

Special Town Meeting Minutes

October 13, 2009

Electors and others qualified to vote at town meeting met at the All Purpose Room of the Bolton Center School on Tuesday, October 13, 2009. Present were First Selectman Robert Morra, Selectmen Robert Neil, Leslie Shea, Robert Lessard, and Raymond Walker; Board of Finance Chairman Robert Munroe and members Kelly Regan, James Bruner, John Toomey, Edward Steele, and Joseph Fleming; Board of Education Chairman Karen Bergin and members Paula Meyers, Trace Maulucci, Joseph Muro, Matthew Giuffre, and John Hambrook. Also present were Administrative Officer Joyce Stille, School Superintendent Paul Smith, and about 70 Bolton residents.

Mr. Morra called the meeting to order at 7 PM. He explained that Town Meeting Moderator Catherine Peterson was unable to attend, so a moderator would have to be chosen for the meeting. On a motion by Mr. Neil, seconded by Ms. Stille, Mr. Morra was unanimously chosen as moderator for the meeting. Mr. Morra proceeded to read the call of the meeting, the return of notice, and the resolution to be voted upon.

RESOLVED: That pursuant to the Bolton Town Charter, Chapter 9, Section 9.3(A)10, the professional agreement between the Bolton Board of Education and the Bolton Education Association (teachers' contract) for the period July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2012 be approved.

A motion was made to this effect by Barry Stearns, seconded by Joyce Stille.

Mr. Morra then called for questions or discussion on the resolution.

Mr. Munroe, Board of Finance chairman, spoke first. The Board of Finance members had discussed the contract at great length at a special meeting held the previous week, and decided not to take an official position, but felt it was their responsibility to alert the town residents as to the impact of the contract on their taxes. The first year of the contract, when no increase is proposed, is not a problem. However, in the second year the contract calls for a general wage increase of 2% and a delayed step increase of .78% for 44 of the 99 teachers. Also, health benefits will increase significantly at 10%. All of this will cost the town, in the fiscal year 2011-2012, about \$330,000, which will have a 2.5% impact on the total budget and on taxes.

Ms. Bergin, Board of Education chairman, spoke next. She stated that the Board of Education and the Bolton Education Association reached an amicable agreement in a spirit of total cooperation. The teachers' union recognized the needs of the community and the school as well as their own needs. Communication between the two groups was always excellent; the agreement was unanimous, and it is one of the lowest negotiated contracts in the state. Mr. Giuffre, chairman of the Board of Education Personnel Subcommittee, added that his members looked at the financial and benefits side of the contract as well as its language and conditions. The Board of Education attorney

confirmed that this contract is strongly in favor of the board, with no one else even close to it in the state. The tax increase in the second year of the contract is not being disputed. Concerning the increase in health benefits cost, Mr. Giuffre stated that the board does not have the authority to negotiate on this specifically, but looked at the contract as a whole to see what made the most sense to the common good.

Adam Teller questioned if the health benefits increase included an increase in employee contributions. Ms. Bergin replied that the second year of the contract includes an increase in employee contributions, which are among the highest in the state for teachers.

Robert Galle asked how the contract compares to other town employee contracts for wage increases. Mr. Morra replied that the historic average increase for town employees is 3%, but that other employees do not receive step increases.

Susan D'Amico noted that fewer than half of the teachers are getting the step increase, and Amy D'Agata questioned if they would really be getting a 2% increase in the second year of their insurance costs are going up .5% at the same time.

Mr. Giuffre responded that it is difficult to make the figures line up exactly, but essentially, yes, the increase in health benefit payment would impact the salary increase.

Ronald Rousseau asked about the average teacher's contribution to health care in dollars. Mr. Smith replied that the average was approximately \$3,500, or 17.5% of the total per person cost of approximately \$17,000. However, since some teachers have individual plans and some have family plans, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact amount.

Mr. Fleming, a Board of Finance member, stated that he has been involved in negotiating education contracts since 1974, and this contract is well thought out and was negotiated in an atmosphere of mutual respect. He warned that if the contract is voted down it will go to arbitration which will cost the town thousands of dollars, and, since it was negotiated in good faith on both sides, it will be upheld by the arbitration board.

Since there was no further discussion, Mr. Morra called for a voice vote. The yes vote was overwhelming, with only a few no votes, so the resolution was declared passed.

On a motion by Mr. Teller, seconded by Mr. Neil, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan M. DePold
Town Clerk

