

**SPECIAL MEETING
WASHINGTON CENTRAL UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
MINUTES**

April 8th, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.

Approved by the WCUUSD Board 6.5.19

Temporary Moderator Susan Clark (Middlesex) opened the meeting at 6:06 p.m. She reviewed Robert's Rules of Order and other norms for the meeting.

She invited student Ginger Knight to read a civil invocation as a welcome message.

1. To elect the following officers of the District from among the qualified voters of the district, which officers shall assume office upon election and serve for a term of one year or until their successors are elected and qualified:

Moderator
Clerk
Treasurer

Vera Frazier (Berlin) nominated Gus Seelig (Calais) for the position of Moderator. This motion was seconded.

Buzz Ferver (Berlin) nominated Paul Hanlon for the position of Moderator. Mr. Hanlon declined.

Barry Bernstein (Calais) moved to cast one ballot for Gus Seelig.

A vote was called; Gus Seelig was elected moderator. He presided over the meeting.

Richard Kehne (Calais) nominated Mary Ormsby for Clerk and Treasurer. This motion was seconded.

Robert (Berlin) nominated Rosemary Morse (Berlin) for Clerk. This motion was seconded

A vote was called for the Office of Clerk. A voice vote indicated that Mary Ormsby was elected.

A request was made to vote using cards: **Mary Ormsby was elected clerk.**

Mr. Seelig invited other nominations for treasurer. None were heard. **Mary Ormsby was elected treasurer.**

Kyle Landis-Marinello (Middlesex) asked whether he could add a non-binding resolution to the meeting agenda tonight.

He stated that he believes it is important to state on record that nothing that happens tonight is consent to the “forced merger.” He noted that the state board order includes “any other business” in its warning. Moderator Gus Seelig stated that he would like to take care of the business on the agenda and then address this issue, if time permits, at the end.

Chris McVeigh (Middlesex) reiterated Mr. Landis-Marinello’s sentiment and urged the meeting as a whole to take up this resolution now, before any votes occur, to be clear that the business that takes place does not constitute a voluntary merge on behalf of everyone in attendance.

An objection was heard, as the article is out of order.

Barry Bernstein indicated that the body can ask to have it heard, and if the majority of the body wishes to vote on it, then that is allowed.

Discussion: Kyle Landis-Marinello indicated that if we are able to get this out of the way now, the rest of the meeting might go more smoothly. He indicated that there are many people present who are not in favor of a forced merger, but do want to work together.

A vote was called to sustain the ruling of the moderator, to take this up at the end of the meeting, time permitting. This was voted down.

Kyle Landis Marinello moved: nothing that happens tonight shall be interpreted as consenting in any way to a forced merger. Seconded by John Brabant (Calais).

Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith (East Montpelier) asked, would this in any way make any decisions that we make tonight unofficial? Chris McVeigh indicated that, it being a non-binding resolution, it has no impact on any decisions that are made. Flor Diaz Smith indicated that the main priority is teachers, (teachers contracts) and students; she wants to be sure we are not jeopardizing moving forward.

Mark Chaplin (Middlesex) asked what are the hopes of the group (with the lawsuit)? Where are we hoping this will go?

Kyle Landis-Marinello stated that four of the five towns are currently legally challenging the forced merger.

Diane Nichols-Fleming (Berlin) indicated that this nonbinding resolution helps us to feel that our voices are heard.

Rick Thibodeau (Worcester) indicated that the resolution is worded in such a way that it seems everyone present is against a merged district, and that is not the case.

The question was called; $\frac{2}{3}$ voted in favor of calling the question.

A vote was called. This motion carried; the nonbinding resolution was adopted.

Flor Diaz Smith moved to have agenda item #3 (re: Australian Ballot) move to #2 on the agenda. Seconded. Discussion: Barry Bernstein asked for clarification - does this refer to voting by Australian ballot, going forward, at tonight’s meeting?

Dorothy Naylor (Calais) explained that the reason for deciding on Australian ballot first is that it will help to make decisions about meeting dates going forward.

Stewart Clark (Worcester) asked for clarification - is it Article 3 or Article 4?

Dorothy Naylor indicated that it would be best to vote on Article 3 and Article 4, before 2.

