

# TOWN OF PEACHAM, VERMONT

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## Minutes of the 2023 Annual Peacham School District Meeting

The legal voters of the Town of Peacham met at the Peacham Congregational Church in Peacham, Vermont on Tuesday March 7, 2023 at 1:00PM.

School Moderator Tim McKay opened the meeting and turned Article 1 over to School Board Chair Mark Clough.

**Article 1:** To elect a School Moderator to conduct and govern the meeting.

Dick Browne nominated Tim McKay. Kathy Corcoran seconded. There were no other nominations. Tim McKay was elected as School Moderator by a voice vote.

**Article 2:** To hear and act upon the report of the Board.

School Director Andra Hibbert spoke about the current state of the Peacham School District. There are currently 68 students enrolled in the Peacham Elementary School. Beyond 6th grade, in the next fiscal year, the School District will tuition an estimated 42 students attending an estimated four different schools. These students are able to access high-quality education in the greater community due to the town's commitment to education. In looking at opportunities for growth in the current fiscal climate, the budget includes funding for a 20%-time foreign language teacher and a reserve capital fund to be used for future consideration in the budget. This year's warned budget is for \$2,292,405.00, which is a 12% increase in spending from last year, with a tax rate of 1.66. This tax rate, while an increase, continues a four-year trend downward from FY2020 when the tax rate was 1.97. Moving beyond the pandemic, the school has been able to return to a lot of community-based learning such as the buddy program and working with the senior center. Peacham Elementary School continues to be guided by the collaborative, responsive, and community-minded leadership of Principal Sam McLeod. Hibbert spoke about filling a few critical positions during the summer of 2022, the strong team at the school, and the new elementary school mascot. Mr. McLeod has been working with the school district on the math and science curriculums and plans to continue this work in other subject areas.

Principal Sam McLeod thanked the School Board members, Superintendent Mark Tucker, Food Service Director Tanika Stewart, and the Peacham Elementary School staff for all of their hard work ensuring that Peacham students receive exemplary education opportunities. McLeod shared a few anecdotes about the staff and community members. He explained that, to continue serving as a community-based school, there will now be monthly community newsletters and monthly meals with various community groups.

School Board Chair Mark Clough thanked McLeod for his leadership at the elementary school and thanked outgoing School Director Kate Patno for her work on the School Board. Clough commented on the synergy that the school has with the members of the Parent Teacher Friend (PTF) group, who are engaged with the school in a great way.

**Article 3:** To elect one School Director for a term of 3 years

Erin Lane nominated Dan Devine. There were no other nominations. Dan Devine was elected as School Director for a term of 3 years by a voice vote.



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**Article 4:** To elect 1 School Director for a term of 2 years.

Alex Maclean was nominated from the floor. There were no other nominations. Alex Maclean was elected as School Director for a term of 2 years by a voice vote.

**Article 5:** To elect one School Director to complete a vacated 3 year seat.

Tim Scott nominated Andra Hibbert. There were no other nominations. Andra Hibbert was elected as School Director to complete a vacated 3 year seat by a voice vote.

**Article 6:** To elect a School District Clerk.

Peter Craig nominated Rebecca Washington. There were no other nominations. Rebecca Washington was elected as School District Clerk by a voice vote.

**Article 7:** To elect a School District Treasurer.

Peter Craig nominated Rebecca Washington. Rebecca Washington declined the nomination. Gillian Sewake nominated Mike Heath. There were no other nominations. Mike Heath was elected as School District Treasurer by a voice vote.

**Article 8:** Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize the Peacham School Board to expend two million two hundred ninety-two thousand four hundred five (\$2,292,405.00), which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year?

Dick Browne moved to accept the article, seconded by Diana Senturia. There was no objection to letting Superintendent Mark Tucker, who is not a registered voter of Peacham, speak.

Tucker spoke about the great collaborative working relationship he has with Principal Sam McLeod and the School Board and about how lucky Peacham is to have such a great school. He then went over a few specific details of the budget. The Expenditures are up 8.7% this year, which is less of an increase than many of the other schools in the district. Some of the causes for the increase in the budget are raises for the teachers and support staff, the inflationary cost of health care, tuition for secondary schools increasing by \$115,000, and an increase in nursing services. The state has been running a fairly significant surplus in the education fund for the past 2-3 years and, to give it back to the school systems, they set a fairly high yield rate, which gives the school district the opportunity to raise some extra money. There is \$50,000 included in the budget to be set aside in a capital reserve fund for improvements to the school such as replacing all of the lighting, looking at heat loss caused by original windows, and other building needs. On the positive side, the Caledonia Central Supervisory Union (CCSU) board agreed to change the allocation formula for certain non-school specific costs at the supervisory union level to make it as fair as possible, which resulted in a \$24,000 reduction in Peacham's budget. Additionally, Peacham is benefiting for one final year from the Small Schools Grant, which will no longer be available with the implementation of the new weighting study. The Small Schools Grant will allow the school district to raise \$81,741 less in taxes than it would have without the grant.

