

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF LITCHFIELD
APRIL 30, 2019

A Special Town Meeting of the Town of Litchfield was held on Tuesday, April 30, 2019 at the Litchfield Fire House. There were approximately 55 people in attendance. First Selectman Leo Paul Jr. called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Lisa A. Losee, Town Clerk, served as clerk.

A motion was made by Jeff Zullo, seconded by Paul Parsons that L. Cleveland Fuessenich preside as Moderator. J. Zullo moved to close nominations seconded by P. Parsons and all voted in favor. It was then voted unanimously that L. Cleveland Fuessenich serve as Moderator. Motion carried.

The Moderator read the certificate of Posting and Publication and it is attached to these minutes as Exhibit A.

The Moderator read the Warning of the meeting and it is attached to these minutes as Exhibit B.

Item I: To Discuss the Future of Bantam School, known as the Bantam Annex, Per Request by Petition Received 4/17/19.

The Moderator declared the floor open to discussion and set a 3 minute limit to speakers with further opportunity to speak after all who want to have a chance to do so.

Betsy Glassman: Resident since 1991; went on the walk through at the Bantam Annex and found that it had a sound foundation; pluses included bright windows, gym, solid frames, nice wood doors, nice bathroom tiles; negatives included lack of heat efficiency; solar should be considered; external walls in excellent condition; need two new boilers but may not need if solar heating is used; \$3m estimated to update; cosmetics are a mess but building is solid; doesn't understand the deal with trucks being parked there belonging to Lewis Tree Service who does tree cutting for Eversource; they park for free where it costs \$22 per day to park at a truck stop; thinks they should at least pay to fix pot holes and repairs to driveway and parking lot.

Laura Pavlick: Wants to understand the conflict: 1. That Town Hall should be in the center of Litchfield and 2. That Bantam P & Z won't change zoning; are these the reasons for conflict?

J. Zullo: explained timeline, hearings and analysis going back to 2005-2006 when 15 sites were analyzed including the Bantam Annex and the committee at that time recommended that the Town Hall remain in the center of Litchfield; must also accommodate residents on the Thomaston/Campville town line and other sections of town; committee made decision at that time and the Board of Selectmen endorsed it; further committees moved forward from there.

L. Pavlick: Can we start fresh and reconsider the negatives and the positives understanding there are two options?

J. Zullo: There are three options; regionalization will be an option; if we make a decision today we could end up with an empty school building; schools sized to accommodate 1500 students, enrollment is 890 students and going down; only two thirds of the three school buildings are being used.

Leo Paul: The Facilities Committee was tasked to consider whether a school building would be empty and become available.

L. Pavlick: How many employees work in the Town Hall?

L. Paul: Approximately thirty; the Annex was considered with each committee and had been dismissed and determined to be too costly to renovate.

William Burgess: A drawing was done as to the possible lay out of the Annex; it was determined too expensive; \$3mil is to make it status quo; it would take a lot more money to update it.

Kim MacDonald: Has been following this issue for a year; feels Annex has not really been considered; it is a different climate now; town needs to grow through education and reasonable taxes; only expense has been for emergency fixes; about to pay for that error; boards listen but don't respond; get ideas then they die; citizens are speaking up; Bantam will not change zoning; want to save money; not an outrageous amount needed for Annex; building is structurally sound; property is magnificent; does not want development; wants to preserve property.

Carol Powers: Subst. Debt/population decline-\$8mil does not make sense.

L. Paul: No one is talking about \$8 mil.

John Langer: Walk through was successful; there were electricians, masons, contractors; for the age and lack of maintenance it is in great shape; sound walls; phone lines; ample parking for town hall campus; no smell for a closed up building; clean; infrastructure paid for; it's a no-brainer.

Anne Haas: Read a letter from Paul Haas referring to the Newtown Town Hall, common sense prevailed; he implores all residents to look again at Bantam School.

Nancy Southard: Son lives on Campville Road; she is on route 63; 9 miles between houses; 12 miles to get to town hall from Northfield, it is a distance; deed restrictions are on current town hall property.

