

**Town of Washington
Bryan Memorial Town Hall
Special Town Meeting
April 4, 2013
7:30 p.m.**

Moderator: Mark E. Lyon
Clerk: Sheila R. Silvernail

First Selectman, Mark Lyon, welcomed everyone and requested nominations for Moderator. Mary Anne Greene nominated Mark Lyon with second by Kathy Gollow. With no other nominations, Mr. Lyon was duly elected Moderator.

Moderator: Thank you, I'll have Sheila read the warning.

Clerk: Warning – Town of Washington Special Town Meeting
The voters and electors of the Town of Washington are hereby warned that a Special Town Meeting will be held on Thursday, April 4, 2013 at 7:30 p.m. at Bryan Memorial Town Hall, Washington Depot, Connecticut for the purpose of nominating candidates for four positions on the Shepaug Region #12 Board of Education. Dated at Washington, Connecticut this 14th day of March 2013.
Mark E. Lyon, Richard O. Carey, Anthony J. Bedini
Board of Selectmen

Moderator: The purpose of this, the sole purpose of this meeting is to nominate candidates for the Region #12 Board of Education. They're names will appear on the ballot in the Region #12 budget referendum. There are four positions to be filled. The only thing we ask is that we need a nomination and second. If you're nominating somebody and you'd like to speak a few words, you're welcome to, but we do have to have you use a microphone and state your name for the record. Then after nominations are closed, the candidates have the option of giving a brief speech if they would like. So with that, we'll ask, I'll call for a raise of hands for anybody who wants to make a nomination. Great! We'll start in the front and go back. How's that sound.

B. Carey: My name is Barbara Carey. I would like to nominate Peter Tagley.

Moderator: Ok, we have a nomination. Do we have a second?

P. Allen: Phyllis Allen, I second Peter's nomination.

Moderator: Ok, Mr. Tagley?

P. Tagley: I nominate Fran Caco.

Moderator: Ok, Fran Caco? Ok, do we have a second?

E. Caco: Second, Edward Caco.

Moderator: Edward Caco. Who is, we were heading back here. Mr. Mitchell?

J. Mitchell: Jim Mitchell, I'm on Old Litchfield Road and I've been a resident for thirty-eight years. Sixteen years ago I nominated this lady for her first term on the Board of Education of Region #12. She's eminently qualified and she's done a great job. She keeps costs under control and in these tough economic times we need someone who can be very cost conscious and she is. She's done a great job and I would like to nominate Valerie Anderson for another term.

Moderator: Ok, do we have a second?

A. Trowbridge: My name's Allen Trowbridge and I proudly second Valerie's nomination.

Moderator: Ok, we're working right John.

J. Anthony Bogue: My name's Jennifer Anthony Bogue. I'd like to nominate Rich Dean.

Moderator: Pardon, Rich Dean?

J. Anthony Bogue: Richard Dean.

Moderator: Richard Dean. Do we have a second?

C. O'Toole: Carrie O'Toole and I'd like to second that nomination.

Moderator: Ok, and ...

D. Alex: Donna Alex, I'd like to nominate Peter Bowman.

Moderator: Ok do we have another?

C. Koslosky: Cindy Koslosky and I second.

Moderator: Ok, Peter Bowman, ok.

M. Greene: Mary Anne Green, 92 Bell Hill Road, Washington and I would like to nominate Jim Hershfield for another term. I don't think we need to go into great detail about the wonderful job he has done for these many years for the town and for the region.

Moderator: Ok, do we have a second?

M. Gorra: Michele Gorra, I'll second.

Moderator: Ok, do we have any other nominations?

M. Gorra: Michele Gorra, I'd like to nominate Jennifer Pote.

Moderator: Do we have a second for Jennifer Pote?

K. Gollow: I'm Kathy Gollow. I'd like to second Jennifer Pote. I think she'd do a wonderful job. She does a wonderful job with the school right now. She's young. She's energetic. She knows a lot about kids in general.

Moderator: Ok, are there any other nominations? Ok, do we have a motion to close nominations?

J. Wildman: I ... we close.

Moderator: Do we have a second?

R. Reich: Second.

Clerk: May I have a name please?

Moderator: That was Janet Wildman and a second, Ray Reich. This is great. I think what I'm going to do is ask the candidates who have been nominated, by alphabetical order of their last name, if they would wish to speak, they can come up here for a brief speech if they so desire. So that would leave us, we'd start with Valerie Anderson.

V. Anderson: Hi, I'm Valerie Anderson. I live at 171 Blackville Road. I'm a neighbor of my great, wonderful friend, Jim Mitchell. I'm honored to serve another term if elected. I'm honored to be nominated by Al and Jim tonight. Lately I think the Board has become too much of a rubber stamp, too many expenditures, too many programs, and frankly too little time examining the why we're doing certain things that we are and the consequences of these changes. I've been Treasurer and Finance Chair of the Board for probably six years now and I always ask the hard questions. I always want a good and spirited and intelligent debate of why we're doing things, but most

importantly are these initiatives and these expenditures good for the children and good for our wonderful taxpayers.

I ask questions sometimes that are not popular. I do want to know why when we have a decrease in the population of our school system, 5.6% decrease this year alone. When I joined the Board, we had 1146 kids in the entire school system. We were considered very small then. We're going to go down to 594 kids in the entire school system in 2020. We have extremely good demographic studies every year and they are really reliable. So this year now we're talking about 794 children in the entire school system, yet we have a budget increased proposed of 1.4% increase. I don't know why and I do want to see if we can get that budget increase at least down to the level it was in the previous year, but quite frankly it should go down even lower than that.

So as Treasurer, as Finance Chair, I look at the numbers. I look at the consequences. Why do we have to pay \$25,000 give or take a student. The Town of Bridgewater we're paying something like \$32,000 a child to educate them in Bridgewater. We still have a staff of about 181 people. That has not changed. There have been some rearrangements and that's good. It's a beginning. We are seeing some decreases, but the overall staff number is still 181. The ratio is basically one staff member for every little more than four kids. That's crazy in my humble opinion.

We have started new programs. For instance, we now have, whether you know it or not, we're going to have a universal Pre-K program to service all children in all of the three towns. This is a new initiative. Do we need to do this now, especially with our population decreasing? And, we should look at the staff numbers extremely carefully. Do we need to buy 130 iMac laptops at \$1300 a pop for staff members? Do we need to buy 186 Chrome laptops so that each eighth, ninth, and tenth grader has their own? This is on top of very generous program of laptop that exists, state-of-the-art desktops, smart boards. You name it. We have it. This year alone we'll be spending a little less than a quarter of a million dollars on hardware alone and we did this each and every year that the population goes down. We also have a new program called "Bring Your Own Device." I don't know if a lot of you know that. That your children, the kids are allowed to bring any portable device they can. There are some restrictions, 3G or less, but smart phones, mini-iPads, laptops, computers. We are tripping over hardware in our schools and we're talking kindergarten up. So these are concerns of mine. Yes, we want the best technology for our schools, but at this particular time 1.43% increase in budget, 5.6% decrease in population.

This year's going to be very important. We do hope to have finally an initiative on consolidation and I hope it goes through. I hope somehow or another we can come together and consolidate hopefully at the Shepaug campus. It's going to be shared

sacrifice for everyone to close individual schools, but we have to do it because this is getting to be too small a district and too expensive.

So thank you for the nomination. If I am re-elected, once again I will ask the hard questions. I will take a lot of heat, but that's what I do best.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: Peter Bowman?

P. Bowman: Hi, I'm Peter Bowman. I live on 7 School Street in Washington. First of all I want to thank Donna and Cindy for nominating and seconding me. I appreciate their support and their confidence in my ability to at least run for a position on the Board of Ed. I share many of the same concerns that Valerie has. I don't have the experience she does. I'm not going to go into that level of detail. However, I'm interested in running on the Board of Ed because I am frustrated with some of the recent decisions that have been made on the Board of Ed. Some may be right decisions, but I think they've been very rash and gone forward without the proper consideration. Many decisions took years to come about and they were changed very, very quickly and abruptly.

Also, and Valerie had alluded to it, the school in the region is changing. It's going to be physically changing. We're going to go from probably several school buildings to fewer school buildings. I'm an architect. I have quite a bit of experience for ten or twelve years now working on school renovations both new and existing buildings. I understand the school funding, design, you know, many aspects of school's construction. So I'd be happy to apply my professional experience to the benefit of the region. Thank you very much.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: Fran Caco, Caco?

F. Caco: Good evening, I want to thank you for my nomination Peter and to my husband, Ed, who has for the last four years supported me every day that I've left, Monday, to go to the Board meetings. I have had a great attendance record at the Board meetings and I've been on numerous committees. I joined, went out for the Board four years ago for the sake of being a voice of a parent with small children in the school system, for the last, I have one child in every grade level of the school. I have a elementary school student, a middle school student, and a high school student. I see the changes on a daily basis that are going in our school. I see the declining enrollment. I don't have the numbers and the fiscal stuff that Valerie brings because

she works with that every day. It's her accountant background, but I always bring myself and I always listen to the children, to the teachers, to the parents, to the community members. I take what you say. I read every email that comes across my computer. People stop me in the hall, I listen to them. On the ... I will bring that back to the Board if I am re-elected. I do this because I know we can be better. I do this because all as parents need to have voice and I do this because our children. Our children are our future and we are the Board of Education. It is about the education. It is not about the bottom line. It is about the education and I am here for our students and our children and I hope to be re-elected so I can continue moving forward and helping the region and our community and most importantly our students achieve the goals that need to be achieved. Thank you.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: Richard Dean?

R. Dean: I'd like to start off by saying thank you to Jenny Bogue and Carrie O'Toole for the nomination and just a little bit about myself. For the past thirty-two years I've lived in the northwest corner of Connecticut with the last thirteen years as a resident of Washington. I have been employed for twenty-seven years at Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals. Currently as a pharmaceutical scientist in the research and development centers. I attended Western Connecticut State University and graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in chemistry. I have volunteered as a firefighter in the Town of Warren and have spent seventeen years as an EMT serving the Towns of Warren and Washington. I have two children that have attended the Washington Primary School, the middle and high Schools. Currently my younger daughter, Emily, is a senior at Shepaug and she won her tennis match today along with the Washington, the Shepaug girl's tennis team, while my older daughter, Nicole, is a junior at American University in Washington D. C. My reason for running for the Board of Ed is to be a vocal member that is willing to engage in the dialogue concerning the direction of our schools. From my many years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry I am able to analyze data and draw conclusions from that data. I believe that is important to listen to the community and to facilitate discussions that would help in better understanding the challenges that our students and our community are facing. I have seen the best that Shepaug is able to offer to our students and I would like all future students of Shepaug to have the same opportunities, the same level of opportunities that were available to my children. Thank you.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: Jim Hershfield?

J. Hershfield: Good evening, I'm Jim Hershfield. Thank you for my nomination. My term that ends this June 30th will be the end of my fourth term which will mean that I've completed sixteen years on the Board. So if I'm voted to the Board again, I will finish twenty years on the Board. Many people may think that's entirely too long for any one person to serve on the Board of Ed. It may be correct. I have two daughters who both went through the system K through twelve and have both graduated, one in '07 and one in '09. They received great educations. I still enjoy the work. I have been fortunate to have been elected Chair of the Board for the past I think four years and I've enjoyed that.

The Board, the Region, is going through a lot of significant changes right now. We have a new superintendant who came in and started July 1st, Dr. Constantino. I have supported Dr. Constantino. She has examined the system, looked very closely at it, suggested changes to the Board that the Board has supported. Not every member of the Board, a majority of the Board certainly. Some folks, parents, have thought that some of the changes were too abrupt, were not done with careful enough consideration. I think. I didn't agree with that. I think that they were carefully thought out and if not now, when. We are shrinking. We had to deal with certain issues. She's aligned the middle and high school so that next year it will be a six through twelve school instead of having a separate middle school, a separate high school, two separate principals. Next year, this coming year, there will be one principal in the middle-high school and an assistant principal. So things like that, doing away with the block scheduling which was a hallmark of our school, but she felt that we were not getting the bang for our buck, that there was a lot of waste in that system with the current population that we have now. The Board agreed with that. I know that there were people who disagreed with that, but I think if it's looked at closely those were proper decisions.

The long-range planning committee that's in operation now will be making presentations to the Board of options as to how the system is going to be, the physical plant of the system in the future. The Board will make a decision and present an option to the public for a vote. The public will have to decide. If there's going to be any change to the system as far as closing a school in any one town, it's going to require the positive vote of all three towns to do that. If that doesn't happen, then we'll have to consider some other options. The other option is a status quo to remain as we are, but it will be extremely expensive as we go forward.

So I think that the Board is doing a lot of good work. I'm excited about the new things that are happening. I would like to be able to stay on to help guide those things through. I'm certainly just one of twelve members. So I appreciate the nomination and thank you very much.

Audience:: [Clapping]

Moderator: Jennifer Pote?

J. Pote: I wasn't prepared to write a speech so forgive me. Everybody spoke so beautifully so I'll do my best. I'm Jennifer Pote. I've lived in Washington for fifteen years with my husband. We have two children. One of them is in third grade at Washington Primary School and the other is in sixth grade at the middle school. I have been serving as PTO president of Washington Primary School. I think I'm on my second year and I've previously for several years was vice-president and really kind of fell into the role and ended up really loving it. So it's become sort of a passion of mine that has now grown into long-range planning which I feel like I've been eating and breathing and sleeping a lot information. It has actually kind of put a fire in my belly and I'm really excited about the possibilities of Region 12 and so for me as being a board member, I'm already so impressed with the current board and how they handle things so I would be honored and thrilled to be one of them or among them. I feel like I've learned so much from all of them just by watching and listening to them. So if I were to be on the Board of Ed I would really work in the best interest of what I would want for my children. I feel like that's what I could bring to the board as well as trying really hard to think outside the box and yet still try to keep the decency and dignity of what our wonderful school is. I'm excited about the possibilities so I really want to make it a fabulous school, selfishly for my children and for the community because I've grown to love this place as much as the home that I grew in, in Bethel. So that's what I have and I think that's all I have from my chicken-scratch that I was writing back there as I was so nervous wondering what to say. So I think I've covered it all. Thank you.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: Peter Tagley?

P. Tagley: Well, it's certainly nice. I've been living in town since 1978. To see so many candidates unagendaed running for the school board is certainly nice. God forbid if anybody ever got elected to the Board of Ed without an agenda much less with an agenda and that's one of the biggest problems you do face when you sit on the Board of Education. From 1985 to 1986 to 1995 to '96 I was a Board member and the issue that we dealt with at that time was whether to renovate three schools or to build a new primary school. The public decided against a number of us who disagreed with them that they wanted to spend \$8.9 million to paint and patch three buildings instead of \$6 million that cost to build a new primary school for 500 children. It's very difficult living in these three towns to get people to leave their local primary schools and go into one single school. It's still an agenda today. Roxbury has changed its tune,

Washington certainly seems to be interested in consolidation at the primary level. Bridgewater we're not sure. Right now there's a committee of fifty of us sitting at the High School going through an agenda of issues and trying to formulate an idea of what people will support for referendum. In about another several months, that's going to go before the Board of Ed and the Board of Ed is going to have to make the choice what they wish to ... to the public with for referendum.

When I left the Board in 1996 I felt it was good to step back. You can be on the Board of Ed too long. I really believe that. You need to step back and take a look at what's going on. So I attended meetings, still attend meetings, and now of course we have a new superintendant. She's caused some controversy. The previous superintendant we had was never seen. The previous superintendant stayed in his office most of the time. Nobody knew he existed. The principals ran the schools. The teachers ran the classroom. There was very little direction coming from the chief executive officer. That changed. The Board of Ed decided it wanted change. It brought in someone just as it did in '95 and '96 when it hired Chuck Sweebin and he caused a lot of controversy also. So people are having trouble right now of dealing with the agenda of the new superintendant. When you sit on the Board of Ed, what is your job. Your job is not to manage the educational system. That's not what you're there for. You are a board of directors. A board of directors hires the chief executive officer. The chief executive officer runs the system. Your job is to analyze his or her program and decide whether it will work. That's your job as a board member. You're not running the system. I cannot tell you how many years I've spent on the Board and off the Board that people got on the Board to run the system. They had their own ideas how the educational system should function. The teachers run the classrooms. The principals run the buildings. The superintendant gives them a plan and you don't interfere with that. You're there to see things running smoothly. We happen to have a very good educational system. I sent three kids through the system. I have never heard of many complaints until recently when we hired the new superintendant. That's strictly because nothing had been happening for the previous five years and so change is difficult for people.

So my goal is to get re-elected to make sure that we don't have the same problem with Chuck Sweebin which cost us \$450,000 to pay him off because board members had a problem with him. So he left with a package of \$450,000 after one year being superintendant. My God, I wouldn't want to see that happen right now. We have to work through with the new superintendant what her goals and objectives are. Teachers have goals and objectives. Principals have goals and objectives. The superintendant has goals and objectives and so does the Board of Ed. It has to work as a team. Can't have controversy on the Board of Ed. It has to be a smooth running ship.

What will happen in the future I can't predict with the buildings. It would be wonderful if we were all under one building because we'd save an awful lot of money and we'd be able to put money into the system where it belongs, into the educational system, into teachers and programs. That's where the money needs to go. Right now it's going into building, a significant amount. Our budget, if you speak to Mark Lyon, one of the biggest problems this town has seventy cents of every dollar or more in this town goes to education and that's wonderful to a point, but what about all the roads that need to be fixed. Over \$6 million worth of roads?

Moderator: Only five!

P. Tagley: Only five! So as a board member you have to balance all of the pressure that comes from parents, from teachers, from students, from taxpayers, from selectmen, from finance committee members. That's what you have to balance and that's the job that you have to be prepared to do when you sit on the Board of Education. Very difficult job, not easy, not everybody's always happy with what positions you take, but it's exciting. I'm glad to see all of the new faces running. I can't remember the last time we had this many people wanting to sit at meetings at night for two or three hours. So I think it's wonderful. It means that people are interested in their town. They want to partake in that town. I think that's great.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: I have no favorites here, but I have to agree with Peter. I think it's wonderful that we have seven people that are willing to put the time and the effort into a very difficult job. I just want to thank those seven people for stepping up and volunteering. It is at times a very thankless job, I'm sure, but it can also be very rewarding because one of the most important things we do, do as a town is education our children. So thank all seven of you for volunteering.

I would ask that sometime next week you give a call to Sheila Anson, the Town Clerk, to make sure that you're names are correctly put on the ballot and good luck to all of you.

Audience: [Clapping]

Moderator: I would entertain a motion to adjourn.

Audience: So moved.

Audience: Second.

Moderator: All those in favor.

Audience: Aye.

Adjourned at 8:02 p.m.