

June 23, 2005

SPECIAL BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING

Present: Richard Sears, First Selectman Washington, Michael Jackson, Board of Finance Chairman Washington, William Stuart, First Selectman Bridgewater, Irene Allan, Board of Education Chairperson, Barbara Henry, First Selectperson Roxbury, Richard Carmelich, Superintendent, Nicholas Solley, Selectman Washington, Neil Cable, Selectman Bridgewater, Ed Tierney, Board of Finance Chairman Roxbury, Molly Stratton, Board of Finance Chairperson Bridgewater, Public & Press

Richard Sears opened the meeting by welcoming the representatives from Washington, Bridgewater and Roxbury to this special meeting. Mr. Sears went on to say that he called this meeting not to talk about what happened in the school referendum vote but to move forward and discuss options in pursuit of what the wider public feels is best for the kids in our towns. Mr. Sears would like to see everyone working together on the options available through a structured process while keeping the wider public informed. He closed by saying he would like to hear from everyone at the table and when discussion was done there would be time for public comment.

Barbara Henry began by asking Irene Allan what direction the Board of Education was headed at this point. Ms. Henry feels that the vote was a directive; town's people want to keep the primary schools in the individual towns but not at any cost. Irene Allan answered that the Board has not yet sat down to discuss a direction they were waiting till after today's meeting. Ms. Allan went on to say that she disagreed with Ms. Henry on the point of the vote being a directive and stated that she felt the vote was tainted by the "No No" mailings that went out to residents in Washington and Bridgewater. Ms. Allan went on to say that the Board of Education has done research over many years and there are no other options. Ms. Henry went on to say that people are looking for other options, before the vote she thought that people wanted to consolidate, but the vote showed to opposite. Ms. Henry suggested moving the 5th grade to the middle/high school to open space in the elementary schools, move walls to make space.

Ed Tierney spoke next and began by stating that regardless of the "No No" mailings people have the sense to vote what they want and the people doing the "No No" mailings have every right to express their opinion. Mr. Tierney's concern is with the buildings that will be left for the towns if consolidation occurs. The expense of renovating these buildings, which should have been maintained through the years, should be the responsibility of the Board of Education. Mr. Tierney feels it should be part of the consolidation costs.

Nicholas Solley was next to speak he agrees with Ms. Henry that townspeople want to keep their schools but not at any cost. Mr. Solley feels the main problem is finding land around the middle/high school area. He also agrees the 5th grade has options. Mr. Solley closed by saying that he has had experience working with the private school sector and construction can be done cheaper *than* architects design.

Irene Allan is here to listen. She offered the following information: constructing the elementary schools individually is more expensive, to renew to new gives you a 20 year warranty with state reimbursement and simple renovations/maintenance gives you no warranty or state reimbursement. Ms. Allan went on to say that the elementary schools have been maintained it's just cheaper to demolish than to renovate, this can be done in Bridgewater and Roxbury.

Richard Carmelich sees the situation as a triangle, you have the needs of: the kids, the taxpayers and the towns, the problem being where do those points intersect? The notion of schools in the three communities meets the needs of the kids and towns but not the taxpayers. Mr. Carmelich at one time

proposed moving the 5th grade to the middle/high school but was rebuffed. If you do move the 5th grade to the middle/high school permanently you would still need to renovate the elementary schools and will now be working on four buildings. This situation works for the kids and towns but not the taxpayers, not to mention you will still have substandard rooms and infrastructure. Ed Tierney interjected that these inferior buildings will be left to the towns; perhaps the towns should take over the cost of renovating with no state reimbursement or deregionalize grades K-5. Mr. Carmelich replied that deregionalizing is a long and expensive process. Barbara Henry asked what if each town kept up their own buildings? Mr. Carmelich answered that you would get no state money and would still need to meet the Educational Specifications. Educational Specifications are the common and educational guidelines for what is needed at each grade level. Irene Allan added that public school codes are stringent; there is a distinction between school building code and regular building code. Mr. Carmelich addressed Ed Tierney's question regarding the cost of renovating the left over school buildings. His personal opinion is that money should be made available for these buildings; it all comes from the same pockets. Mr. Carmelich questioned who would set the price for renovation of the old school buildings; he would think each town would want to make that decision according to their use.

