

## **Minutes: Town Meeting October 4, 2004**

---

Disclaimer: While we have attempted to reproduce them accurately, the electronic documents you see here are not the official public documents. Official copies may be obtained on paper from the [Town Clerk](#).

---

The meeting was called to order by First Selectman Richard Sears at 7:30 p.m. with the first order of business the nominating of a Moderator. William Fairbairn was nominated and with no further nominations Mr. Fairbairn was duly elected.

MR. FAIRBAIRN: Thank you. I'll ask the Clerk to read the Call. Janet. Janet Wildman is the Clerk for those of you who don't know her.

THE CLERK:

### **WARNING TOWN OF WASHINGTON, CONNECTICUT ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

The voters and electors of the Town of Washington are hereby warned that the Annual Town Meeting will be held on Monday, October 4, 2004 at 7:30 p.m. at Bryan Memorial Town Hall, Washington Depot, Connecticut, to consider and act upon the following:

1. To set the dates for the annual town budget hearing and meeting in May of 2005.
2. To introduce the Town Planning Process.

DATED at Washington, Connecticut this 24th day of September, 2004.

Richard C. Sears, Nicholas N. Solley, Harry W. Wyant, Board of Selectmen

MR. FAIRBAIRN: Thank you, Janet. First Resolution, is that coming from you, Dick?

MR. SEARS: RESOLVED: that the annual town budget hearing for the 2005-2006 fiscal year be held on Thursday, May 5, 2005 at 7:30 p.m. and the annual town budget meeting be held on Thursday, May 19, 2005 at 7:30 p.m.

MR. FAIRBAIRN: Thank you. Is there a second? Mr. Carey. Is there any discussion? If not, let's go ahead and vote. All those in favor say aye. Opposed? MOTION CARRIED. Dick?

MR. SEARS: Thank your all for coming. I am so excited to see so many of you townsfolk of all ages to consider together our town's future. Thanks for coming. It is a town wide planning looking forward and not backwards. We Washingtonians take great pride in our town and we are not only interested but we like to get involved. We like to take charge and have some say. And huge forces are coming upon us and it is important that we awaken and look at those forces and look at what we might be able to do about them. Our last working dairy farm, Potter's farm, is for sale. Washington Supply is for sale. You know, perhaps, that Vinnie's Texaco might be, or is, on the market and I've heard that the Wykeham Rise School property is for sale. These are some of the major pieces of our daily life. There is nothing strange about that occurring at this time but we are in change. I just heard that the Seymour farm - I don't know if it's true - on Whittlesey Road, 300 acres, is for sale. We are in the shadow of urbanization. We are a small town, we want to retain our rural character, and here we have a room filled with 140 rural characters. I think we can do this together. For those of you who did not have a chance to hear my rendition of "This Town is Your Town, This Town is My Town" you will be spared that tonight.

MR. FAIRBAIRN: However, there are CD's available.

MR. SEARS: However, it is about who we are and what we are about. Where we might be as well as where we have been. And I have a verse that says, 'Blacksmith is gone now, soon, too the milk cow. Changes come slowly, but change we must now.' Let's choose our future with pride and hope for Washington is made for you and me for generations and generations to come. That's how I feel about Washington and I'm sure you do too. That we can have some influence over our future, even facing these major forces. We the people are the caretakers of the town. Stewards is the proper word of the facilities, of the land, of the buildings and of our common culture. This is serious business. The planners and I have considered this a joyful time because we are doing this together. No one from the side is doing your planning for you. I want you to be a player in this and you are and we are together. We are sincere about that. I'd like to show the planning process here. Our Commission on Conservation and Development made us aware of major issues. This is a goal for the next seven weeks. It is to include as many citizens as possible to clarify the issues and the options before us. To get a sense of planning priorities and get a sense of what we want to do, what we want as a party politic. And to provide this information to the town boards and town leadership. These are our goals and this is the planning process designed to help you understand the issues to get a side of it and see each one in the light of the other to get a clear picture. And thus the art of the mobile, the piece of art where each separate