Steve Ardussi: It is essential that Bantam keep the Post Office there; good location; can't consider closing that; Litchfield Post Office couldn't handle that.

Meg Finn: Lives on the Goshen town line; doesn't understand what makes the drive so difficult.

J. Zullo: There are meetings at town hall almost every night; want citizens to be engaged; plans for new town hall included nice sized meeting room; want to support all citizen's needs; town hall is a functioning building for all citizens to participate in; part of analysis determined it should be centrally located to accommodate all citizens; 56 mile town; if the town hall goes to Bantam now we are left with what to do with other empty buildings; there is a lot to consider.

Steve Simonin: Lives in Northfield on Thomaston border; has no problem driving to Bantam; would take back roads; traffic in the center of town horrendous; Annex has one floor so no need for elevator; internet connections good; area for police good; lots more room; great place for meetings; was very impressed with building; area out back would be a great soccer field; worth consideration.

Peter Archer: A school would be too big for a town hall; center school would make great apartments; people on the Cornwall/Milton line drive that now; time is not a factor

L. Paul: People who say there is little use of the Town Hall do not know; people are in the Town Hall every day, all day long; there is activity in the Town Hall all day long; just ask the Town Clerk...

Burke Gibney: At the time that the 2005-06 committee studied 11-15 sites they didn't know when the courthouse would leave; circumstances have changed since then; we've lost the courthouse rent; have to

consider the debt situation; taxpayers bottom line; how much money are we spending moving forward; need to look at Bantam Annex and renovating.

J. Zullo: The lowest cost would be to use a school building; example is the LIS-has gym, fill rooms with offices and have meeting rooms- for \$1/2mil? Have to consider different options; should stand down now; invest \$40-\$50,000 to analyze use of school buildings; by far the lowest cost but are they too big.

B. Gibney: Heard suggestion; agrees with standing down.

Karen Horgan: Regionalization with Wamogo will leave a school open; keep split of some town offices in Annex for now.

Gary Gillman: Need to understand why we are here; newspaper said only one option left which scared people; good to hear other options being considered; keep Bantam School; town should hold onto it; if we stand down what is funding the Annex now? Town not budgeting for it; we are living off rent money from the courthouse; know that money has to come from somewhere; any plan needs to include a gym for Park & Rec; thank you to the Board of Selectmen and all who came out for this meeting.

Curtiss Barrows: New town hall would be on the smallest property we own; limited space; sell it.

L. Paul: We can't sell it there is a deed restriction.

C. Barrows: We have no other auditorium; we need to keep LIS for the auditorium; nothing for Park & Rec except Bantam School gym; holding back is good; should hold on to the property.

Marjorie Hubbard: Lives five miles out of town; people choose where they live; can't accommodate all; some will have to drive.

John Palmer: It's 3.9 miles from Town Hall to Bantam School; there's been short term thinking; we need long term thinking.

K. MacDonald: Standing down is a great thought; Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance need to listen to community; give recommendations; need to give options when time to vote; in future look at who's in office to listen to citizens and let 'us' have a say.

J. Zullo: Must explain the process; committee does the analysis and makes recommendation to the Board of Selectmen who can accept or reject it; there can be no choices on a referendum; by State Statute it must be a yes or no question, written in the affirmative; no multiple choices allowed.

Town Attorney Michael Rybak confirmed statements.

L. Paul: Process includes public hearings prior to referendum; can't vote on an either/or question.

J. Zullo: Town Hall Review Committee looked at three options.

K. MacDonald: Asking that all options be equally presented.

A. Haas: Scope was to look at three options; Annex was not considered.

J. Zullo: The first option was looked at closely by a previous committee; \$11mil was not an option; that is why the Town Hall Review Committee focused on the other two options; Board of Selectmen creates the charge of the committee.

A. Haas: She is a volunteer who goes once a month to a meeting at Town Hall; drive is not a problem; stuff not on the internet is a problem; read letter.

L. Pavlick: If the Town Hall moves to a school we still have two empty buildings; what would that scenario look like? Consolidation has been talked about for 30 years; it's not even in the cards now.

J. Zullo: Board of Education could shut down a school anytime; 1/3 of school buildings are empty; enrollment is going down; do we want to keep funding three school buildings?

