

Selectmen members present:	Kevin McCormick Steven Quist Allen Phillips	Christopher Rucho John O'Brien
School Committee members present:	Richard Shaw Stephen Paige	Siobahn Bohnson Jennifer Breen

Mr. McCormick convened the joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee at 7:09 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to interview candidates for the open seat on the School Committee. Two candidates have applied for the vacancy and the meeting will begin with their open statements.

### **Mark Trudeau**

Mr. Trudeau stated that he moved back to West Boylston in 2006. He was raised in West Boylston and attended school here. He became involved in town politics through getting involved with the school system. He was shocked to find out how much financial stress the town was under. Subsequent to that he served on the Regional Planning Committee. He had a bit of an epiphany during a discussion of potential partners and he came to understand that in order to do something with any partnership you have to figure out what the school is good at and what we have to offer to attract students, keep students, and convince the taxpayers to fund the schools. The reason he is here is he was asked by a number of people to take a more active role. He thinks Superintendent Kane and his administration do an excellent job and spend too much time fund raising. It is the people at the table's job to raise money for the schools. He will work hard on that. Other thing we want to free him up for is this school is special, a nurturing environment and he can work with his staff to use MCAS as a tool to evaluate teaching techniques. Government is not expenses, it is services and services cost money. He intends to recast the school budget by services. We need to be able to articulate benefits in exchange for costs and we will have to bring overrides. He is not afraid to do that. He is not afraid to ask the members of the staff to continue to make the school better as 80% of the budget is personnel.

### **John Owanisian**

Mr. Owanisian opened by stating that regardless of who wins this evening he has a great deal of respect for Mr. Trudeau. Mr. Owanisian stated that he has an extensive school board related background with ten years as the Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Chestnut Nursery School and Kindergarten, balanced several budgets. He has significant budget experience and marketing and promotion skills. When he left Worcester he was on the Jacob Hiatt Magnet School Council. He has been on the West Boylston Middle/High School Council for five years and he was also on the Elm Park Center for Early Childhood Education. He founded a parent advocacy group after moving to town. It was a group to advocate for the schools, and he has a distribution list of 70 parents. He also serves on the Parks Facilities Committee since 2006, a member of the Finance Committee and the Town-wide Planning Committee. He is a product manager for Hewett Packard. He has two children in the school system, Mark and Laura. Laura is a senior this year. For him the value of the school is its small school nature. We need to do more to market the schools and he developed a brochure on the school which he distributed. We offer a personalized setting and he thinks we need to do more to promote the small school setting. We clearly cannot compete with some of the larger schools and he proposed a fund raising summit to include some the other fund raising committees in town including the West Boylston Arts Foundation to look at the best and brightest of the ideas. There is more we can do in terms of fundraising and tying into the community. Maybe we could do things with private

funding.

Question #1, Mr. McCormick asked please describe why you are interested in this position and what strengths you would bring to the Committee.

Mr. Owanisian – He has always been involved with public service and have a long history with working on the Mission Committee at the United Congressional Church in Worcester. Public service is important with the young people and the elderly. He has strong communication skills and analytical ability schools. He has perseverance and when assigned something he will see it through.

Mr. Trudeau – Strength is many years, 30, in various aspects of program management, excellent analytical and organization skills and good people skills and understands personnel issues. He understands how to engage people and the way the School Committee would work to more easily engage people and make it easier for people to understand what we are doing. He managed a large budget project, and saved money where possible. The results are good products and delivered on time.

Question 2 – Mrs. Bohnson asked what do you see as the 3 biggest challenges facing our school system?

Mr. Trudeau – If you look to the survey done by the Regional Planning Committee, people like the school's small size but are frustrated with the small size. He doesn't know if we are going to be able to solve the broadness of program offerings, however, 80% of our budget is personnel and the challenge is to get every person on the staff firing on 12 cylinders. There is no other opportunity to be a more effective tool than to give our people the tools to be effective. The drain of students who go to other communities and the need for other programs such as special education and vocational.

Ms. Bohnson added that in Mr. Trudeau's opening statement he mentioned that as part of the School Committee's responsibilities he sees fund raising.

Mr. Trudeau – in terms of preparing the budget in a way that is understandable so that when the voters consider the budget and the degree that they want to fund the schools they need to understand what they will get for each dollar.

Mr. Owanisian – the first challenge is promoting the school. We have an excellent small school nature and that is what attracted him to the community. We have a great school system and he is not sure we do enough to promote things to lessen migration out. The second is vocational school funding issue – the question is realistically what can we do about it. Do something in-house or look at alternatives and maybe join a vocational school district. He would like to come up with an action plan to address it. The third is regionalization. These discussions will not go away. We need to take a hard look at the benefits and sometimes you loss the personal identity. Somebody might make the football team here and not make the football team if we were with Wachusett. Promote schools here, look at vocational schools, and follow up on regionalization and involve the population.

