

2018 Combined Town of Fletcher Annual Meeting & Fletcher Town School District Annual Meeting

The legal voters of the Town of Fletcher and the Fletcher School District, Franklin County, State of Vermont, were hereby notified and warned to meet in the Fletcher Elementary School in said Fletcher on Tuesday, March 6, 2018 at 9:30am to act on the following articles:

Barry Doolan called the meeting to order at 9:30am. He asked for a brief recess to allow those persons already in line time to check in. Barry again called the meeting to order at 9:40am. Fletcher Girl Scouts Dani Reardon and Hailey Zamuda led the group in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. First-time attendees were welcomed by a round of applause. A moment of silence was observed for those residents who've passed in the past year.

Article 1 To adopt of Robert's Rules of Order.

Barry gave a brief explanation of Robert's Rules of Orders. Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Stephen Smith seconded. There was no discussion. Melanie Meilleur moved to cease debate. Stephen Smith seconded. Article passed by voice vote.

Article 2 To elect a Moderator for the Town Meeting.

Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Stephen Smith seconded. Barry Doolan introduced himself. Patricia Freed-Thall nominated Barry Doolan. No other nominations. Patricia Freed-Thall moved to cease nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Barry Doolan. Melanie Meilleur seconded. Barry Doolan elected moderator by voice vote.

Article 3 To act on the reports of the various officers of the Town contained in the current Town Report covering the 12 month Town Budget from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017.

Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Jensen Welch seconded. Karrie Sweet made note of a correction to the Reappraisal Fund summary on page 46 of the Town Report. A deposit of \$6,078.00 was left out, thus the balance should be listed as \$39,276.73.

Wes Graff asked about the dog ordinance violations referenced in the Select Board report on page 23, specifically how it was revised to prevent legal costs of this nature in the future. Jon Bondy gave a brief history of the problems with the dogs in question, and shared that the ordinance is now set up with fines which are enforceable by the courts. He gave a simplified explanation of the ordinance. Wes Graff inquired if there was any way to recoup the attorney fees. Jon said that we have no legal right to recover attorney fees. We can set up fines that are large enough to roughly compensate us for our expenses, but not by directly recovering the exact legal expenses. The original ordinance had fines that were too small; the new ordinance has larger fines in an attempt to not get caught in the future. Pam Jedlicka asked if the \$7,000 was all attorney fees. Jon said it mostly was, but also included boarding costs and vet bills.

Terry Riggs asked about the completed budget, and actual amounts spent versus budgeted amounts. Barry asked that specific budget questions be addressed later on in budget discussion.

Janet Graff asked about the Balance Sheet on page 22, wondering why the money owed on Town Clerk's office and paving project are not listed as liabilities. Karrie Sweet said that the auditors prepare this part of the report, based on NEMRC (our accounting

software provider) reports. She agreed that it probably should be listed as such, but would need to look at the way NEMRC sets up these reports to confirm that.

Suzanne Stritzler shared that there is a need for volunteers on the Planning Commission and Development Review Board.

David Clark spoke in his capacity as our district supervisor of North West Solid Waste District, sharing that the Fletcher drop-off site is no longer in service. He asked the audience to get in touch with him if there were sufficient interest in getting this service going again. In the meantime, residents can utilize the Georgia drop-off location for their trash and recycling needs.

Terry Riggs referred back to the previous question of listing the Town Office building and paving loan as liabilities. He said that we only list liabilities that are due that year, not the total liabilities. Jon Bondy said these liabilities should be listed somewhere in the Town Report, even if not necessarily in the Balance Sheet section.

There was no more discussion. Tom Kalinoski moved to cease debate. Melanie Meilleur seconded. Article passed by voice vote.

Article 4: Will the Town instruct the Town Auditors to have the Town Report printed as usual?

Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Tom Kalinoski seconded. Barry explained that this article refers to the manner in which the report is printed. There was no discussion. Melanie Meilleur moved to cease debate. Wes Graff seconded. Article passed by voice vote.

Article 5: Will the Town vote a sum of money to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town for the FY 2019 (July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019)?

Barry asked for a brief deviation from Robert's Rules to allow for introductions of Select Board members. Barry requested that the Clerk substitute \$1,340,038.00 for "a sum of money" in this article. Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Jensen Welch seconded. Barry explained that the budget number is not a fixed amount and can be amended up or down from the floor prior to voting.

Matt Gillian began the presentation with an update of the paving project so far. He spoke to the multiple grants that the Town was awarded this year: \$40K for culvert replacement on the Cambridge Rd., \$175K for paving, \$20K Better Roads grant for Mayotte Rd., \$81K for the Arch Culvert on Fairfield Rd. The paving loan is currently still a construction loan, we are only paying interest until the project is done. The actual payments will begin in November of 2019. The Select Board is proposing using \$200K from FY19's paving budget to decrease the total loan amount needed, saving \$100K for other regular paving items in Town. The goal is to keep the loan amount as low as possible. Due to grants and general cost savings, the Town will spend about \$160K/year instead of \$200K/year on the paving loan.

