

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Tuesday, June 26, 2024 at 6:30 PM
Portland High School Media Center – 95 High Street

Town Clerk Michael Tierney called the meeting to order at 6:37 P.M. Eighteen electors were present, including Board of Selectman Ryan Curley, John Dillon, Shaun Manning, Michael Pelton & Jim Tripp. Additionally, Board of Education Members Angela Hammond, Tim Lavoy, Meg Scata & Sarah Spear were in attendance. Also present was School Superintendent Charles Britton.

A motion was made by Ryan Curley, seconded by Shaun Manning, to nominate John Dillon as Moderator. Seeing no other nominations, a motion to close nominations was made by Ryan Curley, seconded by Jim Tripp. John Dillon was elected moderator by a unanimous vote.

Moderator Dillon read the Call of the Meeting and instructed the Clerk to record the Call of the Meeting, and the Return of Notice, along with the minutes of the meeting.



Town of Portland, Connecticut

33 East Main Street • P.O. Box 71 • Portland, CT 06480-0071
www.portlandct.org • Phone: (860) 342-6715 • Fax: (860) 342-6714
Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer
Office of the First Selectman

LEGAL NOTICE of SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Wednesday, June 26, 2024 at 6:30 P.M.

Portland High School Media Center, 95 High Street, Portland, CT 06480

The electors and those persons eligible to vote in town meetings of the Town of Portland, Connecticut, are hereby warned and notified that pursuant to Chapter V, Section 503(a) of the Town Charter, a Special Town Meeting will be held on June 26, 2024 at 6:30 P.M. in the Portland High School Media Center, 95 High Street, Portland, CT for the following purpose:

ITEM 1. To discuss a Resolution:

- (a) To appropriate \$68,000,000 for costs related to the renovation and expansion of Valley View Elementary School into a pre-K-Grade 5 school;
- (b) To finance said appropriation by issuing bonds or notes in an amount not to exceed \$68,000,000;
- (c) To authorize the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, to determine the terms, conditions, and other details of the bonds or notes;
- (d) To declare the Town's intent to finance the project so that project costs may be temporarily advanced; to authorize the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, enter into agreements to bind the Town in connection with financing the project; and to determine that, if necessary, financing of the project on a taxable basis is in the public interest; and
- (e) To authorize the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, to apply for and accept or reject grants-in-aid for the project, and to authorize the First Selectman to execute agreements and other documents on behalf of the Town for the project and the financing of the project.

A copy of the complete resolution to be voted on is available for public inspection in the Town Clerk's Office and on the Town's website at www.portlandct.org. Dated this 18th day of June 2024.

Attest:  Ryan J. Curley, First Selectman



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RETURN OF NOTICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT on June 20, 2024, I left a duplicate of the attached warning and notice of the Special Town Meeting of the Town of Portland, Connecticut with Michael V. Tierney, its Town Clerk.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I caused a copy of said warning and notice to be published in the RIVEREAST NEWS BULLETIN, a newspaper having a substantial circulation in said town on Friday June 21, 2024.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I caused to be set upon the signpost or other place nearest the office of the Town Clerk and at all other places and signposts designated by the Town a written copy of said warning and notice.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that all the above acts were done before the holding of said Special Town Meeting on Wednesday, June 26, 2024 at 6:30 PM.

Dated at Portland, Connecticut this 18th day of June in the year 2024



Ryan J. Curley
First Selectman

TOWN OF PORTLAND, CT SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

RESOLUTION TO APPROPRIATE \$68,000,000 FOR THE RENOVATION AND EXPANSION OF VALLEY VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INTO A PRE-K-GRADE 5 SCHOOL AND TO AUTHORIZE THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS OR NOTES OF THE TOWN IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$68,000,000 TO FINANCE THE APPROPRIATION, OR SO MUCH AS MAY BE NECESSARY AFTER DEDUCTING GRANTS TO BE RECEIVED FOR THE PROJECT

BE IT RESOLVED:

SECTION 1. That the Town of Portland (the "Town") appropriate \$68,000,000 for costs related to the renovation and expansion of Valley View Elementary School into a pre-K-Grade 5 school (the "Project"). The appropriation may be expended for site improvements, design, construction, renovation and installation costs, engineering and professional fees, inspection, evaluation and surveying costs, materials, equipment, furniture, purchase costs, legal fees, financing costs, interest expense on temporary borrowings, and other costs related to the Project. The appropriation shall

include any federal, state or other grants-in-aid received for the Project. The Board of Selectmen or, a building committee, if established, is authorized to determine the particulars of the Project. The Board of Selectmen may reduce or modify the scope of the Project and the entire appropriation may be expended on the Project as so reduced or modified.

SECTION 2. That the Town of Portland finance the appropriation by issuing the Town's bonds, notes or other obligations in an amount not to exceed \$68,000,000, which bonds, notes or other obligations shall be issued pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended. The bonds, notes or other obligations may be sold as a single issue or consolidated with any other authorized issues of bonds, notes or other obligations of the Town. The Director of Finance shall keep a record of the bonds, notes or other obligations. The bonds, notes or other obligations shall be signed in the name and on behalf of the Town by the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, and shall bear the Town seal or a facsimile thereof. The bonds, notes or other obligations shall each recite that every requirement of law relating to its issue has been fully complied with, that such bond, note or other obligation is within every debt and other limit prescribed by law, and that the full faith and credit of the Town are pledged to the payment of the principal thereof and the interest thereon. The terms, details and particulars of such bonds, notes or other obligations shall be determined by the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them. Said bonds, notes or other obligations shall be sold by the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, at public sale or by negotiation in their discretion. If the bonds, notes or other obligations are sold by negotiation, the purchase agreement shall be approved by the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them.

SECTION 3. That the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, are authorized to issue temporary notes in anticipation of the receipt of the proceeds of said bonds, notes or other obligations. The temporary notes shall be signed by the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, and shall bear the Town seal or a facsimile thereof. The temporary notes shall be issued with maturity dates in accordance with the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended. The temporary notes shall each recite that every requirement of law relating to its issue has been fully complied with, that such note is within every debt and other limit prescribed by law, and that the full faith and credit of the Town are pledged to the payment of the principal thereof and the interest thereon. The net interest cost on such notes, including renewals thereof, and the expense of preparing, issuing, and marketing such notes, to the extent paid from the proceeds from the issuance of bonds, notes or other obligations, shall be included as a cost of the appropriation.

SECTION 4. That the Town hereby declares its official intent under Treasury Regulation Section 1.150-2 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, that Project costs may be paid from temporary advances of available funds and that the Town reasonably expects to reimburse any such advances from the proceeds of borrowings in an aggregate principal amount not in excess of the amount of borrowing authorized for the Project; that the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, are authorized to bind the Town pursuant to such representations and agreements as they deem necessary or advisable in order to ensure and maintain the continued exemption from federal income taxation of interest on the bonds, notes, other obligations or temporary notes authorized by this resolution, if issued on a tax-exempt basis, including covenants to pay rebates of investment earnings to the United States in future years; and that the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, are authorized to make representations and

agreements for the benefit of the holders of the bonds, notes, other obligations or temporary notes to provide secondary market disclosure information and to execute and deliver on behalf of the Town an agreement to provide such information with such terms and conditions as they, with the advice of bond counsel, deem necessary and appropriate.

SECTION 5. That the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, are authorized to apply for and accept or reject any federal, state or other grants-in-aid for the Project; to execute agreements and other documents with contractors, vendors and others on behalf of the Town for the Project; and to take all actions necessary and proper to carry out the Project and to issue the bonds, notes, other obligations or temporary notes to finance the appropriation.

SECTION 6. That the Board of Selectmen hereby authorizes the Portland Board of Education, through the Superintendent, to apply to the Connecticut Commissioner of Administrative Services, or other state or federal agencies, and to accept or reject grants for the Project.

SECTION 7. That the Board of Selectmen hereby authorizes the preparation of schematic drawings, outline specifications, preliminary studies, as well as architect, engineering, construction and/or other consulting studies and reports for the Project, and the filing of notice of the Project.