Gus Seelig asked Flor Diaz Smith and the person who seconded the motion, if they are ok with this friendly amendment. They are. **A vote was called; the vote carried.**

2. To determine a date and location for the first annual meeting of the District and all subsequent annual meetings, which shall be not earlier than February 1 and not later than June 1 in each year.

Dorothy Naylor moved the first annual meeting Tuesday May 21, 2019, U-32 High School at 6:00, and all subsequent annual meetings be held on Town Meeting Day. Seconded.

Discussion: What will be the purpose of the annual district meeting to be held in May? Dorothy Naylor stated that it will coincide with electing a board of directors. If a person wishes to run for one of the board seats, the person has enough time to collect signatures and have the petition to the Town Clerk in time for the May 21st meeting.

Kyle Landis-Marinello asked, on May 21, could the timing begin at the usual time (in the morning), and have the Australian ballot votes available at each town's school or polling place? Flor Diaz Smith stated that the May 21 date also allows for possibly voting on articles of agreement.

Shawna (Middlesex) - asked the logistics of having this annual meeting on Town Meeting Day, when townspeople will be at their own town meetings? Dorothy Naylor stated that she assumes voters will be able to vote at their own towns. Shawna stated that she would like an opportunity to meet the candidates. Some discussion followed about opportunities for forums.

Sarah Merriman (Middlesex) clarified that a vote on May 21st would be by Australian ballot, since town clerks can't be in two places at one time.

Stewart Clark: Are articles of agreement a topic for the May 21st meeting? Dorothy Naylor indicated that the articles of agreement will not be ready for the May 21st meeting; however, we will be having open meetings to discuss the articles of agreement as the work continues.

Lesley Fitch (Calais) reminded the group that we are required to hold public meetings to allow for discussion on any items that will be voted by Australian ballot.

Chani Waterhouse (Worcester): Explained that there were default articles of agreement from the Agency of Education, and a group has been meeting in open meetings to discuss and work from this default draft. Richard Kehne stated that there is a difference between attending an open meeting when discussions take place, and voting on items.

The motion carried.

3. To determine whether to vote on the District's budget and all other public questions by Australian ballot.

Flor Diaz Smith moved to vote on the District's budget and all other public questions by Australian ballot. Seconded. Discussion: Richard Kehne expressed concern around Australian ballot - as inconvenient as floor votes might be, Australian ballot distances people from decision making. Stewart Clark indicated that he is opposed to voting on budget and public questions by Australian ballot. He stated that it is important to get together and discuss what we are voting on; Australian ballot removes us from the process. A floor vote allows for the process of discussing the budget and amending the budget.

Lesley Fitch stated that there is nowhere in our district that can hold all of the registered voters in our five towns. There are a great deal who would not be able to participate. She indicated that Australian ballots provide an equal opportunity for everyone to vote.

Rubin Bennett (East Montpelier) reiterated that it is not feasible to have all of the voters in our five towns be able to come together and take care of business.

Janice Aldrich (East Montpelier) indicated that she is in favor of Australian ballot; absentee ballot is allowed in Australian ballot.

A member of the audience indicated that "all other public questions," as this article is worded, is too broad.

Gus Seelig suggested that the motion be divided into two: voting on budget versus voting on "all other public questions."

Ellen Knoedler (East Montpelier) clarified - if we decide to not take up the budget by Australian ballot, will it default to floor vote or is there a possibility that some other mechanism would come into play for voting on the budget?

A member asked how the five towns currently vote on their school district budgets. Chani Waterhouse indicated that all of the towns use Australian ballot to vote the elementary school budget, except Worcester.

Chris McVeigh urged those present to consider a floor vote for the budget. It allows for discussion. To say "we can't do it because it is too hard" is not acceptable.

Richard Kehne stated that it is a weak argument to say we don't have a big enough space; we were forced into this merger to begin with. He indicated that we learn and discuss when we have a floor vote.

Brian Tagliaferro (Middlesex) indicated that accessibility and opportunity to vote is paramount, and floor vote limits ability to participate.

Richard Raubertas (East Montpelier) indicated that insisting on a floor vote results in disenfranchising a large number of people and it is very telling that four out of five of our towns have already made the choice to move to Australian ballot.