Jesse Wiens gave a summary of the actual amounts spent in the budget, explaining major increases and decreases. The Town closed the year with an overall surplus of about \$54K. Jesse led the audience in a round of applause for Matt in recognition of saving so much money on the paving project.

Matt gave an overview of the Capital Plan and Equipment Maintenance. He shared that municipal graders, loaders, and backhoes should have 20-year life span; trucks should be no more than 10 years. The newest truck in our fleet is 10 years old. Older trucks lead to more repair which equates to more money spent. The Board has added \$20K to the budget line for the Equipment Fund.

Christine E. Nilsen presented the proposed budget. Last year's budget went up \$10K, this year's is up \$210K. The biggest chunk of this increase is due to paving. She

explained the other major increases: pay increases, adding a day for Assistant Town Clerk, preservation of records, additional DRB legal fees, increase to 3 FT road crew instead of 2 FT and 1 PT, etc.

Discussion:

Josh Cozzens said that he's been a Fletcher resident for about 5 years. He proposed switching to voting via Australian ballot for both the Town and School budget like we did for bond votes. He requested we hold a straw poll on this proposal at the end of the meeting.

Pam Jedlicka asked if a paper ballot vote could be held on this proposal today? Barry said that yes, it could if seven people stand to request that, but it would only be informational: a special Article would need to be warned for an official vote on this change.

Dawn Pelkey asked about increases to FTE for Road Crew and Assistant Town Clerk positions. Jon Bondy said that Road Crew changes were part of the FY 2017 budget, the current FY18 budget as well as the proposed FY19 budget. Grant work and legislative changes to Clerk/Treasurer tasks have increased the amount of work at the Town Office, necessitating the increase to the Assistant's hours. It is still a part-time position.

Sue Ferguson said the increases to the Town and the School budgets equal more money coming out of all of our pockets. She would like to see both of these numbers made smaller, recognizing those folks who voted against the paving project. She said that vote only passed by eight votes. She proposed an amendment to this article, reducing the overall budget amount by \$30K. Pam Jedlicka seconded.

Secondary Discussion on Amendment:

Matt Gillilan made a point of clarification on the vote for the paving loan, correcting Sue Ferguson's earlier statement. There were only 263 voters at that Australian Ballot vote: 158 for & 108 against, a difference of fifty votes, not eight.

Jon feels that if a decrease is proposed, the audience should suggest where they'd like cuts to be made.

Wes Graff made an amendment to the amendment, stating that the \$30K reduction proposed by Sue Ferguson be allocated to the paving loan. Terry Riggs seconded this amendment to the amendment.

Tertiary Discussion on Amended Amendment:

Terrence Keating feels that Select Board and Road Commissioner are better prepared to decide how money should be adjusted for the paving loan and the project in general.

Stephen Smith asked what effect this reduction of \$30K would have on the overall budget. Jon said not very much and he would like to see the Town make real changes.

Terry Riggs feels that the road project that was put into place was extended and not what was voted on. He was upset that the Select Board did work beyond the scope of the bond - even though it was under budget, it was not what was proposed/voted on.

Kathryn Towle feels it's not as simple as saying we'll spend \$30K less and that there needs to be a bigger analysis, i.e. what amount to borrow vs. interest payments. Jon said we originally anticipated borrowing 1.3M, now looking at only 1.1M, meaning this amendment WOULD lower future expenses, but not affect much this year.

Paul Meilleur asked Matt Gillilan about current conditions of roads. He wondered if we cut money out of the budget now, will we just need to spend it later. Matt

said that within these loan payments and the budget staying on course, we will be able to address pavement concerns/needs of other areas of Town. He is basing this on info from the Agency of Transportation and his discussions with multiple paving vendors.

Jim Ferguson said that pavement costs are based more on a cycle of materials cost (oil prices) rather than on a basis of need.

Annette Kalinoski made a motion to cease debate on this amendment discussion. Melanie Meilleur seconded. Voice vote in the affirmative to cease debate.

Bruce Webb asked for clarification of the amended amendment. Barry stated it was “reducing the proposed reduction of the paving loan by \$30K.” Voice vote on the amended amendment failed.

Returned back to original amendment: “reduce budget by \$30K” There was no further discussion. A call for vote by show of hands was requested. Results: 29 for, 61 against

Krystal Jenness feels the big issue is that property taxes are increasing and it’s hard for folks to manage. Many people might move.

Jess Graff asked about what percentage of residents’ land is in the Current Use Program and what percentage receive the Property Tax Adjustment. Jon was not sure about the numbers enrolled in Current Use. He did say that the income-based reduction only has an effect on the school portion of taxes.

Pam Jedlicka spoke to the attempt to change to voting by Australian ballot a few years back. She feels that would give a better representation of voters in the Town as it would be more open to those who are not able to take time off from work during the week. The only options today, are to vote yes or no. Jon said this is not accurate. In this current floor meeting, the budget can be amended. It’s a more flexible option. - Australian Ballot would be completely non-flexible. Line items could not be changed. A survey was put out in the newsletter and we only received seven responses. Another survey will be going out soon.