element is in balance with the others so if you touch one it touches the other. And so with our public education which we have pride in and do well at but it costs money as we consider that and then there is affordable housing and open space and about other municipal facilities. But these are the major issues that have come out of our plan of conservation and development. And I'm asking you - I'm pleading with you and I'm inviting you that if you have a passion for one of these elements - which many of you do - that you hold that passion and keep the passion and hold that as you look at the other elements that are in our common good. I'm not asking you to put away your passion or desire for affordable housing or open space or the best in education we can afford, but be open to these other elements, because people have gone deeply into finding how we might be a town in balance but a town moving dynamically with the other elements. Keep the common good in mind as well as your particular interest. AH four of these elements you can see displayed, (slides being shown on screen) They are open space which is our desire for preserving open space. Our desire to maintain a diverse population through affordable housing as well as all the way up and down the scale. We are caretakers and stewards of millions of dollars of wonderful property, including this beautiful building here. The selectmen, especially, have concerns day and night about these properties on their mind for you. So we want to look ahead and we'll show you tonight some of the areas which need further caretaking. Certainly our schools, and particularly our Washington primary school. But to look at the whole Region 12 and educational needs. These are the elements that hang in balance. Finally, slide 4, this is a schedule we will be going through over the next 7 weeks. Tonight's plan is simply to provide presentation. There will be champing at the bit from your side. You are used to dialogue and debate as a town. The best time for that will be at the forums in the next 5-6 weeks where we will get right inside issues and numbers, that is dollars, tax implications for every one of these will be discussed in detail by the people who know these issues best. This presentation is meant to be 40 minutes total or less than an hour to give you what we have done, what we are talking about, come and talk with us at the forum. And finally, there will be a Saturday forum for those who can't meet with us during the week. They can come to that and cover all four issues at the library on October 30th, and a final closure forum - a focus meeting - to get a sense of the feel for the town at this place and time. If you had one million dollars to spend, how would you spend it and pull that together we will have some sense for our planning boards and commissions. That is the beginning. That is the introduction. I want to thank the planning team of Jack Field, Mike Jackson, Dan Sherr, Jay Hubelbank who have been working with me. I want to thank the selectmen of Nick Solley and Harry Wyant who appointed the housing diversity committee to study one of the major issues coming out of the plan of conservation and I want to thank Bill Fairbairn who was chairman of that. I want to thank the Conservation Commission who appointed the Open Space Committee and Dan Sherr, who was chairman of that. I want to thank the Region 12 school board and

Jay Hubelbank who you will hear from tonight. Jay served many a good year as chairman of the Board and is now chairman of the building committee for the regional board. I want to thank Chris Charles for setting some light refreshments for all the boards and commission and committee members. These are your townsfolk who come here at least once a month and sometimes 5 to 10 times a month to do the business of the town. Any illusion I had about the CEO, the chief elected official runs the town was dispersed within 20 minutes after walking in and knowing that Kathy and Phyllis and Mary Anne really run the town. So go upstairs afterwards for a little wine, cheese and crackers and a little continuing conversation. A couple of high school students came tonight to help us out. Please do join us. That's it from me. We are out here together. I want to introduce to you Susan Payne. Susan is the chairman of the Conservation Commission and she is going to make a presentation for the open space.

SUSAN PAYNE: I am delighted to be able to make this presentation. Before I start I want to thank Dick Sears for his leadership in now making the TPOCD a living document. With your input over the next month we will be able to set implementation priorities. In the next several minutes I want to convince you of the importance of protecting the open space that defines the beauty of Washington and challenge you to become a Washington Steward. Please take notes and bring them with you for discussion of Open Space, Thursday evening, October 28, 7:30, here in Town Hall and bring your friends and neighbors.

All of us would agree Washington appears to have extensive open space. It helps define our rural character, and we love it. What you may not know is that very little of it - less than 20% - is permanently protected from development. Some of what appears to be open space is "unprotected open space", known as Public Act 490 farmland and forestland. We want to insure the balance of development with conservation. The permanent protection of Open Space is critical to maintaining this balance. Managing future growth is also critical to maintaining this balance. In survey after survey you have told us that you want to preserve the rural character of Washington, - its farming heritage, its single family homes, its rural roads, its village centers. The quintessential New England town.

