

July 30, 2006

SPECIAL MEETING

Present: First Selectman Richard C. Sears, Selectmen Nicholas N. Solley and Mark E. Lyon.

Board of Finance Members: Jack Boyer and Jack Field.

Board of Education Members: Irene Allan, Michelle Gorra, Larry O'Toole, Jim Hirschfield, Valerie Andersen, Matt Franjola.

Press: John Addyman-Voices, Tom Lucas-Waterbury Republic

Members of the general public.

Call to Order: First Selectman Dick Sears called the meeting to order at 6:04p.m.

Dick welcomed those in attendance and explained that the purpose of this Special Meeting of the Board of Selectmen was to discuss the elementary school needs. Dick further explained it was his hope and intention that members of the three Boards (Selectmen, Finance and Education) could share ideas for going forward before the special Board of Education meeting tomorrow evening. He spoke of the need for collaboration and cooperation by all parties in order to solve the apparent impasse.

Dick used the analogy of a triangle to demonstrate what he felt to be the major points that should be met for any idea and/or suggestion. These points would be: 1)does it meet the educational needs of the children; 2)would the cost be at a level taxpayers can afford; and 3)does it meet the needs of the Town.

Dick asked those who were present from the Board of Finance and Board of Education to spend 3-5 minutes explaining their idea, position or opinion.

Jack Boyer expressed his concern that the three towns are at a standoff. His suggestion would be to move the 5th grade up to the Shepaug campus - a "partial consolidation". This would also decrease some of the renovation costs of the three primary schools. The Selectmen and the Boards of Finance should contact the Town's Senators regarding the allowing of de-regionalization K-4. The Towns would be responsible for each renovation of their primary school buildings and future maintenance.

Valerie Andersen agreed that the three Towns are at a stalemate. On 6/21/06 she sent a memo to the Board of Education resurrecting the idea of the "Build to Suit" concept. She compared this to a commercial real estate deal when the landlord -Town-would fix up the building(s) to meet what the lessee (Region #12) wants and needs. In Valerie's opinion, consolidation is not going to work and de-regionalization may not save money. Legislators may be able to assist with State grants. The Region is maintained and the Towns get to keep their schools.

Larry O'Toole felt that Valerie's idea had merit but voiced concern if state reimbursement monies were not received, Roxbury and Bridgewater would suffer - Washington has less major renovation needs. He felt that a partial de-regionalization was something not to be afraid of. Larry feels that we call ourselves a region however we do not act as one when we do not transfer students from overcrowded schools to a school with more room. We have created a process in which the three towns are fighting instead of working together.

Matt Franjola felt that the situation should be treated strictly as a straight real estate deal and should not

be confused with de-regionalization. De-regionalization would not be needed to "Build to Suit". Build to Suit would eliminate the political equation of one town against the other two. Later in the meeting Mr. Franjola suggested the advocates for each of the plans develop a list of pros and cons and meet again to summarize.

Irene Allan voiced her concern that discussing de-regionalization and/or "Build to Suit" is premature until the consultant presents all the pros and cons or a region at tomorrow's Board of Education meeting. She felt that ideas were being expressed at this meeting and it's not known if they are even feasible. Irene personally has no new ideas but posed the question of consolidation in another location as a possibility.

Jack Field expressed his thoughts that the referendums have continually failed in Washington because of the amount of money that would eventually be spent - the costs of the projects, the debt services, operational costs - could amount to as much as \$70 million. If a consolidated school were to be built, there could be a savings of \$40 million over 20 years. The distribution is askew with Washington paying 45% of the bill and Roxbury and Bridgewater paying so much less proportionally. He also voiced his concern that the voting public is upset when Town leaders do not agree. He posed the possibility of a consolidated school for Roxbury and Bridgewater, or building a new Washington elementary school on the Shepaug campus. Valerie Andersen mentioned a big enough school to accommodate Roxbury and Washington - in Roxbury.

Jim Hirschfield stated he was not an advocate of de-regionalization and had hoped that the Steering Committee's suggestion to bring the subject to the public vote in **one** question months ago would have been a much better choice. He did not feel a Washington Primary School being built on the Shepaug campus would be well received by the other towns.

Michelle Gorra felt that all parties should keep an open mind and that all ideas are worth considering. She is concerned about the time being lost. Consolidation did not pass - Washington needs to realize that and get on with finding other solutions.

Mark Lyon felt that possible a new approach should be looked at. He stated he had been in favor of the three school renovation plan but cost did become an important factor in his and others decision making. He felt consolidation may be the solution but does not know how to legally or politically bring it back. He felt the Build to Suit idea may present problems with the division of operating costs.

Nick Solley felt that Washington's seniors and taxpayers in general did not feel they could support the other 2 towns financially. He suggested a referendum to spend money needed to get actual bid costs (architectural design). He felt there was a possibility the numbers may come in lower than what has been stated so far.

Dick Sears was the last to share an idea that was given to him by Father Bennett from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church. Obviously, consolidation was not approved nor has the referendum passed to renovate the three schools. This "new" idea was one actually suggested several years ago in a study done by the Region. It would entail keeping grades K-2 in the present elementary schools in each town. A consolidated school would be built on the Shepaug campus for grades 3-5 or 3-6. This would meet the wish to keep the schools in the towns for the lower grades and meet the lower cost of building a consolidated school for the higher grades and would eliminate the overcrowding in the elementary schools. Mr. Sears felt town and education needs would be met with this plan. The question was raised how many schools would we be eventually be building and/or renovating. Some present felt this may be too large a project.

Bon Lombardi as a member of the audience said he had done some legal research and felt that

Washington could separate the elementary school from the Region with the help of our legislators.

Ron Chute felt that Mr. Sears' idea of the triangle presented early on in the meeting was a good one for communicating with the public - keeping all factors on an even plane - not just talking money and politics but including the most important factor which is the education of our children.

Jay Hubelbank former chair of the Board of Education felt that the Build to Suit idea was probably the best we had at this point and cautioned that de-regionalization can be inefficient educationally. He also stressed the point that Washington should not assume for the other towns in the Region.

Adjournment: Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 7:35. By Dick Sears, seconded by Nick Solley and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Anne Greene

Selectmen's Secretary