Joanna Vonculin (Middlesex) stated that this is a false dichotomy - to say it's either discussion *or* Australian ballot; it can be both and she is for whatever gets the most people involved as possible.

Josh Fitzhugh (Berlin) indicated that this budget will be one of the largest in Washington County; having Australian ballot is needed to ensure the greatest participation.

Patrick Wood (Middlesex) asked whether there is a way to have a large, productive discussion about the school budget, and allow the town or the group as a whole indicate that the budget should move forward (ultimately to Australian ballot).

Chris Cadorette (Calais) moved to call the question. A $\frac{2}{3}$ vote was in favor of ending debate on the first part of the motion.

Motion was revisited: to vote on the district's budget by Australian ballot. This motion carried.

Second part of the motion: to vote on all other public questions by Australian ballot.

Motion was made and seconded. Discussion: Chani Waterhouse stated that all of the arguments that were made for voting on the budget could be made in favor of the second part of the motion. She favors Australian ballot for this as well.

A community member indicated that "all other public questions" is too ambiguous, and he would like to ensure a discussion and floor vote.

Michael Duane (East Montpelier) stated that this is so broad, is it possible to pass on this, or table it, and get more specific information, going forward.

Michael Duane moved to table the second part of Article 3: "and all other public questions" for one year. This motion was seconded. Discussion: Alice Agney (East Montpelier) indicated that we might be able to answer what "other public questions" means. They are often simply housekeeping motions that allow business to occur. It's not nefarious.

Josh Fitzhugh - it is very broad - at the very least, the school board directors should decide on a case by case basis whether items should be voted on the floor or by Australian ballot.

Rose (East Montpelier) asked, will we still have informational meetings? e.g., if we move to Australian ballot?

Rubin Bennet encouraged the group to not table this item, and to vote in favor of Australian ballot. The mechanisms are in place for public discourse. Tabling this item would "hobble" a new board.

Patrick Wood suggested a friendly amendment - use "basic housekeeping items" instead of "all other public questions."

Suggestion was made for a friendly amendment, rather than one year, at the discretion of the board, to bring back a definition/ list of items that is more narrow and specific than “all other public questions.”

Scott Tassej (East Montpelier) stated that anything to be voted on should be Australian ballot.

A vote was called on the motion to table this item. This motion was defeated.

The original motion regarding Australian ballot regarding “all other public questions” was voted on. This motion carried.

4. To determine whether to elect members of the District Board by Australian ballot.

Rebecca Reed (East Montpelier) moved to elect members of the District Board by Australian ballot. This motion was seconded. Discussion: Stewart Clark indicated that we don’t know how many members will be elected. He believes it is important that we have an opportunity in an open meeting, to hear from them, to get together and have an opportunity to discuss.

Discussion: Robert (Berlin) moved to amend the article: each town voting for only its own members. This amendment was seconded. Discussion: Dorothy Naylor indicated that, to have a set number of members from each town (e.g. two from each town), then we have to vote as a whole, and not by each town. Flor Diaz Smith stated that we are not allowed to amend this article, as it has been provided by the AOE and State Board of Education. To amend the article would not be following the rule of law. Chris McVeigh explained - with proportional representation: one person, one vote - this is included in the articles that will be addressed for July 1, 2020. However, the set, even, number of members from each town needs to be voted on by all of the towns.

Robert (Berlin) explained his intention (regarding the amendment.) Susan Clark clarified the idea of “one person, one vote.” Kari Bradley (East Montpelier) stated that the amendment would put us in contradiction with our default articles of agreement; it might be a topic for another day, but not for tonight.

Gus Seelig agreed and ruled that this amendment is out of order.

Question was called. Two-thirds voted in favor of ending debate.

Vote was held on whether to elect board members of the district board by Australian ballot: This motion carried.