Ms. Bohnson thanked both candidates for coming forward.

Question 3 – Mr. Quist asked could you please describe the role, as you see it, of a School Committee member in our town?

Mr. Owanisian – the School Committee oversees the policies of the schools, sets direction. The School Committee would take more of a strategic role with policy and guidelines, the administration would be address tactical issues. Looking at the biggest issue is discussions about the budget and having

involvement with the Board of Selectmen around town meeting time.

Mr. Quist – I am challenging the town on how we can be proactive in this economy. What would you do to make this small school system the best in the country?

Mr. Owanisian – if you have class sizes of 70 or 80 to make it the best, you take a hard look at the curriculum, finding a niche and work and focus on one or two core things to make it almost like a private school setting and promote those one or two things.

Mr. Trudeau – the role of the School Committee is two-fold. They are like a Board of Directors to the Superintendent who is like the President and the most destructive thing is to meddle. The School Committee's role is to remove barriers for him and his staff to be able to run the school. The School Committee has a responsibility to be the primary contact between the voters and the school. As far as best in the country, he does not shy away that you could be like a prep school. He does not see any reason why it couldn't. We have some gifted people here. Far too much noise and fear in the school system about the budget.

Question #4 – Ms. Breen, what would your focus be should become a member of the committee? Are there any particular projects/ideas you would like to pursue?

Mr. Trudeau – two hot buttons – one real value - take all of the expense lines and mapping them to the services they provide. The other is giving the opportunity to facilitate some of these discussions to explain how we can be the best that we can be.

Mr. Owanisian – would be willing to lead a focus group to define what is it that makes the school system appealing and market it. He would be willing to facilitate a meeting with the various groups and working with the Parks Facilities Committee on meeting with citizens to work on private fundraising. Thinks schools are broad based, is a member of the Finance Committee and has a passion for promoting the schools. Ms. Breen thanked both candidates for coming forward.

Question #5 – Mr. O'Brien asked - it is fairly apparent that there will continue to be budget constraints over the next several years. Could you give me your thoughts as to how you would best utilize the limited budget resources we have and, if cuts were necessary, how would you approach them and still maintain a quality school system?

Mr. Owanisian – I wish I could sit here and say that a 20% budget cut in the School Department budget is possible. He has ten years managing budgets and reducing benefits to staff in a nursery school. He would take line item by line item and review the School Department budget. Highest priority would be services to students not to negatively impact class sizes. Maybe administration or procurement policy and shared services. He has studied the school budget and thinks the School Committee is doing a reasonable job managing it. Some areas of shared services with other town. He would look at procurement of front office and areas that do not directly impact the schools.

Mr. Trudeau – agrees with Mr. Owanisian. We have cut services offered to the schools to the bone. He has looked at the budget and doesn't see fat as 80% is staff and 15% is outside services required by law. He would like to explore special education transportation and maybe we could share that service with other districts. You have to keep the core curriculum and support services in place. He personally helped manage three layoffs and it is incredibly painful. We would have to look at offerings that might be available outside. Thinks we have to be creative and look at opportunities to solve the needs of our students in other ways.

Question #6 – Mr. Shaw commended both candidates for stepping forward and noted that both have been very active. He asked, what ideas do you have that would create more revenue for the Town and the Schools?

Mr. Trudeau – I wish I had some short term ideas. I have monitored the discussion around this in the past. We started charging for bus transportation and people stopped taking the bus and we still have to pay for the bussing expense. He thinks we have a wonderful opportunity being located between Exit 3 and Exit 4 off of I-190. This could be the place for people to stop and pick up something they need. We need to market the town and make the businesses along Route 12 more attractive. Maybe signage on Route 12 or encourage businesses to face lift their property and maybe planting trees. Turn it into a destination point.

Mr. Owanisian – there are no easy dollars out there. He would be willing within 90 days to organize a fundraising summit. He is impressed with the high energy community. He would organize a fundraising summit to assemble the best ideas. We have a very active business and citizen group.

Question #7 – Mr. Paige asked how might you improve our discussions with the town and other boards concerning the budget process?

Mr. Owanisian – Has similar observations. He is a member of the Finance Committee. We have a town budget and a school budget and it breeds a divide. The school has value to everyone in the town. Some of the people he talks to who do not have children in the schools would want to give the school the least amount of money. There is no easy solution. He suggested maybe meeting every three months and coming up with a common purpose. He thinks the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee's relationship have improved and the challenge is coming up with a common purpose. He suggests more regular meetings.

Mr. Trudeau – feels sometimes the committee tries to do the voters job. The executive branch has the responsibility to make the budget numbers as small as possible and shrink them and then you have a list of services and costs. The schools offer many services. We have to engage the voters in conversations in what kinds of services they want. You put the override on the election ballot and you say do you want to have a swimming pool and this is the amount it costs or do you want to have an AP course and this is that number. He thinks the voters should decide.