When we speak of the role of Open Space in preserving Washington's rural character, we mean for the next generation as well. Is it important to you and your neighborhood to preserve more open space? Large and small parcels contribute to our rural character from the Green to the New Preston falls to Meeker Swamp. Truly preserving open space means permanent protection. Based on community meetings, the Town has set a goal of 30% permanently protected open space by 2015. 19% is already permanently protected. Achievement of our goal will add 3000 acres to Washington's Open Space inventory over the next ten years.

Washington has been an active farming community since before its founding in 1779. The Averill Family has been farming since 1746. And tonight we are standing on ground once occupied by Borden's Dairy. Much of what we see as we enjoy Washington's current Open Space is actively farmed or maintained by our farmers, but most of it is not permanently protected. The POCD urges the continued support of local agriculture and active farming in Washington to contribute to our local economy and our rural character.

The town of Washington is approximately 40 square miles, 25,000 acres. Think of it this way: a bit more than 20% is already developed, primarily our beautiful New England village centers - (the white on the map). A bit less than 20% is already permanently protected by Steep Rock and Weantinogue Heritage land trusts and the State protection of the Averill and Seymour Farms (the dark green) leaving about 60% open space available for development (the light green).

So managing growth, striking the right balance between development and conservation, that is, permanent protection of Open Space is a major priority for our community. With the pressure for building seen in many of the surrounding towns, we run the risk of more than doubling both building and population in Washington, unless we manage our growth. Some would say development produces taxes. They are right but residential development produces more cost in town services than it produces in tax revenue. A November 2002 American Farmland Trust survey reports the cost of town services for residential property is \$1.16 for every \$1 of tax revenue.

As Dick Sears stated at the opening of this meeting, the 2003 Plan of Conservation and Development is our road map. It includes an Open Space Plan. A year ago at a town meeting we approved the creation of an Open Space Fund to which \$25,000 in "seed monies" has been allocated from the 04-05 town budget. And citizen conservation gifts continue to add key acres to our permanently protected open space inventory every year.

We must balance the Town's development with the conservation of natural resources, the protection of historic areas and buildings, the continuation of agriculture and the preservation of open space and woodlands, and the provision of housing diversity for the vitality of Washington.

We are all Stewards. We are responsible for the preservation of our quality of life and that of generations to come. Look around you. Look at neighboring towns. Please come to the Open space meeting on Thursday, October 28th at 7:30. Thank you very much.

MR. SEARS: I would like to have Susie and the other members stand and turn around and say 'hello' so we can say "Thank you." We'd like to introduce at this time, Billy Fairbairn, who is the chairman of the Housing Diversity Committee that the selectmen have set up. Bill.

MR. FAIRBAIRN: Thank you. The 2003 Town Plan of Conservation and Development states "Addressing housing needs in Washington in order to maintain a diverse community was identified as one of the top issues by both Town officials and local residents."

The dominant planning theme since the first Plan of Development in 1963 has been the preservation of 'rural character.' Rural character is not simply defined by just open fields, wooded hills and pastoral vistas. In addition to these attributes the rural character of Washington over its 225 year history has also been defined by its diverse population - in ages, degrees of affluence and differing viewpoints.

Recommendations of objectives, specific plans, funding needs and the Town's responsibility in the process based on key findings and recommendations set forth in the Housing Study Committee Report of 2002 and the Town Plan of Conservation and Development of 2003.

The objectives are 96 new units of affordable housing over the next ten years. Target seniors, independent and assisted living, who live here or have lived here; low/moderate income people who live or work here and initial priority to be limited equity single family units scattered throughout town, and possibly clustered units in the village center. Specific plans are to adopt a "parcel program" immediately setting up the framework for donation or purchase of suitable properties and eligibility of applicants. Partner with open space committee to meet the joint needs of town on these issues. Partner with private entities to meet common interests of the public and private sectors and the creation of a Town Housing Authority to initiate, oversee and run future projects. Finally, for funding needs and the town's responsibility. Increased funding for established Town housing fund. Designation of a part of the mill rate annually for housing. Bond issue for housing and open space initiatives, partnering with the private sector, and the possibility of offering tax credits to establish an affordable housing base. Failure to implement sound planning will lead to further erosion of those attributes that have defined the character of our town for the past 225 years.