Lars Baris asked if we could have a mixed system of voting, floor vote for some items and Australian ballot? Barry said that topic should be brought up for discussion later on under other.

Patricia Freed-Thall said no one likes increases. She feels the Select Board is working hard to try to bring costs down.

Terrance Keating asked what the next steps would be if the budget was voted down. Jon hoped that wouldn't be the case, but the Board would have to look at the budget again and schedule a re-vote.

Annette Kalinoski moved to cease debate. Melanie Meilleur seconded. Seven people stood up to request a paper ballot vote. Results: 136 votes cast, yes 96, no 40. Budget passed.

Article 6: Shall the Town authorize the Select Board to purchase a grader should an extraordinarily good deal become available during FY19, expenditure not to exceed \$150K?

Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Annette Kalinoski seconded.

Discussion:

Matt Gillilan said the Town’s current grader is a 1998, making it 20 years old. It’s working...barely, and might need a new transmission soon. If our current grader breaks down, it will cost about \$10K/month for a rental. Occasionally, there are floor models or rental machines that become available for purchase. It would be about \$250K to buy a brand new grader, so we’re looking at used models with less wear.

Paul Meilleur asked how this would affect taxes. Matt said that the initial payment would come out of the Equipment Fund. We could be looking at a lease agreement as that is how vendors are operating these days. We could make annual payments and then be able to buy the equipment at end of lease for \$1.00 or some small amount, though no decision has been made yet.

Bruce Webb proposed an amendment to the article, removing the \$ amount. He feels we should trust Matt and the Select Board's opinion on a purchase when the time comes. Keith Glover seconded.

The amendment passed by voice vote.

Melanie Meilleur moved to cease debate. Bruce Webb seconded. Article passed as amended by voice vote.

Article 7 Shall the voters of the Town of Fletcher adopt the following resolution urging the Town of Fairfax to pave the Fairfax/Fletcher Road in 2018?

Whereas, the Fairfax/Fletcher Road is a heavily used traffic corridor connecting Fletcher and Binghamville to Fairfax and Vermont Route 104, and

Whereas, the Fairfax/Fletcher Road has numerous potholes, broken pavement, heaves, and depressions, and

Whereas, the residents of Fletcher have endured these conditions long enough,

Be It Resolved, that the residents of the Town of Fletcher urge the Town of Fairfax to fix the Fairfax/Fletcher Road in 2018.

Melanie Meilleur moved to bring the article to the floor. Tom Kalinoski seconded.

Discussion:

Jon Bondy explained that this article was a piggy-back to Article 8 which had been passed on to us at the request of the Town of Fairfield. He shared that the Board has recently heard some comments about Fairfax's intention to pave a good portion of that road this year, but that was long after the deadline for inclusion of this article in the Warning.

Dawn Pelkey asked if we have contacted Fairfax about this article to discuss this topic. Jon stated that passage of this article would only be advisory in nature; we cannot force them to do anything. Jon shared that he had personally reached out to the Fairfax Select Board in regards to addressing that road's maintenance, but had not received any response.

Matt Gillilan shared that he'd received a call from Fairfax's Road Commissioner when this article was posted and he was not too happy. He relayed to Matt that they currently have RFP's in place for bids on this project.

Terry Riggs feels this article is way out of line. He said that many of our Town trucks utilize that road for hauling our materials, thus contributing to its deterioration.

Wes Graff has bad feelings about this in general. He feels it puts pressure on other towns and is not appropriate.

Melanie Meilleur moved to cease debate. Jensen Welch seconded. Article defeated by voice vote.

Article 8: Shall the voters of the Town of Fletcher adopt the following resolution urging the State of Vermont and the Agency of Transportation to reclaim, rebuild and pave Vermont Route 36 in 2018?

Whereas, Vermont Route 36 is a heavily used traffic corridor connecting northeastern Franklin County through the Town of Fairfield to St. Albans and Interstate 89, with 2900 vehicles passing through Fairfield Center daily, and

Whereas, Vermont Route 36 has been in deplorable and unsafe condition for years, and

Whereas, the residents of Fairfield have endured these conditions long enough, and

Whereas, the State of Vermont Agency of Transportation schedule calls for repaving a thin layer of pavement in the calendar year 2019, the residents of Fairfield do not feel this is a sufficient or timely fix to the issue,

Be It Resolved, that the residents of the Town of Fletcher urge the Vermont Legislature, the Governor, and the Vermont Agency of Transportation to fix the rapidly deteriorating Vermont Route 36 by reclaiming, rebuilding and paving it properly in 2018.

Tom Kalinoski moved to bring the article to the floor. Patricia Freed-Thall seconded.

Discussion:

Jesse Wiens shared that this article was brought to our attention at the direct request of the Town of Fairfield, as well as from our mutual state Representative, Dan Connor.

Melanie Meilleur moved to cease debate. Tom Kalinsoki seconded. Article passed by voice vote.

*** 11:30am ***

Article 9: To elect a Moderator for the School District Annual Meeting.

Jensen Welch moved the article to the floor, seconded by Annette Kalinoski. Barry Doolan was nominated as Moderator. The motion passed.

Article 10: To elect a clerk for the School District Annual Meeting.

Tara Sweet was nominated as clerk for the meeting. The motion was approved.

Article 11: To hear and act on reports of School Directors from previous year.

Mary Lynn Riggs moved to open discussion on the article, seconded by Terence Keating.

Discussion:

Betsy Lesnikoski presented some important information about the current school year. Betsy shared some corrections to the Town Report. There are some revised handouts published on the back table. On page 76 under the expenditure summary, the percentage should state a 3.5% decrease not a 100% increase. Also, on page 75 which is the revenue

proposal, line 2 was left out which lists the state spending income in the amount of \$3,174,168. The total revenue should be \$3,377,339.

Betsy continued that on page 70, the tuition table left off some figures so a revised document of complete tuition is provided as well as information about how it has changed over time. Betsy presented information on what's been happening in this year's budget. She explained the journey of where we are and how we got here. The budget process began in October 2016 ahead of the new fiscal year which followed on July 1, 2017. The goal is to provide high quality education for all students grade PreK-12 in a fiscally responsible manner. In December 2016, the school board approved a budget for FY18 (this current year that we are in). At the time the board was developing the budget, we anticipated an increase of 3.5% for secondary tuition. These announced tuition rates have to be reported by January of each year to the state. Fairfax published a 17.5% increase after the Fletcher school board approved their budget in December. Fletcher was not aware of this discrepancy until the fall which meant that we significantly under budgeted for tuition. This directly impacted this current budget we are in since most of our students go to Fairfax for secondary education. Fairfax was increasing some programs and also dealing with loss of Westford students due to the merger with Essex. Because we send so many students to Fairfax, this will result in a deficit in this current budget for Fletcher. We don't yet know the extent and as we get closer to the end of June, we will have a better understanding of where our budget stands. To further complicate matters, there is announced tuition and in December the state assesses an allowable tuition. In doing this the state determined that Fairfax's announced rate was much lower than actual cost and allowed Fairfax to back bill for their costs. Fairfax understood that Fletcher is already struggling with a deficit and decided to only back bill partial tuition of \$1,000 per student. Fletcher also did not qualify for the small schools grant in FY18 due to a change in the state rules so we will budget conservatively for FY19 in case we don't get it next year either. There have been questions about the Capital Improvement Fund and Betsy shared the purpose of the program and explained the special article a year ago. Inadvertently the entire amount of the surplus last year was applied to this year's budget instead. We need to move forward and the board is committed to holding off until January to approve any future school budgets so we know the tuition information. Also the board has established a Tuition Committee to understand what the tuition rates are since this is becoming a big issue. Betsy explained more about how we are going to pay this deficit. She clarified that the proposed FY19 budget for next year does not take into account the deficit. Once we know what the deficit will be, we will figure out how to address it. She added that Fletcher did receive the services and we need to pay for them. The board is looking at all options including a payment of the deficit over several years or a low interest long-term loan. We will have a better idea of how to repay it once we know the full impact. Betsy stated that she has been asked if FWSU knew about the tuition increase in January. She stated that yes, FWSU was aware of the increase in BFA Fairfax tuition but they did not willingly withhold that information. There was an oversight with many things going on such as Act 46, teacher and para contract negotiations, moving to new healthcare plans, and more. It was not until this fall that everyone realized what had happened when the tuition bills came in. Fletcher pays an assessment (usually 8%) based on our enrollment for services provided by FWSU. The SU provides so much that our students benefit from. Betsy recalled that last year, a survey went out looking for input from the community and the data showed that Fletcher values high-quality education and retaining its local school board and local control, and to keep school choice. Betsy added that FWSU has submitted an application to keep our SU as is which allows us to maintain our local school board and school choice. We should hear back from the state by June 1

about whether the application will be accepted and if Fletcher can remain in FWSU or if we are being reassigned somewhere else.

Tom Kalinoski asked about the Capital Improvement Fund. He wondered if the board could reduce the transfer of budget surpluses into this account since 50% may be too high. Betsy shared that the board has discretion to reduce the transfer amount as needed and the board has chosen in past years to use more of the surplus to reduce taxes. It is up to 50% that the board is allowed to use for improvements to the building and facilities.

Todd Baumeister stated that the town needs to understand that the state has never gone through a school consolidation process before. Several board members in FWSU recently met with the Agency of Education. The Secretary of Education started asking questions about adding other schools to FWSU which is a possibility. Act 46 says that we need to have a certain number of students to become a consolidated school district and FWSU schools don't have enough students. If another school is merged with us, Fletcher will not have much time to react. For example if schools from the Islands is added to FWSU, all elementary schools in that system would be together operating as a single district. It would not be just our school. Fletcher needs to pay close attention to what is happening. And he supports having a Town Meeting rather than an Australian Ballot vote and is ready to revitalize the website from a couple years ago to preserve town meeting if needed.

