SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
THURSDAY April 17, 2014
FINAL Minutes

Present: Michael DeChiara, Dan Hayes, Mare Fox, members; Bob Mahler, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order at 7:06 P.M.

B. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar

C. Warrants and Gifts

Warrants signed:
APR 01
APR 02
APR 03

D. Approval of Minutes from March 20, 2014

Committee outlined several changes to the minutes format. Several emendations were also outlined.

DAN MOVED THAT THE MARCH 20, 2014 MINUTES BE APPROVED AS AMENDED. MARE SECONDED. TWO APPROVED (MARE ABSTAINED).

E. Public Comments and Announcements

Michael announced this is his last school committee meeting. The announcement was met with appreciative applause as well as a gift from Dan (chocolate milk), who also provided cookies and juice for the public.

F. New Business / Discussion Items

1. Shutesbury and the Amherst Regional Assessment Method – presentation by Amherst Regional Central Office – Maria Geryk, Sean Mangano, Kathy Mazur, Mike Morris

The presenters were invited to explain the data and assessment method as well as its impact on the town budget. There will also be a presentation and question and answer session at Town Meeting. They explained that the current method, using a 5-year rolling average, is predictable for several years, asks each town to pay the same amount per student, and is stable, smoothing out changes in enrollment over time. They also explained that the statutory assessment method, which relies on several factors calculated by the state, is less predictable because of the figures changing every two or four years, and also builds in a lag time that renders inaccurate the

assessment of what towns can pay based on property wealth. A comparison chart of the alternative vs. statutory methods indicates that the alternative (currently used) method prevents large swings; however, Shutesbury has been assessed at a higher rate since FY08 under the alternative method. The benefit of the alternative method is realized over time. The Shutesbury assessment is projected to grow over the next three years because enrollment is growing here while simultaneously dropping in Pelham.

Michael clarified that the alternative assessment method must be voted forward by all four towns in order to apply, whereas the Amherst-Pelham regional budget only requires support of three towns to go into effect.

The presenters continued, pointing out that if Shutesbury votes to return to the statutory method at Town Meeting, it might mean that Amherst and Pelham might not pass the regional school budget. An immediate, tangible impact of this would be losing staff. This would hurt morale, and the town would lose teachers because the hiring season is now, so even if the budget gap were resolved later, the hiring pool would be thinner. Reduction in Force (RIF) notifications must be sent to staff by April 15, but this notification timeline has been extended to May 15 to accommodate the Town Meetings. Another tangible impact on the school system would be on valued programs (art, sports, etc.), whose funding sources have been declining. Essentially, if the alternative method is not kept, the SSC budget would no longer be accurate, since it was based on the alternative method.

Dan expressed his support for the current method, which seems to be the most fair.

Public attendees asked questions to clarify various points, but made no statements indicating disapproval of the currently used alternative assessment method.

2. Preparation for Town Meeting

The committee discussed how to present the assessment method most clearly at Town Meeting. The most worrying issue is explaining the necessary increases in mandated costs. There are some options for tweaking the current assessment method for FY16 that might satisfy both town voters and the other towns.

3. Collaborative for Educational Services – Vote on Articles of Incorporation

Dan explained the vision of the CES as a place that fosters collaboration among schools. They also help facilitate virtual education for students who are suspended, disabled, etc. Michael pointed out that any school district in the state could join CES, which seems to contradict its local focus. Bob replied that CES has statewide programs, and that to be active members of CES, those other districts would have to attend meetings.

DAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE CES ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION AS

WRITTEN. MARE SECONDED. THREE APPROVED.

4. Superintendent Search Discussion

Bob wants to draw up a list of attributes the towns would like in a superintendent and is sending out a request to school committee members; he is particularly interested in getting feedback from the several seasoned members who are leaving their respective committees.

5. School Choice – pre-vote discussion (vote possible)

The committee has to vote in May, so this pre-vote discussion serves to clarify the issue. Bob commented that SES is the largest elementary school in the Union, and class sizes are pushing acceptable limits, so he recommends to not open School Choice seats.

MARE MOVED THAT SES DOES NOT PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL CHOICE FOR ACADEMIC YEAR '14-'15, BASED ON A LACK OF AVAILABLE SEATS. DAN SECONDED. THREE APPROVED.

G. Unfinished Business / Updates

1. Principal Search Process

Bob described the process so far: an 8-member search committee composed of staff, teachers, and parents whittled down 42 applications to 7; 6 came for interviews. The final candidates are Tom Jefferson, Margo Lacey, and Jackie Mendonsa. May 1 is the public forum, while a final determination will be made by mid-month.

H. Policy Review: None at this time

I. Reports

1. Principal's Report -distributed

2. Superintendent's Report

Bob reported that at the last superintendents' meeting, schools that bought into the Edwin computer system for PARCC are having a very difficult time connecting. While there are parts of PARCC that are positive, there are a lot of issues with it, and a lot of work that needs to be done to fix these issues. The reporting on DESE's website about PARCC is overwhelmingly positive; ignoring its negatives makes this kind of reporting tantamount to propaganda. Mare commented that the students seem to be experiencing significant stress over PARCC testing.

Bob also presented a summary of collaboration and support provided by Union #28 to

its schools.

3. Regional School District Planning Board Report

Michael reported that the Board is not meeting as a whole right now; working groups are meeting individually now and so far don't have information to share.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report

Michael reported that the last two meetings have been on race, equity, and safety. Two meetings previously, the teacher who has been recently targeted by racial attacks spoke to a large gathering; it was a powerful experience. At the last meeting, a committee was created to look into the issue of equity in the region. Also, Kip Fonsh is no longer chairing. The issue of life-threatening allergies was also addressed, but a draft policy could not be arrived at; the policy will likely be crafted in the fall. An anti-discrimination policy was also approved. Finally, they discussed safety measures with police in executive session. One important discussion there was about lockdowns: the public perception of a lockdown is far more alarming than the reality (doors are locked and shades drawn, but the school day continues as usual otherwise). "Shelter in Place" is far more serious than a lockdown at SES. The committee was somewhat concerned that the two terms are used differently in different schools.

5. Union #28 Report – including Budget and Personnel

Michael reported that U28 has well-crafted policies now. Prudence Marsh has been offered a 3-year contract as SPED Director for the Union.

6. CES Report

Dan reported that CES is working on bylaws.

J. Future Business

1. Shutesbury School Committee – May 15, 2014

Michael alerted the committee that they must meet on May 12 to reorganize, per bylaws.

K. Executive Session

DAN MOVED TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 8:49 P.M. TO DISCUSS NEGOTIATIONS AND A LEGAL MATTER. MARE SECONDED. THREE APPROVED.

Adjournment