

# TOWN OF PEACHAM, VERMONT

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## Minutes of the May 29, 2026 Special Town Meeting

The legal voters of the Town of Peacham met at the Peacham Town Gym in Peacham, Vermont on Friday, May 29, 2026 at 6:00 pm.

Moderator Tim McKay opened the meeting at 6:06 pm.

**Article 1:** Shall the voters of the Town of Peacham, VT authorize the Town of Peacham Selectboard to take all actions necessary to purchase the Peacham Elementary School from the Peacham School District, for the amount of \$1?

Nate Giroux moved the article. Seconded by Diana Senturia.

Selectboard Member Will Kempton explained that, amongst merger talks in the state legislature, the School Board came to the Selectboard with a proposal to sell the school to the town for \$1. There would be a triple-net lease and nothing would change other than the name on the deed. If the school is forced to merge in the future, the town would not lose control of the property.

School Board Chair Mark Clough stated that it would be a win-win and that, if the school were to close for any reason, the sale would protect the town from losing the property. Barnet lost its school and surrounding property when the Barnet School District became a part of CCSD. If the Peacham School were to close, the building would be a good community building and emergency shelter. He further explained that all the testing that's been done on the building for harmful substances has come back clean.

Laurie Kozar asked about financial liability and deed restrictions. Clough answered that a full title search would be done by an attorney and that the School District's attorney has already performed a preliminary search with nothing coming up. The property insurance will have to be provided by the town's insurer, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, but the invoice will be paid by the school.

Nate explained that he's been working on the school building for the last five years and that it's in very good shape. Everything is up to code and there's no work that needs to be done.

Bruce Westcott moved to postpone the meeting until September 1, 2026 at 6:00 pm in the gym. Seconded by Joel Wright.

Westcott explained that the legislature has not decided on the passage of H955, which would remove the forced merger option for two years. In his opinion, if the legislature passes H955, an involuntary merger is not a liability that the town needs to deal with.

School Director Alex MacLean stated that Westcott is correct that the legislature has not officially passed H955, although the senate has and the house is still debating and is about to pass it. It contains voluntary, not forced merger, language but has things that will very likely lead to mergers, such as study groups about mergers and financial tools used to put pressure on schools, especially small schools, to close. Even if H955 passes, there's still a real risk of merger and MacLean stated that the voters should pass the vote.

Geoffry Fried stated that the merger discussion exposed a liability that's much wider than the merger issue. If the school closes due to forced merger or for another reason, it's a question of whether the town owns the property or not. He asked for reports of other towns doing this type of sale and Selectboard Member Christina Rumery answered that Craftsbury has already done it.

Jerry Senturia spoke against the motion on the floor and stated that the voters should pass the vote because this kind of sale might be prohibited by the legislature in the future.

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Beatrice Ring stated that it doesn't cost anything and will have the same effect on the taxpayers; therefore, there's no reason to postpone the vote.

School Board Chair Mark Clough explained that there's no risk involved in voting on it now and that one potential risk in waiting is that the legislature could vote to claw back properties that didn't do this on a timely basis. In the future, the town could sell the school back to the school district.

Eric Pomeroy pointed out that there's no mortgage on the school, so it would be considered an asset, not a liability.

Mercy Browne asked about maintenance costs and School Director Andra Hibbert answered that all upkeep and maintenance would remain the responsibility of the school district.

Laurie Kozar asked if there would be liability for the town and expenses on the balance sheet if the town assumes ownership of the property. School Board Chair Mark Clough explained that the taxpayers assume the liability as the town. The school district will carry the liability insurance on the property.

Bruce Westcott stated that if the legislature adjourns, they will not come back and make a different decision before January. He's concerned that the school board will potentially be in a position to negotiate a merger without having the property as an asset and asked if Peacham's negotiating position would be just as strong without that asset. School Director Andra Hibbert answered that with the way H955 is currently written, Peacham would be in a study committee saying which school districts should merge. The voters of the Peacham School district would then vote on whether to join the merger. Hibbert doesn't see an issue with needing the asset, but instead sees it as looking for partners in a changing educational landscape. If people are concerned about what might happen to the school building down the line, there would be articles of agreement in the event of a merger. School Director Alex MacLean added that any other school district that wanted to merge with us would want the students not the building. School Director Dan Devine explained that if negotiations for potential mergers were contingent on the school district owning the property, the voters of the town could choose to sell the property back to the school.

Laurie Kozar asked about a right of first refusal. School Board Chair Mark Clough answered that a right of first refusal would be in the terms of the lease agreement.

Nate Giroux explained that his concern with not selling the property to the town would be that it could potentially be owned by the CCSU or a different entity in the future.

Moderator Tim McKay restated the motion to postpone the meeting until September 1, 2026. The motion to postpone was defeated by a voice vote.

Article 1, as written, passed by a voice vote.

Diana Senturia moved to adjourn. Seconded by Dave Jacobs.

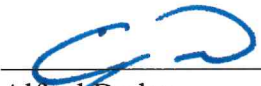
Meeting adjourned at 6:29 pm.

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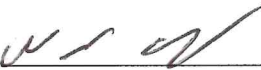
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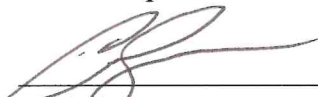
The foregoing is approved and attested by:

**Peacham Selectboard:**

  
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Alfred Dedam

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Andrea Otto

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Will Kempton

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Christian Snow

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Christina Rumery

**Moderator:**

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

**Town Clerk:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Rebecca Washington