

****DRAFT****

Lincoln, VT Special Town Meeting Minutes

A “hybrid” meeting at Burnham Hall and on Zoom

August 23, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Town Officials Present: Todd Goodyear, *Moderator*; Sally Ober, *Town Clerk*; Bill Finger, Oakley Smith, Bay Jackson, Paul Forlenza, and Will Sipse, *Selectboard members*; there were about 20 people attending in person at Burnham Hall, and numerous others on Zoom.

Moderator, Todd Goodyear, called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. He asked if there were any non-Lincoln residents attending the meeting. Abigail Chang and Shawn Kimball identified themselves. The meeting rules were reviewed; each person would get no more than two turns to speak, for up to 5 minutes each.

The purpose of this meeting is to ask questions and discuss **Article 1: Shall the Town of Lincoln withdraw from the Mount Abraham Unified School District (MAUSD)?**

The Moderator opened the meeting for comments and questions.

1. Jan Buker asked us to review the definition of a community school. She pointed out that years ago when our Community School was rebuilt after a fire, her parents, Ron and Peg Rood, became founding members of the “Lincoln Community Club.” This organization served to support the school and its community, and the spirit of this group has continued on through the years in different formats. She wondered how many elementary aged students do not attend Lincoln Community School (LCS), or whether we have lost students to attrition? [No answer given]
2. A question was asked about the “limbo,” [transition] period, if Lincoln votes to withdraw from MAUSD. Would our school be at risk for retributions such as staff cuts, while we work out our separation plan? Jim Warnock, a member of the Save Community Schools (SCS) group, indicated that if we vote to withdraw, we would have to establish a new school board which would create and approve an exit agreement. This agreement would divide up assets and address any outstanding concerns.
3. Someone heard that the MAUSD Board is meeting tomorrow night and there might be an item on the agenda to “give back” the right for a town to vote on repurposing its school. Selectboard member, Paul Forlenza, indicated that this may happen, but some school board members don’t like the wording of the article, and may ask for an amendment. Our Articles of Agreement, when the MAUSD district was formed, already say that a school may not be closed without the affirmative vote of the town in which it is located. Some argue that we have always had this right, so why is the board voting to “give it back”? The SCS group maintains that the word “repurposing” means the same as “closing,” if it means that our students would not attend elementary school in the town where they live. Rob Backlund, one of Lincoln’s two elected MAUSD board members, suggested that changing a community school to be anything other than an education center for grades K-

6 should be voted on by the town. He said the idea of putting this on the agenda for the Aug. 24 MAUSD Board meeting, came up at their recent annual retreat. Alan Kamman wasn't sure it would change anything in terms of Lincoln's vote tomorrow.

4. A question was asked whether adding younger children to the LCS building for preschool or daycare, which are in high demand, would help with our student "head count". Also, if Lincoln votes to exit, would we rejoin our current supervisory union [for contractual services and banking purposes], or another one?
5. *The Moderator, noted that members of the Save Community Schools (SCS) group, who had already spoken twice, wanted to help answer questions. He asked the body to allow him to suspend the rules of our meeting, to allow a back-and-forth format, where SCS and town officials act as a "panel" for addressing questions. Hearing no objection, the Moderator invited Paul Forlenza to speak again.*
6. Paul Forlenza indicated that the Lincoln Cooperative Preschool is a private organization and they want to remain that way. Jeanne Albert, from SCS, informed us that preschoolers can count as equalized pupils, but they are weighted as 0.46 of a student for taxation calculations. In comparison, elementary aged students count as 1 equalized pupil, and secondary school students count at a rate of 1.13. Jim Warnock added that if we enrolled students from out of town, they may not count toward our equalized pupil total. Jim also pointed out that [Ripton, just voted to withdraw from their school district and they have not yet been assigned to a new one. How that goes remains to be seen.]
7. Jan Buker reminded us that the Act 46 legislation which merged our school district in 2017, was not intended to close community schools, and our superintendent has not honored that.
8. There was discussion about the power of the merger committee between the MAUSD and Addison Northwest School District (ANWSD) and possibly trying to put a hold on that committee's work, but it was uncertain whether that would be possible.
9. Attorney, Karen Lueders, explained that neither of the school boards has the authority to disband the merger committee under current law.
10. One person expressed a feeling of Lincoln being "bullied" by the MAUSD board, and worried that we would fight an uphill battle for a long time.
11. Jim Warnock and Paul Forlenza encouraged everyone to remain respectful and transparent as we continue the work of this journey. We will need to obtain the approval of our neighboring MAUSD towns in our next step [if Lincoln votes "YES" tomorrow]. The superintendent and MAUSD board are responsible for protecting the school district, and they are doing what they believe is right. SCS is focused on saving community schools. Both parties disagree on what should be done, but nobody should be seen as a demon.
12. What are the pros and cons of voting YES?
 - a. Several people commented that we should act with a sense of urgency to vote YES, because if the merger committee decides to combine the two districts, we would have to convince 9 other towns to approve our withdrawal.
 - b. A merger with ANWSD is actually phase II of the Superintendent's proposal. [Phase I is to repurpose the Lincoln, Starksboro, and New Haven community

school buildings, and send those K-6 students elsewhere.] It appears that the Superintendent's proposal is already being acted upon, and the other proposals offered by the community will not be seriously considered.

13. Emma Wood, described herself as a fairly new resident of Lincoln, and said that she has never seen a simple question be so complicated. The possibilities have been discussed and reviewed, and we can not foresee the future. The wellbeing of our children should be everyone's number one concern when we vote, and number two is the wellbeing of our community. Consider what is best to do at this moment, right now. She emphasized that of all the places she has lived in her life, Lincoln people have shown the most effort of giving to each other. Our students are getting a wonderful foundation here, the best she has ever seen. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the possibilities of this decision, simplify your thoughts and vote with your heart. [Round of applause from the Burnham and zoom attendees.]
14. Mike Fisher applauded the last statement, and said that he was a member of the Act 46 Study Committee which led to the formation of the current MAUSD Unified School District. He voted "NO" for the merger back then, because he maintains that the farther we move the decision making from the classroom, the less responsive the decisions are [toward the needs of individual students and school staff].
15. Tory Riley, LCS Principal, asked how we would obtain results of the vote tomorrow? Sally Ober, Town Clerk, said she would post the results online on the Lincolnvermont.org website, the VT Secretary of State Election Results website, Front Porch Forum, and on paper outside the Town Office and at the Lincoln General Store. Anyone who wants to receive results by text or email, may also submit a request for results. We always report to various press and media in the area as well.
16. Sally Ober reminded people how to vote by Australian ballot at Burnham Hall tomorrow, August 24. Every active voter was sent a ballot, unless they very recently registered. It is not too late to register, you can come to vote in person at Burnham Hall tomorrow. The polling place will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. She said that about 400 absentee ballots had already been received back, but Lincoln voters should turn out in better numbers than that.

Meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Sally Ober, Lincoln Town Clerk