Question #8 – Mr. Phillips thanked both candidates for coming forward and asked, give me your opinion on regionalization. Do you think WB should regionalize and Why/Why not?

Mr. Trudeau – in speaking to a number of potential partners about regionalizing, the Regional Planning Committee learned that a building is not an asset, it is a liability. The town's business manager says we have limited opportunity in terms of desirability. If you look at the expense profile of us versus the other. Each needs a principal and you might be able to save a little with the central office and have only one Superintendent. Then there is the high school. He does not see how regional saves money. If you have more kids you can offer more classes.

Mr. Phillips – in the issues involving the town and the schools you want to make a difference. The same issues we have now we have had in the past, why now and not then?

Mr. Trudeau – I was in the middle of a project and had no time and it is a little intimidating. I think I will be incredibly busy and think I can be added value.

Mr. Owanisian – this is an issue that will not go away. If this was a regional school system I would probably not be here tonight. I would have never moved here. The argument would be if you can save a substantial amount of money. The dollar expenditures are similar. You do get broader curriculum offerings. If you compare grade 8 and 10 MCAS with West Boylston and Wachusett they were fairly close. He does not see a financial benefit. If you are in a big regional school system you have less involvement in the student body. He thinks what you give up would exceed the financial benefit. He is willing to look at it. He would like to know the issues we had before.

Mr. Phillips – why are you stepping forward now?

Mr. Owanisian – it is all a matter of timing. I considered running previously. Very involved on the Board in Worcester and three committees.

Question #9, Mr. Rucho asked, do you think we have a good school system? What aspects of our school system should we highlight in an effort to “market” our school system?

Mr. Owanisian – let’s promote we cannot compete with regional or vocational schools. To him class sizes of 70 or 80 are unheard of. He thinks it is a pretty good deal when you look at the cost of private schools. Identify what parts of the curriculum we can be the best of. We have a high percentage of kids going onto college, a low dropout rate, a safe student population, benefit is a personalized setting. In a regular school a lot of kids are a number. To him it is like a private school and let’s get the message out there.

Mr. Trudeau – thinks small is not enough. The questions about what needs to be highlighted needs to be presented to the staff of the school. Start thinking about this as a prep school. Maybe map science for AP. Have really high standards in the class room. Have the best students be able to take the AP test and pass it.

Closing Statements:

Mr. Trudeau – thanked everyone for their time and attention tonight. He hopes that if he gets the position that the voters will consider him in March. He thanked Mr. Owanisian and respects him a lot. They worked together on the needs of the schools and he thinks we would do well with either of us and the choice will be where do you see the fire in each of us.

Mr. Owanisian – thanked everyone for their time. It is an honor to be here with Marc Trudeau, we have worked on a lot of projects together. He thanked Lisa Moreland who made this all possible. He has significant amount of school experience on the Board of Directors for ten years and now on the Elm Park Center Board of Directors, increased involvement in the nursery school, balanced budgets, and been on the site council. He also built a relationship with the Parks Facilities Committee. He thinks it is important for the School Committee to have a good relationship with the Parks. A lot of experience on the Finance Committee. He has interviewed all the department heads and sees how the town operates. He is on the Town-wide Planning Committee working on the Master Plan update. He has strong communication skills, helped build grass roots move and would like to do more in terms of fundraising, has a passion for community service and strong perseverance, does not easily give in and likes to see things get done.

Motion Mr. Shaw to place John Owanisian’ name into nomination, seconded by Mr. Rucho, all in favor.

Motion Mr. Shaw to place Mark Trudeau’s name into nomination, seconded by Mr. Rucho, all in favor.

Roll call vote: Mr. Paige thanked both gentlemen for stepping forward, it is a big obligation on their part and he does not want anyone to feel slighted. He votes for Marc Trudeau; Ms. Breen – Marc Trudeau, Ms. Bohnson – Mr. Owanisian, Mr. Shaw - Mr. Owanisian; Mr. Rucho - Mr. Owanisian; Mr. Phillips - Mr. Owanisian; Mr. O’Brien - Mr. Owanisian; Mr. Quist - Mr. Owanisian; Mr. McCormick – Marc Trudeau.

It was announced that John Owanisian will fill the open seat on the School Committee. Mr. Owanisian thanked everyone for their vote of confidence. He has a great deal of respect for Mark. This is difficult. Together they put forth a ten-taxpayer petition to restore a part-time remedial position. He is honored and thanked everyone for their vote.

With no further business to come before the Board, motion Mr. Rucho at 8:30 p.m. to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Quist, all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved: October 20, 2010

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Nancy E. Lucier

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Kevin M. McCormick, Chairman

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Allen R. Phillips, Vice Chairman

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Steven J. Quist, Clerk

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Christopher A. Rucho, Selectman

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John J. O'Brien, Selectman