

**Franklin Northwest Unified Union School District
Organizational Meeting Minutes
At the Missisquoi Valley Union School Theater
March 21, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER: 7:04pm

The Franklin Northwest Unified Union School District Organizational Meeting was called to order on Thursday, March 21, 2019 at 7:04 p.m. by Tim Magnant, Moderator after the legal voters of the Franklin Northwest Unified Union School District (the "District"), comprising the voters of the Towns of Franklin, Highgate, and Swanton were notified and warned to meet at the Missisquoi Valley Union Middle-High School in Swanton, VT on the 21st day of March 2019, in the Trahan Theater at 7:00 p.m. It was noted that a paper ballot may be requested for a vote at any time during the meeting and that non-residents or attendees from other districts may not vote. Additionally, it was noted that anyone wishing to speak should state their name and speak loud enough so that all members of the assembly can hear. The following business was conducted at the meeting:

Articles 1 and 2: Were approved at the February 20th, 2019 Organizational Meeting.

Article 3: 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:

Action: Ed Daniels nominated Tim Magnant as Moderator.

Vote: YES

Clerk:

Action: Don Collins nominated Erica Benoit as Clerk.

Vote: YES

Treasurer:

Action: Denis Boucher nominated Robin Blouin for Treasurer.

Vote: YES

Article 5: To determine whether to vote on the District's budget and all other public questions by Australian ballot.

Action: Richard Thompson made a motion to vote by way of Australian ballot, seconded by John Hubbard.

Discussion:

- Cindy Gates (Franklin) Does not agree with the Australian ballot method. She feels that the people whom care should show up at the meetings. People are going to vote that don't know what they are talking about and didn't attend any of the meetings.
- Elizabeth Mansfield (Swanton) Stated there was a meeting tonight and the people did voice vote, would not be able to vote by no fault of their own. Please keep in mind there are people that are not able to attend the meetings.

- Jay Denault (Franklin) Made the point that he fully understands the Australian ballot process. Wants everyone to also realize there is not one budget to be voted on but five. If it's done by way of Australian ballot, people should be conscious, all the school's budgets are held hostage by just a yes or no. Jay recommends passing over the vote until the board can create a manor, where there would be more access to the individual budgets.
- Richard Thompson (Swanton) Has worked polls for 23 years, and believes Australian ballot increases voter turnout. An Example of this, the last few years the MVU meeting was voted by town meeting style, the average vote was 192. In March of 2018, the vote by Australian ballot, was 1,394 votes, not even close. Floor voting was archaic. It makes people feel that only the people that show up and informed or care enough to vote, which is totally wrong. There are many reasons that people are not able to show up to vote, for ex. the elderly, people homebound, in the hospital or in the military serving overseas for the right to vote! Australian ballot allows 45 days, to vote via absentee ballot. Swanton has done their voting by AB since 1993. Last year Swanton had 500 absentee ballots, which would mean that 500 people wouldn't have been able to vote, town meeting style. This is voter suppression. Suppressing the weak, the poor and the elderly. This is 2019 NOT 1919.
- Jason Guyette is in the military and was deployed in 2015-2016 with less than 20 days notice. If he were in that same situation again, he would be unable to vote. Jason has three children in the school system he wouldn't be able to vote for. He is a softball coach and volunteer fireman and works very hard for the community. It would be unfair to deny people to vote, a lot of times parents are carting kids to sports and other activities. Thanked everyone for coming and feels that there are still a lot of people that wanted to make it but were unable.
- Ty Choiniere (Highgate) Doesn't agree with Act 46, feels if Australian ballot is voted for, we are giving the rest of the state away. If you have a concern about one thing, you have to vote everything down. Feels there are a lot of people that do come.
- Connie Beyor (Highgate) the right to vote is so important, but so is the responsibility to know what they are voting for. Example, a few years ago there was a sports team on the budget and people didn't want to approve it, so they voted the entire budget down. Connie thinks there is away around it. Yes, get to an Australian ballot but only after finding ways to have people more informed about what they are voting on and be able to ask questions. Connie likes Jay's idea of tabling this right now.
- Meaghan Conly (Swanton) to assume someone is ignorant and unable to make an educated vote on something simply because they can't attend a meeting is incredibly insulting. For those that work full time, they may not be able to get to the meetings in time or get a day off. And is shouldn't be acceptable to not let them vote. Asks to continue the AB process.
- Mary Wood (Swanton) after being a teacher for over 30 years and on the school board, she has experienced both types of voting. Feels everyone should take the responsibility of informing those people that aren't at the meeting. Feels the only way to do that is with AB and by using all the technology that's out there today and educate the people that aren't at the meeting. When they go to the polls, they are going to make the best educated decision.
- Doug Clark (Franklin) would like to know what happened to the absentee ballot?
- Missy Corey her understanding is if you have AB then you have the right to an absentee ballot. Missy supports AB and works an hour from Swanton and just can't always make it to vote. She has exercised her right to vote via absentee ballot and appreciates having the right.

