

**TOWN OF ENFIELD  
ENFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

**PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES  
APRIL 13, 2022**

**TIME:** 5:30 PM  
**LOCATION:** Public Works Facility & Teams videoconference  
74 Lockehaven Road, Enfield

**PRESENT**

**Board of Selectmen:** Katherine D.P. Stewart, John W. Kluge

**Excused:** Meredith Smith

**Administrative Staff:** Ed Morris, Town Manager; Alisa Bonnette, Assistant Town Manager

**Members of the Public:** Susan Brown, Dan Kiley, Curtis Payne, Bill Warren, Anita Warren, Tim Jennings, Dave Beaufait, Tracy Young, Nancy Smith, Bill Chase, Jim Bonner and other members of the general public.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Kluge called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Mr. Kluge read the public hearing notice noting the purpose of the public hearing being to discuss Warrant Article #16 to be voted April 30, 2022 at the business session of Town Meeting: “(By Petition) Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB 2) to allow official ballot voting on all issues before the Town of Enfield on the second Tuesday of March?”

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Ms. Stewart moved to open the public hearing at 5:30 PM, Mr. Kluge seconded; vote unanimous in favor of the motion (2-0).

Alisa Bonnette provided a brief presentation on the use of Teams for the videoconference portion of the meeting.

Ed Morris made a short presentation relative to the Town Meeting process under SB 2 (attached).

Tracy Young spoke in favor of the article. When we vote on major issues we would like to know if there's a strong opinion from the population. These issues should not be decided by just a small number of people. He believes it will involve more people.

Dave Beaufait does not believe the process will meet Mr. Young's goal. The School, which has operated under SB 2 for about 30 years, had about 7 Enfield residents attend their deliberative session. A small number of individuals can have a great deal of impact on what is being voted.

Dan Kiley, stated that yes, what Dr. Beaufait said is true, but then everyone is voting on it. At Town Meeting there's discussion and within 10 minutes you're going to vote on it, as opposed to having 6 weeks to decide whether or not you want to vote for what has been amended. The other thing adopting SB 2 would do is you'll know when Town Meeting is going to be, as opposed to the last few years when the second session hasn't been held when it was supposed to be. While the Town has said it's because of COVID, but the other districts in the same school district have held their meetings on time. Enfield had the opportunity to hold its second session in the high school auditorium which would hold 600 people, instead we scheduled it 8 weeks later. SB 2 meetings are held within a short time period rather than at a time when the Selectmen decide to set it.

Susan Brown stated Town Meeting is not a requirement, it's a privilege. We are so fortunate to live in New England, where we can go to Town Meeting and decide how we want our Town to be run. SB 2 is the worst idea any idea ever had about town government. The last thing we need to lose is Town Meeting. We need people going to Town Meeting instead of switching to SB 2. We need to provide child care at Town Meeting, and there needs to be food at Town Meeting. COVID shouldn't change Town Meeting and that's what some want to do. We need Town Meeting. We're fortunate to be able to come to Town Meeting and she hopes everyone attends and votes down SB 2.

Tim Jennings provided a bit of history about Town Meeting under SB 2, from its origins, being created primarily with the intent to control spending. It originated from the ultra-conservative members of the legislature. The notion was the elites controlled the Town via the traditional Town Meeting and that if more of the public voted the budgets would come down. The desired result did not materialize in most towns, certainly not in Enfield. He addressed process and participation with large meetings of 500 – 600 voters become unwieldy for some larger municipalities. But Enfield is the same size as it was 20 years ago. He does not believe anyone is claiming the Enfield Town Meeting is too large to be managed in person. But in 1996 the Town adopted SB 2. For 5 years Enfield was an SB 2 town, but in 2001 the Town voted to return to the traditional Town Meeting. Comments from those who voted to return to the traditional Town Meeting cited lack of information, no clear ways to share pros and cons. The ballot was too long, and complicated articles were often misunderstood, so many questions were voted based on the best guess of what was intended. There was an inability to significantly impact the budget. The inability for town officials or petitioners to explain or lobby for particular articles, leading to frustration that votes were being cast without a full understanding of the issue. Inability to directly address the Board of Selectmen, Budget Committee, Town Manager and other officials. Also, because of that there's no feedback provided to the town government about the will, mood or sentiment of the town on the issues. While Mr. Jennings understands the desire for a strong mandate from the town, he suggests that if 200 people attend Town Meeting they represent a cross section of the Town. Deliberative session was poorly attended, did not fulfill its intended purpose, over time attendance fell further. Many felt that it was a waste of time. Eventually petitioners and other interest groups quit making the detailed presentations. In the end, the deliberative session became little more than a public hearing. There were also comments about individuals simply not seeing one another and participating in the annual ritual. Mr. Jennings has no quarrel with people who wish to revisit this issue. He went on to note that civic engagement is deteriorating and the benefits of coming together to Town Meeting. Town meeting is a commitment. He encourages everyone to attend this year.