Thomas Galinat asked about the penalty associated with spending over the excess spending threshold and about the predicted outcome of the new weighting study.

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Tucker explained that there is no longer an excess spending penalty, which has been sunsetted for last year and this year and goes away with the implementation of the new weighting study. Tucker does not currently have concrete guidance for how the weighting study will be calculated and/or implemented.

Tucker reviewed the tax impact table on page 90 and the education fund sources tables on page 89 in the 2022 Annual Town and School Report.

Wendy Morgan asked those in attendance to help spread the word about the income sensitive tax rate, especially to people who don't have to pay income taxes and may therefore not know about the Homestead Declaration (HS-122) and Property Tax Credit Claim (HI-144) forms.

Tim McKay re-read the article. The article passed by a voice vote.

**Article 9:** Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize the School Board to borrow money to pay its lawful debts and expenses for the fiscal year which ends June 30, 2024 in an amount not to exceed 90% of the anticipated collection of taxes and receipts of other funds to be used for those purposes?

Kathy Corcoran moved to accept the article. Dick Browne seconded. The article passed by a voice vote.

**Article 10:** Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize the Board of School Directors to hold any audited fund balance as of June 30, 2023 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?

Dick Browne moved to accept the article. Diana Senturia seconded.

Becky Jensen asked the School Board for clarification on the article.

Mark Clough answered that the state encouraged this article to be put on the warning.

Mark Tucker explained that any unexpended funds have to be put in an unrestricted reserve fund to be used for operating expenses. Those funds can only be spent on operating expenses, moved to a restricted capital reserve fund, or used to buy down the next year's tax rate. Any of those actions would be approved by a School Board vote at a warned School Board meeting, which are open to the public. The voters of the School District elect School Board Directors to be responsible with the town's money.

Thomas Galinat compared it to the Town's working capital fund and explained that he saw the negative effect on the Town side of unexpended funds from 2021 being used to lower the 2022 tax rate, which artificially inflated the 2023 tax rate. Putting unexpended funds in an unrestricted fund gives the board the authority to retain the funds without lowering the next year's tax rate and gives the board more control to operate with a rainy day fund, similar to the Town's working capital fund.

The article passed by a voice vote.



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**Article 11:** To transact any non-binding business that may legally come before the meeting.

Erin Lane thanked the community for the support they give to the Peacham PTF. There will be an upcoming opportunity to support the PTF at the Mud and Muck Auction on April 1st at the Town Gym.

Sam McLeod explained that one of the greatest assets to the community and the school is the PTF. They fundraise throughout the year and send every kid in the school to Burke Mountain for four full days of downhill skiing and send them to gymnastics as well, at no cost. McLeod encouraged everyone to support the PTF.

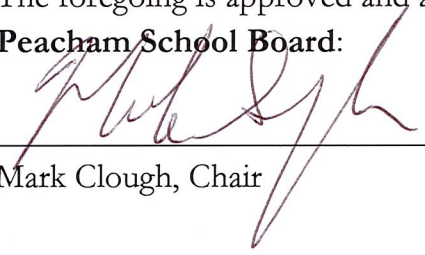
Mark Clough encouraged everyone to let the School Board know how it could communicate better with the community.

Diana Senturia expressed concerns about the current legislation regarding school choice. Alex Maclean explained that the School Board recognizes that there are some concerns amongst the community about the evolving legislation and that the School Board cares about issues on all sides such as equity and retention of choice. However, the School Board does not have any authority on the issue and anyone with concerns should reach out to their representatives and senators.

Peter Craig motioned to adjourn. Dave Edwards seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 2:11PM.

The foregoing is approved and attested by:

**Peacham School Board:**

  
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Mark Clough, Chair


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Cornelia Hasenfuss

  
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Alex Maclean

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Andra Hibbert

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dan Devine

**Moderator:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Timothy McKay

**School Clerk:**

  
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Rebecca Washington