

Minutes of The Annual Meeting, March 1, 2016
Town of Norwich, Vermont and
Norwich Town School District

(Draft)

Moderator Thayer called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Rules of the meeting were read. A voice vote allowing speakers two minutes to speak was affirmed.

At this time the Moderator allowed time for Irv Thomae to speak regarding EC-Fiber. Irv noted that EC-Fiber is not funded by Town Taxes. At last years Town Meeting the Town voted to support EC Fiber to enter into a telecommunications union district which gives them the ability to borrow money in 2017. Currently EC-Fiber has currently has 1200 service customers and hopes to finish Towns becoming fully connected or connect a Town from start to finish.

This meeting is called to determine if the Town will:

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 2016.*

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

Article 4. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich approve a gross spending General Town Budget of \$4,327,993 plus state and federal grants and gifts consistent with budgeted programs for the period July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017?*

Article 5. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$17,000 to the Long Term Facility Study Reserve Fund, which has a current balance of \$18,889, to fund Public Safety Facility Architectural/Engineering Services which are estimated to cost \$35,000 to be available upon passage of this Article? Linda Cook spoke to this article. Three Selectboard supported this budget and two were opposed. Cook explained that 47 percent of the budgeted increase will go towards wages. The employees receive a 1.7 % increase based on a step and grade schedule and a 1.45 percent increase COLA, which is based on the CPI. There have been increases in VLCT memberships, a decrease in Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District membership and an increase in insurances. Other increases noted are the repairs to the Highway Garages and the sidewalk reserve fund. There will be an increase in revenues with the increase of the Trash Cards going from \$30.00/bag to 35.00/bag. The total projected increase in this year's budget is 2.49%.*

Steve Flanders then gave a presentation on how the Town sets the Town Tax Rate. (This presentation will be available at the Town Clerk,s Office.)

Article 6. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$27,000 to the Highway Garage Reserve Fund, which has a current balance of \$18,534, for a portion of the estimated local share of \$82,264 for a \$432,968 addition to the Public Works Garage to be available upon passage of this Article? With this money we will be able to put a new roof on the garage, put an office in for the Public Works Director, gives employees more space for a bathroom and breakroom and improve their water supply with a well.*

Article 7. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich advise the Selectboard to use Federal and State monies that were initially allocated for replacement of the Pool Dam, which was not permitted by the Agency of Natural Resources, for Alternate Projects such as removal of the remnants of the Pool dam, an addition to the existing Public Works building and replacement of a culvert on VT Route 132 near Bowen Hill Road? With hopes of still getting money from FEMA based on damages caused by Tropical Storm Irene, we would be able to remove the portion of the dam that washed out and correct the flow of the stream. Also, we will put a culvert in at the intersection of Bowen Hill Road and US Route 132. Tentative word has it that so far our application has made it through the first stage and is now in the hands of FEMA. An affirmative vote will be looked upon favorably to FEMA when it makes its funding decision.*

Article 8. *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 spoke to this article saying that it has not increased from last year. He announced that they now have a new smart phone application which can be downloaded from either Google Play or the Apple Store (for free) which will show you the expected arrival and departure times of the buses in real time.*

Article 9. *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? There was no discussion.*

Article 10. *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? There was no discussion.*

Article 11. *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? There was no discussion.*

Article 12. *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? Commander Lyle Favreau spoke to this article explaining that funds go primarily toward the Memorial Day Parade. Funds also help pay for supplies used when veterans go into our local schools and visit with children*

This past year the Post has undergone some major renovations which updated the kitchen, bathrooms and meeting room. All are invited to stop by to see the renovations made. This will allow people to come in and use the Post as a place to gather for a small donation. Also, the Post is gathering names for a new memorial - possibly placed next to the two at Tracy Hall - for Veterans who served in the Military from 1975 to date.

Article 13. *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? Bob Parker said the commission is tasked with the upkeep of eleven cemeteries in Town the main ones being Hillside, Fairview, Meeting House and the Union Village Cemeteries. We still have an ongoing relationship with the Department of Corrections for mowing, cleaning and up righting stones. This year the Commission had to remove some of the old pine trees due to internal rot.

Article 14. *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?* Jane LeMasurier spoke saying that they deliver high quality and affordable childcare.

Article 15. *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 spoke noting that this will be Norwich's 255th year. The Society has made milestones preserving Norwich History, including the old pedal organ that Fred Metcalf used to play, an Edison Phonograph from the 1940's and a Norwich Family Diary that goes back to the 1850's.

The Historical Society offers workshops, walking tours and other fundraising events to help support them and they thanks the Town for its support.

Article 16. *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 255th year of the Town's Charter?* Henry Scheier said to this article the Lions Club has been active in this Town for sixty five years now. Scheier went through the history of the locations where the fair has been in the past. With the last move from Route 5 South to the current location on the Town Green, the Club has suffered a loss from the parking revenue they were able to collect previously. This is its principal fundraiser of the year they would like to continue with the fireworks display that it has always done and which Town enjoys. It is because of the loss of funds from parking that it is they are asking for this appropriation to be continued by the town as it has been for the last several years..

The Lions helps many people and organizations in the community and are always looking for new members.

Article 17. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$265,000 to the Norwich Public Library Association, to be used for the operating expenses of the Library?* Lucinda Walker said that over the last year they have seen 61,000 people come through the doors of the Library- 4500 in February alone. Walker thanks the Town for its support and to the volunteers who give countless hours to the Library.

Article 18. *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?* Richard Neugass noted a variety of programs SEVCA has to offer such as weatherization, emergencies and a Health Connect Navigator.

