

Town of Benton
Select Board and Board of Education Joint Meeting
Monday March 4, 2019

Select Board Members: William R. Darcy, Chair; Regina Elliott, Carol Vincelette

School Board Members: Joseph Boutin III, Chair; Timothy Hickey

Others Present: School and Town Moderator, Gil Richardson; Town Treasurer, Dwight Swauger; Town Tax Collector/Town Clerk, Michael Stiebitz; Chair of Trustees of Trust Funds, Laura Richardson.

These draft minutes of the Town of Benton Select Board and School Board are believed accurate and correct, but they are subject to additions, deletions and corrections by the Select Board and School Board at their next meetings when the respective Boards vote on final approval of the minutes. These minutes are made available at this time to conform to the requirements of New Hampshire RSA 91-A:2.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Darcy at 5:30 PM.

Chairman Darcy stated the meeting was called to address the large increase in taxes as a result of the proposed school administration budget and the measures and procedures at the upcoming Town Meeting to mitigate the tax increase.

The extent of the estimated tax increase, from \$15.8 to \$26, was discussed and the resources available to reduce it, including from both the school and town budget and their implementation by warrant articles.

Chairman Darcy presented a plan to reduce the estimated tax increase from \$26 to \$20, which required about \$154,000, and included:

- *The School Board's February 6 vote to reduce the administration's budget by about \$40,000 by reducing the number of contingency students;

- *A further \$50,000 reduction in the school budget which could be offset during the school fiscal year, if necessary, by the School Expendable Trust Fund which had \$88,000 on hand;

- *The increase in the Town budget's contribution to tax reduction by reducing reliance this year on property taxes to fund paving projects and other warrant articles, adding about \$30,000 to tax reduction; and

- *The Town diverting \$33,000 of FEMA funds in the unassigned fund balance from road projects and the new Capital Repair and Maintenance Expendable Trust fund to assist with tax reduction.

It was also noted that even with a tax increase to \$20 per thousand dollars of property value that Benton taxes would still be lower property than all but one of the area towns. A copy of the proposed plan presented at the meeting is attached to these minutes.

Everyone in attendance appeared to agree with the plan and the discussion turned to procedures at the Town Meeting to implement it, with School and Town Moderator Richardson going over the necessary procedures. It was noted that the school administration budget could be discussed in relation to school Warrant Article 5 and that Warrant Article 6 could be amended to implement the further \$50,000 budget decrease. Moderator Richardson agreed to draft and circulate a proposed amendment. As to school Warrant Article 7, not recommended by the Board, it could either be defeated, tabled or passed over without action.

The Town warrant articles were also discussed, with no major issues identified. It was noted that a paper ballot was necessary for voting on Warrant Article 8's three questions. A single ballot with all three questions was preferred over three separate ballots, if it was legally permissible.

Chairman Boutin noted that 4 children are likely to be added to the school rolls in 2020, so school budgets are likely to increase further. Participants agreed that since the plan principally used one-time revenues that a tax rise in 2020 was inevitable, which our citizens need to know about.

The School Board was asked to give its meeting dates and times to the Town's webmaster so they could be posted on the Town's website.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 PM.