SECTION 8. That the Board of Selectmen hereby establishes the Valley View Elementary School Building Committee as the building committee with regard to the Project (the "Building Committee"), which Building Committee shall consist of five full members, and shall include the chairperson of the Portland Board of Education and at least one (1) member having experience in the construction industry. The Building Committee shall approve any contract(s) with architect(s) for the Project as may be selected by the Portland Board of Education, approve any contracts with engineers, contractors, and others in relation to the Project, and approve site plans, schematic and other drawings, plans, and specifications for the Project.

SECTION 9. That the Town Clerk is authorized to prepare a concise, explanatory text of this appropriation and bonding resolution which has been submitted to a referendum vote on the voting tabulators of the Town. Subject to the approval of the Town Attorney, the Board of Selectman authorizes the First Selectman and Town Clerk to prepare and print explanatory materials regarding this resolution, such explanatory text and explanatory materials to be prepared in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 9-369b.

**TOWN OF PORTLAND
WARNING OF SPECIAL TOWN MEETING, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2024 AND
REFERENDUM VOTE, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2024**

The electors and those persons eligible to vote in town meetings of the Town of Portland, Connecticut, are hereby warned and notified that a Special Town Meeting will be held at the at the Portland High School Media Center, 95 High Street, Portland, Connecticut on Wednesday, June 26, 2024 at 6:30 P.M. for the following purpose:

ITEM 1. To discuss a Resolution:

- (a) To appropriate \$68,000,000 for costs related to the renovation and expansion of Valley View Elementary School into a pre-K-Grade 5 school;
- (b) To finance said appropriation by issuing bonds or notes in an amount not to exceed \$68,000,000;
- (c) To authorize the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, to determine the terms, conditions, and other details of the bonds or notes;
- (d) To declare the Town's intent to finance the project so that project costs may be temporarily advanced; to authorize the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, enter into agreements to bind the Town in connection with financing the project; and to determine that, if necessary, financing of the project on a taxable basis is in the public interest; and
- (e) To authorize the First Selectman, Deputy First Selectman, Director of Finance, or any two of them, to apply for and accept or reject grants-in-aid for the project, and to authorize the First Selectman to execute agreements and other documents on behalf of the Town for the project and the financing of the project.

A copy of the full text of the Resolution is on file and available for inspection at the Office of the Town Clerk.

The Moderator shall adjourn the Special Town Meeting at its conclusion and the above item as required by Section 1204 of the Town Charter shall be submitted to a referendum vote on the voting tabulators or paper ballots by Town electors and qualified voters for approval or disapproval on Tuesday, November 5, 2024 between the hours of 6:00 A.M. and 8:00 P.M. Item 1 above shall be placed upon the voting tabulators or paper ballots under the following heading:

QUESTION 1.

"SHALL THE TOWN OF PORTLAND APPROPRIATE \$68,000,000 FOR THE RENOVATION AND EXPANSION OF VALLEY VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INTO A PRE-K-GRADE 5 SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZE THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS OR NOTES OF THE TOWN IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$68,000,000 TO FINANCE THE APPROPRIATION, OR SO MUCH AS MAY BE NECESSARY AFTER DEDUCTING GRANTS TO BE RECEIVED FOR THE PROJECT?"

YES NO

Voters approving said Resolution will vote "Yes" and those opposing said Resolution will vote "No".

Voters qualified to vote who are not electors shall vote at the Portland Middle School, 93 High Street, Portland, Connecticut in accordance with the procedures contained in Section 9-369d of the Connecticut General Statutes, which procedures the Town hereby chooses to apply. Absentee ballots will be available in the Town Clerk's Office.

Dated at Portland, Connecticut this 18th day of June, 2024.

Moderator Dillon called for discussion.

Meg Scata of 5 Freedom Way spoke first. She discussed that a committee made up of citizens came up with a plan, a survey was sent out by Ryan Curley to the residents, and stakeholder sessions were held to educate the public. She mentioned that we have talked about this consolidation and building improvements, along with the current “band-aiding” of the school buildings. This vote offers us the public’s opinion on the project. There is project information on the Town and Board of Education website, so residents can get the correct information on this project. She wants the people to decide in November.

