Town of Royalton
Annual School Meeting Minutes
March 2, 2015
South Royalton School Gymnasium

The townspeople of Royalton, prior to the start of their meeting, gave audience to Representative Sarah Buxton. She gave a synopsis of what the education policy in Vermont is focused on. The House Education Bill, which proposed to reorganize Vermont's education districts into larger entities passed the House, but did not make it through the Senate. Vermont Secretary of Education: Rebecca Holcombe reported that Vermonters have one of the fairest education financing systems, but not "equity of opportunity from district to district." Ongoing affordability and low declining enrolment prompted creation of a new bill in her committee proposing: moratorium on unfunded mandates, elimination of small school grants, 2% spending cap on school boards starting next year and for districts to regroup into larger entities and share resources.

Floor: Eunice Gavin questioned availability of state school funding in light of Vermont's serious deficit. Buxton noted spending cuts and revenue increases would help. Plus, the education fund is set at a predictable rate which would not likely be impacted by the state deficit.

Moderator David Ainsworth called school meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Article I: To elect by ballot the following School District officers:
A. A Moderator for a term of one (1) year.
B. Two School Directors, one for a term of three (3) years, one for a term of two (2) years.
Note: Voting on Article I will be by Australian ballot and the polls will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, 2015.

Article II: To Hear and Act upon the report of the School District Officers.

Motion to accept was moved and seconded with no discussion, by polling those in favor and against by show of raised cards. **Motion carried.**

Article III: To Vote a sum of money for the support of the school for the 2015-2016 school year.
School Director Tim Murphy introduced South Royalton School Superintendent: Bruce Labs, Business Manager: Donna Benoit, Principal: Dean Stearns, School Directors: Christine Hudson, Chris Mabey, Tom "Geo" Honigford and Laurie Smith.

School Director Murphy made the motion to approve the sum of $6,129,233 for the 2015/2016 school year. **Motion seconded.**

Request for a PowerPoint Presentation by Directors Murphy and Smith. Director Smith announced new Director of Guidance: Hanna Glass-McShinsky and Assistant Principal: Frank Romeo. School Board reported enrollment at 375 students including preschool. New England Association of Schools and Colleges has begun their reaccreditation process using a testing system called STAR 360, which will allow teachers to best educate all students and "...zero in on the exact level the students are performing at." Director Smith noted that the board is there to set and monitor the school's vision, vote on and report budget to townspeople, hire superintendants, negotiate contracts and advocate on behalf of school.

Director Honigford reported on the current events of the Royalton District, which is part of five other schools within the union. Group purchasing, like fuel oil, bussing, office supplies, payment of invoices, oversight of the Special Education department and grant writing, goes through the Supervisory Union. State law will mandate a ten- town merger of our Orange-Windsor and the Windsor -Northwest Union in an attempt to increase access to high quality teachers, curriculum expansion and advanced technology while reducing overall expenditures per pupil.

Director Smith noted the combination of school budget, student numbers, Common Level of Appraisal and a legislature-based spending formula which accounts for schools statewide all contribute to Royalton's property tax rate. Over five years, average school spending was 2.6 % vs. 10.6% statewide. Board projects a base property tax decrease from $1.49 to $1.41. Budget proposal of $6,129,233 is up 1.76% from last year. $4,584,311 would be funded by property taxes. Difference would be paid by state and federal funds.

Floor: Lincoln Clark asked what do increased opportunities for high school students mean? Principal Stearns said the goal is to increase classes and electives, along with modified blocks, without having to hire additional staff. This would "...better prepare them for college and careers."

Principal Stearns said the staff is also focusing on meeting needs of elementary and middle school students with the understanding that the three schools within the school are currently driven by the middle and high school. Staff is working to better address elementary school needs.

Floor: Sandra Conrad asked, "Why are we spending more money administratively, not programmatically?" Donna Benoit confirmed Conrad's figures were from a summary recap, which included a supervisory union assessment for Special Education, business functions, services and grant coordination handout at pre-town meeting and broken down differently.

Floor: Harry Dodge asked if money could be saved by having graduation in new gym vs. tent rental and was told the new school sign was paid for through private donation.

Floor: Joshua Bushrod Powers asked about school capacity. Discussion referenced 575, but not to be used simply to absorb other schools.

Floor: Eunice Gavin questioned the hiring of a new middle school teacher. Director Smith said one additional teacher was hired to accommodate a large middle school.

Director Honigford explained to Nancy Wuttke that as the largest school, Royalton's representation was now only at 20%. The current board would request proportional representation.

Moderator Ainsworth called for questions and polled audience. **All in favor of voting sum of $6,129,233.00 for 15/16 school year? Motion carried.**

Article IV: To Act upon the following question: Shall the voters of Royalton Town School District approve the transfer of a sum not to exceed $50,000 from any General Fund balance remaining from the 2014-2015 school year to the Building Reserve Fund? Motion moved and seconded. No discussion. All in favor and opposed signified by raising cards. **Motion carried.**

Article V: To transact any other business proper to come before the meeting.

Sophomore class will be selling breakfast at Town Meeting and Girl Scouts will be selling cookies.

Moderator Ainsworth noted contested races on Tuesday's ballot. For Treasurer: LuAnn Bingham vs. Ted DiCicco and Kim Hebard vs. Tom "Geo" Honigford. Also, Allison Fulcher will run as write-in for Grand Juror and John Dumville for Cemetery Commissioner. Second Constable is also open.

Kimberly Hebard stated she is a taxpaying parent with a fresh perspective who is willing to maintain control on costs of education, while Honigford spoke to his experience as Vice President of the School Board Association, a key component in supporting Royalton at a statewide level.

Moderator Ainsworth noted the two additional ballots to be voted on at Town Meeting on Tuesday, March 3. Article I: Shall the charter of the Town of Royalton be amended to authorize the Selectboard to fill the office of Town Treasurer by appointment for a term up of up to three years? And, Shall the Town of Royalton adopt the revised town plan?

All in favor of recessing were asked to stand up.

Townspeople in attendance: 116
Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted;
Karmen M. Bascom, Town Clerk
Karmen M. Bascom

David M. Ainsworth, Town Moderator
David M. Ainsworth

Joshua Bushrod Powers, Justice of the Peace
Joshua B Powers