Shana Kane asked about secondary tuition rates and said they are confusing. She asked if tech center tuition is included for students attending tech centers and secondary schools. Betsy explained that if our students go to a tech center, Fletcher pays a rolling three year average so it is confusing. For private schools, Fletcher pays a lower state average tuition amount. Shana asked why other public schools would be charging more than the state average for tuition. Betsy stated that schools are obligated to pay the full tuition for public schools, but we only pay a state average for private school and parents pay the difference out of pocket.

Sue Ferguson commented that page 76 line 8 should not be a 0% - there is an \$833. This discrepancy was duly noted.

Bruce Webb asked if Fletcher is getting the support we need from the superintendent. It seems like Fletcher was not advised by the superintendent of these issues and should not be blindsided at the end of the year. Betsy acknowledged there was a miscommunication and FWSU has repeatedly apologized for the mistake. Again FWSU was dealing with many competing priorities at the time of the oversight, but we are moving forward with a plan in place to prevent this in the future.

Laura Peatman asked about protocols and procedures that are in place to fix this? Betsy shared that FES will no longer approve a budget until we get the tuition rates in January. Tara Sweet added that this year Diane Dayvie attended the Fairfax School Board meeting to hear the tuition rates and from now on there will always be a Fletcher School Board member at these meetings where tuition is set that Fletcher has the correct rates for its January meeting. Superintendent Ned Kirsch spoke that in addition, the Business Office will issue a formal letter every January to each school board documenting announced tuition rates for each surrounding school.

Terrence Keating asked how the budget would have changed had FES had this information sooner? Betsy stated that a year ago we were talking about a \$200K surplus, the board was asking to increase its budget, and planning on receiving the small schools grant. Hindsight is 20/20. It is unclear what action exactly the board would have taken, but we probably would have taken some of that earlier surplus and held it in reserve.

Deb Tilton stated that she believes we hired the supervisory union to help us and takes exception to this. No more fine print and better communication is necessary.

The town agreed to cease debate on the article.

Article 12: To elect by ballot a School Director for a three year term (Tara Sweet)

Erin Shaw moved to bring the article to the floor, seconded by Jensen Welch. Tara Sweet was nominated. The motion passed by the voters.

Article 13: To elect by ballot a School Director for a three year term (Aimee Cardinal)

Terence Keating moved the article to the floor, seconded by Jensen Welch. Aimee Cardinal was nominated. The motion was unanimously approved.

***** 12:00pm: Recess for 30 minute lunch *****

Before resuming from lunch break, Representative Dan Connor was invited to speak and answer questions from the audience.

Lars Baris asked about the possibility of hiring a lobbyist to appeal to Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe on the Town's behalf in regards to merger options. Dan said he doesn't feel that would do any good and thinks that Fletcher has done the correct thing so far by submitting a proposal for alternative structure under Act 46.

Shana Kane feels frustrated with way the Board of Education is trying to micromanage the way we do things. She gave the example of how FWSU wanted to change our district's tech center but the Board of Education said "no". Ned Kirsch said that this was correct.

Dan said he would bring these comments back to the Education Committee. He feels this school is incredible, with awesome staff, and an attentive principal who puts the students' faces forward (newspaper, social media, etc.) Dan shared that he did not vote for Act 46. He feels we all want the absolute best for our kids and that education is the one thing which you have that cannot be taken away from you. He spoke with Secretary Holcombe recently and asked her to carefully consider the request of Fletcher's School Board for alternative structure.

Mark McKinnon asked a question about recruiting out-of-state persons to fill jobs here as we do not have young people here to fill those positions. He feels technical education is being downgraded and there needs to be a refocus on that sector of education. He asked what the State is doing to remedy this situation. He asked why the state is not allocating more funding for technical education. Dan said he feels very passionately about technical education and values its importance. He feels not everyone learns the same and conventional education is not for everyone. We should offer educational opportunities to adults (re-training, additional education, etc.) to provide greater opportunities in our current job market.

Wes Graff asked about the current proposal to funding education. Dan didn't want to give a quick answer as the school portion of the meeting was about to continue. He said he would meet with Wes further after the meeting to discuss this topic and with any others who had more questions or concerns. He shared that he is always available by email or phone and his contact information is listed in the Town Report.

Article 14: Shall the voters of said School District approve the School Directors to expend \$3,377,339 which is the amount the School Directors have determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$15,571.99 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 12.34% higher than spending for the current year.

Jensen Welch moved to bring the article to the floor, seconded by Janet Young. Betsy shared a presentation of the proposed FY19 budget. The board unanimously voted to support this proposal. Tara Sweet stated that Diane Dayvie could not attend Town Meeting due to personal reasons, but she supports this budget as well. The big changes are secondary tuition increases and a reduction in staffing through teacher retirement. The tuition rates are going up and we are seeing increased enrollment at the secondary level. We also are proposing a reduction of an elementary teacher due to attrition. The state education fund was short last year so one-time money was used to fill the gap. Then in December the projection was a 9.4 cent increase regardless of local school budget decisions. More recently we are seeing lower school budgets come in at the state level than expected so that looks like it will reduce taxes below that projection which is good news. We are not certain what will happen at the state level going forward. Education funding is still being deliberated in Montpelier that may impact this proposed budget. Betsy shared class size data for FES and explained how enrollment has stayed relatively flat in recent years. Preschool and kindergarten numbers are a bit harder to project so we have shared our best guess at this time. Not everyone chooses to enroll their preschool children in FES. Our numbers can change with families moving in and out. Betsy continued by showing the estimated school tax rate. The higher tax rate is based on updated tuition numbers and the fact that we want to maintain high quality education in our school at the elementary level. Betsy spoke about Act 46 and stated that Fletcher approached several other communities to explore merger opportunities. FWSU submitted our application to the state and presented a proposal for an alternative governance structure under Act 46 which would allow Fletcher to remain in FWSU. The State Board will make a decision about where we will go since we don't meet the provisions to remain on our own under Act 46. The next slide showed different potential tax rate increases for this proposed budget, comparing information received in December and in February. We are still waiting for the legislature to finalize their plan. Betsy shared projected Capital Improvement Fund plan for the next few years. We have made some improvements to our facilities but most changes are not something the public can readily see, such as replacing the underground storage tank for safety reasons. The school is hoping to piggyback on the Town repaving project to be able to do our parking lot at a savings - we have to go to bid per state law, but this option should save money compared to bringing in another bidder. This proposed budget maintains all of the current programs that we currently have in place at FES.

Krystal Jenness asked about the professional development technology position in the budget (page 79). Betsy explained that this is for our Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) teacher who works with all classrooms throughout the school. This teacher supports learning and innovation in the classroom.

Tom Kalinoski commented that one idea that was discussed when he was on the board was to remove coaches from the budget after a few years once classroom teachers received the training. Betsy stated that we discussed that option as a board but decided to keep the coaching position as she provides a valuable service for our teachers.

Kathryn Towle asked about the kindergarten teacher and what would happen with the position being eliminated as classes get bigger. Principal Chris Dodge spoke about the fact that even with this cut, the class sizes at Fletcher are incredibly reasonable. Of course the school will continue to monitor fluctuations in class sizes as we always have. We constantly have to reconfigure as needed in a small school and can create multi-age classrooms when needed.

Todd Baumeister spoke that as a person in town who attends board meetings regularly, this budget is too high. He expressed concern that this budget asks Fletcher taxpayers to pay much more per student to educate students than Fairfax pays. We know

that there will be higher numbers when the bubble class comes through plus the deficit payback. This is the first year since he's been here that he has seen the board selectively choose certain towns for the tax rate comparison to try to make Fletcher look better. We should vote no and voters should not feel bad about it, it's too expensive and this budget will only be going up again next year.

Wes Graff asked about the two literacy teachers and their roles in the school. Principal Chris Dodge explained that we wanted to have the most highly-qualified teachers at every grade level so that is the reason we have two literacy professionals. One is a teacher leader position who provides coaching and does not have a classroom but works with teachers and students.

Jen Cary asked about page 88 and has concerns about the FWSU budget. It appears that FWSU has over doubled their budget in the last couple years. Perhaps it's due to merging services, but we are not necessarily getting some of the services we used to get, including not accurate numbers two years in a row. Betsy stated that we have had to move all transportation, paraprofessionals, and special education into the FWSU budget per state law so that is the change in the SU budget and why it has increased. These consolidated services are charged to FES at actual costs so Fletcher only pays for the services that they incur. This is separate from the SU percentage assessment.

Principal Chris Dodge commented that he hears a lot from community members that we don't get a lot of services from FWSU. He stated that this is not true. It is difficult since so much of the work of FWSU is not public work that you read about in the newspaper. It is important that the community understand that he works with FWSU staff on a daily basis and his feeling is that for the 8% that FES pays, we are getting far more than we are paying for. FES is really well supported by FWSU and he has 24 hour a day access to FWSU support whenever the need arises.

Ellen Bethea asked if the town would have the opportunity to respond to the state board's Act 46 decision about where Fletcher would be placed. Superintendent Ned Kirsch explained that the Secretary of Education will decide on our fate and recommend it to the State Board in June. The State Board has said they will hold regional public meetings in communities where schools were reassigned so that the could voice their concerns.

Stephen Smith asked about advertising under transportation in the FWSU budget line. Also contracted services are in almost every single category which adds up to a lot of money. FWSU Business Manager Chris Sumner explained that the services in the FWSU budget are for Fairfax advertising for bus drivers and contracted services are for things like Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and other specialized services that are required.