- Town Clerk Lisa answered: You can't have absentee on a floor vote. She supports the
- Doug Clark feels it's really important to give everyone an opportunity to vote. The more people voting and giving their opinion the better off everyone will be.

Action: Paper Ballot

Vote: 195 Total Vote

117 YES

78 NO

Article 6: To determine whether to elect members of the District Board by Australian ballot.

Action: Richard Thompson made the motion to elect the board by Australian ballot, seconded by Butch Patch.

Discussion:

- Ty Choiniere wanted to know if all three towns vote on all the members or do you one vote on members from your own town?
 - Julie Regimbal stated that you vote on all three towns members, not on your individual town members, you are voting a board. There will be a set number from each town and all three towns will vote on all the members.

Vote: YES

Article 4: To determine a date and location for the first annual meeting of the District and all subsequent annual meetings, which shall not be earlier than February 1 and not later than June 1 each year.

Action: Don Collins (Swanton) made a motion to hold the first annual meeting and all subsequent meetings on Vermont Annual Town Meeting Day with electrics casting their ballots, at the polling place in their town. Seconded by Gregg Gervais (Swanton)

Discussion:

- Kim Gates Clarification as this would state that we don't vote on anything until next March? The motion is for the first meeting to be on town meeting day, which is March 2020.
 - Julie Regimbal explains in the case of this year, there will be a special meeting held to vote on school budgets and Directors.

Kim thinks the motion should have a date for this year, with the subsequent meetings next year on town meeting day.

- Don Collins accepts a friendly amendment with a date for the meeting this year.
 - Julie stated June 4th would be the earliest we could hold a meeting. There will be two special meetings of the District this year. The first will be to vote on the initial elected board of the school district which will be April 30th, 2019. The next day, the board will warn a special meeting for the budget which will be June 4th, 2019.

Don reiterates his friendly amendment with his understanding that this first year, using AB, on April 30th, 2019 there will be a vote to elect the school board members for the newly formed District. June 4th 2019 would then be the earliest vote on the District school budget vote.

- Gregg Gervias still seconds the amended motion.
- Dan Billado (Swanton) has a concern that the original motion was for town meeting day for the annual meetings. Feels it would be hard to have a Unified School Board meeting on Town Meeting Day.

- Julie explains that in a system with AB, the board adopts a budget at the end of January and it's shared to the community. There will be an informational meeting 10 days prior to the vote. The vote is on Town Meeting Day by AB.
- Toby Maguire (Swanton) doesn't think we can mention the dates of the meetings, that's for the interim board that has that authority and should not be in our mention.

Action: Toby would like to make an amendment to take out the mention of the dates April 30th, 2019 and June 4th, 2019 from the motion, seconded by Meaghan Conly.

