

Minutes of  
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING

THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2011  
6:00 - 7:00 PM – PUBLIC FORUM - OPEN SESSION  
7:00 PM – OPEN SESSION

Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet  
60 Florence Drive, Woonsocket, RI 02895

**Call to Order by Mr. Dubois.**

<b>Roll Call:</b>	Marc Dubois, Chairman	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau, Vice Chairwoman	Present
	Linda Majewski	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Vimala Phongsavanh	Present

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**6:00 – PUBLIC FORUM: Discussion of FY12 Budget**

**Michelle Marandola, Teacher at Leo Savoie Elementary and Parent:** Her children asked her today about their former teacher assistant Mrs. Guiney and whether she was going to lose her job. They said they thought it had already been decided before that it was a bad idea. She told them she thought so too, but she guessed not because now they are on the chopping block again. Marandola read letters from both of her kids about the TAs and spoke about how hard they work and how valuable they are. “They’re a bargain for the money they are paid.” She spoke about the GLEs that are required for grades K-5 and had a copy of them with her—all 35 pages, which were just for Reading. “I have lived here for 37 years and had many wonderful teachers and mentors, but my confidence in the school department is shaken now.” She believes it’s time to take a stand for the children and urged the WSC to make the right choice. Her two eight-year-old sons can see it. She hopes they will too.

**Wendy Carey, Kindergarten Teacher at Leo Savoie Elementary:** She gave a glimpse into the kindergarten classroom without a teacher assistant there to help them. Carey spoke about all the times she has to stop during the day in order to help students that a TA would normally be helping—such as having to stop reading for all the interruptions that a TA could deal with--a student coming in late, a student crying, a student with a stomach ache who didn’t eat breakfast. “Safety is another issue when there isn’t a TA in the classroom to deal with students who may act out in class.” She asked the WSC members to visit a kindergarten classroom for a whole day or maybe two days and watch the TAs to see what they are doing. “Their dedication is invaluable to Woonsocket’s future.”

**Jake Berard, Junior at WHS, ROTC Cadet:** Berard spoke about the 6-period day and how it will affect students in the ROTC. If he wants to go to college, he will need a foreign language and won’t be able to take ROTC. He spoke about how this program has helped him with self-confidence and getting involved in other things in schools, such as sports. He asked that they elect to go with a 7-period school day.

**Kristin Treganowan, WHS Junior:** Voiced her objections to the 6-period day, saying that the students in Woonsocket would be robbed of their freedom to take electives and opportunities for them to grow and succeed. “This country was built on the premise of freedom. The idea of placing some of these courses after school isn’t good because students will still have to choose between band and sports or music, etc. If we go to a restricted 6-period day, students will never reach their full potential.”

**Justina Pietras, WHS Student:** Spoke on behalf of honors students and Advanced Placement classes and how they will be affected by the 6-period day. She spoke about how the students at the career center would be affected negatively. “Electives expand students’ horizons. If you actually care about the students of Woonsocket, you will decide against the 6-period day.”

**Tony Cosentino, WHS Social Studies Teacher:** Urged the WSC to keep block scheduling at the high school. “The success of block scheduling has been proven.” He spoke about the hidden costs that would be incurred by the need for more textbooks if they go to a different schedule – approximately \$250,000 to buy the books. “A 6-period day will potentially decrease literacy. The difference between the cost of block scheduling is minimal compared to the cost of textbooks.”

**Kevin Plouffe, 16-year Band Director at WHS & Lisa Alves, WHS Chorus Teacher:** They were there to represent a variety of groups because the band and chorus represent a cross-section of the student population. Plouffe spoke about the value of the music program and asked that they do not go to a 6-period day. "There's no room for more cuts to the music program. We must not limit the music education of our students and their families. The 6-period day doesn't make any sense." He spoke about the idea of scheduling these programs after school like what was done at the middle schools. "That didn't work. There will be more to lose than gain with this schedule change. We would be heading back to the time where only the children of the affluent will be able to get a music education. Be the keepers of common sense. Do not go to a 6-period day."