Molly Stratton spoke next, saying it is difficult to get to what option is best; each has different costs and benefits. She doesn't understand the last vote or what the outcome meant. There is a need to fully understand the options, costs, choices and benefit for the kids.

This is a complicated problem Michael Jackson stated you have three communities and need to develop a mechanism to present the information to these communities so the people can decide. Mr. Jackson went on to say that facts need to be gathered, he feels the Board of Education has a lot of the information, you need to find a communication process that works and then the townspeople will make a decision.

William Stuart is not happy with the process thus far, the renovation proposal was too much money and didn't go forward and he felt the advisory question was badly worded, voters didn't like it. Mr. Stuart also feels that people write codes every day, next week there will be new ones. He agrees with Michael Jackson's comments and would like to see a new committee formed to present information to the towns. Consolidation might work if presented differently, could it be built for less? Mr. Stuart also agrees with Molly Stratton and feels that increasing the Bridgewater school 60% is ridiculous.

Richard Sears took the floor once again, addressing the representatives at the table. There are two options: three schools or one school. He would like to see the information for these two options include capital expenses and the operating cost for ten years. Mr. Sears would also like to include the cost for a new middle/high school track and address the septic problem at the middle/high school. Mr. Carmelich interjected that at a facilities meeting recently the septic issue was addressed and repairs will be made within the operational budget. Michael Jackson suggested putting a dollar amount on the table. Mr. Carmelich disagreed, if the amount doesn't meet the kid's needs you don't want to spend the money. William Stuart agreed with Mr. Jackson, have a cap. Mr. Carmelich was concerned once a figure is out there you can't change it. Mr. Sears got back to the structure of the new committee. The Steering Committee will be made up of top town officials; Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance *and school officials Superintendent and Board of Education Chair*. There will be two Task Force Committees; the first looking at the three school option and the second looking at the one school option. There will be a *Process and Public Input* Committee that will make sure all is going smoothly. Mr. Carmelich felt the subcommittees should be under the Board of Education and could still maintain a level of comfort with community leaders. He would like to see a referendum question in the Fall. Irene Allan and Michael Jackson both wondered about the Board of Education Building Committee being involved in this process. Ms. Allan also reminded that you want to keep up with the Educational Specification changes; you want the end product to be professional.

Neil Cable addressed people at the table. He stated that he was originally on the Board of Education Building Committee, but when they were told you couldn't vary *from* the Educational Specifications he knew the schools would be too expensive. If you abide by the Educational Specifications without modifications it will be a waste of time. Mr. Carmelich stated that you need to meet the needs of the kids or you are wasting your time and money.

Valerie Andersen from the public felt this was all good news and encouraged the steering committee to look at the 14+ options that the Board of Education has gone through in the past. Ms. Andersen wasn't sure about the referendum question in the fall, maybe a conceptual question in the fall and a money question in April.

A man from the audience was pleased that the Task Forces would include information on operational and capital costs. He also supported Neil Cable on the concern with sticking to the Educational Specifications. And closed by saying something needs to pass, you need flexibility.

Matt Franjola addressed the people by agreeing that it seemed townspeople wanted to keep their local schools but not at the proposed cost. Private schools don't have to meet Educational Specifications and state mandates, should local schools be privatized? The problem seems to be dealing with state mandates and reimbursements.

In closing Dick Sears encouraged people to keep talking. The *First* Selectmen and representatives of the Board of Finance will meet within a week and will set a date for a second group meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:40pm.

Respectfully submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L. Osborne, acting Secretary

Revised 7/5/2005 corrections in italics.