Discussion:

- Don Collins and Gregg Gervais agree it was a friendly amendment and are not opposed to it.
- Richard Thompson states that we are going to forget about the dates, it's very simple, there is an information meeting, then town meeting day, where everyone will vote in their perspective towns by Australian ballot. The JP's from the specific towns, will all take their ballots to a central location because they have to be comingled and counted. They have to be counted as a unified District, not by town.
- Bill Check (Franklin) would like to add the work "tentative" to the motion.

Action: Bill would like to make an amendment to add the word "tentative" to the motion. Seconded

Discussion:

- Kim Gates states that you can't have a tentative undetermined date.

Action: By Moderator, the last amendment is out of order.

Discussion:

- Susan Collins (Swanton) just wanted to point out for clarification, when the term annual meeting is used, aren't we referring to just the voting and not the discussion part.
- Devon Batchelder (Franklin) thinks the simplest way to proceed is to strike the dates at Toby Maguire suggested. Allow the transitional board to set the dates and warn the meetings.
- Earl Black said his understanding is that the interim board is supposed to set the meeting dates and warn the meetings
 - Julie states the interim board will set the date and warn the election of the initial board members. Then the initial elected board will meet and set the warning for the special meeting for the election on the budget. The interim board has been elected, it's the board chair from each of the four boards and the clerk from each of the four boards.

Action: To delete the dates, April 20, 2019 and June 4, 2019 from the motion.

Vote: YES

Action: Ty made a motion to amend the original motion to include that the Annual School District meeting will be held the second Tuesday in March. Seconded by Dave Roddy.

Discussion:

- Kim Gates does not recommend the amendment to have the meeting on the second Tuesday, it's great to have everyone at Town Meeting, Kim doesn't think it's appropriate for individual towns to be discussing it when it's a Unified School District.

Action: The vote to strike the words Vermont Annual Town Meeting to be the 2nd Tuesday in March.

Vote: NO

Action: A motion to hold the first annual meeting and all subsequent meetings on Vermont Annual Town Meeting Day with electrics casting their ballots, at the polling place in their town.

Vote: YES

Article 7: To determine and approve compensation, if any, to be paid to officers of the District.

Action: Lora McAllister (Swanton) moves to make a motion to set the compensation for the officers of the board as follows: Moderator \$500, Clerk \$1000 and \$3000 for the treasurer, Seconded by Richard

Discussion:

- Kim Gates would like to know if these positions are being paid from the MVU budget and the amount.
 - Julie stated the Clerk and the Treasurer each get paid \$500.
- Nancy Magnant (Franklin) would like to know what the responsibilities for each position are.
 - Julie stated the moderator runs the meeting, the clerk is responsible for the elections of the district, minutes, and signs off on financial documents and the Treasurer signs all approved checks by the board.
- Peter Magnant (Franklin) would like to amend to motion for Zero compensation for the Moderator since the vote passed to vote Australian ballot, there is no need for a moderator.
- Mary Wood feels we are going to need the moderator more, there will be more informational meetings. Suggested maybe paying the moderator \$50-\$75 per meeting.
- Don Collins thinks with all the communication that will be done before the annual meeting, thinks you'll be up 6 or 7 nights and would raise to \$1000. Also, would like to point out that the treasurer will now be signing all the checks for the District which will be a lot of work.

Action: An amendment has been made to the motion to pay the moderator zero dollars.

Vote: NO

Action: Motion to set the compensation for the officers of the board as follows: Moderator \$500, Clerk \$1000 and \$3000 for the treasurer.

Vote: YES

Article 8: To determine and approve compensation, if any, to be paid to members of the District Board.

Action: Connie Beyor would like to make a motion to create a stipend, \$2000 for Board members and \$2,500 for the Board chair, seconded by Denis Boucher.

Action: Richard Flint (Highgate) made an amendment to the motion to pay the Board members \$4000 and the Board chair \$5000. Seconded by Ty Choiniere.