**Dr. Lynne Bedard, Principal of the WHS and WACTC:** Dr. Bedard read what the school code listed as the required courses at the WHS in 1975. She then listed the required courses a student needs to graduate now, as well as compile a portfolio, participate in NECAP tests, among other things. She listed all the courses that students can participate in now. "With a 7-period day, this will be our foundation and provide us with the tools we need to ensure student success in the future." She referred to a study out of Harvard, saying that every year in the U.S., 1 million students drop out of high school. "High school students need a sense of purpose—a direction in which they feel they can succeed in the future. Please support the 7-period day so our students will have the essentials they need to be successful in the future."

**Adam Brunetti, WHS Music Student:** Stated that he has spoken with Dr. Gerardi about how much the music programs at the WHS have helped him with his autism. He noted how many awards they have won, as well as the Theatre Arts Dept. with their musical productions.

**Cedrick Samson, WHS Senior:** Asked the WSC members if they knew what the value of a teacher is--because everyone has gotten to where they are because of a teacher. Samson said that he can't get enough of his Math electives right now because there are not enough blocks. "It will be even worse if we go to a 6-period day."

**Lt. Dan Richards, ROTC Instructor:** He acknowledged the WHS students who came to speak tonight. "The decision to go to a 6-period day will have an adverse affect on the ROTC Program. Why does that matter? It will affect how many students are able to enter the program and if we lose even 25 cadets, we will be placed on probation by the U.S. Air Force. If we are below 100 for three consecutive years, the program could be lost." Richards spoke about the cadets and how the program has helped them, including two cadets who graduated last year and entered the Marine Academy. "They both dealt with family challenges and other issues, but they both wanted to be a Marine. They will both graduate from Paris Island next month. I'm certain the ROTC helped them achieve their goals."

**Jeff Partington, WHS Business Instructor:** He spoke about the 6-period day and the negative effect it would have. He asked the WSC to not use a short-term financial issue to change a schedule that works.

**Julianne Silvera, WHS Senior:** Said she has two brothers and one is a freshman and in the ROTC. She would hate to see him have to go to school with only the core subjects and few electives. "ROTC is teaching him to be a man. Our theatre program is one of the best in the area. The music program has won many awards. Without extracurricular activities, there's nothing to look forward to during the school day. The kids that drop out aren't as involved as the kids that are in these extracurricular programs." She thinks that there will be more drop-outs if they go to a 6-period day. She thinks parents will take their kids out of this school system so they will have more opportunities. "If you weren't going to have theatre next year, I would go to Beacon. Don't take away our opportunities, please!"

**Leo Savoie Elementary 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher:** Spoke about the need for elementary principals in all buildings. Said she is also certified as a principal and has assisted when the occasion arose that the principal was not in the building. "The students begin to notice when the principal is not in the building and start acting up. I don't believe that having a teacher in charge when the principal is absent is effective. My students lost out when I was needed to fill in. A full-time building principal is essential to maintain a safe and effective learning environment."

**Rosemary O'Brien, parent of 9<sup>th</sup> Grade student:** Said that she also went to Woonsocket schools and has a son at Quinnipiac College because he had a well-rounded education in Woonsocket. She thinks her younger son deserves the same opportunities as her older son. "Part of the reason he comes to school is because of music. He loves music. Please don't go to a 6-period day."

**Carole Lerner, Special Education Director, Woonsocket:** Spoke about the reduction of two LEA positions that the WSC has before them. "I know making these decisions isn't easy. IEPs are coming in and tomorrow I will be meeting with my department to look at more programs and better placements for students. I think there may be a better way to cut this money from the budget. The work that the current seven LEAs do is not going to go away. It's

required that an LEA be at these meetings. Please give us the time to reconfigure what special education will look like as we get the IEPs in tomorrow and see if we can reconfigure it in a better way for the next meeting.”

**Jennifer Maiello, WHS Theatre Arts Teacher:** Listed the things that Woonsocket will be missing next year if the WSC decides to change the schedule. The Theatre Arts dept. has produced twelve musicals over the last 14 years. They raised over \$250,000 on their own in order to do this. They have alumni students who come back year after year to participate. They involve special needs and medically fragile students in performances. They started their annual benefit and have given over \$28,000 to families in RI who have family members with a terminal disease. “These students are taught a level of teamwork and dedication through these experiences. Many would not get this education if they didn’t have it in school because they can’t afford it. If we go to a 6-period day, there will be no more musicals and benefits and that is a shame.”