Joe Anderson asked about page 79 line 84 and why it's so high. FWSU Business Manager Chris Sumner stated that any contracted services paid by schools are for services rendered in that school. If a special education teacher is hired at FWSU and is working in FES, FWSU has to bill FES for that teacher. The FWSU special education budget represents multiple teachers contracted at FWSU, not just those serving at FES.

Krystal Jenness stated that it appears we are paying \$100,000 for STEM services to support teachers' work. She asked if insurance benefits were included in the salary lines and inquired about why social security is separated out. Chris Sumner shared that the state requires that each teacher benefits be reported out separately so that is the reason for the multiple budget lines. The specific line item in question reflects 1.2 teachers, not just a single person. Chris stated that one would need to look at each of the salary and benefit lines to tally the total compensation for these employees since it includes all of these elements.

Jessica Graff thanked the school board for all their work and long hours. She supports the budget. She is concerned about the opioid crisis and students leaving Vermont for better jobs. This impacts all of us and is indeed about spending but also about investing in our future as a community. She stated that the budget is not more than it needs to be and the school board is not asking for ridiculous things. These are reasonable requests. She stated that the STEM program gives her son the learning that he needs to be prepared for the job market. School budgets are so complicated, but that's because Fletcher is a PreK-6 school with school choice and tuitions its secondary students. This budget is not for anything new, just the cost of doing business.

Bruce Webb stated that he is a former school board member and things have changed a lot over the years. We now have teachers and coaches for teachers plus other special people that come in. He stated that the per teacher cost has gotten out of hand. He knows how hard the school board has worked, but stated that the town needs to send a message and that is no more. The state has to hear it. The supervisory union needs to hear it.

Brianna Douglas stated that she heard that school is an incredibly good one. Everyone is so proud of the learning that children are getting at Fletcher and they go on to get the best education possible. Thinking about the long run, we send students out prepared in STEM and healthy social interaction which is so important. It has taken a lot to get where we are today in education. We know more now about how to better educate students. Sometimes taxes just have to go up to make that happen.

Joshua Cozzens asked that the school budget vote be conducted using paper ballot. He stated that this school budget percentage increase is not sustainable for our town. We will be paying even more in the coming years looking at student projections. Everyone is going to be personally affected and pay more money in taxes. This has to stop. He asked if there is a regulation that could stop tuition increases.

Sara Villeneuve stated that she agreed the budget is becoming unsustainable, but is not sure what the answer is. She stated that we need maintain the school and it costs money to do so. She understands how teachers play so many different roles and sees the work that they do in this school. Fletcher teachers work hard and she knows many who work long hours in this building and care deeply about our children. She stated that she hopes that Fletcher can keep its school open, but cutting teachers is not going to help. She is not sure how to sustain this, but the proposed budget reflects is a minimal increase and includes a cut of one position already. She supports the school budget.

Morgan Lawton stated that she agrees we are getting our money's worth at Fletcher. Children are our future and she supports this budget as well. The school board does the best they can and they pay taxes too in this town.

Rita Clark stated that the voters put its faith in the Select Board earlier on the town budget. Now the voters have an opportunity to put faith in the school board. She recently attended some school board meetings and it was painfully complicated to understand school funding. A mistake was made by a supervisory union and we should not say no to our kids because there was a mistake. She stated that we need to repair the damage of teachers feeling defeated or that they are not doing enough. The town needs to support them no matter what.

Terry Riggs moved to cease debate, seconded by Darryl Arnold. The paper ballots were tallied and the school budget was defeated with 59 voting in favor and 67 opposed.

Article 15: Shall the voters of said School District authorize the School Directors to borrow money for school expenses in anticipation of revenue for the ensuing year?

Janet Young moved to bring the article to the floor, seconded by Erin Shaw. Mary Lynn Riggs moved to call the question. The article was approved as presented.

Article 16: To conduct any other business that may come before the School Directors.

Annette Kalinoski moved to bring the article to the floor, seconded by Mary Lynn Riggs. There was no other business to discuss. The article was approved.

Article 17 To elect by ballot a Selectman for a three year term. (Matt Gillilan)

Jensen Welch moved to bring the article to the floor. Joe Anderson seconded. Terry Riggs nominated Matt Gillilan. Melanie Meilleur moved to cease debate and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Matt Gillilan. Annette Kalinoski seconded. Article passed by voice vote and Matt Gillilan was elected.

Article 18 To elect by ballot a Selectman for a three year term. (Christine E. Nilsen)

Annette Kalinoski moved to bring the article to the floor. Janet Young seconded. Jon Bondy nominated Christine E. Nilsen. Annette Kalinoski moved to cease debate and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Christine E. Nilsen. Article passed by voice vote and Christine E. Nilsen was elected.

Article 19 To elect by ballot a Lister for a three year term. (H. Carlton Ferguson)

Annette Kalinoski moved to bring the article to the floor. Jensen Welch seconded. Sue Ferguson nominated Carlton Ferguson. Annette Kalinoski moved to cease debate and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Carlton Ferguson. Article passed by voice vote and Carlton Ferguson was elected.

