

MINUTES
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
December 30, 2019

Pursuant to notice the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax, Vermont, who are legal voters in the Town Meeting met at the West Halifax Elementary School multi-purpose room in West Halifax, Vermont, on Monday, December 30, 2019 Special Town Meeting of the Town of Halifax.

Moderator Paul G. Blais called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

The Board of Selectmen led the voters in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

The town officers were introduced: Town Clerk and Treasurer - Patricia Dow; Homer Sumner, Chairman of the Southern Valley Unified Union School District Board, Selectmen – Lewis Sumner, Chairman and Mitch Green. Moderator Blais stated that the meeting would be run by Roberts Rules of Order except where state law overrules and gave a brief explanation of parliamentary procedure. Moderator Blais read the warning in its entirety.

The following business was transacted.

ARTICLE 1: Tina Blais Moved that the Town of Halifax will vote to withdraw from the Southern Valley Unified Union School District. Lewis Sumner seconded the motion.

Matthew Stewart asks if Readsboro votes the article down what happens?
Homer Sumner stated: nothing happens. We stay the way we are.

Homer Sumner spoke on behalf of the article. He stated if both towns vote yes there is no guarantee that the unification will be dissolved. Town can only vote to withdraw. It is up to the AOE Agency of Education and the Secretary of Education to dissolve it and they would have to make a ruling. We merged in 2017 and we were told if we didn't merge with a town the State would merge you. The School would lose their small schools grant. At that time, Stamford was in the mix. Stamford chose to try to have an interstate compact with Clarksburg which is much closer to Stamford. Halifax and Readsboro forged ahead with the merger. This past year did not show any benefit except to the 8th grade acquiring six students from Readsboro. Readsboro is in the bottom 5% of the education in the state. Money is being put into Readsboro for their education to become better. There is not any difference between Halifax and Readsboro except for the staff each school had for years has not been doing the same thing. Readsboro School needs a 1.6 million dollar renovation to their school. The proposed budget which will go into effect July 1, 2020 first draft the per pupil cost if we split will be \$ 18,471. Halifax will be \$ 15,938. Where if we stayed combined the per pupil cost will be \$ 17,541. Halifax Per Pupil cost are roughly \$ 3,000 less than Readsboro. Halifax has enrollment of roughly 80 kids and Readsboro has roughly 42 students enrolled. Rough draft of budget is 1.7 million for Readsboro and 1.6 for Halifax.

Chris Worden asks if there are provisions for withdrawing and how does it happen?
Homer Sumner stated the first town that wishes to withdraw can get a petition which goes to the Selectboard. The Selectboard could have warned the meeting without the petition with a vote from the floor. After the vote from the floor, the Secretary of State will be notified by the Town Clerk that Halifax voted to withdraw. Then Readsboro has to vote by Australian Ballot. If Readsboro votes to withdraw then it is up to the Secretary of State of Secretary of Education to make the final decision. When the decision is made then the decision goes into effect the following July 1, Per Paul Blais.

Amy Kamstra asks if Halifax is not able to withdraw are there any other options.

Homer Sumner states that if there were other schools in the area that want to join, then both Halifax and Readsboro would have to vote to accept a new town. If Halifax closed its school then Halifax would have to tuition their students to Readsboro.

Fran Swanson asks if it is known how Readsboro will vote. Homer Sumner stated that the school board has not voted to withdraw. 2 of the Readsboro members have made it clear that they think it is a good idea to withdraw.

Rhonda Ashcraft asks how much are the costs of repairs to the Readsboro School? Homer Sumner stated it will cost approximately 1.6 million and if we stayed merged both towns will cover the cost.

Matt Stewart asks how soon the renovations need to be done. Sumner states that there is no time frame. The 1.6 million is only an estimate from an engineer. The engineer stated that when the renovations have begun then they all have to be completed and needs to come up to 2019 specs. Matt Stewart then asked why did the inspection happen? Sumner stated because the school is not up to code. The front doors cannot be locked for safety reasons. There was a \$25,000 grant for safety, and the installers stated they cannot replace the doors because of current issues with the wall. There is asbestos everywhere also.

Patti Pusey made a motion to call the question and Deb Sumner seconded the motion. Calling the question was so voted.

Article 1 was so voted. A floor vote was requested for an actual count. A show of hands was given in favor of the Article and was counted by the Board of Civil Authority. The Board of Authority counted 48 hands raised in favor of Article 1 to withdraw from the Southern Valley Unified Union School District and no hands were raised against the article. Article 1 was so passed.

There was no discussion under Article 2

Lewis Sumner made a motion to adjourn, Judy Fowler seconded the motion. Adjourning the meeting at 7:26 was so voted and adjourned.

Attest: _____ Patricia Dow _____
Town Clerk

We, the undersigned, approve and attest that the record of the Special Town Meeting of the Town of Halifax held at the Halifax Elementary School Campus multi-purpose room on Monday, December 30, 2019 is a true record of all action taken at the meeting.

Attest: _____ Paul Blais _____
Moderator

Attest: _____ lewis Sumner _____
Other Election Official