**Nicholas Bousquet, WHS student:** Said he doesn’t think it’s right for the students to be here fighting for their education. They deserve a good education just like kids in other areas of the state like Barrington and Newport.

**Dasia McNeil, WHS student:** Said she would miss out on her music education if they choose to go to a 6-period day.

**Another WHS Senior:** Said that all she wants in life is an education. She sees officials making decisions with negative outcomes. “By implementing a 6-period day, you would take away the opportunity for electives. To keep students from dropping out, they need to have hope for a future.”

**Matt Brennan, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Student at WHS/WACTC:** Said he is in the Graphics Program at the WACTC because he wants to be a graphic designer. “If you go to a 6-period day, I would have to choose between business courses and my graphic arts class.” He spoke about how much he has learned from his business classes and internships that he has received because of them. “You may be cutting teachers and saving money, but you are also cutting education.”

**John Ward, Woonsocket City Council President:** He noticed that there’s a request for an additional City allocation of 3.5%. He promised to get that money even if we have to raise taxes. Ward was surprised that more people weren’t in attendance at tonight’s meeting. “Our problem may be that we don’t have enough money to fund the education that our kids deserve, but that is something the state has done.” He spoke about the fair funding formula that was adopted and how it isn’t fair because we aren’t getting what we need now in order not to take away from communities like Barrington, who will lose money. Ward spoke about a large part of the student population coming from public housing and we don’t get taxes from public housing. “If we did, it might solve some of our problems.” He also spoke about the fact that Woonsocket pays for Social Security that other towns do not. “That state doesn’t factor these things into the formula. We can’t raise taxes enough to bring all the things lost back.” Ward is going to meet with the Speaker of the House about the things that we are being deprived of. He also met with the Senate President. Ward commended the WSC for doing what they can and everyone else for their sacrifices. If you hear of a hearing (said to students holding signs), take your signs to the State House and bring your data to them. We know our kids deserve the same education as kids in Barrington, Newport, and elsewhere. Our children don’t deserve to get screwed.” Dr. Gerardi thanked Council President Ward for sharing the sobering truth of what we are dealing with and thanked him for all of his support. “The City Council, the Mayor and the WSC have been forced into legal situations. We did sue the state for a fair funding formula. They did pass one, but we don’t believe it’s fair and we are going to re-file our papers for another lawsuit,” said Gerardi.

**John McLaughlin, So. Main Street, Retired Woonsocket teacher:** Said he doesn’t think everyone is doing what they can. “In Woonsocket, less than 20% of the taxes go to education—in other communities, 77% of taxes go towards education. If you had twins and you gave 20 cents to one and 80 cents to the other, is that fair? The City Council decides how much the Education Dept. gets. The state is also causing problems.” McLaughlin spoke about state workers and the raises they get. “The state is spending more and more and taking your money so they can give themselves raises.” He believes that the school committee needs to bring everyone here down to the City Council meeting and ask them why only 20% of our taxes are going to education. That leaves us fighting against each other. I would rather see you spend the money on people sitting in front of full classes, than people sitting around in meetings drinking coffee.” He commended the young man who came up and said he shouldn’t be here fighting for the education he deserves.

**Katelyn St. George, WHS 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Student:** Said she is in an AP European History Class and hopes it won’t be her last year being able to take this class. She asked if the AP classes would still be offered if they go to a 6-period day. Dr. Gerardi said that those classes would be the least affected. St. George stated that for the class she is in, they have 2000 years of history to learn about. They have a 1½ block all year long to learn it. If they were cut

down to half that time, it would have a devastating effect. They have to take an exam at the end of the year and it would have a terrible impact. "Please consider the AP classes as well as the other extracurricular activities when you make your decision."

Chairman Dubois called a 5-minute recess before the Open Session of the meeting.

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**7:00--OPEN SESSION:****1. Discussion and Approval of FY 12 Budget:**

Mr. Dubois thanked all those who spoke during the Public Forum, saying that there were 24 speakers. Dr. Gerardi thanked the Finance Subcommittee and all those who participated for their hard work. "We have come to the conclusion that there are very few good options. Mr. Dubois asked for people to call him with ideas they had in order to save money and not have to cut programs and positions. Someone suggested cutting some bussing tonight, but we have already done some of that. We have discussed closing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Social Street Schools, but it doesn't add up to \$1.8 million. The Finance Subcommittee was so frustrated that they threw up their hands and didn't know what to do," said Gerardi. He said he has gotten input from various sources and the decisions they have to make leave him with a pit in his stomach. "These are decisions we don't want to have to make, but as Mr. Ward said, we have legal obligations," added Gerardi. He spoke about the Judge telling him last time that we didn't do enough to balance the budget. He was hoping that RIDE would step up and give us something in writing saying, "No, you don't have to do that", but they haven't. "We have to make a decision about scheduling in fairness to the students and the staff. At the WMS, a lot of scheduling issues were resolved due to enrollment reductions and Carole Lerner looking at reconfiguring the special education department." Gerardi spoke about the parent suggestion of a flex schedule for electives allowing students to attend those programs after school and allowing those teachers to come in starting at Period 2. "Going from a 7-period day to a 6-period day would save us \$726,000, which is the biggest ticket item on the list of cuts you have before you. With a 7-period day, we would only save the cost of one teacher. Other things to be considered are TAs, the elimination of two more LEAs, and consolidation of Instructional Leaders. We are legally obligated to submit a balanced budget," said Gerardi.

Mrs. Forcier was thinking of a way to save some Kindergarten TAs last night. "The budget the Governor submitted, every state representative I have spoken to said that it's not going to fly," she said. Forcier urged everyone to contact our representatives and tell them our kids deserve the same education as everyone else. "I love the kids' signs, but we need to bring them to the State House! We are being ripped off by the state! The original fair funding formula said that the state was underfunding Woonsocket by \$13 million, so the state made it so that it was more comfortable for the suburban communities to accept because they would be losing money. We filed another lawsuit again today against the state. I think the state wants the urban schools to fail because they want to go to charter schools. I'm here because I care. I have kids in Woonsocket schools. My daughter did band since 6<sup>th</sup> grade and has learning disabilities and it helped her through it. I'm very saddened that I have to make these hard cuts. However, there is hope. The state budget hasn't been finalized," she said. Forcier spoke about the EduFunds and urged people to call their representatives about it. She found a way to save five Kindergarten TAs by the elimination of one assistant principal at the WMS because the enrollment has dropped. "That's \$113,262 saved. If we close Social Street School, that's another \$25,000 saved. A shutdown during Christmas vacation will save another \$1,700 a day. Staff would have to plan now to use their vacation time then. We need \$278,262 and we would be able to save half of the Kindergarten TAs. They would have to go between two classes, but it's better than nothing," said Forcier. Mr. Dubois said that the administrators are on salary, but non-union employees get a set rate. "We wouldn't save the money on their salaries during a shutdown," said Dubois. Dr. Gerardi said that it gives us more in manpower, but not in savings on salaries. We would save on utilities, however. Mrs. Majewski proposed that, because 80% of the Instructional Leaders' salaries is paid by Title II, that they become consultant positions so we wouldn't have to pay fringe benefits. "We have been paying the other 20% of that cost, which is \$233,000, which amounts to their fringe benefits. It's nothing personal against any of them. I have worked with them all and I like them. The consultant payments could come out of Title II," she said. Dr. Gerardi said that we have seven Instructional Leaders for whom 80% of their salary and benefits come out of Title II funds and 20% of their salary and benefits come out of local funds. It ends up being less than \$233,465 that you would save. We have also invested a lot in our teachers who have become Instructional Leaders. Many of them are also peers who our teachers will receive better than someone from the outside coming in and telling them what to do," said Gerardi. He gave Mrs. Majewski credit for thinking outside the box (while Mrs. Busby worked on the figures). Busby reported that \$122,000 is fringe and that would be the savings. "It's pretty obvious that we will be reducing staff. If we take this cut and these people go back to their teaching jobs, that will be three more teachers collecting unemployment," said Gerardi. Mrs. Nadeau asked what the Instructional Leaders' salary would be without the benefits. "No more than their per diem rate now," said Majewski. "How much would it cost to put department heads back? I don't trust grant funds because they go away and it becomes district funding," said Nadeau. "We saved about \$300,000 by changing to Instructional Leaders," said Gerardi. He also noted that Mr. Nasuti is piloting the new evaluation system and it will take about 60 out of 180

