flanders discussed bonding versus a mortgage: Mortgages are not authorized for towns, there are constant payments, declining interest and increasing principal. Total interest would be \$1.6 million and they need surety collateral.

Bonds: Variable annual payments, constant principal reduction, declining interest and total interest of \$1.6 million. Full faith and credit surety of the municipality, (No collateral).

If the bid were to exceed the bond (which is unlikely to occur) the most qualified bidder will provide a price for a reduced scope.

Speaking against the bond, Goulet feels that the building of 8,500- square -feet is too much. When this started it was a 4,000- square- foot building and went from this to a two-story building and 8,500 square feet. Goulet feels that 1,000 square feet of this is in stairs and elevators and feels that we still have time to fix and meet the needs of the departments. Goulet said that this has been thrown together in the last six months and can be cut in half or by one third, for this is 30 years and is a huge debt. Also he would

like to address the needs and wants and feels the board knows the needs. Goulet said the sky is not falling and there is still time, a special election would cost about \$1,000 which is about the cost of the mailing the town paid for.

Moran spoke in favor of the bond reinforcing that the rate is a great rate and if we wait it will cost the town money. He stated that he resisted in voting for this as he believed that the cost would be closer to \$1 million dollars than the \$3 million. Moran noted that in the survey the town sent out that most people supported spending 10% more in taxes to fix our current buildings. He firmly believes that this is a good deal and will never be cheaper; he hopes the town votes in favor of it.

There was general discussion surrounding this issue. This discussion included much support for the buildings and improvements and the need to approve this article; that maybe this amount may not be enough to make the necessary improvements.

Those opposing this article said article included the cost and cost to the tax payer, the cost to the lower- income families is too and that the high taxes in this town are forcing out people with lower income or fixed income, making this a less diverse town. Also, that maybe the town did not spend enough time finding a better location to moving the police and fire to another location entirely.

Article 10. *Shall the Town enter into a telecommunications union district to be known as the East Central Vermont Telecommunications District, under the provisions of Subchapter 3, Chapter 121 of Title 24, Vermont Statutes Annotated?* Irv Thomae, who is chairman of the Board of EC Fiber (Katie Smith is our alternate), said that this is a no cost article. EC Fiber organized eight years ago by an inter-local contract to bring fiber-optic to 24 towns. They have been able to borrow 6.3 million from 432 district investors and have connected over 1,000 people in parts of a dozen towns. This has been done without taxing the local grand lists. They would like to bring access to the thousands of people who still do not have high- speed internet.

Inter-local contracts are not recognized in other states and even in parts of Vermont, making it difficult to borrow money. By allowing them to reorganize as a municipal utility district it will make it easier to borrow enough money to build out the network more rapidly. This also will be done without using tax dollars.

By passing this article it would allow EC Fiber to reorganize if the Legislature allows them to do so and be able to call a meeting of the entire district.

Article 11. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$12,860 to Advance Transit to be used to help cover operating costs and providing matching funds for grants, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of providing public transportation services to benefit Town residents?* Van Chesnut said that this increase of \$2500 is for the expansion of service on this side of the river. This came about through a planning process of both Vermont and New Hampshire as a need.

The State of Vermont made available a grant for \$200,000, which Advance Transit got for expansion. A 5% local match is needed for the cost of the project. They have asked Hanover for \$10,000 and Hartford for \$30,000 and asking Norwich for a small percentage of \$2500.

Chesnut recommended that we look at the 2014 report on Vermont Transportation website which notes that Advance Transit is one of the most productive lines in the state.

Article 12. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$3,000 to Good Beginnings to be used for those operating expenses that are reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Norwich residents? No discussion.*

Article 13. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$500 to the Green Mountain RSVP & Volunteer Center of Windsor County to develop opportunities for people age 55 and older to positively impact the quality of life in the community through volunteer service, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents? No discussion.*

Article 14. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$2,500 to Headrest to be used for operation of the hotline, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of Norwich callers using the 24-hour hotline? No discussion.*

Article 15. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$1,500 to the Norwich American Legion, to be used for the Legion's Memorial Day observance, such amount being reasonably necessary to provide a dignified event honoring those Town residents who gave all? Demo Sonfronas spoke on behalf of the Legion saying that this money goes towards the Memorial Day Parade.*

Also, the American Legion Post #8 is seeking the names of Norwich veterans who entered military service post 1975 from Norwich and returned to Norwich or retired from military service while a resident of this Town. This will be for a new monument.

