

**TOWN OF WILLINGTON
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 17, 2022**

First Selectwoman Erika Wiczenski called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM and read the call of the meeting:

The electors of the Town of Willington and all persons who are entitled to vote in Town Meeting on the matters mentioned in the following warning are hereby warned and notified to meet in Town Meeting at the Old Town Hall; 11 Common Road, Willington, at 7:00 P.M. on Monday, October 17, 2022, for the following purpose:

ITEM I

Willington electors to nominate and vote for Willington electors to fill a vacancy on the Regional 19 Board of Education. Registered voters attending shall cast a certified paper ballot on the nominated names.

ITEM II

To see if the townspeople, on the recommendation of the Board of Finance, will authorize the appropriation of \$40,000.00 from LoCip, to contract with BETA Group, Inc. to provide Stormwater Management and GIS Mapping services which are needed as part of the MS4 permitting process.

Dated at Willington, This 3rd day of October, 2022.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski asked for nominations for a moderator.

Stef Summers nominated First Selectwoman Wiczenski as moderator.

Robert Jellen seconded the motion.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Moderator then read ITEM I:

Willington electors to nominate and vote for Willington electors to fill a vacancy on the Regional 19 Board of Education. Registered voters attending shall cast a certified paper ballot on the nominated names.

Michelle Doucette-Cunningham moved to nominate Todd Szabo as a candidate to fill the vacancy for the Region 19 Board of Education.

Laurie Semprebbon seconded the motion.

Peter Latinsics nominated Arthur Christensen as a candidate to fill the vacancy for the Region 19 Board of Education.

Jim Bulick seconded the motion.

Moderator then opened the floor for discussion and gave each nominee a chance to speak to their nominations, going in alphabetical order.

Arthur Christensen spoke first. Mr. Christensen stated that he is a softball coach, future introductory basketball coach as well as a substitute teacher at Hall & Center Schools. He also noted that many may recognize him as a constant present to speak segment in the Board of Education meetings where he has advocated for transparency in the new curriculum which is now available in the library. He also said he

was the only parent in town asking why ARPA money is not being spent on our kids in the schools because they suffered significant social educational progress during the pandemic. After several conversations with Superintendent Stevens, they came up with a few plans to present to the ARPA Commission that will benefit the welfare of our students.

In addition, Mr. Christensen stated he was the only person to call out the Board of Education for charging families to put their children in the afterschool program on professional development half days. He calculated the cost and researched the method of payment that would not impact the board's current budget. The project was discussed and passed at the last BOE Meeting, and he stated that 34 families will be receiving refunds for their payments to the program.

Mr. Christensen stated that he is very concerned about the education and wellbeing of our students in our schools. Being seated as a member of the Region 19 board, will allow him to be a local voice for the high school kids in town. He was asked why he would want to attend long meetings, do lots of paperwork and deal with angry parents. His response was that long meetings are required to determine proper solutions for the issues; paperwork and research is necessary and angry parents are just concerned parents who need to be heard. He knows this because he is one of them – that is why he would be the best representative for the Town of Willington.

Todd Szabo then spoke. He has been a resident here since 2016 and has a son who attends Center School. He loves his son's kindergarten teacher. Mr. Szabo stated that he has been a poll worker and ran for a position on the Board of Finance last year. He added that he volunteers on his son's ball team here in town. When he lived in New Britain, Mr. Szabo served on the Board of Assessors as well the Conservation Commission and worked in the legislature as well.

Mr. Szabo stated he is interested in getting involved in town issues and would like to help kids on the high school level. These kids need access to state funding for programs and to ensure they are safe in all aspects – from security to the air quality.

He would love to become involved in the PTA and Board of Education in the future and looks for everyone's support.

Moderator opened the floor for discussion.

Ann Grosjean stated that she thinks we need to have someone who is really positive advocating and representing Willington on the Regional Board.

Robert Jellen stated that he has served on the Region 19 board since 1999 with the exception of a one year absence. The Region 19 Board of Education was by far the best board he has served on in his career. Being a former teacher, he noted that it is a very cooperative board and have rarely ever had any issues.

The board is there to solve problems that come up but the main focus is to work on programs and other instances that come before us. He would like to see a positive person; one who learns quickly and learns the ropes serve on the board. We have been very fortunate to have a regional high school in this area. It is a remarkable school that offers wonderful programs.

Mary Newman said she is concerned with the Willington School system and we should probably look past cooperativeness. When she looks at the real-estate ap, the Willington Schools are rated at a 3. The kids deserve better – we should look into fresh ideas instead so we can bring that 3 up to a 9 or 10.

Meresa Pelletier stated that her child attends school with Mr. Christensen's child and she has heard him speak at several Board of Education meetings – which speaks volumes to her. She wanted to thank Mr. Christensen for his involvement and the hard work he has done. She looks forward to see where he goes.

Orlando Rodriguez clarified that we have a small population, and it is easy to sway the ratings. He added that we have a decent school system in which both of his children attended, and they are doing just fine. Our schools are great – we aren't Mansfield.

Sarah Smith stated that the members of the Region 19 board are intelligent and thoughtful; are from Ashford, Willington and Mansfield. It is a blue-ribbon school and we need someone who is going to do their homework and take it extremely seriously.

Nicholas Tella stated that he admires Mr. Christensen and thanked him for speaking out & sticking up for us at all of the Board meetings. He added that Mr. Christensen is someone that will fight for everybody no matter what side of the aisle you are on.

Elaine Newcomb stated that she has spent 45 years in town and has a long history here. She served on the local Board in the 1980's and was here when we voted to join Region 19. She added that Art works hard and researches the issues at hand. She strongly advocates for Arthur.