Nancy Smith moved to Enfield during SB 2 and appreciates what Town Meeting provides. People don't attend the deliberative session, don't know what's going on. More people are voting but probably not educated. She feels it's a step backwards.

The potential for childcare was discussed, perhaps by a local organization. Childcare is often not well used even when offered. Children can be brought to Town Meeting. It would be a learning experience.

Mr. Morse noted that finding an organization or licensed provider to provide childcare would be ideal. If the Town were to do so we'd have to run each volunteer through a background check which could take weeks or months to get people vetted.

Liability issues surrounding childcare were discussed. If an organization were to do it the Town would not have the liability.

Bill Chase admits to being an uneducated voter and suspects he's in the majority, not the minority. He is supportive of having a Town Meeting to help educate people, but it should not be held at the expense of those who are uneducated or unable to attend the meetings. There needs to be some prevention or protection for taxpayers who can't get to the meeting, who aren't technologically knowledgeable to participate via Zoom. His concern is if the only people who get to vote and have a say are the ones who attend the meeting, even if you have all of 200 people there, they represent a small percentage of the taxpayers of the Town. He does not feel that's fair, those people who are active participants get out their friends and get them to the meeting. There are a lot of elderly people who can't get out, don't know what's going on, are not on Listserv and do not have the access that some of the younger, more fluent people do. They still have a right to vote because it's their money being spent.

Ms. Stewart feels online attendance counts as attendance at the meeting. We welcome all people to attend in person or participate online. Anytime we can give access to a meeting and offer participation it's fantastic.

Bill Warren discussed his experience with Town Meeting beginning in childhood. He later became moderator. But if you look at the Town Meeting last year 83 people where at last years' Town Meeting. Take away the Budget Committee, Board of Selectmen and employees, how many people were there out of 3,700 people? It's a very small number making the decisions. Speaking to a Selectboard member from a town up north Mr. Warren asked how SB 2 worked for them. He said he could not say there was a difference in the outcome of the votes between SB 2 and traditional Town Meeting, so a lot of the fears and concerns, that is going to be pretty much the same no matter which way you go. I'm not trying to sway people away from the traditional Town Meeting, but things have changed a lot from when he attended his first Town Meeting in 1963. People in recent years have wanted more access to voting by mail. It's a changed situation. Don't let those fears concern you because the outcome will probably be the same.

Ms. Brown wonders if we need to start a publicity campaign and let people know they really need to come to Town Meeting. If you don't come and you don't vote you can't complain.

Ms. Stewart replied that people come regardless if it's SB 2 or traditional Town Meeting. If there's a major issue up for a vote people will turn out. Some is just about how interesting and compelling it is to be there. By not attending you're saying you're relatively sure the vote will come out in your favor.

Mr. Kiley noted that 30 people showed up at the School deliberative session this year, but 590 showed up last year when they tried to get rid of Patrick Andrew. If there's something on the ballot people will show up for the deliberative session.

Mrs. Smith feels the last two years are a bit of an anomaly. She doesn't feel they're representative. But the other thing that's changed in the last few years is we aren't mailing out the town report. She believes having it mailed to households helps.

Discussion followed regarding the size of the town report, the content of the report, the cost of mailing, the quantity simply thrown away after having been mailed, and the potential for mailing out just the warrant and budget and posting the full report online.

There were no further comments.

Ms. Stewart announced the next public hearing on Monday, April 18<sup>th</sup> relative to Article 17 – Increasing the Board of Selectmen to 5 members.

Ms. Stewart moved to close the public hearing at 6:15 PM, Mr. Kluge seconded. Vote unanimous in favor of the motion (2-0).

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Stewart moved to adjourn at 6:15 PM, Mr. Kluge seconded. Vote unanimous in favor of the motion (2-0).

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 PM

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Meredith C. Smith, Chair

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John W. Kluge

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Katherine D. P. Stewart  
Enfield Board of Selectmen