Article 16. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$15,000 to the Cemetery Commission under 18 VSA § 5361 to supplement the interest from the Perpetual Care Trust Fund for maintenance of the Town Cemeteries? Jay Van Arman said this is the same amount as the last ten years. This helps pay for the mowing and brush removal for the eleven cemeteries in the Town of Norwich.*

Article 17. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$4,348 to The Child Care Center of Norwich to be used for income sensitive scholarships to Norwich children, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents? Wendy Teller-Elsberg said this is a non-profit organization which helps people who are income sensitized with childcare.*

Article 18. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$8,000 to the Norwich Historical Society and Community Center to support those programs that support the celebration of historic events, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents? Judy Brown thanked the town for past support. They are asking for the same amount as in past years. This year has been amazing for them and our 254- year heritage. This year they completed a multimedia project on farms in Norwich. They have spent the year conserving a cataloging and received the 1901 hearse from the Norwich Cemetery Commission for display as well as a Paul Sample watercolor.*

The Historical Society has had many visits from the Cross School students and still partners on 1st Wednesday's with the Norwich Library.

The Historical Society lost member Nancy Hoggson this year and will miss her and her leadership.

Judy encouraged everyone to stop by and learn and maybe volunteer.

Article 19. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$3,000 to the Norwich Lions Club to be used to underwrite the fireworks for the Norwich Fair in celebration of the 254th year of the Town's Charter?* Henry Scheier spoke thanking the town for its support. The money is used by the Lions Club to the community. The Lions Club would like to continue to provide fireworks to the town as part of its annual fair.

Article 20. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$257,500 to the Norwich Public Library Association, to be used for the operating expenses of the Library?* Lucinda Walker spoke thanking the town for its support. Walker explained that the library is a non-profit entity and that 70% of its operating budget comes from the town. The library raised the rest of its money thru fundraising.

Over the past two weeks it has had 1,900 people come through its doors and had 1,800 items checked out. The community room had been booked twelve times in the last two weeks. Walker again thanked the people.

Lisa Christie chair of the board thanked the librarians for all they do.

Article 21. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$3,750 to SEVCA (Southeastern Vermont Community Action) to be used for emergency needs, referral to and assistance with accessing needed services, financial counseling and food and nutrition education, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents?* Anne Day spoke thanking the town for its support. The organization is asking for the same amount of money as before and said that it is necessary more now than in the past as the legislature makes cuts to budgets.

Article 22. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$4,000 to The Family Place to be used for general program support, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs such as direct service through early intervention, child care payment assistance, healthy baby visits, reach up, welcome baby, parent education, playgroups and other services to benefit Norwich residents and their children?* Arline Rotman said that even though she is no longer on the board now, this is a great organization and is well-run and effective. It has helped 197 families over the last four years with home visits and playgroups 46 in this last year.

It also helped four people get their high school diplomas - an actual diploma and not a G.E.D.

Article 23. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$2,000 to the Upper Valley Trails Alliance to be used for trail planning and work, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents?*
No discussion.

Article 24. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$15,600 to the Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice of VT and NH to help support the home health, maternal and child health and hospice care provided in patients' homes and in community settings, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents?* No discussion.

Article 25. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$5,300 to the White River Council on Aging to be used for home delivered meals, transport and social services, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit senior citizen Town residents?* No discussion.

Article 26. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$1,000 to Windsor County Partners to be used for mentoring youth, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town youth? Nancy Dean said that for 40 years the group has matched adult volunteers with at-risk children. The town has been very faithful since 1974.*

Article 27. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$2,500 to WISE (Women's Information Service) to be used to support WISE's crisis intervention and support services and prevention education, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents? Lisa Christy thanked the town for past support. This past year WISE has helped 30 people in Norwich.*

Article 28. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$3,000 to Youth-In-Action to be used for those operating expenses that are reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Norwich residents? No discussion.*

Article 29. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich require that taxes be paid in U.S. funds in two installments? The first installment will be due and accepted at the Town of Norwich Finance Office on or before 4:30 pm August 14, 2015 and the balance will be due at the same location on or before 4:30 pm February 12, 2016. An official United States Post Office postmark/cancellation (not a postage machine date) will determine the payment date for all mailed payments. Interest on overdue taxes will be charged at 1% per month for the first three months and 1½% per month thereafter. All delinquent taxes will be subject to an 8% collection fee in accordance with Vermont Statutes after February 12, 2016. No discussion.*

Article 30. *Transact any other business that may legally come before the annual Norwich Town Meeting. Ashley moved to honor the memory of Nancy Hoggson for her dedicated service to Norwich over many years as a member of the Selectboard, as chair of the Norwich Historical Preservation Committee and as a truly involved citizen of our town.*

Ashley moved to thank Ed Childs for his many years of service to Norwich on the planning board and on the Selectboard. Ashley moved to thank Warren Thayer for his years of service as town moderator.

A motion moved to honor the above made by Ashley seconded by Day. Motion passed on a voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Bonnie J. Munday,
Norwich Town Clerk



Warren Thayer,
Moderator



Nancy Dean,
Chairman, Board of Civil Authority