Article 20 To elect by ballot an Auditor for a three year term. (Kevin Holmes-Henry)

Annette Kalinoski moved to bring the article to the floor. Sue Ferguson seconded. Annette Kalinoski nominated Kevin Holmes-Henry.

Discussion:

Since Kevin was not present, Karrie Sweet stated that he had relayed to her his interest in the position, but he stated due to work obligations he can not be as available as he has been in past.

As there were no other nominations, Annette Kalinoski moved to cease debate and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Kevin Holmes-Henry. Janet Young seconded. Article passed by voice vote and Kevin Holmes-Henry was elected.

Article 21 To elect by ballot a Town Agent & Conveyor of Lands for a one year term. (Neal Smith)

Jensen Welch moved to bring the article to the floor. Tucker Riggs seconded. Annette Kalinoski nominated Neal Smith. Sue Ferguson moved to cease debate and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Neal Smith. Tucker Riggs seconded. Article passed by voice vote and Neal Smith elected.

Article 22 To elect any other Town Officers to fill any Town Office that may be vacant at this time.

Janet Young moved to bring the article to the floor. Annette Kalinoski seconded.

Discussion:

Karrie Sweet shared that there were no vacant elected positions at this time, though there are appointed positions available on the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board as Suzanne Stritzler had mentioned at the beginning of the meeting.

Janet Young spoke to the open positions on the Planning Commission and the importance of developing a Town Plan. Serving the Town in this capacity is a long-term way to influence population growth which in turn affects school costs.

Annette Kalinsoki moved to cease debate and pass over this article. Sue Ferguson seconded. Article passed over by voice vote.

Article 23 Will the Town authorize the Town Treasurer to receive all Real Estate taxes?

Sue Ferguson moved to bring the article to the floor. Jensen Welch seconded. There was no discussion. Patricia Freed-Thall moved to cease debate. Tucker Riggs seconded. Article passed by voice vote.

Article 24 Will the Town instruct the Select Board to borrow money to pay current expenses in anticipation of taxes?

Sue Ferguson moved to bring the article to the floor. Janet Young seconded.

Discussion:

Stephen Smith asked if this article was still necessary. Jon Bondy stated that it wasn't as we now receive taxes quarterly, but if it doesn't pass we would not be able to borrow money if an emergent need arose.

Patricia Freed-Thall moved to cease debate. Tucker Riggs seconded. Article passed by voice vote.

Article 25 To discuss any other business that may properly come before the Town Meeting.

Jensen Welch moved to bring the article to the floor. Tucker Riggs seconded.

Discussion:

Lars Baris shared his concerns with the State's position on a school merge. He requested that we hold a non-binding vote to determine whether Fletcher School District should merge with Fairfax School District. Ellen Bethea is concerned that so many people have already left this meeting and will not be able to give their opinion via this vote. Jen Cary said that this is a non-binding vote and more of a representation of those persons present. Betsy Lesnikoski reminded the audience that voting to merge with Fairfax means we lose school choice. Tom Kalinoski moved to cease debate on this topic. Lars Baris seconded. A vote via show of hands had the following results: 23 Yes, 51 No.

Tom Kalinoski shared that the clock at the church is in need of winding. He encouraged persons interested in assisting to contact Charles Tinker.

Mark McKinnon shared his concerns about the decreasing numbers of Vermont dairy farms, especially in our county, as well as a lack of necessary resources for the few that still exist. Monies put aside by state/feds for agricultural improvements is mostly put towards phosphorus run-off, should be put into encouraging diversification. This will affect lifestyle in Vermont unless we can change this.

Karrie Sweet shared that we currently mail out about 400 paper copies of the Town newsletter and send it electronically to about 150 more persons. She requested people please call the Town Office to let us know what method you prefer. Some email addresses have kicked back, but we feel most of these issues have been fixed. Jon Bondy said the newsletter is most effective way to reach out to residents and the best way to

gauge opinions and gather information. He is open to suggestions if people feel this is not the case.

Melissa Sargent-Minor implored people to attend the upcoming School Board meeting and any other meetings in the future. The regular meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month at the school.

Stephen Smith feels that both the Select Board and the School Board are working very hard and requested a round of applause in appreciation. His request was granted.

Jesse Wiens reminded everyone that the Select Board meets the first and third Mondays of each month at 7:00pm. All are welcome to attend and give their input. He also reiterated the positions available on the Development Review Board and Planning Commission. These were concrete ways folks could serve the Town and help plan for our future.

Article 26 To Adjourn.

Annette Kalinoski moved to bring the article to the floor. Tucker Riggs seconded. There was no discussion. Annette Kalinoski moved to cease debate. Tucker Riggs seconded. Article passed by voice vote and the meeting was adjourned at 2:20pm.

Dated at Fletcher this 19th day of March, 2018

Town Meeting Minutes by Aimee Tinker, Assistant Town Clerk & Assistant Treasurer
School Meeting Minutes by Natasha Wheel, FWSU Executive Assistant &
Communications Coordinator