Terry Szymanski: We're losing people now; if we raise taxes we will lose more people; it's hard.

B. Glassman: Center school is the best building for town hall; but 15-20,000 square feet too big; the building to use is LIS followed by LHS; buildings are falling apart; we keep spending but they are falling apart.

P. Archer: Was a second opinion ever gotten on the town hall issue; seems like the same architect is always used.

J. Zullo: Three different contractors did estimates that the committee used last year-O & G; Burlington Construction and an Independent estimator.

K. MacDonald: Have got to have opportunity to talk; need all information and not bias presentation; if there is doubt it should tell you something; have to address mistrust; Bantam deserves valid interest on what happens to the Bantam Annex.

J. Zullo: Must challenge that-every citizen has valid interest in what happens to the Annex.

L. Paul: This is the 7th public hearing on the Bantam Annex.

M. Finn: What is the immediacy? ADA compliance? No handicap access?

L. Paul: Town Hall needs renovation; we keep studying it; something needs to be done.

M. Finn: What happens to the property? [if town hall moves]

L. Paul: Deed restriction for public use; quasi public use

M. Finn: Parking lot? What about Probate? Could they use Annex?

L. Paul: Sure. Probate pays rent to us or we have to pay them if they move.

M. Finn: There is grant money to renovate Annex

L. Paul: No-grant money is not available to municipalities-it only would've been available to the Housing Trust.

Raz Alexe, Public Works Director and Town Engineer: Here is the problem-maintaining buildings is a situation; both are falling apart; the question of why should we renovate shouldn't even be asked; estimates he offered were for band aids, not for long term; \$5 mil is a lot but problem is serious; one building or both has to be renovated for long term; they are not safe and not healthy; even the littlest repair such as fixing a door jamb requires abatement; contamination has to be addressed; he was asked to provide estimates to bring buildings to an acceptable level for the 21st century only.

Pam Corning: Senses frustration; meetings are great but have narrow focus; surveying towns people should be done; not able to speak at meetings to all the needs that interest people.

J. Zullo: Reflect back; the Town Hall Review Committee reviewed three options; within one year this board brought it to referendum; plan was not approved so we have to continue and move forward; dialogue cannot happen at every meeting; every meeting cannot be a public hearing; he hears that the public wants to be more involved; surveys are not typically done; two options were brought to the town; the Bantam Borough paid Eagle for half or part of the analysis that was used for the option of affordable housing; this Board is not sitting on its hands; two options failed so we try again; another committee-another recommendation to the Board of Selectmen-another referendum.

W. Burgess: There is a strong group that wants a decision on the Bantam site; fifteen years is not good for a community to wait; Board of Education gets to decide about their buildings; sometimes you have to give up what you love; Bantam doesn't want Annex to be zoned for commercial use and doesn't want Litchfield to decide; perhaps it can be maintained and Bantam Borough should decide where the money comes from; allow open space; Board of Education-property in the Borough of Bantam-someone has to make choices and find a way.

Kevin Tessier: What is the next step? A comprehensive study on all pieces?

L. Paul: The Board of Selectmen have to decide whether to bring back the committee or to move forward; To make it clear- to regionalize, all four towns have to hold referendums to agree to do a study which could take 18 to 24 months; then all four towns would have to hold a referendum on the same day to choose to regionalize and if it passes in all four towns then a plan is developed which could take 24 months; then they can regionalize which could take another 24 months; Board of Selectmen need to have further discussion; we have to renovate something and it will go to referendum again; the Town Hall Review Committee was made up of citizens, ad-hoc residents, town employees, professionals, engineers; we look for people with experience; we ask for volunteers who would then interview with the Board of Selectmen who is the appointing authority.

C. Barrows: Are all four districts represented?

L. Paul: Yes if possible, if no one comes forward from a section of Town we're stuck.

K. MacDonald: How long legally does it take to become compliant?

L. Paul: Once any work is started we must become ADA compliant.

B. Glassman: \$3mil Annex update has more space; \$3mil town hall update has to be built; Raz says one has to be done.

A. Haas: Long term vision; how did we get \$30mil debt service and not maintain buildings?

J. Zullo: Not \$30mil. In 1999 we were \$1mil debt service plus capital- now \$7mil; Where are we spending?-Road repair, bridges, \$22mil on school, sewer plant up grade-we spend on what is needed and prioritize; for example if we get a wash out on a bridge.