So those are some of the ideas. I know that a lot of you are going to have other ideas and we want you to bring those ideas to our meeting on November 4th. Anything and everything will be considered. If we fail -I always get close to my mortality here - my mother was one of ten children and they're all gone now and my father's family is

almost gone, too. A hundred years from now no one is going to visit our gravestone but what they'll remember is what we did as a town to preserve this. As Dick said, we are stewards of this property. So let's do what is right for our young and particularly for our old people as well. So I hope to see you at our meeting on November 4th. Thank you.

MR. SEARS: I want to introduce to you now, Nick Solley, our selectman.

NICHOLAS SOLLEY: The Selectmen would like to acknowledge its Buildings and Properties Committee and the chairman of that is John Allen. John, will you stand? Reese Owens and Dave Showalter. (Applause)

Municipal Facilities. For well over a dozen years the Boards of Selectmen and Boards of Finance have developed a long range capital plan to assure good stewardship - and you've heard that word a lot tonight - of our facilities, as well as planning for the upgrading and replacement of our roads and equipment. Slide one will show a sampling of our municipal facilities.....maybe not...

MR. SHERR: We don't have them.

MR. SOLLEY: That's okay. I have a picture. Anyway. The picture, in effect, shows a collage of our facilities, our old firehouse, our new municipal buildings, the garages that hold our highway equipment, our new firehouse, the facility in New Preston, the boat ramp, the boathouse, the caretaker's cottage. I'd like to commend the Building and Properties Committee which sort of came out of moth balls three years ago for all the fine work and specifically and for bringing many, many of our buildings up to date. Specifically they oversaw the painting of this building. They saw a new entrance outside leading to the land use room. They are overseeing the painting of Pavilion Hall in New Preston. A new boiler went into the old firehouse. These guys do a lot of our work. We're very indebted to them. But there is still much more work to do. I'm assuming we have no slides.

MR. SHERR: No slides.

MR. SOLLEY: Okay. For instance, our beautiful, beautiful Bryan Memorial Town Hall built in 1932. A symbol and focal point of Washington Depot. We will shortly be upgrading the landscaping in the front of the building with a grant from the Village Improvement Society. And the long awaited elevator. This project was started in 1996 by the Trustees of Bryan Hall and we hope to see this built - we plan to see this built - commencing early 2005. This is thanks to a Small Cities Grant - federal grant. Our building will also need some major infrastructure repair, including upgrading our heating system. We do have a new boiler. Plumbing. The potential for air conditioning

some day and a telecommunications upgrade. Right behind me this stage is unusable. Code does not permit it to be used for any public function.

Slide Number 2. Number 3 rather, (amused laughter) We have a lovely beach on Lake Waramaug that has a boat ramp, a boat house and a beach house that houses the caretaker and the beach office and storage. We must, based on our agreement with DEP remove the current boat launch and replace it in accordance with that agreement. We will have to remove and relocate the current boat house and make room for parking for the boat launch. We should also consider at the same time, as we're upgrading the northerly half of this property, we should also consider upgrading the beach house and provide new facilities for the caretaker, beach office and facilities. This apartment has been sort of gerry rigged over the past 20 years. It's very accessible but given the fact we are going to be doing a new ramp it would be a very good time to potentially take some local capital improvement money for this project.

Slide Four. Washington Depot. As we all know, it's a jewel, it's a gem, it's a postcard. It's the social, commercial and cultural center of the entire town. Our Town Plan of Conservation Development recommends that we pay attention to preserve our village center. The Plan of Conservation and Development suggests that we undertake an in-depth study of the entire Depot area to help us preserve and plan for social, commercial, recreational and cultural vitality. The Planning Commission is moving on this to hire a consultant to help us assess the village center. They are in the process of doing this right now. We have allocated money in this fiscal year to do so.

The Titus Road property, specifically the old town garage. This could be a meeting all by itself. This is beautiful property four and a half acres (4 1/2 acres) surrounded by the Shepaug River. It has many, many potentials; but it has some liabilities, as well being as close as it is to the river. Its potential includes such things as village housing, recreational areas, of course, playing fields, soccer fields, additional parking in the Depot which is badly needed, another pedestrian walkway. All of this takes planning and this is what the Planning Commission is about to embark upon.

So these are just a few of the facilities issues that the selectmen and Buildings and Properties Committee are taking up. There are many, many others and I urge you all to come out October 20th. We're all doing our own sales pitches here to help us foresee and pave our way to facilities which the towns needs and we need your input. Thank you very much.

MR. SEARS: You will be able to see the pictures on October 20th at the meeting. It gives me pleasure to introduce the former chairman of the Regional School Board and neighbor of ours, Jay Hubelbank.



MR. HUBELBANK: I'm glad to see the slides. Thank you, Dan. Good evening. I first want to thank Dick Sears for getting me involved in this process. As of July 1st of this year I have been replaced as chair. They're all up at the high school this evening and so I am happy to be here instead, quite honestly.

I have been on the Board a number of years and I think although we make up about 60% of the town of Washington budget. We often aren't involved in planning for the Town of Washington and I really appreciate Dick asking us to be involved in this process, rather than as an afterthought, which I sometimes think is the case.

This is our mission statement. We will give you a chance to look at that. Region 12, for those of you who don't know, has students from Roxbury, Bridgewater and Washington. We were formed in the early 1970's and we have about 1,100 students right now, which is a good number. Right now we are operating four buildings. It was interesting listening to Nick talk about the town buildings. School buildings take up most of our time right now. Each town has its own primary school, which we are maintaining; and right now we are getting ready to look at what we need to do to renovate and bring those schools up to current standards. Why do we need to do something? I think Roxbury's building - part of that building was built in 1905 or something like that. Our building is 1950. All three buildings are very old. We did do renovations 20 years ago; but now, as Nick pointed out, they are out of code in a number of areas. In addition, the buildings don't meet educational requirements. When all of us went to school things were a lot different than they are today and I'm going to talk a little bit about that. But we don't have space for classes. We have specialty students in our classrooms with numerous needs which didn't exist when we were in school and a lot of extra technology.

Additionally, two of our three buildings are overcrowded. Roxbury and Bridgewater are overcrowded and we need additional space. The big question we face and we have spent 18 months of work looking at this is whether we should renovate or build a regional primary school. There were some strong feelings in the community about renovation and about why we should renovate. All town officials - every selectman and every Board of Finance member - sent us a letter indicating they wanted us to maintain their primary school. Additionally, the public we have spoken to and surveyed indicated their desire to keep the primary school. However, there were good reasons to build a regional primary school. Quite frankly, it is more cost effective. Some years ago, in fact, we did a study and found at that point it was costing us over a half a million dollars more to maintain three primary schools than it would have cost to build a new one and maintain that school. There are clearly deficiencies in having a regional primary school, but the strong sentiment we got from the community told us we needed to continue with the three schools. One of the issues we did look at seriously, even though we felt that we knew what the public was telling us, we did

look seriously at a new primary school -a regional school. But we found there really isn't the land available. I thought quite frankly we had a lot of land up at the high school. First off, we don't have as much land as we thought and a lot of the land, especially when you look at the septic needs up there, would not be conducive to putting a school up there. So we really didn't have the space where the high school is. Quite honestly we looked at land over in that same area - Roxbury area - to try to find a centralized piece of land that we could buy. We couldn't find anything that would meet our needs. We really didn't have much community support with that idea.

As I mentioned before we renovated the three primary schools - a complete job in 1986. That was a \$5 million renovation. We repaired all the roofs in those buildings. We did some minor code work and we basically did what I call non-educational work. I'll talk about what I mean by that in a minute. What do we need to do? As with all buildings in town, we have code requirements we have to meet. If we do any renovation in these buildings the State requires us to do everything. You don't just get to one thing and not do the rest. We have step modifications, parking issues, accessibility, siding issues and other issues like the concrete wall. Drainage issues, elevator issues and upgrades. And, finally, educational needs. And what I mean there is we have issues. Currently state standards for a regular classroom is 950 square feet. We have classes in our district that range from 510 to a larger of 840 square feet. The problem with that, again, is that we have anywhere from 15 to 25. I think now we have some classes with 28 kids in them. Again, we have kids now with different needs than we had before. Kids in wheelchairs. Kids with AIDS. We now have kids with large technology in the classrooms and those classes, quite frankly, are not large enough to do the job. We also have a problem in the schools in that we don't have room for arts and music in the Bridgewater and Roxbury schools right now. Those classes are held inside with a cart if you will. The teacher goes around with a cart from classroom to classroom and we have a problem here to provide for the needs of these students. The gym classes meet in the cafeteria which creates a problem for scheduling and all.