5. To determine and approve compensation, if any, to be paid to officers of the District.

Stephen Looke (East Montpelier) moved to approve compensation to be paid to officers

**moderator \$250
clerk \$500
treasurer \$6600**

This motion was seconded. Division was called for. **This motion carried.**

6. To determine and approve compensation, if any, to be paid to members of the District Board.

Linda Urban (East Montpelier) moved to approve \$1000 each, to be paid to members of the District Board. This motion was seconded. Discussion: Vera Frazier stated that Berlin school board members do not receive compensation for their time; she amended the motion that there is no compensation. This amendment was seconded. Discussion: Carl Witke (Worcester) stated that there are costs incurred, and not everyone is in a position to serve (fiscally), offering this compensation provides a more equal opportunity to serve on a board.

Rose (East Montpelier) asked whether this compensation is already in the budget?

Chris Cadorette - there is no budget yet for the unified district.

Barry Bernstein - stated that it is asking a lot to expect board members to do what they do without compensation.

A vote on the amendment (to provide no compensation) was held - this motion failed.

A motion was made to amend the motion to prorate the payment. This motion was withdrawn.

Vote on the original motion (for \$1000 compensation) - this motion carried.

7. To establish provisions for the payment of any expense incurred by the District before it becomes fully operational on July 1, 2019 under a voter-approved budget for the fiscal year beginning on that date.

Rubin Bennett moved this motion. Seconded. Discussion: Carl Eitner (East Montpelier) asked for clarification.

Matthew DeGroot (Worcester) amended the motion: to authorize the payment of any expense incurred. Seconded.

Discussion: Diane Nichols-Fleming asked, where is the provision coming from? Is it from money that we are borrowing before the board is in place? Rubin Bennett explained that the new district will incur expenses before it is fully operational.

Paul Hannon (Calais) stated that the board authorizes payment. We don't necessarily want to authorize any payment that is put before the board. Do we want to amend: to authorize the board of WCUUSD to authorize the payment of any expense incurred.

Matthew DeGroot accepted this amendment (to his amendment).

Discussion: Robert Porter (East Montpelier) stated that this seems like an unlimited amount of money that we are authorizing. Carl Eitner asked for clarification - can the district incur expenses that will be paid by this provision, before May 21st? Dorothy Naylor stated that the May 21st meeting will be to elect a board of directors.

Matthew DeGroot indicated that this provision is required by statute, any time a new municipality is formed. He indicated his understanding that we will continue to use our current funds to cover expenses until the new board is operational.

Matthew DeGroot explained his understanding that the new district does not have funds until July 1, 2020. Stephen Looke indicated that as board members we are required to keep the schools operational. The board will be responsible for meeting the obligation.

Carl Eitner asked for clarification on the motion. Some discussion followed.

Lesley Fitch explained such expenses (of the district) that may be imminent: warning meetings, providing notices, printing, postage, ballots.

This motion, as amended, carried: To authorize the board of WCUUSD to authorize the payment of any expense incurred by the District before it becomes fully operational on July 1, 2019 under a voter-approved budget for the fiscal year beginning on that date.

8. To authorize the District to borrow money pending receipt of payments from the State Education Fund by the issuance of its notes or orders payable not later than one year from date: provided, however, that the District is authorized by Vermont Statutes to borrow sufficient funds to meet pending obligations.

Allison Gilman (East Montpelier) moved to authorize the District to borrow money pending receipt of payments from the State Education Fund by the issuance of its notes or orders payable not later than one year from date: provided, however, that the District is authorized by Vermont Statutes to borrow sufficient funds to meet pending obligations.

Seconded by Rebecca Reed (East Montpelier). This motion carried.

9. To determine whether to authorize the Board of School Directors, pursuant to the provisions of 16 V.S.A. § 563(10) & (11)(C), to provide mailed notice to residents of the availability of the Annual Report and proposed school budget in lieu of distributing the Annual Report and proposed budget.

Chris Cadorette moved to authorize the Board of School Directors, pursuant to the provisions of 16 V.S.A. § 563(10) & (11)(C), to provide mailed notice to residents of the availability of the Annual Report and proposed school budget in lieu of distributing the Annual Report and proposed budget.

Seconded by Chris McVeigh. Discussion: Cindy Gardner-Morse (Calais) explained that this means people will not receive an annual report, so will be asked to vote on a budget without information provided (at that time) about said budget.

This motion carried.

Motion to adjourn; was seconded and carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary