

Town of Washington

Bryan Memorial Town Hall

Special Town Meeting on April 6, 2017 at 7:30 p.m.

Moderator: Henry Martin

Clerk: Sheila Silvernail

CANDIDATES in ORDER of NOMINATION

John Buonaiuto: Nominated by Joan Lodsins with second by Leslie Andersen.
Edwin Matthews: Nominated by Ted Bent with second by John Payne.
Valerie Andersen: Nominated by James Mitchell with second by David Werkhoven.
Peter Tagley: Nominated by Diana Tagley with second by Rod Wyant.
Jennifer Pote: Nominated by Michelle Gorra with second by Kerry McKeon.
Randall Carreira: Nominated by Erica Ryland with second by Joan Lodsins.
James Hirshfield: Nominated by Jay Hubelbank with second by Michelle Gorra.
Tim Laughlin: Nominated by Kerry McKeon with second by Jennifer Pote.

MINUTES / TRANSCRIPT of MEETING

First Selectman, Mark Lyon, welcomed everyone and requested nominations for moderator. Ray Reich nominated Henry Martin with second by Jay Hubelbank. With no other nominations, Henry Martin was duly chosen as Moderator.

Moderator: We will call this Special Town Meeting to order. Sheila, will you read the warning please.

Clerk: TOWN OF WASHINGTON – WARNING
The voters and electors of the Town of Washington are hereby warned that a Special Town Meeting will be held on Thursday, April 6, 2017 at 7:30 p.m. at Bryan Memorial Town Hall, Washington Depot, Connecticut to consider and act upon the following:

- To nominate candidates for the four Region #12 Board of Education positions whose terms will be expiring 6/30/2017. Voting for these candidates will take place in conjunction with the Region #12 Budget Referendum on May 2, 2017.

Dated at Washington, Connecticut the 23rd day of February 2017.

Mark E. Lyon, David Werkhoven, Jay Hubelbank
Board of Selectmen

Moderator: Thank you, Sheila. As the warning said, we are here for a very specific purpose to nominate candidates. In a moment I'm going to open the floor to nominations then ask for a second. Then when all the nominations are in, we'll close the floor for nominations. I would like to ask each

candidate nominated to simply stand with the microphone to accept the nomination if you choose and say a few words.

Male: [Inaudible]

Moderator: The question is can a candidate be nominated if not present. The nomination will be in order as long as there is a second. The person just won't have a chance to speak, but will have an opportunity after today to accept the nomination or reject it. There will be no disadvantage due to absence.

Peter Tagley: Can we have the candidates speak alphabetically to give it some order?

Moderator: I was thinking chronologically, but alphabetically works if someone can help keep track of names.

John Payne: I would just like to make a comment that this meeting while identified as a special meeting had no publicity or no description whatsoever as to its purpose or process. If I'm not mistaken, I believe that this is the largest part of the budget of this town.

Moderator: Yes, it is.

John Payne: I would like to know why it was not publicized better and why you could not readily attain what was to happen here.

Moderator: I'm sure that the warning was properly advertised and it does say that the meeting is to nominate. From a marketing standpoint, maybe we could do a better job getting the word out beyond the legal requirements. I also took you point that about two-thirds of the budget is related to the Board of Education's jurisdiction. You make a good point.

John Payne: I would just like to be on the record that I believe it was inadequately described even to the point of challenging whether this in fact as a result should continue.

Moderator: I don't see anyway that this meeting cannot continue because the legal requirements for the special town meeting have been met. Let me double check with our secretary. Is it fair to say that John's sentiment will be reflected in the minutes and therefore will be an official part of our record?

Clerk: Yes, it will be in the audio and the minutes.

Moderator: Thank you. Anything else before we go on?

Phyllis Allen: I just disagree. This job is so tedious and so many people do not even want to face the fact of getting on the school board. Many people have been asked. I've been asked a couple of times. I want no part of it. I think they are wonderful people that spend the time doing this. I congratulate them.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: I don't think you're disagreeing with John. I think John is saying that it is such an important role that it ought to be advertised better so more people will know about it and attend. I don't think there's any dispute about the importance of the job and how difficult it is.

Phyllis Allen: [Inaudible]

Moderator: Any other questions before we open to the floor to nominations? I wanted to say one thing more. The warning clearly states that the purpose tonight is to nominate, not to have a debate, not to have a forum, so we will not be taking questions of the nominated candidates from the audience. We're going to give them a chance to say a few words to accept the nomination and then move on. If the respective town committees decide that they would like to have a forum or debate later before the May 2nd vote that's up to them. That won't happen tonight. Any other questions before we start?

Audience: [No response]

Moderator: I open the floor to nominations. In the back, Joan.

Joan Lodsins: I'm here tonight to nominate a gentleman to the Board of Education. He has lived in Washington for thirty-eight years. He and his wife have raised their children here and put them through the Region 12 school system. He will have the time needed for this very important position. Anyone who has spoken with this man knows that he has the passion to do the best job he possibly can. Despite what some have said, he is not opposed to a vo-ag education. He is opposed to the lack of transparency and misinformation that has been given to the voters in Region 12. He too wants the best education for our children, but would like to see it happen in a fiscally responsible manner. I am pleased to nominate John Buonaiuto to represent Washington on the Board of Education. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Joan. Is there a second for that nomination? Ok, could you just state your name please?

Leslie Anderson: Leslie Anderson.

Moderator: Thank you. I am now looking for additional nominations. Yes, sir.

Clerk: Please state your name.

Moderator: Yes.

Ted Bent: My name is Ted Bent and I'd like to nominate Edwin Matthews for the school board.

Moderator: Thank you, is there a second for that? John Payne is seconding Edwin Matthews. Looking for more nominations, yes, sir, right here.

James Mitchell: My name is Jim Mitchell and I've lived on Old Litchfield Road for forty-two years. In making a full disclosure, the woman I want to nominate tonight is also a friend and a neighbor, so take that into consideration. There was a time not too long ago in the political spectrum when they said things like experience matters. That was a cliché. That was a quote, experience matters. If experience matters, which I think it does and I hope all of you do, I'd like to nominate Valerie Andersen for another term on the Board. She has served valiantly for twenty years. She is a watchdog of the fiscal conservative. She's also a member to whom all of these decisions have circled around common sense. She was a treasurer of the Board of Education. She's got vast experience so if experience matters, I think she's the best qualified person for the job. I nominate Valerie Andersen.

Moderator: Thank you very much, is there a second for Valerie Andersen.

David Werkhoven: I also live on Old Litchfield Road and I'm proud and pleased to second Jim's nomination of Valerie. Valerie has certainly served her time already, but I'm very anxious to have her continue for at least one more term and try to see some current projects, especially the AgSTEM project, through. She's a dedicated public school advocate. Her family has gone through the school. Obviously she has served the schools. She is fiscally astute, very intelligent, and also not afraid to speak her mind. Most importantly her highest priority is the kids. We've have had outstanding schools. We continue to have outstanding schools because of the support of people like Valerie on the Board of Education. We have to maintain that. This is critical. Please join me in my support of Valerie. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you very much. I'm scanning the floor for more nominations, yes?

Diana Tagley: I would like to nominate Peter Tagley, current board member. I guess you all know him and I don't have to say much.

Moderator: Thank you, is there a second for Peter? There's lots of seconds. I'll take in the back row.

Rod Wyant: I'll second the nomination of Pete Tagley.

Moderator: Thank you, well, we've got four so far. Looking for more nominations.

Michelle Gorra: I'd like to nominate Jen Pote for another term on the school board. I am making this nomination with great confidence and enthusiasm. She has served one term. She's been a great member diligently caring out her duties on the board as well as on the Facilities Committee. She's attended continuing education, is dedicated to the schools, has raised her children through the schools, has been involved in the PTOs of the primary school. She now has children in the middle school and the high school and is always advocating for our students and the betterment of Shepaug as a region so I'd like to nominate Jen Pote.

Moderator: Thank you very much. Is there a second for Jen?

Kerry McKeon: I second Jen's nomination.

Moderator: Thank you very much. Ok, are there more nominations? In the second to the last row, yes.

Erica Ryland: I'm from Washington and I'm here to nominate Randall Carreira who can't be here tonight, but has authorized me to state that he has accepted the nomination.

Moderator: Thank you very much. Is there a second for Randall. Ok, Joan.

Joan Lodsins: I second the nomination for Randy Carreira.

Moderator: Thank you. That's six, any more?

Jay Hubelbank: Good evening, I'm here to nominate Jim Hirshfield for another term on the Board of Ed. Jim has served the region and our town for twenty years. I've served with him for a number of years and he is a tireless advocate. He has been a chairman of the board for a number of years, has steered us through some rocky times, and done a great job while doing that providing communications with the town as well as running those meetings at every meeting. I think he has done a great job and deserves another shot to be on the board. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, and a second for the nomination of Jim?

Michelle Gorra: Michelle Gorra [second]

Moderator: Michelle Gorra seconds. Ok, that totals so far to seven. Are there any more?

Kerry McKeon: I'm Kerry McKeon from Kielwasser Road and I'd like to nominate Tim Laughlin. I'm proud to nominate Tim Laughlin for the Region 12 Board of Education. Tim represents the future of this region. He moved to town in 2013 and renovated a home on Painter Ridge. In October of last year he became a new father. He is well versed in how government works. He worked for the New York City Council and is now president of the East Side Partnership, a New York City based improvement district working in Manhattan's lower east side. Locally he has served on the Region 12 Building Committee. He has extensive professional experience managing large scale capital projects and working with municipal and state government agencies. He's interested in running for the Board of Education because he wants thriving schools for his son. He believes that good schools are essential to growing, vibrant communities. I support Tim not only because of his work experience, but also because it's important to have the perspective of young families on the board. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. Is there a second for Tim?

Jen Pote: Jen Pote [second]

Moderator: Thank you very much. Well, we have four slots and we have eight nominees so those are nice numbers. Are there any more nominations? One last time, I'm looking for people who would like to nominate. Seeing none, I'm about to close the floor for nominations. Is that okay with everybody? Are we really done with it?

Audience: [No responses]

Moderator: I do close the floor for nominations. So we have eight people that have been nominated and seconded. I believe six of eight are here. Going alphabetically, the first is Valerie Andersen.

Valerie Andersen: Hi, I'm Valerie Andersen. I live on Blackville Road and I want to thank these wonderful gentlemen for their kind words. I really appreciate it. I have been on the Board of Ed for many years now. My children have gone through the Region 12 system. My husband and I are the products of public schools. I support public schools 100% and we must continue to do that in Region 12. In order to go against the head winds that we face of a dramatic decrease in population, we have to be creative. We've been creative with our new AgSTEM program that is slowly, we hope surely, working its way through the legislature. We might be able to start in earnest this summer. I think we have to be fiscally conservative. We have to monitor what goes on with AgSTEM. The entire school board wants us

to make this a success because, frankly, the word I use is charter school. Unless we become a charter school with the declining enrollment we see everywhere in all our schools, we're not going to exist anymore. What a horrible crime that would be for our communities. We have a fantastic school system. Our scores have been amazing. We actually compete very positively not only in our educational reference group, but with gold coast schools, with Darien, with New Canaan, with Greenwich. We're doing fantastic things here in town, in Bridgewater, and in Roxbury, and up on the hill. This is a time indeed for experience. This is a real crucial time so I appreciate your nomination, your second, and I would like to serve another term. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Valerie.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: I believe next alphabetically is John Buonaiuto. Would you pronounce it?

John Buonaiuto: John Buonaiuto, Buonaiuto. Good evening all. I will start with a little bit of my background. I went to Newtown High School and right after high school I entered the service. I was an antenna installer and installed communications equipment all around the world, many countries, including Iran when the United States had friendly relations with them. I entered college under the GI Bill in an effort to learn about many things I had seen in the service. I have a bachelor's degree in history and social science with a minor in anthropology. I am state certified for teaching at the secondary education level. I did graduate work in general education toward a teaching certification in grades K through 12. As a career, some of you may know, that a teaching job in the late 1970s was not all that lucrative. With a young family started and need to earn more money, I began a career at United Parcel Service which lasted forty years. During that time I held numerous job assignments. Every day was an adventure and every day I strived to learn more and something new. Throughout my life I have remained informed about educational issues on the local, state, and national levels. Over the years I also did substitute teaching in many area schools. I actually substituted at Shepaug in 1978. As Joan Lodsin stated I have lived in Washington for thirty-eight years. Our two sons were educated in the Region 12 school system. Even in the early 1990s class sizes were small. Our youngest son, Matt, graduated from Shepaug in 1995 with only forty-nine students in his class. Perhaps some of you here tonight have seen the three-word bumper sticker, Question the Answers. I believe that people should ask questions, not in an adversarial or condescending manner, but rather as a method to determine and have a better understanding of the true facts. This is how we make informed decisions. Asking questions is one of the primary reasons I'm here tonight as a candidate for the Board of Education. It is no secret that I have been

outspoken about the AgSTEM controversy, not because I do not believe in vocational education, agricultural education, but because I simply believe that the numbers that were projected originally and even now are not enough out of district students to validate and sustain the project. If the project moves forward and the money is granted by the state, I will remind everyone, that with at most 102 students it's still going to cost the region about \$500,000 a year to sustain the program in addition to the already, I think, \$1.2 million, just to operate. I think you all know that originally the projection was to cover the cost to operate, pay down the debt, and have enough money left over to do other renovations on other projects in our aging facilities. The school budget is now at \$21,387,146 for a total population of 671 students. There are 143 persons on the Region 12 educational staff consisting of administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and tutors. When you do the math that equates to one staff member for every 4.7 students. There is no vital reason why, when given the teacher-student ratio, we cannot be in the top 10% of the school systems in the state academically. The incumbents have had their chance. Some of them have been Board of Ed representatives from Washington for twenty years now. I believe that we can do better. I have attended many Board of Ed meetings over the past two years and have a good understanding of what can be improved. If I am elected, you can be certain that I will work in the best interest of our students as well as the taxpayers of Washington. Thank you very much.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you, John. Just double checking, is Randall Carreira here?

Audience: No.

Moderator: So next is Jim Hirshfield.

James Hirshfield: I'm Jim Hirshfield. I live on South Street in Washington. I have lived here since 1989. I have two daughters who went through the system, K through 12, graduated from Shepaug. One is about to graduate from veterinary school in Iowa. I'm very proud of that. The other works down in New York at Memorial Sloan Kettering. So they both received an excellent education here. I'm one of those that John Buonaiuto spoke of that have been on the board, finishing twenty years. If I'm elected again, it will be going for twenty-four years. There's a lot of issues facing the board. I do accept the nomination. As I said in previous times that I've run, the only thing that I can offer to the board and to the town is to apply my best judgment to the myriad of problems that come before the board. It is a not inconsequential process when you have (we used to have thirteen) now we have twelve board members from three towns. Most things we are in unanimity on and we get through easily, but on controversial items it is

controversial. There's a lot of discussion and we do the best that we can. I apply the best judgment that I have for the best interest of the town. I've always the best interest of the region. I've always tried to think regionally and not town wide for both the students and the taxpayers. I appreciate the nomination and would appreciate your vote. Thank you.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you, Jim, thank you. Ok, next is Tim Laughlin.

Tim Laughlin: Good evening everyone. My name is Tim Laughlin. As Kerry mentioned, I moved to town in 2013. My wife and I both grew up in the area and made the choice when we were looking for a home to buy to settle in Washington. I think it's important that there is the perspective of a young parent on the Board of Education. I think it's important that we think about the future. Miss Allen was right. Sitting on the board is a very tough job and I think the members of our board who have looked forward toward the future deserve our respect and appreciation. We need to make some hard choices. There are a lot of things that we need to discuss still, especially regarding our elementary schools and looking at student population. I approach my potential candidacy and I approach those I would support for the board in the premise that they want to keep the schools open, that they want to see the schools grow and thrive into the future. They want to keep young families both here and come into the town so that we can make sure not only our schools are growing, but our communities, our local economy, and businesses are as well. So I'd appreciate your support. If given the privilege to serve, I would do my best for both taxpayers and parents in the town. Thank you.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you, Tim. Next is Jennifer Pote.

Jen Pote: My name is Jen Pote and my husband and I moved here eighteen years ago, hard to believe. We have two children that are now at Shepaug. My son is in middle school. My daughter is at high school. I really had the pleasure of serving my first term. I enjoyed it, surprisingly. I enjoyed the collaboration of the members. I feel like we all work really well together even though at times it doesn't always sound that way. I've really enjoyed it. I deeply care about my community. I work really hard and tirelessly to continue to make strides at the high school, Shepaug, and at the elementary school. So I just encourage everybody. I actually wanted to proudly say one thing, that we are in the top ten. Shepaug High School is in the top ten schools in the state. It is actually. If you go to the Connecticut State Department of Education, you can see that it's one of the top ten high schools. I'm really proud. I think the strides that Shepaug

has made especially in the last four years need to be acknowledged more. I just want to tell everybody that. I'm extremely proud. I'm a strong advocate for all the students of Region 12. I'm mindful of the taxpayers of Washington because I am one. Thank you.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you, Jen. This is just procedural to check that Edwin Matthews is not here? Oh, you are here. Will you accept my apology.

Edwin Matthews: That's fine with me.

Moderator: Ok, Edwin Matthews.

Edwin Matthews: I accept the nomination. There is nothing more important than education. A school is vital to this community and to the young people that live here. Let me just add a couple words about where I come from. I grew up in a small western town. I went to public school. I then went to college to study the history of science. I got a law degree and practiced law for many years around the world responsible for major corporate transactions. I did a lot of work defending death row inmates and environmental cases. I've had a life long interest in education. I started a secondary school once. I taught at the Gunnery for three years, environmental science and American literature. I've been working for several years with an inner city charter school in New Haven, common ground, and have sponsored programs to train teachers around the country on environmental science. I would look forward to contributing to the Region 12 schools. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Edwin. We are to Peter Tagley.

Peter Tagley: Good evening, thank you. My wife and I moved here thirty-nine years ago. Our three children went through the school system. I got on the board from 1985-1995 because they were very contentious times. We were hoping to build a new primary school which never came to fruition. Board members were very contentious about one another. It was a very territorial Board of Education. So I left in 1995 and stayed on the sidelines. I would go to board meetings, listen to presentations by staff and board members. Then five years ago the board hired a new superintendent, Pat Cosentino. I went to the board meeting one year before I got elected. The reason I decided to be on the board was that she had made a number of changes in the system and was getting pushed back from the staff. So I decided it would be a good time to get on the Board of Ed and see if we could promote some of her agenda. She's done an excellent job. She's been a very good superintendent. The system is doing quite well. The biggest issue we face, of course, as everyone knows, is population. We are well under 700. My guess is we'll drop into 500s over the next ten years.

Unless we come up with even more than the Ag program, we're going to have some very contentious times getting the public to adopt our budgets and our theology. So it's a time when it's good to have board members who have been on the board before, served on the board, don't necessarily have any particular agendas, and hopefully have a very calm, good environment and produce some results that will enhance the school district.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you, thank you, Pete. Everybody that's been nominated has had a chance to speak who is here tonight. One person is not here. I have to tell you I am impressed and I hope we all feel very proud that of the four positions that are open, we have eight candidates. Knowing how hard this job is the fact that we have eight candidates for four positions is very impressive.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: I'd also like to thank the nominators and the seconders for their help tonight. We have accomplished the agenda. Yes, Jim.

James Hirshfield: Move to adjourn.

Audience: [Multiple Seconds]

Moderator: One second before I call that motion to order. I remind you all no decisions have been made tonight regarding voting. That will take place at the school budget meeting on May 2nd. That's when everybody will be able to make their judgment in terms of election to these four open positions. Yes?

Female: I have a question [inaudible] so there won't be a meeting for the vote?

Moderator: No, this will be in the same process as the budget vote.

Female: Ok.

Moderator: It will not be done at a town meeting. Town meeting only nominates in this town. I understand that the other towns in Region 12 do it a little differently. I think they do it the way we used to do it. This town saw fit to try to get broader participation in the voting by having it done in referendum on budget night. Ok, we have a motion to adjourn. John, were you going to second that or did you have something else to say?

John Payne: It's not a motion. I had a comment. Is that ok?

Moderator: Yes, it is ok.

John Payne: I'd like to congratulate and say thank you to everybody who is nominated this evening. I have a request. People in Washington that I've talked to at least have very little idea about the tax implications of various issues that are going to come up in front of the board. I ask that before May 2nd, before we come back to this room, that the nominees maybe get together or individually or email each other to give the public an idea of number one, what the operating costs will be. Number two, what it will be if in fact the town has to assume one-third of the pension costs. Finally, what the financial outcome would be if the AgSTEM program does not succeed in drawing an adequate number of people. If it doubles our taxes, that's fine with me. I think it's very important, but I think people should know what it means to their budgets.

Moderator: Thank you, John, thank you. We have a motion to adjourn that's been seconded. Is there any more discussion before we vote on the motion to adjourn?

Audience: [Silence]

Moderator: All in favor of adjourning, please say aye.

Audience: Aye.

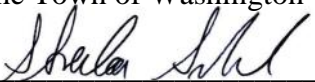
Moderator: Any opposed?

Audience: [Silence]

Moderator: We are adjourned, thank you.

Meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

I, Sheila Silvernail, certify to the best of my ability the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of the Town of Washington's Special Town Meeting on April 6, 2017.

 Dated at Washington, CT this 7th day of April 2017.