

TOWN OF ALSTEAD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Public Hearing and Select Board

Approved Minutes for Meeting of January 23, 2025 at 5:00 PM

Town Offices, 15 Mechanic Street, Alstead, NH 03602

SELECT BOARD PRESENT: Joel McCarty, Chair, Gordon Kemp, and Matthew Saxton.

STAFF PRESENT:

Name	Position	In Person	Google Meet
Misty Gratacos	Town Office Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shelley Steuwe	Recording Secretary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stephen Murrell	Police Chief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jesse Moore	Director of Sanitation, EMS & Grounds	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steve Reynolds	Dir Emergency Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

COMMUNITY MEMBERS: **In person:** Barbara Viegner, Joe Levesque, Marge Noonan, Maggie Forrestall, Judith Willis, Jo Cargill (Walpole resident), Bill Sommer (Walpole resident), Kevin Hicks, Kathryn Wright; **Google Meets:** Glen Elsesser, Carol Reller

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PUBLIC HEARING:

Re: Walpole withdrawal from Fall Mountain Regional School District. Presented by Steve Varone and Cheryl Mayberry.

A link to their presentation can be found here: [presentation](#)

A link to the Withdrawal Committee reports can be found here: [5876](#); [5871](#)

Public question/comment

- Mr. Saxton says that the financial figures differ from town to town and asks how that would be any different if the school district was to dissolve. Mr. Verone says that a

town's own school board can look at what it's doing and make budget decisions, whereas within the school district there is less freedom to do that.

- Mr. Saxton asks how much of the difference in financial figures between towns can be attributed to out-of-district placements, and Mr. Verone says that it's not more than other school districts.
- Mr. Gruber says that both of his kids went to Fall Mountain and had an excellent experience in the FMRSD. Together we can cooperate, share, and learn from each other. This process needs to have educators involved. He hates to see our system with such an excellent public school model change.
- Mrs. Forrestall says that she has two kids who will go through the school FMRSD system, and she is a teacher in Stoddard (SAU 24). The organization there is unconventional, but there are real resources that she has access to despite it being a small school. She asks how aware are non-teachers of these specifics and if everyone is aware of the different benefits of scale of economy. It's not just about the money. She doesn't feel the isolationist value matches her values. Mr. Verone says that he agrees, it's not just about the money, and the wish to withdraw doesn't have to do with money. It's about control to make the best decisions for your school, and to pass budgets based on your own community. The school budget in March passed by more votes in Walpole than any other town. It's frustrating for them to be the outliers in votes, up or down. 53% of towns in NH operate like this (not within a cooperative district). You get to decide your budget and the money stays in your town.
- Corporal Underwood asks about special education needs for students. If the school district dissolves and families need special education services, it's at the town's expense, correct? Mr. Verone says this is correct, and it's about \$100,000 per student (per year). The State will help fund anything above that amount.
- Mr. Saxton asks what Mr. Verone means "ground swell" in Walpole. Mr. Verone says that 82% of the population doesn't vote. The Walpole Selectboard asked them to look at all components (including money). The concept of the cooperative is that everyone moves in lockstep, and when there is an individual opportunity for a town, they cannot act on that. He provides the example that there was an opportunity to provide Walpole's students with additional resources (funded by Walpole) but they were not allowed this because everyone in the district would have to pay and couldn't (even though Walpole wanted to pay). Mr. Saxton asks why they couldn't put a warrant article in to get this resource, and Mr. Verone said that they could. Mr. Saxton asks why they can't just do that going forward rather than breaking up the district? Mr. Verone says that he doesn't support this method. He goes on to say that he would rather support students' strengths than invest money into helping them improve upon their weaknesses. He gave the example of students who are particularly weak in math, and that investing money into this area of weakness for them is not going to result in helping those students become accountants. The goal is to "turn learners into earners".
- Mr. Levesque says that he has been on the School Board for 6 years and has never rejected Walpole requests for their K-8 schools. This goes for all of the towns (as far as he is concerned). If a request is going to vote and will only raise taxes in the town that is requesting it, then he'll support it.