Richard Lawton of 331 Cox Road spoke next. He discussed that he has lived in Portland most of his life and attended Portland Schools. He stated that in a previous meeting, they outlined the school plans, and he thinks there will be limited parking at the new Valley View complex. He asked how the traffic would be impacted with student drop-off and with bus traffic. He also discussed the sharing of the school cafeteria, library, etc. between grades in the one building. He believes that the cost will be more than anticipated, and that we should make improvements to the current school buildings. He feels this would be more efficient. With a project this large, he also feels that it will be hard to control the building project. Richard also discussed a recent announcement by State Senator Norm Needleman. There were state funding for HVAC improvements to area schools. He feels that we should pursue this type of funding as well.

Next, Selectman Shaun Manning read the following letter that was submitted to First Selectman Ryan Curley, via email by Ingrid Swanson Moss of 533 Main Street:

Dear Board of Selectmen Members,

I understand that tonight is a BOS vote that considers propelling forward the process of School Consolidation, initiating the grant proposals, and sending it towards a referendum.

****I am writing to voice my concern about this plan and my personal vote of non-support for proceeding with the School Consolidation plan at this time.****

To be transparent, and in the spirit of cooperation, I agree with many elements of the school consolidation plan:

- I agree that we need to invest in our town's education system.
- I agree that we need to renovate our elementary schools, all of which are in states of disrepair.
- I agree that our students need improved facilities and better physical learning spaces.
- As a taxpayer, I am willing to shoulder my portion of the increased taxes that it will take to make improvements -- I am not a vote of non-support because I am upset with the fiscal undertaking.
- And I hope that some of the momentum and energy towards improving our schools can be maintained and harnessed for a better plan.

However, I am very opposed to consolidating all of the schools into ONE GIANT elementary school. I have viewed the BOE meetings and presentations, I have attended forums to ask questions and share my perspective, and I will continue to be open to discussion at any time. I believe that I have

a unique perspective as someone who grew up and was educated by Portland Public Schools, who then left town for several decades, and who has now returned with three elementary aged students who are in Portland Schools (entering Kindergarten, 2nd grade, and 3rd grade). My kids will be greatly impacted by this decision. Some of my main concerns and positions are bulleted below:

1) I support closing ONE elementary school and consolidating into two schools. My preference would be a Pre-K through 2nd grade school, a 3-5 school, PMS housing 6-8, then PHS.

2) The School Consolidation Plan means that Portland will end up with a giant elementary school (one of the largest around!) which is antithetical to what a Portland education has always looked like. We specifically moved to Portland (and out of Glastonbury) for our children to attend schools that were smaller, more intimate, less anonymous. In our small Portland schools, our kids are KNOWN to staff -- they are known by the teachers, by the janitors, by the nurse, by the secretaries, by administrators, by support staff, etc. The kids feel safe, they feel seen, they feel accountable -- these are things that improve their morale, their positivity about education, and their academic performance. In a school of 600 or more kids, that familiarity and intimacy is lost and it can never be replicated (I do not believe that the "neighborhoods" of grades adequately addresses this issue at all). This culture of SMALL schools is the very foundation of what makes Portland schools so fantastic and it would be devastating to lose that. While I am not arguing that the physical structures don't matter (they do -- and they need major improvement!), the culture, dynamic, and "feel" of the schools matters more.

3) Similarly, I hate to see the loss of administrators, nurses, specials teachers, etc. with the School Consolidation Plan, where the idea is to pay less by cutting those positions and consolidating fewer personnel to do the same job as many. I would rather pay more and have nurses who aren't maxed out on numbers and overwhelmed and who actually know our kids! Same with administrators! It's a loss for the students to try to max out the student ratios in order to save some dollars.

4) I am concerned that a very extensive study was conducted over multiple years by a committee (headed by Lou Pear), with focus groups, assessments, examinations of the buildings, and community input, and a comprehensive report was issued. Those recommendations -- to consolidate to TWO elementary schools -- have essentially been completely ignored. When I have asked why, the response centers around the subsequent survey that was conducted. My concern about the survey is that MANY folks didn't have anywhere near the info that the committee did (and misunderstood many questions on the survey). Also, we are touting the "majority" position as our guide when in actuality, the majority was only the majority by a very slim actual number of votes. And if the options were to be two rather than three (for example: 2 elementary schools vs. 3) -- I believe that the result would be VERY different, because those voting for 2 or 3 elementary schools greatly outnumber those who want complete consolidation.

5) I tried to remain very open-minded about the architectural plans for the mega-school but was disappointed by many aspects of that as well. A prime example is ONE gym (and not just a gym, it will be a "gym-itorium" because it will be a gym with a stage). ONE gym for 600+ students does not give our kids access to the physical gymnasium space often enough (when presently our elementary

kids get gym twice a week). Also, the town is already maxed out on gym space, where we have three elementary gyms! My 3rd grade son couldn't get more basketball practice because there is no gym time, as is. Our after school programs, rec programs, basketball teams, indoor soccer teams, etc. will be so detrimentally impacted by losing two gyms and only having ONE. If this happens, I'd bet we will be knocking on neighboring towns' doors, asking for space to conduct our programs and practices! This is just one example of how the mega-school plans do not adequately address what is really needed when losing two physical school structures. My longer list includes concerns about kids having to start eating lunch at 10am because of limited cafeteria time, as well as infrastructure concerns regarding parking (completely insufficient parking for a school and staff of 600+ students, let alone events that will occur at the school that involve families) and traffic issues on High Street and Hall Hill. I struggle to understand why we want to create these problems!

6) I am also concerned about how there is no plan for what will occur to the Gildersleeve and Brownstone properties. I have viewed the land use committee meetings and remain confused and concerned. As a resident whose home is less than 200 yards from Gildersleeve, I want to know with certainty what will occur to that property before I would ever vote to decommission it. If the solution is 200 more apartments -- something that would forever change my neighborhood, greatly impact my property's value, and change the safety of our portion of Main Street -- that will impact my vote. Likewise, Brownstone is an iconic building in this town and its fate is important to me. So I am personally concerned about these things, but I also think that town residents as a whole need this information. And we are not going to get needed votes on the education improvements unless we have thoughtfully planned through the collateral impacts and are able to offer those solutions. I don't want us to lose momentum for educational improvements, but I think we will lose votes for any plan without these appropriate collateral plans in place.

These are just a few of my concerns, and while I know that I will have the opportunity to place my official vote when things get to a referendum, I feel it is important for our elected representatives to understand the positions of folks in town. I welcome the opportunity to further discuss things at any point (860-836-0965) -- I welcome respectful dialogue and am committed to keeping an open mind.

That said, at this time, I urge you to reconsider pushing through the School Consolidation plan in its present form and in such a rushed fashion.

Thank you,
Ingrid Swanson Moss

Lastly, Sarah Spear of 78 Job Pond Road spoke. She supports the consolidation. She feels that we owe it to our tax payers to bring this to a vote/ referendum. She feels that the movement of students to a new building every two years creates an upheaval for the students where they have to start to work with new teachers and support staff. This is especially problematic for students with special needs and who work with additional staff members in addition to their teacher. She feels that the reduction of this movement is essential for the consolidation.

Seeing no further discussion, moderator Dillon noted that the Town Meeting is adjourned until the Referendum on Tuesday November 5, 2024, being held from 6:00 A.M. until 8:00 P.M. at the Portland Middle School. 93 High Street. Early Voting will also be available at the Portland Town Hall 33 East Main Street, starting on October 21st and ending November 3rd. Absentee ballots will available in the Town Clerk's office during regular business hours starting on October 4, 2024.

A motion was made by Ryan Curley, seconded by Shaun Manning to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 P.M.

ATTEST 
Michael V. Tierney, Portland Town Clerk
Dated at Portland, Connecticut, this 1st day of July, 2024