Article 19. *Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$6,000 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?* Don McCabe spoke to this article noting that the organization has been in existence for thirty years. It has served 37 families in Norwich and offers accredited high school programs. The Family Place offers tours every Thursday, by reservation.

Article 20. *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?* Pete Griggs spoke to this article thanking the Town its support and asks its support this year.

Article 21. *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?* Cathy Cullen spoke to this article thanking the Town for past support. She noted that the group provided services to 50 patients in Norwich this past year. The VNA provides services to people from birth to death.

Article 22. *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?* Warren Thayer spoke to this article explaining that he is on the Council and that the client base growing. They would appreciate the town's support.

Article 23. *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 spoke to this article saying that this program began 42 years ago. It has level- funded for many years now. This program matches adult mentors with children.

Article 24. *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?* There was no discussion.

Article 25. *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?* Chris Lord spoke to this article thanking the Town for all past support. Youth in Action has 534 students of which about half are from Norwich. It is looking to looking to improve its relationship with Norwich is always looking for ways to reach out to the community.

Article 26. *Vote a five-year extension of the exemption from property taxes previously granted to The University Grange under the provisions of 32 VSA § 3840.* Linda Cook spoke to this article saying that most of us recognize the Grange from its Saturday morning

pancake breakfasts. She noted that the Grange is always looking for new members and volunteers.

Article 27. *Vote a five-year extension of the exemption from property taxes previously granted to the Root District Game Club under the provisions of 32 VSA § 3840. There was no discussion.*

Article 28. *Vote a five-year extension of the exemption from property taxes previously granted to the Beaver Meadow Union Chapel under the provisions of 32 VSA § 3840. There was no discussion.*

Article 29. *Pursuant to 24 VSA § 2741(a)&(c) and 32 VSA § 3832(7), vote to renew and extend for five years the property tax exemption agreements between the Town of Norwich and the Norwich Fire District for two parcels of land owned by the Norwich Fire District, parcel #1 being approximately 350 acres lying southwest of Beaver Meadow Road and adjacent to Charles Brown Brook and parcel #2 being approximately 567 acres lying along Beaver Meadow Road and Tucker Hill Road; to exempt these lands from property tax and to keep in place the deeds conveying the development and recreation rights on said lands to the Town of Norwich, under which deeds the Norwich Fire District retained forestry and water rights. These development and recreation rights will revert to the Norwich Fire District if the tax exemptions are revoked, or if they are not extended by renewal when required. Brion McMullan explained that this article that this article brings about 1000 acres of land to the town with shared control with the Fire District. He noted that this gives everyone the ability to use this land.*

Article 30. *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 12, 2016 and the balance will be due at the same location on or before 4:30 pm February 10, 2017. 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 10, 2017. There was no discussion.*

Article 31. *Transact any other business that may legally come before the annual Norwich Town Meeting. Tim Briglin and Jim Masland spoke briefly at this time highlighting the events taking place in the State House. Tim noted that families of four earning under \$32,000 a year and single people earning under \$21,000 a year, are eligible for Medicaid. He also spoke on Health Reform and possibly taxing providers who have private practices. They are trying to figure out how to pay doctors to keep us healthy.*

Other items mentioned were Act 146 and the Marijuana Bill.

Jim Masland said that people who live in Norwich tend to stay here and that speaks very highly of the community. He looks forward to working with townspeople and welcomes phone calls, email and mail. He echoed Tim remarks and said that they have a difficult course ahead for the next year funding Medicare budgets, and possibly taxing health care providers in private practice.

Article 32. *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).* There was no discussion.

Article 33. *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)?* There was no discussion.

Article 34. *Shall the voters of the Norwich Town School District approve the School Board to expend \$5,458,847, which is the amount the School Board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$17,746 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 2.8% higher than spending for the current year.* Neil Odell introduced the board members, Kelley Hersey, Justin Campfield, Tom Candon, and James Mackall, Superintendent Frank Bass and Assistant Superintendent for Business John Aubin.

This year they are asking for \$5,458,847, up 4.2% from last years \$5,237,720. This is an increase of \$220,127. It was noted that there will be no Act 46 penalty for per pupil spending. There will be 19 teachers this year compared to 18 teachers next year. The most notable changes are in Special Education, Wages and Health Insurance.

There is a 7.99 % increase in health care and benefits due to contract and wage increases and benefit plans. The SAU assessment is down this year due to a change in student ratios. The student lunch program has moved to a different area in the budget.

Revenues are relatively flat this year regarding tuition, interest and other local revenues. The Special Education Block grant is down \$14,543 or 5.3% and the Special Education expense reimbursement is down \$33,397 or 8.6%. This means that total revenues are down. Projected student enrollment is expected to decline.

Comparison data shows that Norwich is ranked at 14th in the state spending for education. This is questionable though on the formulas used to arrive at these comparisons.

On a positive note, Marion Cross School is in the top 10 of all schools in VT for SBAC scores, is ranked the best elementary school in the State of Vermont by SchoolDigger.com and is rated the 6th best Public Elementary School in the Nation by TheBestSchools.org.

We have a certified Energy Star Building consuming less energy than 80 % of similar buildings and it has been recognized with the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in 2015.

Article 35. *Transact any other business that may legally come before the annual meeting of the Norwich Town School Board.* Irv Thomae spoke urging people who make under \$90,000 to apply for income sensitivity with their state tax return. They may qualify for a state credit towards their property tax bill.

There was no other discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 9:42.

Respectfully submitted by:

Bonnie Munday, Town Clerk

Warren Thayer, Moderator

Nancy Dean, Chairman, Norwich Board of Civil Authority