- Ms. Mayberry says that she is a business administrator in Winchester, which is a very poor town. She works very closely with the Town to manage the school's budget, and that special education costs are a very real concern. They use a Capital Reserve to set aside funds to support special education. Winchester also shares resources with Hinsdale and some other towns as needed. As chair of Walpole's Selectboard she would like to see more interaction between the School Board members and each town's selectboard to help bridge the gap in communication. When the study started they looked at educational benefits and financial pros and cons for both remaining a cooperative and dissolving, and used State statistics to inform that data. Much of this came from the Department of Education. They want to support children as much as possible while keeping the impact on the tax base in mind.
- Mr. Saxton asks what will happen with the Fall Mountain High School if the district dissolves, and Mr. Verone says that if they use RSA 195 nothing will change with the high school. If Walpole withdraws from the district, they'll need to tuition students to the high school. Mr. Saxton then says that it sounds like the only thing that Walpole will gain from withdrawing from the district is saving on district-wide special education costs. He asks Mr. Verone if there is anything else to be gained. Mr. Verone says that they'd also be able to make their own decisions about the curriculum and how many teachers to staff.
- Ms. Cargill (of Walpole) says that she is concerned about the politics which is now pulling people apart from each other, and is concerned that shared decision making within the district is going to be more difficult going forward. They want to be able to keep teachers that they chose to hire, not an HR person over at the district, and not have someone be able to just take that teacher and assign them somewhere else. They also want control over their curriculum (see Mr. Hicks' correction on the assignment of teachers below).
- Mr. Saxton asks how this will impact bussing services, and Mr. Verone says that towns will need to enter into a contractual services agreement to share bussing services. He says it is also possible to keep bussing in place and have the high school as the contractor.
- Mr. Sommer (of Walpole) asks Mr. Verone to confirm his understanding that if Walpole withdraws from the district their only choices for their high school students is to send them to Bellows Falls (VT) or Fall Mountain, since Keene won't accept their students unless they incorporate with them. Mr. Verone says that Keene's position was that Walpole would need to send all or none of their high school students, and they felt strongly that not all residents would be in favor of this and that it should be parental choice. Bellows Falls offered parental choice.
- Mr. Gruber says that part of the problem is that State aid for public education is half of what it was 20 years ago, so now everyone is scrambling due to high property taxes. Residents need to push the State to do their fair share to help with the cost of education. Mr. Kemp points out that this comes from taxpayer money, regardless. Corporal Underwood says that the lottery supports public education, and Mr. Gruber says that part of that is now going to private schools and elsewhere as well.

- Mr. Hicks (principal for the Alstead Attendance Area) clarifies that the school district's Human Resources department has nothing to do with hiring teachers, and only does the background checks and onboarding. He says that it is each town's local principal, teachers and para educators that do the hiring. Ms. Cargill asks if teachers can be transferred to another school within the district, and Mr. Hicks says yes, but there is also a process in place to contest this. He says it's very rare to transfer teachers and only happens in response to a critical need (like with special education) and a bonus is given to those teachers who choose to move into these roles. He goes on to say that increasing the number of school boards in the district will increase the inequity between towns when it comes to collecting bargaining agreements.
- Ms. Wright asks if there is public access to all the information collected in the study Mr. Verone was involved in, including budget information. Mr. Verone says yes, but that they did not build a budget. Ms. Mayberry clarifies that the purpose of putting this on the school ballot is to have a district-wide study done. The findings from the initial study is available on Walpole's website (linked above). Mr. Levesque notes that it is a \$50,000 Warrant Article on the school ballot to fund the study.

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. McCarty called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:35 PM and then proceeded with leading the agenda-based discussion.

GUESTS:

ACTION ITEMS: Warrant Article discussion

- Articles 2-14: Approved as written.
- Article 15: Mr. Kemp notes a slight chance that DRA will force them to make this two separate warrant articles. If so, the Board unanimously agrees to add a second warrant article.
- Articles 16-21: Approved as written.
- Article 22: Changes to be made –
 - Strike the language and copy the language from Article 26,
 - Add “and/or rehabilitation or removal” after “maintenance”,
 - Add “\$1000 by Unassigned Fund Balance and \$500 raised by taxation”, and
 - Change tax impact to .003.
- Articles 23-25: Approved as written
- Article 26: Changes to be made –
 - Strike the language and replace it with language regarding food freedom.
- Article 27: Changes to be made –
 - Change \$2,000 to \$1,000; \$500 from Fund Balance and \$500 from Lake Warren Preservation Association,
 - Add “on public waters within the boundaries of the town of Alstead. Nothing in this article authorizes the Town or any other party acting on its behalf access to private lands without owner permission” after “water testing and analysis”. Voted 2-1.

MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS: None reviewed.

OLD BUSINESS: Not discussed.

NEW BUSINESS:

OTHER ITEMS:

DEPARTMENT REPORTS: Not provided.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

INFORMATIONAL:

EXECUTIVE SESSION/S:

On a motion made by Mr. McCarty and seconded by Mr. Saxton *the Board Chair adjourned the public meeting at 7:14 PM.*

Important Upcoming Events/Meetings

Date/Time	Subject	Location	Notes
January 28 at 5:00 pm	Selectboard Meeting	Town Offices; 15 Mechanic Street	
February 1 at 10:00 am	Deliberative Session	Town Hall; 9 Main Street	
February 10 at 6:00 pm	FMRSD School Board Meeting	High School	2nd Monday of each month
February 11 at 5:00 pm	Public Hearing re: Vilas and Warren Dams update	Town Hall; 9 Main Street	Selectboard meeting to follow
March 11 8:00 am - 7:00 pm	Town and School Voting Day	Town Hall; 9 Main Street	

Respectfully submitted,

Shelley Steuwe

Recording Secretary