Now, what are the next steps? The first thing the Board has to do is what is called Educational Specifications. We are .....for each of our buildings. This happens to be the copy for us for Booth Free School about 50-60 pages long and really is a road map which spells out what has to be done. How large the classrooms have to be. What kind of size if we want to put in any extra space in any of the schools. We will form a nine member building committee. We've actually appointed three people tonight. We have one Board member now and three parents with construction experience on the committee. We are looking for community members to participate as well. One of the things I will mention as things for you to do is if anybody is interested or would be interested in being involved in this building project I would be happy to talk to you.

We hope to hire an architect over the next month. We're looking to determine whether we need one architect or two or three depending on how the project goes. We will be providing you with the specs, and over the next period from November through February the architects will be at work working with the Building Committee to come up with some design. We'll present those then to the Board of Education starting with some public presentation and finally culminating in June for a vote. The way the process works is we have to submit to the State Department in the month of June an application for funding. The State will reimburse us approximately 30% for the work that we do. The 30% reimbursement is for any new construction or code work or technology that we do. The State has laws if you do maintenance work they'll reimburse you for a certain percentage of it but not all of it. So it usually works out to about 30% overall. We can only submit an application in June; and if the Legislature were to approve that in the next Session, which would be in January of '06, we hope we would be able to start doing work in that next coming summer. So that's the plan for us right now.

I want to mention about the State funding. The State will pay as we build the project. The State will pay their share of the project. We don't have to - as we have in the past - we had to bond for the State's share of the project and we had to bond for that to pay the costs. Now the State will pay us their share up front so when we go to bond for this it will only be our share that we bond for. The Town's share is based on the annual enrollment of students in the school district K to 12. Washington is currently 45% of the population of the school. We were actually over 50% ten years ago. The population has actually dropped so we will pay a lesser percentage of the costs of the school now than we did five years ago.

Finally, we are holding our presentation for the town on November 9th. We will be holding other presentations during the course of this project over the next six to nine months and we encourage you to come to those projects. As we get closer to other dates we'll have more cost figure numbers and all. You can contact the Board of Education Building Committee members and I mention support as obviously that's my biggest goal and why I am involved in the Board of Ed. I do want to mention as I mentioned before, if there is any interest in any of you becoming involved in any of these committees, I suspect we will break up into subcommittees, one for each school district and one for each school. If you have an interest in participating, just let us know. Hope to see you on November 9th. Thank you very much.

MR. SEARS: Thank you very much, Jay. We have now come all the way around full circle. At each one of the forums money will be discussed. Taxes will be discussed. The fact is if we want to make hay this quality of rural life is going to cost. Robert deCourcy, who comes to pay his taxes the day after he gets his bill, says this is the best.. What is it you say, Robert?

MR. ROBERT deCOURCY: The best buy I get for the money. This is a great buy to pay taxes in Washington.

MR. SEARS: At ninety years old you can say anything you want. We will hammer it out. It is going to cost tax dollars. It is going to cost mill rate. Each one of you is going to decide if we can afford it and we will be looking at those kinds of realities in the sessions. So that should be enough to get you to the forums. And then we will pull it all together and we'll look at the future and we will make hay and maintain our quality of life.

I want to reiterate this is your project. I really want it to be, as I came before you, to have this as our town and take a part in it. I would like to have you look at the town website - washingtonct.org, - will have these presentations on there and any updates of our planning process. It is a great interactive municipal site. It's one of the best in Connecticut, I believe, and it really works. Keep it up and keep the planning hot. So we have our schedule and the handout of the schedules is in your town newsletter and on the website as well. We invite you to come to the forums and tonight when you go home I'd like you to meet a new neighbor - someone you don't know. This is the public and we can get can get angry and we have our differences and reasonable and even unreasonable can differ but tonight you're not getting a chance to talk. Please say 'hello' to a new neighbor tonight and introduce yourself as I did earlier. I guess this portion of the program is just about it.

We did it in about one hour. So I just want to say "See you at the forum." Thank you.

MR. FAIRBAIRN: If there is no further business the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

I, JANET M. WILDMAN, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of the Annual Town Meeting of the Town of Washington, Connecticut, held on October 4, 2004, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Janet M. Wildman