

TOWN OF PEACHAM, VERMONT

Minutes of the 2026 Annual Peacham School District Meeting

The legal voters of the Town of Peacham met at the Peacham Meetinghouse in Peacham, Vermont on Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at 10:00 am.

School Moderator Tim McKay opened the meeting.

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

Rick Scholes nominated Tim McKay.

Dick Browne moved to close nominations. The motion passed by voice vote.

Tim McKay was elected as School Moderator for a term of one year by voice vote.

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

School Director Andra Hibbert thanked former principal Sam MacLeod for his five years of leadership at Peacham School and thanked outgoing School Director Diana Senturia for her service on the board.

Principal Lydia Cochrane explained that this year has been focused on building community through connection, collaborative practices, and consistent routines. At the beginning of the year, Cochrane and the staff did data analysis and looked at their strengths, where they wanted to grow, and set goals for the year. One goal was to have 100% of students achieve academy growth in math and literacy. They launched a new literacy curriculum for the intervention program and started using more actionable assessments to drive instruction. There was an increased collaboration between the special education department, academic interventionist, school counselor, principal, and paraprofessionals to have an all-hands-on-deck approach to student learning. With these and other practices, they hope to build a stronger culture and see a 50% decrease in behavior referrals. Cochrane acknowledged the community members and organizations who have helped educate the students and thanked them for the opportunities and programs they have made possible.

CCSU Superintendent Matt Foster was given permission to speak and explained that the budget is in pretty good shape. On December 1st, the state sent over the preliminary tax info that was printed in the town report. However, there is currently a bill in the legislature that would help buy down the tax rate and the handouts show the preliminary tax numbers if the bill passes. Foster further explained that the budget is up 4%, the CLA has a negative impact on the tax rate, and the increase in long-term weighted average students has a positive impact on the tax rate.

Adam Kane asked for a read from the board on the changes that are unfolding state-wide and what it might mean for the school. School Director Andra Hibbert explained that Act 73 was passed last summer and, in the fall, a redistricting task force met to look at redistricting maps and took public commentary. The task force came to the idea that Vermont should be moved to a cooperative education system without redistricting. The governor rejected that idea and wants more consolidation. The legislature is currently looking at two proposed redistricting maps. One would move to a school district model which would consolidate Peacham School into a larger elementary school district and would get rid of school choice for 7-12 grades. The other map would preserve the supervisory union model and would preserve school choice. Selling the school building to the town would future-proof the town against possible school closure or the elimination of the Peacham School District as a school district.

Alex MacLean acknowledged that there is a ton of uncertainty and encouraged voters to reach out to their legislators with two messages: no forced mergers and the importance of supervisory

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unions. Cathy Browne asked for clarification on the messages to the legislators and wondered what impact it would have. MacLean explained that reaching out to legislators means a lot to them and impresses upon them the importance of the voter's values.

Cornelia Hasenfuss requested an explanation of the difference between a supervisory union and a school district. CCSU Superintendent Matt Foster explained that the supervisory union board has representatives from each school district and a consolidated school district would have one school district board making decisions for all of the towns. A consolidated school district might cause a loss of voice and direct impact, as well as losing school choice outside of the school district.

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

Gillian Sewake nominated Dan Devine.

Jerry Senturia moved to close nominations and have the clerk cast one ballot for Dan Devine. Seconded by Dick Browne. The motion was passed by a voice vote and the clerk cast one ballot.

Dan Devine was elected for a term of three years.

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

Gillian Sewake nominated Rose Dedam.

Jerry Senturia moved to close nominations and have the clerk cast one ballot for Rose Dedam. Seconded by Dick Browne. The motion was passed by a voice vote and the clerk cast one ballot.

Rose Dedam was elected for a term of two years.

Article 5: To elect a School District Clerk.

Peter Craig nominated Rebecca Washington.

Hearing no other nominations, Rebecca Washington was elected as School District Clerk for a term of one year by acclamation.

Article 6: To elect a School District Treasurer.

Ken Kraus nominated Morgan Gold.

Hearing no other nominations, Morgan Gold was elected as School District Treasurer for a term of one year by acclamation.

Article 7: Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize the Peacham School District's Board of Directors to take all actions necessary to sell the Peacham Elementary School to the Town of Peacham, VT for the amount of \$1.

Karen Lewis moved the article. Seconded by Dick Browne.

Jerry Senturia proposed an amendment to the article: "in passing Article 7, this body requests that the Selectboard accept the Peacham Elementary school building and grounds." Seconded by Diana Senturia. Becky Jensen pointed out the potential issue with the voters in the school district meeting requiring the Selectboard to take action. Jerry Senturia explained that the amendment would just request Selectboard action, not order it. Adam Kane asked for the Selectboard's response. Selectboard Chair Alfred Dedam explained that the School Board

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drafted a triple-net lease agreement that the town has received and sent to VLCT for review. As long as the school is operating, the finances do not change and any liability concerns would fall on the school district. Dedam was not comfortable speaking for the board but he is in favor of the sale as a way to protect a community asset that the taxpayers have been paying for. Larry Jensen asked what obstacle the amendment is trying to clear. School Director Andra Hibbert answered that the amendment clarifies the will of the voters. The sale could have been done by the school board, but they value the will of the voters.

Moderator Tim McKay re-read the amendment and the amendment passed by a voice vote.

McKay read the amended article, "Shall the voters of the Peacham School District authorize the Peacham School District's Board of Directors to take all actions necessary to sell the Peacham Elementary School to the Town of Peacham, VT for the amount of \$1. In passing Article 7, this body requests that the Selectboard accept the Peacham Elementary school building and grounds."

Cornelia Hasenfuss asked what happens to the school building if the article doesn't pass. School Director Andra Hibbert explained that, as long as the Peacham School District continues to operate a school, it would remain the property of the school district. If the Peacham School District ceases to exist, the property would become the property of whatever entity it became a part of. From a community standpoint, it has benefits as a community space in an emergency situation that no other building in town provides.

Dylan Hovey asked for clarification on whether selling the property to the town would ensure that there will be an operating school in Peacham regardless of redistricting. School Director Andra Hibbert explained that it would not ensure there would be an operating school, but that it would ensure the town would retain ownership of the building as a community asset.

Bruce Westcott asked if the acceptance of the sale would be a matter of the vote of the Selectboard or the vote of the town. School Director Andra Hibbert answered that it would be a vote of the Selectboard.

Article 7, as amended, passed by a voice vote.

Article 8: Shall the voters of the Peacham School District approve the school board to expend \$2,921,099, which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? The Peacham School District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in per pupil education spending of \$15,897, which is .12% lower than per pupil education spending for the current year.

Jerry Senturia moved the article. Seconded by Dick Browne.

Larry Jensen asked if the decrease in cost per pupil is due to an overall decrease in costs or an increase in pupils. School Director Andra Hibbert explained that it is due to the long-term weighted average of pupils being up.

Dave Farnham explained that he lives on Peacham Pond which is an isolated part of town that pays a lion's share of taxes. He doesn't mind paying his share of the taxes but wanted to state that the community has a gift horse on the pond. He supports schools and appreciates education but he is struggling with the amount of money that's being asked for and needs to know that there will be a line in the sand.

Margaret MacLean was given permission to speak and explained that the problem addressed by Farnham is a tax problem not an education problem. She encouraged voters to contact their legislators with a message to fix the taxes and leave schools in local hands. There is a

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complicated tax situation that hasn't been paid attention to, which includes state payments not being adjusted for inflation. MacLean explained that closing small schools such as Peacham would not save money and might even cost more money due to transportation costs.

Kathy Buck asked if the per pupil spending included secondary education and what the difference in number of pupils is between the elementary school and grades 7-12. School Director Andra Hibbert answered that the per pupil spending includes all grades and is based on a long-term weighted average. Principal Lydia Cochrane answered that there are currently 63 prek-6 grade students.

Joel Wright explained that although the school and town budgets are voted separately, property owners get one tax bill. Since 2013, his tax bill has increased by 72%, which far outstrips inflation. He would accept paying a higher tax rate if he knew it was a crisis in an isolated year, but he is worried about constant increases and the affordability of the town. He also plans to express his frustration with his legislators. Wright stated that he is opposed to the school budget.

Ron Miller expressed his opinion that in order to fix some of the problems that towns are facing the state needs the most educated people. The reliance on property taxes to fund everything is outdated and the state needs to get creative to find new sources of income.

Moderator Tim McKay reread the article. Article 8 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, 2027, in an amount not to exceed 90% of the anticipated collection of taxes and receipts of other funds to be used for those purposes?

Dick Browne moved the article. Seconded by Rick Scholes.

Article 9 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, 2026 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 the article. Seconded by Larry Jensen.

Article 10 passed by a voice vote.

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

Dick Browne moved to adjourn. Seconded by Nathan Colpitts.

Meeting adjourned at 11:08 am.

The foregoing is approved and attested by:

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Peacham School Board:

Mark Clough

Alex MacLean

Andra Hibbert

Dan Devine

Rose Dedam

School Moderator:

Timothy McKay

School District Clerk:

Rebecca Washington