Discussion:

- Lynn Calderwood stated that she thought the point of this was to save money but it doesn't seem like it now.
- Richard Flint we are going to save money, but somewhere else, so why not give it to our own community.
- Linda Hartman (Franklin) would like to know how many Board members there will be.
 - Julie answered there will be 9. The default articles say 6, which is two from each town. An amendment committee has discussed that the transitional board would be put out to the voters, that is proposed to have 3 to be determined by voters.

- Lynn Caldwell (Highgate) stated that we are currently paying \$18,700 now, if we approved the amendment, we would be paying \$38,000 for 9 Board members.
- Rebecca Howrigan (Highgate) would like to know what the projected time, how many hours, how many meetings per month etc. is for the members.
 - Denis Boucher estimated about 6-8 hours a month currently, but it will be a lot more.

Action: Motion to pay the Board members \$4000 and the Board chair \$5000.

Vote: NO

Action: Motion to create a stipend, \$2000 for Board members and \$2,500 for the Board chair.

Vote: YES

Article 9: 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 of that date.

Action: Jay Denault made the motion to pass over this article, because of the dates, the new dates that are in the Senate are for July 1, 2020, seconded by Dan Billado.

Discussion:

- Don Collins understanding is that the legislation in the Senate is different than the legislation in the House. The Senate can vote before it goes to the floor and there will be a conference committee where they will either agree compromises or the legislation will die. Don is very concerned about postponing something on the possibility that the legislature will act reasonably.
- Gerald Gates (Franklin) Would like to know if we decide to not put this in to action right now, can the interim board put it on the ballot later on to be voted on?
 - Julie informed everyone the purpose of this motion is essentially to pay for the election, to pay for the ballots. Yes, you are right we can. The electric has to vote to allow us to expend the money. The purpose of this one is to expend the money on ballots. We could do it but it's really helpful if you gave us the authorization to spend money on the ballots, so it wouldn't be a town expense instead a school expense.
- Richard Wilkins (Highgate) the article indicates any expense incurred, not just voting expenses. Can that be anything other than was stated?
 - Julie adds it could be a legal fee, but we wouldn't be operational, so expenses would be very minimal and likely to just be having elections.
- Dan Billado legal alone could be one thing, then it can get blown out of proportions with the least little thing. The motion on the floor is based on the verbiage in the article.
- Richard Wilkins would like to know in order to table the motion indefinitely, you have to have a good reason as to why it can't be voted for today. Would like to ask Jay, what is so important that it can't be voted on today?
- Jay Denault thinks the legislature will change the date from July 2019 to July 2020. Wants to wait until we know when we will be forced in to the merger, either 2019 or 2020.
- Meaghan Conly would like to clarify about the bill that is being referred to that's currently in the Senate. It was referred to the committee on the 19th, regardless of what we may here. To make such a big decision based on the probability of something doesn't seem to be very smart. The amended proposal that was passed leaves the decision up to the new board.

- Pierrette Bouchard (Franklin) In order to have a newly elected board, you have to have an election, that election would cost money. If we want the delay, the elected board has to vote on the delay, but we can't have the election, where are we? Maybe we could amend this to limit the amount of expense.
- Earl Fournier wants to keep the options open and recommends we not pass over this article.

Action: Motion to pass over this article indefinitely

Vote: NO

Action: Dick Thompson moved the motion 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 of that date, seconded by Toby Maguire.

Discussion:

- Earl would like to know whom establishes the provisions?
 - Julie says first the transition board, and then the elected board will be establishing the provisions.
- Kim Gates has a big problem with a blank check for an unknown amount, she has heard legal, she has heard elections but the way she reads this, is it's a blank check which she has huge concerns with.

Action: Paper Ballot

Vote: 128 Total Vote

64 YES

64 NO

Action: Chris Yates (Highgate) made an addendum to borrow money for the election expense only from the Supervisory Union, seconded by Earl.