Matt Clark supports Art. He has known him over 5 years as they are neighbors. He has heard him speak at all the BOE meetings. Mr. Clark added that Mr. Christensen is responsible, thoughtful, and mature. There has been a lot of talk about cooperation – it is good; we all need it to constructively move forward. He is in support of Arthur.

Ralph Tulis stated that he has participated on several online meetings and offers support of Mr. Christensen.

Jamie Kroppek stated that she moved to Willington 2 years ago. She appreciates that Arthur does critical thinking and asks the hard questions. She noted that she found out the ratings of our school system after she moved here and she personally thinks it would be an honor to have Mr. Christensen on the board. She added that speaking of cooperation – it seems to her that our local Board of Education cooperates within their own party- lines. If thinking outside the box and challenging everything is a way to cooperate, then that is not what she wants. She thanked Mr. Christensen for all of his support to our kids.

Liza Boritz clarified what cooperation means – it is more of a spirit. Everyone is in cooperation because we have similar goals although we see different ways to accomplish them. She thoroughly believe that everyone in this room has the same end goals; whether we have different perspectives on how to achieve them.

She then added one of the key elements of the high school experience is identity development where they are learning who they are as individuals, emerging into their social circles and learning from their peers. She then asked the candidates what their understanding about this key time of development would be to them.

Mr. Christensen answered first. He clarified that he has a Business Degree; and no formal training in sociology or psychology; however he related to himself when he was in high school. He said back then, he wanted to be a doctor but was drifting all over the place. He was really good in sports. What really

got him through was being in the drama club. His answer would be to offer clubs/activities /sports or any sort of variety to give them a bunch of places to go and people who feel and think the same as they do.

Mr. Szabo then spoke. He said he does not have a degree in sociology or psychology, but his best friend has a 12-year-old son who is currently in an identity crisis and wanting to be known as a she. Mr. Szabo stated that he completely welcomes that. He remembers when he was born; seeing him in the hospital; and then they grow up and they become adolescents and they have different ideas. The best thing most importantly you can do is to support your kid – just as they are. He added that we need clubs – drama, music, or the gym. Kids don't like to go to math class, but they sure like to go to the gym or football practice. The best thing to do is to identify what you are looking for and support the idea of the scope and encourage and implement it into a policy.

Moderator ended the discussion; noting that Matt Clark had asked to call the question to vote.

All were in favor of calling the question with the exception of 1 No (S. Summers) 0 Abstentions

All in attendance were given a paper ballot to cast their vote. Votes were hand counted.

Moderator thanked both candidates for offering to serve. She stated that she has no doubt that either candidate will support our students. She looks forward to that.

Results: There were 71 total hand-written votes.

Arthur Christensen: 36 Todd Szabo: 34 Neither Candidate: 1

Arthur Christensen will fill the Region 19 Board of Education vacancy until the next municipal election.

Moderator then read ITEM II:

To see if the townspeople, on the recommendation of the Board of Finance, will authorize the appropriation of \$40,000.00 from LoCip, to contract with BETA Group, Inc. to provide Stormwater Management and GIS Mapping services which are needed as part of the MS4 permitting process.

Question II was then moved by Laurie Semprebon; seconded by Ralph Tulis.

Moderator then opened the floor for discussion.

Nicholas Tella stated that he does not understand the process. Is it for us to do the cleanup of the town?

Troy Sposato, Public Works Director clarified that it is a requirement of MS-4 permitting process as implemented by the State. The project is to map out all of the catch basins and outfalls around town and upload into a GIS database that will be maintained by the Town. Mr. Sposato noted that this particular step is the next part of an ongoing process.

First Selectwoman Wiecewski added that Willington was designated as an "urban community" a few years ago and this is one of the requirements to comply with the permitting process. She added that previous administrations had fought the designation; but because of the apartments in the Burt Latham area, the designation remained and now we must follow the guidelines.

Rob Cook asked if this is a yearly requirement or one time deal? Mr. Sposato noted that this will be a one time thing. Once it is set up, we will be able to add and make changes to and maintain it ourselves.

Matt Clark asked what LOCIP funding is? Moderator clarified that LOCIP stands for Local Capital Improvement funding. It is grant funding from the state. As a town, we need to appropriate the funding first then we will be reimbursed once the project is completed.

Orlando Rodriguez clarified that it is state funding.

Ralph Tulis said it may be grant money, but in reality, it is our money that we paid in taxes that is coming back to us.

Orlando Rodriguez clarified that with state money, everyone in the state pays for it and if we are not going to spend it, we might as well give it to Mansfield.

Nicholas Tella asked if we have looked into any other companies other than Beta Group? Troy Sposato said that Beta is a state approved vendor on our CRCOG site.

Shirley Ernst asked if we don't take the money, we still have to do the project, correct? Mr. Sposato answered yes.

Linda Miner asked why they only sought one quote? Moderator stated Willington's procurement policy is a State vendor or out to bid with at least 3 quotes. The vendor that we will use is a state approved vendor.

Rob Cook asked if there was a set timeframe to do the project? Troy Sposato stated that there could be fines if we do not comply. He added that this should have been done 2 years ago.

Stef Summers noted that other state grants or money that we are looking for could be compromised if we don't follow this mandate.

Laurie Semprebon moved to call the question to a vote.

John Blessington seconded the motion.

All in favor. Motion passes.

ITEM II was then called to vote.

All in favor with the exception of 1 No (N. Tella) 0 Abstentions.

Ralph Tulis moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:54 PM seconded by Michelle Doucette-Cunningham.

Respectfully submitted,



Robin H. Campbell
Town Clerk

RECEIVED
WILLINGTON, CT.

2022 OCT 19 P 12:35



TOWN CLERK

