

Regional School District Planning Board
Minutes of Meeting of the Planning Board
April 29, 2020
(via Zoom)

The meeting convened at 5:33 p.m. on April 29, 2020 via Zoom teleconference with the following present:

Peter Dillon, BHRSD Superintendent;
Beth Regulbuto, SBRSD Superintendent;
Alford: Lucy Prashker; Charles Ketchen; Jeffrey Blaugrund (school committee);
Egremont: George McGurn, Marci Bush; Thomas Berkel;
Monterey: Jon Sylbert; Donald Coburn;
Sheffield: Bonnie Silvers; Nadine Hawver; Colin Smith;
New Marlborough: Jane Burke (school committee); Susan Smith; Tara White;
Great Barrington: Deborah Phillips; Stephen Bannon (school committee); Peter Taylor;
West Stockbridge: Roger Kavanagh; Marie Ryan; Molly Thomas;
Stockbridge: Chuck Cardillo

Also present: Calleigh Wile, assistant to the Secretary; T. Cowgill (press)

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Lucy Prashker, as chair called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m. noting that a quorum was present.

After expressing her thanks to the members of the board for attending the meeting by Zoom during this difficult time, Ms. Prashker asked the superintendents to provide an update on how the school districts were managing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Peter Dillon reported that BHRSD's efforts have been focused on basic needs and supporting students in learning, and that the district was trying to provide support to the different situations of all families. He said he did not yet know about summer school programs or how things would look in September.

Beth Regulbuto noted the difficult challenges of internet connectivity for many families while remote learning, emphasizing the importance of trying to achieve equity and accessibility for all students. She also highlighted the importance of the public school system and the connection between students and teachers, and how interpersonal, social, and emotional support of the district's students has become a primary focus for the district.

Because of other commitments of Peter Dillon, Ms. Prashker determines that the agenda items will be taken out of order beginning with the report of the subcommittee formed to explore the possibility of engaging a consultant and/or facilitator.

Subcommittee Report:

A written report of the subcommittee was previously circulated to the full board and is attached to these minutes.

Peter Taylor, as chair of the subcommittee, reviewed the report and reported the recommendation of the subcommittee as follows:

1. Engage a facilitator to (1) recommend how the committee can work best together, (2) identify a united vision for partnerships and potential consolidation, and (3) think through how to maximize skills of committee members; and
2. Engage a consultant to help with (1) long term support, (2) content expertise, (3) guidance on how to organize the committee in an effective way to identify and organize throughout the due diligence process, (4) data gathering and analysis to understand issues and make decisions, and (5) other issues that may emerge requiring special help.

Taylor stated that the subcommittee believes that the role of facilitator and consultant could be filled by the same person or by two different people and the subcommittee wants to evaluate both options. A list of recommended candidates was generated. In the interest of time and efficiency, Taylor recommends the board delegate the duty of interviewing for the purpose of identifying a short list of candidates (2 per role, depending on responses) to the full board with its recommendation.

On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously

VOTED to accept the recommendation of the subcommittee delegating to it the responsibility of identifying and interviewing interested parties and making a recommendation to the full board.

Approval of Minutes of March 7, 2020:

After correction of typos in the draft minutes previously circulated, including the spelling of Marie Ryan and Donald Coburn and the replacement of “not” on p. 3 with “may”,

Upon motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously

VOTED to approve minutes of March 7, 2020 meeting, as corrected.

Confirmation of vote taken by town committees to join the Regional School District Planning Board (“RSDPB”)

The Chair asked for confirmation from town representatives from each of the 8 towns that the respective town committees had or will tonight formally vote to join the Regional School District Planning Board. The respective town committees below then either confirmed that the vote had earlier been taken or took a vote following a motion made and duly seconded to join the Regional School District Planning as follows:

- a. Alford (Lucy Prashker, Charles Ketchen, Jeff Blaugrund)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously
VOTED to join the RSDPB.

- b. Sheffield (Bonnie Silvers, Nadine Hawver, Colin Smith)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously **VOTED** to join the RSDPB.
- c. New Marlborough (Jane Burke, Susan Smith, Tara White)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously **VOTED** to join the RSDPB.
- d. Monterey (John Sylbert, Don Coburn)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously **VOTED** to join the RSDPB.
- e. West Stockbridge (Marie Ryan, Roger Kavanagh, Molly Thomas)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously **VOTED** to join the RSDPB.
- f. Great Barrington (Deborah Phillips, Stephen Bannon, Peter Taylor)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously **VOTED** to join the RSDPB.
- g. Egremont (George McGurn, Marci Bush, Thomas Berkel)
On motion made and duly seconded, it was unanimously **VOTED** to join the RSDPB.

Mr. Cardillo advised that this vote had already been taken for the Town of Stockbridge..

RSDPB Statutory Mandate

The Chair then reviewed the statutory mandate of the RSDPB as including:

1. The study of the fiscal and educational advisability of establishing a regional school district, organization, operation, control, constructing, maintaining, and operating to serve needs;
2. Developing an estimate of construction and operating costs;
3. Assessing the education soundness, methods of financing, and any other matters pertaining to the organization and operation of a regional school district; and
4. Reporting the board’s findings to the selectmen of the eight towns.

There was then discussion on the wide scope of this mandate and whether all facets must be covered. Jane Burke commented that perhaps not all components would need to be followed, at least initially. She expressed a concern about imposing any additional burdens on the school committees at this time and suggested that timeline expectations may need to be expanded.

George McGurn stated that the board needs to be realistic in the current climate and suggested that the board not limit its horizons.

Prashker expressed her view that the current situation requires that the board work extra hard to

explore ways to meet the many challenges that the school districts now face.

Bonnie Silvers reported on the current work of the Berkshire County Educational Task Force to address the immediate needs of remote learning. Prashker said that she would forward the BCETF recent report to the full board, noting that the board should take advantage of the work that has already been done in the county.

Jeff Blaugrund stated that he would be cautious about moving quickly, noting that it is important to follow the data.

Roger Kavanagh asks if there is a specific timeline for starting and ending the work of this committee. Prashker clarifies a timeline is not specified by statute.

Nadine Hawver expressed concerns over the state financial support of the districts, particularly as it relates to the need of the BHRSD to build a new high school. She suggested revisiting the possibility of merging just the high schools. Steve Bannon responded that while a high school consolidation might be the most simple, he believes the board should continue down the road of exploring a full consolidation. Jeff Blaugrund noted that curriculum plays into any plan for elementary through high school education.

George McGurn noted that a project of this scope has taken three to five years in the past and that the subcommittees should address all components identified in the statutory mandate.. Jane Burke stated that she does not want to slow down the board's work, but wants to acknowledge the challenges that the pandemic is currently presenting.

Quorum Requirements

The Chair confirmed that a quorum for the board will remain a majority of board members. George McGurn expressed a concern that each town be represented at each meeting.

Legal Counsel

The Chair noted the need to retain legal counsel experienced in the area of school consolidation and offered to work to develop a list of potential candidates. Jeff Blaugrund asked that any potential candidates be vetted by the superintendents and that the superintendents confirm that the state grant permits engagement of counsel.

Subcommittees and Full Committee Meetings

The Chair asks committee members to let her know what subcommittee(s) each would like to join.

Peter Taylor suggests exploring different phases for subcommittee work:

1. Exploratory (subcommittees to identify initial set of due diligence and fact finding for feasibility); and
2. Development of recommendation.

It was noted that subcommittee meeting notices will need to be posted, quorums met, and minutes taken. A suggestion was made that at least one member from each Town be on each subcommittee. The Chair agreed that town diversity on the subcommittees would be good but any absolute requirement that a member of each town serve on each subcommittee would require some members to serve on multiple committees..

The Chair agreed to expand the description of the subcommittees. The timing of when to form the Community Outreach and Communication subcommittee was left open for further discussion. A number of board members voiced the view that it was important that there be only one voice speaking for the RSDPB.

There was some discussion of whether to form an Executive Committee. The consensus was not to do that at this time.

Other Business

There was discussion about the June 30 deadline on the state grant. Superintendent Regulbuto stated that she believes that an extension may be available.

Adjournment

At 7:06 p.m., a motion was made and duly seconded, and it was unanimously

VOTED to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Tara White, Secretary