Vote: YES

Article 10: 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 late than one year from provided, however, that the District is authorized by Vermont Statutes to borrow sufficient funds to meet pending obligations.

Action: Motion is moved by Toby Maguire 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 late than one year from provided, however, that the District is authorized by Vermont Statutes to borrow sufficient funds to meet pending obligations.

seconded by Christ Shepherd.

Action: Jay Denault made an amendment to pass over, seconded by Ty.

Discussion:

- Jay Denault doesn't believe there will be many expenses incurred that would require an Article like this at this time.
- Ty would like to know what Julie Regimbal's opinion is on Jay Denaults comment.
 - Julie Regimbal stated that this is the language voted on every school budget. So that in the next school year, because the State Ed Fund doesn't give money to pay the bills and teachers on July First. So, we have to ask the tax payers to borrow money in anticipation

of that. This is for next year before we get Ed money so in her opinion she doesn't want it passed over.

- Gerald Gates would like to know why this isn't brought up with the budget, if it was he would vote it down now.
- Lora McAllister would like to know what happens if we don't have a passed budget, if there is no budget, how do we run and operate a school?
- Lynn would like to know if it's possible to have both this question and the budget on the school budget ballot. If it doesn't pass, still be able to vote yes they can borrow.

Action: To table Article 10

Vote: YES 59

NO 48

Article 11: To determine whether to authorize the Board of School Directors, pursuant to the provisions of 16 V.S.A. d 563(10) & (11)©, 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.

Action: Dave Roddy moves the motion, to determine whether to authorize the Board of School Directors, pursuant to the provisions of 16 V.S.A. d 563(10) & (11)©, 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 Dave Bennion

Discussion:

- Connie wants to know if we don't have any money how are we going to pay for it?

Vote: YES

Discussion:

- Jay Denault stated one of the duties of the transitional board is to prepare the Articles of Agreement to be presented to the permanent board and voted on. There were other Articles that no actions were taken on partly due to the pending lawsuit.

Action: Jay Denault would like to make a motion for the transition board to include the articles that were not acted upon by the committee at the time of the vote. There were about a half dozen articles that no action was taken on. Seconded by Jim Jewett.

Moderator: This is a straw poll because it wasn't warned and there is no article for that, but we can straw poll it.

Discussion:

- Tobias Maguire is trying to figure out if Jay is trying to bind what the interim board can do with this motion? It's up to the interim board to decide what or if they are going to bring in amended articles to the voters. The board can take the committees recommendation, or they can discard them. It's up to the interim board.

Moderator: This motion has been declared a straw poll, because it's not warned. It's a motion out of order but I allow it as a straw poll if people feel it's in their best interest.

Discussion:

- Don Collins would like to encourage anyone here or anyone that's seen the video tape, when they see the warned minutes for the transition board, to come to the meetings. They can put forth their ideas. It doesn't mean the board is going to accept everything that is recommended. That should be the process. Not telling the board tonight what they can and can't do. The meetings are public and everyone is welcome to go and give their opinions.
- Jay Denault stated we have created a transitional board and that board has three duties. One of those duties is to prepare the articles of agreement to be presented to the permanent board. To be clear, there were articles that the committee didn't take any action on. My motion is to include those articles.

Moderator: I agree but I have declared this a straw poll because it's out of order and not warned for this meeting.

Discussion:

- Connie Beyor would like to know why they weren't included in the articles at the meetings if they were important.

Moderator: Would like to thank the young ladies that have been running around with the microphones all night.

- Jay Denault stated that he has attended the meetings, the articles that weren't taken action on were important. Unless they are included in the presentation to the voters, they will never get a chance to vote on them and they were important articles.

Action: Anyone wanting to show support for Jay Denault's motion to include these articles that were not acted upon by the committee in the public vote. This is non-binding.

Vote: Non-binding

YES:29

No:26

Action: Motion to Adjourn at 10:26pm, seconded by Chris Shepard.

Vote: YES

Adjournment: 10:26pm