A. Haas: Debt in maintaining and repairing is much less for Annex than Town Hall.

Fran Carpentier, Town Treasurer: There is a lot of misinformation about debt; we have \$23mil debt service not including \$1.6mil in sewer bonds and from now through June 2025 \$17mil of that will be retired; it is where we stand with other towns that matters; our debt level will drop significantly; spending about \$4mil per year and dropping; the only way to reduce taxes is to grow the Grand List; we are mostly residential with no commercial growth; roughly 85% of bonding is for Public Works, roads etc.; our roadways are the fourth largest in the state with twenty miles of dirt roads and we are mostly residential; we can't have it both ways; we have a large geographic area; all comes at a cost unless we want to grow the Grand List; our standing is relative to other towns and is always in a state of fluctuation.

A. Haas: Finished reading letter; asked that a future Board of Selectmen's meeting be scheduled to be held at the Annex and noticed two weeks in advance; could do a walk through again.

Lauren Sage: Happy to see that the Bantam Post Office has been painted but the back and side of the building has not been done; please paint the whole building.

Jonathan Tarrant made motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by N. Southard. Meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa A. Losee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" being more prominent and the last name "Losee" following in a similar style.

Lisa A. Losee
Town Clerk

Exhibit A

POSTING CERTIFICATE
NOTICE OF SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
APRIL 30, 2019

I, Lisa A. Losee, the duly elected Town Clerk of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut, hereby certify that I have this day posted in this office, on the Town Website, and all other places designated by the Town, the warning of Special Town Meeting to be held on Tuesday, April 30, 2019, which was caused to be published in the Republican-American, a newspaper having a substantial circulation in the Town of Litchfield, in its issue of April 25, 2019, which publication was at least five days prior to the holding of said Meeting.

Signed and sealed at Litchfield, Connecticut this 24th day of April, 2019.

Attest:



Lisa A. Losee
Town Clerk
Town of Litchfield


Exhibit B

**NOTICE OF A SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF LITCHFIELD
TO BE HELD APRIL 30, 2019**

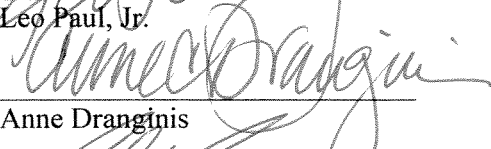
Notice is hereby given to the electors of the Town of Litchfield and those qualified taxpayers lawfully entitled to vote in Litchfield Town Meetings pursuant to Section 7-6 of the Connecticut General Statutes that a Special Town Meeting will be convened on April 30, 2019, at 7:00 P.M., at the Litchfield Firehouse, 258 West Street, for the following purpose:

- I. To Discuss the Future of Bantam School, known as the Bantam Annex, Per Request by Petition Received 4/17/19.


Dated at Litchfield, Connecticut this 23rd day of April, 2019.



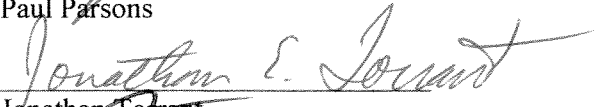
Leo Paul, Jr.



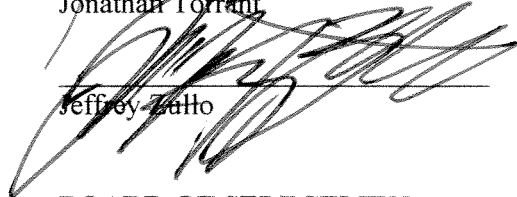
Anne Dranginis



Paul Parsons



Jonathan Torrant



Jeffrey Zullo

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
TOWN OF LITCHFIELD**

Any persons requiring special assistance should contact First Selectman Leo Paul, Jr. between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at 860-567-7550.