school days to do it. "There are a couple of models being piloted right now. Either way, it's going to be a bear to implement. Our checklist system isn't going to meet the standards that are part of the Race to the Top grant that we committed to," explained Mr. Garceau. Mrs. Nadeau thinks that what is going to happen in Providence is that they are going to hire back teachers that are like sheep and will follow whatever they say—not people who are outspoken or will rock the boat. "That's who they will consider highly qualified. I read in the Providence Journal that they plan to hire retired teachers and pay them \$500 a day to evaluate. They hire people who are already making a pension!" said Nadeau. "Unfortunately, Race to the Top will provide the funds for training, but it doesn't provide money for the support," noted Gerardi. Miss Phongsavanh asked Mrs. Majewski what she was thinking about for a contract for consultants, but Majewski said she hadn't thought any further than how much it would save. Phongsavanh said she has hired contracted employees and she has found that you don't get the quality and consistency that you would get from someone who is on salary. Majewski disagreed, saying that she has been a contracted employee for nine years and no one has ever had a problem with the quality of her work. "I have a right to my opinion, also. I'm in a very difficult position right now because I'm a product of the WHS and had the opportunity to participate in all those programs that will be affected," said Phongsavanh.

Mrs. Nadeau said that many people approached her during the break tonight about why we aren't attacking bussing. She explained that they had heated discussions about it and she has always hated bussing, but she looked at this winter and how the streets were and the sidewalks not plowed. "Other communities have crossing guards. We can't afford them. We looked at just bussing elementary kids, but it won't save us much on the number of buses. It's a safety issue and we know parents will get together and sue and we will probably lose and then we would have to pay fines. We came to a consensus that it was not the thing to do. I don't want to have the death of a student on my conscience," said Nadeau. Dr. Gerardi reported that every year since he has been here, they have scrutinized bussing and increased the walking distances, etc. "We changed the start times of the schools to use fewer buses. We have the longest walking distances out of any community in RI," he said. "The City plans on raising our funding by \$377,000 as part of their 5-year plan—what percent of the budget is that?" asked Dubois. Mrs. Busby told him it was 3% of the \$12 million that they already give us. Dubois said he has no problem with asking for a 4.25% increase from the City since we have been level funded for the past few years. "We would have \$566,595 if we got a 4.25% increase," said Dubois. Mrs. Majewski asked if the City would have to petition to go over the cap considering they have not met their union obligations and have a deficit themselves. Mrs. Busby told her they would. Mrs. Nadeau said she heard from Councilman Roger Jalette and he said they aren't in a deficit because they got the bond issue and some other revenue came in. "They don't want to send out a supplemental tax bill in an election year!" said Nadeau. "None of these cuts are easy. Someone spoke about saving money—there is no money to save. There isn't any money to spend! Someone said we look bored. I'm not bored—I'm tormented," said Majewski. She doesn't support the elimination of kindergarten TAs. She would support a 7-period day and noted what she would support as cuts. She asked Mrs. Busby if we could take the remaining \$700,000 out of the Due To Due From account from the City. Mrs. Busby said that we can't because it's money already spent and a cash flow issue. Mrs. Majewski asked about the status of the Regulatory Compliance Review. Dr. Gerardi said he did get a letter saying we can use our UCOA numbers to put that we spend less per pupil than any other district, which will help us in a Maintenance of Effort suit. "The question is—will a judge uphold it?" he said.

