

**CALAIS SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING**  
**March 4, 2014**

The meeting was called to order on March 4, 2014 at the Town Hall at 9:02 a.m. by Craig Line, moderator. Craig noted the size of the crowd and said the hope was that by starting earlier more people would attend the school meeting. Craig reviewed "Roberts Rules of Orders" stating that the meeting will be conducted fairly and impartially with civility, respect and fairness.

Suzanne Culver, school director, rose to acknowledge Scott Thompson's service to the board and to the town. Stating that she does not speak at town meeting...ever, Suzanne said that when she was asked to speak about Scott, she was more than willing to acknowledge the number of years that she, the town and the school have benefited from his input. Scott brought to the table diversity and knowledge, she said, and he was constantly "on." Acknowledging how much the board appreciated his input, Suzanne said, "Everyone should find a moment to find your way to Scott and shake his hand and thank him for all his years of service." Suzanne presented Scott with a brass bell.

**ARTICLE 1.** To elect a Moderator for the year ensuing.

Conrad Smith nominated Craig Line. The nomination was seconded, and Craig was unanimously elected moderator.

**ARTICLE 2.** To see if the Calais School District will vote to adopt a total budget in the amount of \$1,980,384 for the 2014-2015 school year.

Peter Johnke moved Article 2 and the motion was seconded. Charlotte Hanna Bassage referred to the School Board Report on page 73 of the town report which talks about the many good things happening at Calais Elementary School (CES). Charlotte introduced CES principal Marissa Meyer and superintendent Bill Kimball.

Charlotte's remarks covered the budget, roof and taxes. A handout was distributed showing historical student enrollment and budget figures. In the past, the budget stayed flat to match enrollment, but the budget has since gone upward. The Board tries to match the budget to enrollment and this chart shows this, Charlotte said. The cost per pupil is lower than most towns. Calais is 66 out of 106 elementary schools. Peter Johnke asked about the discrepancy between the student population numbers in the handout and in the town report. The state does not count bodies, Charlotte said. The list on page 78 in the town report counts bodies.

The school needs a new roof but the Board will not ask for a bond. The roof will be divided into six sections and one section a year will be redone. Payment for the roof will come out of the capital fund. One cent on the tax rate is put into the capital fund each year and the Board has been doing that for 15 years. The building is in really good shape, Charlotte stated. "Compare this to our neighbors who are paying 16 cents on their bond. This is an example of how we are saving money while delivering services to our kids."

Turning to Page 81 in the town report, Charlotte noted there are four components to the education tax: CES spending; U32; Common Level of Appraisal; and the statewide education tax. She explained that the 1.88% increase in CES spending translates to a negative 1.8 cent on the tax rate. U32 and Calais school spending increases 1.2 cents on property taxes. However, the statewide tax is going up 11.7 cents. You are being asked to spend 14.5 cents for the CLA, Charlotte said. Further explaining that in order for the State to tax everyone equally, it assumes current market value throughout the state. Calais has not had a reappraisal for seven years, though a reappraisal is scheduled to begin this summer. The 14.8 cents will go away, but the statewide tax has increased substantially and it will not go away. The only thing we can do is be very clear with our state legislators how much this hurts taxpayers, Charlotte said.

Barry Bernstein asked if Calais is being reimbursed for East Montpelier kids who are at Calais temporarily due to construction at their elementary school. Yes, Calais is being reimbursed.

Charlotte pointed out that every year the school board provides a list of changes in the budget. The changes are listed on Page 82 of this year's town report.

Phil Tonks questioned the increase in the tax rate, and Charlotte explained that Calais is still a receiving town. The school receives special education money and a grant for being a "small school." The State gives with one hand and takes away with the other hand.

Dot Naylor said the budget shows the actual for the previous year, but not the budgeted amount. \$72,000 came in in 2013 but where does it show here? Charlotte said the Board gives the town-approved budget to the principal and tells her to manage to that budget. If there is a surplus, it goes into the fund balance. It might be 1 or 2%, as much as \$20,000 or \$30,000. That's what is paying for the roof repair. If it's over 5%, the surplus goes back to property owners in the form of tax reduction. Dot asked for those figures to be put in the town report so the information is easily accessible. Charlotte referred her to page 88 of the town report.

Rhonda Shippee noted that it is not accurate to say that the CLA will go away.

Steve Duke made a motion to amend the article by cutting the budget ten percent, reducing the request in Article 2 by \$908,000. The motion was seconded. Sage Kennedy pointed out that over 25% of parents of kids at Calais Elementary School also went to the school. "I get that taxes are high, but we are talking about our neighbors' kids and neighbors' grandkids," she said. "Now is not the time to cut the budget." Chauntelle Eckhaus said that the school board invites people to attend their meetings. "I went and they were talking about the budget line by line. Watching it, there wasn't much to cut. They looked at it long and hard." The time to suggest changes is when the school board is developing the budget and invites people to come, she said.

Joseph Murray said he has worked with lots of kids who have had trouble in school. "I'd like to talk about the quality of our schools. How do our kids do when they get to U32? Nineteen Calais kids went to U32 from Calais Elementary and a high percentage of those kids are on the honor roll. Our kids compete with kids across the world. They can't just get C grades to compete and, frankly, be able to afford to live in Calais."

Marion Gray said she is suffering from taxes and asked the board to look at transportation costs. Explaining that she sat in the school yard for two hours and counted the cars that came, she pointed out that a lot of parents are driving their kids to school and the children are not using the buses. Charlotte said that the school is required by law to provide transportation. In 2000, 5.5% of the budget was spent on busing. Now 4.6% of the budget goes to transportation. Consider also how much gas has gone up, Charlotte said.

Ginny Kern said she recognizes that Calais has done a good job with the budget; it is a statewide problem.

Conrad Smith said that taking money out of the Calais Elementary School budget will not affect the tax rate that much. It is the state education fund that is the issue, and it is not being funded correctly by the legislature. "Amending this budget is symbolic," he said, "but it will not change your taxes. You have got to get the legislature to adequately fund the education fund."

Cornelia Carey made a motion to end debate. Her motion was seconded. By voice vote, the moderator determined the vote to end debate passed. A paper ballot was called for. The resulting vote showed 58 voting for the amendment to reduce the budget and 141 voting no. The amendment failed. Marianne Miller called to end debate on Article 2. The call was seconded and Article 2 passed by voice vote.

As it was past 10 a.m., the time warned for town meeting, Mac Gardner-Morse made a motion to recess the school meeting and move to the town meeting. A hand count was taken and 129 voted to end the school meeting. 71 voted not to recess.

The meeting was recessed at 10:35 a.m.

The school meeting reconvened at 4:15 p.m.

**ARTICLE 3.** Shall the Calais School District authorize the Board of School Directors to hold any audited fund balance as of June 30, 2013 and as of June 30, 2014 in a reserve fund to be expended under the control and direction of the Board of School Directors for the purpose of operating the school?

Craig Line moved to vote by unanimous consent; the article is boilerplate in terms of holding money and borrowing money.

**ARTICLE 4.** Shall the Calais School District authorize the Board of School Directors to borrow money in anticipation of the receipt of revenues for the school year?

Craig moved for Article 4 to be adopted by unanimous consent.

**ARTICLE 5.** Shall the Calais School District vote the Calais Elementary School budget by Australian ballot?

Mac Gardner-Morse moved the article and it was seconded. Heather Scandale spoke in support of Australian ballot because of her family's work and kid schedules. She wants to be able to vote for the school budget. Cindy Gardner-Morse suggested passing over the article and holding meetings to discuss the effect on town meeting. Craig suggested moving through the debate today and the article could be warned again next year.

Scott Thompson said the school board has tried to involve people especially during the three months of budget planning. Voting is the last stage of a much bigger process, he explained, especially the deliberation and discussion of the budget. He said prior town meeting, the school board voted against Australian ballot. "The vote is an impoverished way of the democratic process. The board depends on this back and forth so we know what you want. We use this input to help us prioritize. I welcome greater participation. I'm afraid Australian ballot voting will subtract more than it adds, and it will force us [the school board] to fly blind and everyone else too. We won't hear as much in order to understand the public issues. I am open to try and figure out other means for those who can't get to town meeting."

Craig explained that the article can be debated today or it could be passed over and postponed for future discussion if there is a motion to this effect. Jeff Fannon made a motion to postpone the article indefinitely.

There was discussion about the start time of the school meeting and the fact that Article 5 was the last article on the warning, indicating the possibility that the school board wanted to have the Australian discussion last. Scott Thompson pointed out that the budget, being the biggest issue, was placed first on the Warning. Before the Australian ballot item came up for discussion, the meeting attendees voted to move into the town meeting. Gus Seelig explained that at a meeting of the selectboard months ago, before the warning was even developed, it was decided that the school meeting would begin at 9 a.m. in an attempt to encourage more people to attend. "We really want to encourage participation," he said. "I'm happy to work with any group, to revisit the issue of space, or go to two separate days for the town and school meetings. All public officials are struggling to have more people participate."

The amendment to postpone the discussion was defeated by voice vote.

The article was defeated by voice vote.

**ARTICLE 6.** To transact any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

Noting that he is stepping down from the school board and that his thanks is in the town report, Scott Thompson went on to say that he wanted to give thanks to his colleagues, the kids, his neighbors, the supervisory union and the teachers. "It has been a complete joy, a fantastic experience," he said. Scott said he wanted to thank Dot Naylor for her assistance and also Peter Harvey who ran against him for the position and then went on to do something significant by bringing the school board minutes to the people of Calais in a way that the school board had never been able to.

Peter Harvey said, "I didn't really run *against* Scott. We ran for the same seat. After the last two years, I'm happy to say I'm glad he won."

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

A true record of the meeting,

Attest,	Calais Town Clerk and Treasurer
Attest,	School Board
Attest,	Board of Civil Authority