Mr. Dubois asked Gerardi to explain why we are mandated to have LEAs, which he did. "Principals used to lead the IEP meetings, but at a school like Pothier with 150 students with IEPs, the principal would spend up to 2 ½ days a week tied up in meetings. An LEA is also highly qualified to lead the IEP meetings. If we don't have LEAs in place, we will need to get a teacher who will need to attend these meetings," explained Gerardi. Dubois asked how many TAs will be left if we eliminate special education and kindergarten TAs. Gerardi explained that the special education TAs were in classrooms that have been eliminated. "Do you feel there is a need for 27 TAs at the high school level?" asked Dubois. "Mrs. Lerner is looking at them still and can't really move forward until we decide on a schedule," said Gerardi. "Why can't we have a special education teacher serve as an LEA as part of their duties?" asked Mrs. Forcier. Gerardi explained that at the elementary level, they don't have duties. "Some school districts have case managers who teach half of the time," he added. "I would love to keep every teacher assistant we have and a four block schedule, but I was in court when the judge said we had to have a balanced budget. If we don't balance our budget, we will spend thousands of dollars on lawyers' fees and we will lose again. We already did once. I don't want to go through that again," said Forcier. Mrs. Nadeau said that the Finance Subcommittee sat there late into the evening practically reinventing the wheel. "Nobody wants to do this. I agree with Mrs. Forcier on the Christmas vacation shutdown to save 5 teacher assistants and closing Social Street School, etc., but you have to do what you have to do. It's not etched in stone. We have to make a schedule decision tonight. We can't wait any longer. I have to do my job. I defy anyone to go out and come up with a solution we haven't already considered!" said Nadeau. "If we keep a 7-period day, we have to come up with \$726,057," said Dubois. Mrs. Busby said most of the 27 TAs at the WHS are 1-on-1s and special education TAs and can't be cut. "They are all special ed with fourteen 1-on-1s," said Busby. Mrs. Lerner explained that the 1-on-1s come through an IEP process. "We bill Medicaid for their services and we get a significant reimbursement on their services. We have always had them in self-contained classrooms. They are required by law, but in all those instances, I feel we need them to run the classrooms," said Lerner. "Are

you able to say we are able to get rid of five of those positions?" asked Dubois. Lerner said she will certainly make every effort to do that. Mr. Dubois said he has no problem requesting the City to up their allocation to the 4.25% to pay to keep the 7-period day. He suggested closing Social Street School, closing down during Christmas vacation, cutting two secondary assistant principals, five more special education TAs and all the kindergarten TAs and then ask the City for an increased allocation. Vimala Phongsavanh said she would be voting along with Mrs. Nadeau and Mrs. Forcier because she doesn't think that the City will give us the extra funds. "If we get our EduFunds back, we can relook at the schedule," said Forcier. Dr. Gerardi noted that we are dealing with a \$1.8 million problem, however. Mr. Dubois thanked everyone involved on the Finance Subcommittee for helping out for two months and named them all individually. He knows how important the electives for college are and that's why he doesn't support a 6-period day. Mrs. Majewski asked about the revenue from sending schools being affected if we go to a 6-period day. Dr. Gerardi said it would probably be affected.

**Mrs. Forcier said she would stick with her recommendation for the cuts, which were for a 6-period day schedule and the cuts necessary to do that, keeping half of the kindergarten TAs, close Social Street School and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue School, shut down during Christmas vacation, and cutting one assistant principal at the middle school.**

**Motion to approve Mrs. Forcier's recommendations: V. Phongsavanh 2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau  
Roll Call Vote: 3 yes – 2 no (MD/LM) MOTION APPROVED.**

## **2. Discussion and Approval of Grading/Grading Policy-2<sup>nd</sup> Passage**

Mrs. Majewski said there was a proposal for 60 as a passing grade and one for 65 as a passing grade and that she had recommended that the minimum grade of 60 be passed. Since they have received more information on what other districts have, she is now recommending that we look at 65 for a passing grade. Majewski was told that this was up for 2<sup>nd</sup> Passage and was approved for 60 as a passing grade at 1<sup>st</sup> Passage.

**Motion to approve the minimum passing grade of 60: M. Dubois 2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau  
Roll Call Vote: 3 yes – 2 no (LM/VP) MOTION APPROVED**

## **3. Graduation Credit Requirement Alignment Policy – 2<sup>nd</sup> Passage**

**Motion to approve: A. Forcier 2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau  
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes APPROVED**

Motion to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.: A. Forcier

2<sup>nd</sup>: L. Majewski (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary