

**SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE**  
**THURSDAY January 15, 2015**  
**FINAL Minutes**

**Present: Dan Hayes, Mare Fox, Fred Steinberg, Steve Sullivan, members; Matthew Galman, Accountant; Bob Mahler, Superintendent; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Public Guests**

**A. Meeting Called to Order at 7:01 P.M.**

**B. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar**

No comments on perpetual calendar.

**C. Warrants and Gifts**

Warrants signed:

4005: \$1,860.07

**D. Approval of Minutes from December 18, 2014**

Several emendations were offered for the minutes.

**FRED MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 18, 2014. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

**E. Public Comments and Announcements**

Michael DeChiara spoke about the RAWG report recently submitted to the regional school committee; RAWG unanimously supported forwarding the proposal, but not all members support all items in the proposal. Michael is personally opposed to several items under the finance and governance sections. In particular, the proposal would set up a Pre-K-12 region rather than a Pre-K-6 region as originally planned. Also, Shutesbury would not gain financially from regionalization; the efficiencies to be gained apply more to the other towns. Furthermore, voting to change the regional agreement according to the proposal would strip Shutesbury of its status as an equal partner with other towns in the region; the town would lose some of its ability to negotiate for what it wants in the school. Ultimately, even if the town votes to regionalize, SSC must still vote to leave U28 in order for regionalization to proceed.

Bob noted that the last set of minutes available from RAWG was from last June, but the group has met multiple times since then. Michael assured him that minutes were taken and were going to be posted on the website. The committee thanked Michael

for serving on the subcommittee all these years. Dan praised Michael's objectivity, as evidenced by his oppositional stance toward the same proposal he has helped to shape while on the subcommittee.

Dan added that we would do well to ensure our future decision-making processes are inclusive and that communication is clear. Steve said that the information forums Bob organized were incredibly well attended; Bob affirmed that people are practically begging for hard information to help inform their understanding of what's at stake. Both indicated they thought the process is moving very fast. Michael responded that RAWG has never thought the vote needs to be held at the annual Town Meeting; a special meeting could be called for it. Dan said that a special meeting for the vote would disadvantage a sizable number of people who couldn't make it. Michael said that Steve needs to be empowered to take that message to the regional school committee.

Bob continued by pointing out that there seems to be a blasé attitude about the decision, but in fact it is an enormous decision. There are seven towns on the table, not four, and if there are only two towns left in U28, it's untenable. It seems to be all about Amherst, not about the other towns, and Bob asserted that Shutesbury would lose things going down the hill. Michael said that the representatives on the regional school committee from the other towns would disagree, and Bob said they have no facts to back them up. He concluded that for something as complicated as this, the timeframe is ridiculous and the attitude is even worse.

Bob reported on the two forums he held in Leverett and Shutesbury: 21 people showed up at each. People's concerns ranged from financial to losing the identity of their school, or even the school itself. Governance is also a concern, but it was not discussed in any detail because of a lack of information on the proposal. Also, the impact on U28 has never been discussed, never been a part of the process, and Erving, New Salem and Wendell are quite concerned about what might happen to the impact on them.

Jackie added that people are unclear on what the first vote means. It has been presented to her several times that the first vote opened the conversation, but it's still fuzzy to people. Michael said the first vote changes the status quo that's been in place since the 1950s.

Dan asked Michael about the language in the proposal that allows Leverett to keep its greenhouse open. Michael responded that the agreement is at the level of the towns, and the superintendent calls the shots anyway, so such provisions couldn't be built into the proposal. It's inaccurate to assert otherwise. Mare asked who will be answering all these questions about the proposal; Dan said that it will be up to interpretation, which makes looking at the specific language of the proposal so critical.

Bob reiterated that the timeframe for the decision is incredibly short, given that the document won't be public until Jan 30 and there's a vacation week in Feb.

## **F. New Business / Discussion Items**

### **1. FY16 Budget**

Matthew reported that the FY16 budget is now \$1,875,216, which is \$2,600 more than the original. This is due to a salary being overlooked. Bob said that the meeting with the Fin Com was positive.

Steve said that we've been lucky with this budget because everything has balanced out despite unexpected expenses, but that must stop at some point. Bob said that there are some ELL monies in the next budget to help, but yes, we have been lucky.

### **2. Kindergarten Grant**

Nancy Birtwell attended a Pelham School Committee meeting a month and a half ago. She pointed to a nearly two-foot stack of binders in the room, identifying them as the NAEYC-required classroom portfolios from kindergarteners; she worked 80 hours to put them together, for which Bob granted her release time. The costs of meeting the reporting requirements are enormous; Pelham received \$14,000 from DESE but had costs close to \$10,000. For this reason, Amherst voted to turn down the state grant. In addition, the DESE grant takes the teacher out of the classroom for the crucial first two months. Nancy requested that SSC vote to turn down the DESE grant for all these reasons.

Dan acknowledged that it seems ridiculous to have to go through all of that for the money that comes in. Bob pointed out that the loss of about \$11,000 in Shutesbury's case means that that money would have to be added to the budget. He said we are the only state that requires NAEYC membership, without assistance, to even apply for the state grants. The thing to do is lean on the state to drop this requirement. So the decision to re-certify with NAEYC or not needs to be looked at, but the grant does pay a significant part of the teacher's salary.

Mare clarified that the grant is for five years; Nancy said yes, but there are annual reporting requirements, and for the GOLD level, even more reporting pieces that have been added recently. Bob was totally sympathetic to Nancy's point, but it's hard to make a recommendation with the budget sitting on the table. We need to know more about how closely it's tied to the preschool grant.

The committee asked clarifying questions about what is assessed under the grant, and who assesses. Bob said he would call the administrators in charge of grants and let

them know SSC is considering not applying because of the problems. He will also talk with other superintendents. Approaching the legislature probably isn't the way to go; DESE needs to hear from people instead.

Michael said that partnering with MTA might be a good idea; also, making the argument that we have small decentralized offices, so the administrative burden should be eased. Dan said it was a good suggestion to offer a solution like that to DESE.

### 3. Regional Assessment Method

Dan reported that there are two different methods: statutory and alternative. The statutory method is a complicated formula from the state that factors in many things, and is completed late in the cycle, making it hard to build into school budgets. The alternative method was devised to increase predictability and equity; it is a per-capita method. However, the alternative method has meant that Shutesbury has paid more than it would have using the statutory method, up to about \$1.1 million over several years. Dan then presented the numbers for both methods to the committee.

Fred asked about process; Dan said that towns using an alternative method have to vote every year to continue doing so. Michael added that it's not the lateness in the cycle so much as the unpredictable factors that are the problem for budgets. Mare said this should probably be on the perpetual calendar so that the committee has enough time to consider what to do in a given year. Dan agreed that SSC should have a larger discussion at some point about the methods, perhaps leading to an endorsement of one over the other.

4. Recommendations from RAWG to the Regional School Committee: see Public Comments above.

## **G. Unfinished Business / Updates**

### 1. Superintendent Search – Update

Bob reported that today, members of the screening committee went to see one of the candidates in her school and talk with people there. The other candidate will be visited next Thursday. After that, the regional school committee will interview the candidates and the public will have the opportunity to meet with them. Dan noted that he felt confident both candidates are strong. Bob added that both candidates seem very interested in the job. Jackie said they are both particularly interested in the elementary school piece of the district, which is unusual.

## **H. Policy Review**

### 1. Second Reading, First Vote – JH Student Absences and Excuses.

Fred proposed a number of clarifications and edits for the policy, none of which constituted a substantive change to its intent. Jackie noted that she would like times to be used in the policy in order to quantify a half-day absence and its consequences. She would also like clarification of policy on chronic tardiness. The committee decided to define a half-day absence as tardiness of ninety minutes or more. Bob updated language related to the Principal as well.

**DAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE JH STUDENT ABSENCES AND EXCUSES POLICY AS AMENDED. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

## **I. Reports**

### 5. Review of Expenditure Report: (moved up in agenda)

Matthew followed up on a previous question about networking and telecom being overbudgeted; in fact, there will not be any more money spent on this account because E-Rate will kick in during the second half of the year, and there's a credit on the Crocker account that matches the next two payments exactly. Matthew noted the 37% increase in supply costs from National Grid for electricity; he created a demand forecast for 2015 that so far is midway between 2013 and 2014. However, the usage is on an upward trend over the past few years. Jackie added that there was an inflated energy cost last year because of a fault in the timing mechanism that controls the boiler. The committee could not identify the reason for the increasing usage. Jackie and Bob will look into it.

Matthew continued that the forecasted energy usage may amount to around \$45,000 with National Grid, but only \$26,000 is budgeted for this item. It is possible to switch suppliers, but we would need to investigate potential companies. He recommends an 18-month contract because that would take the school through this winter as well as the following one, so if the school needed to switch again, it wouldn't happen in the middle of winter. The energy czar at the collaborative in the Lower Pioneer Valley offered recommendations for suppliers. The committee recommended we switch to Major unless there are obvious problems dealing with the company. Bob added that we should let the Fin Com know the energy line item might be \$10,000 short this year.

## 1. Principal's Report

Enrollment is 156 because of an additional first-grader. We budgeted for two preschool teachers, but will not be able to run two classes unless we pursue enrollment aggressively and early. That process has started.

As for PARCC, the timing of subject areas is different than in MCAS, so students will have to adjust to a different curricular emphasis as well as to an increased number of testing sessions: five sessions twice in the spring, for a total of ten. (Fifth graders will also take the MCAS science test, since PARCC does not cover the science portion.) PARCC is also timed, whereas MCAS is not. The rollout of these testing sessions is also quite problematic because of their increased number. On top of all this, the PARCC format is different from the MCAS. The teachers are only now starting to examine the Common Core and the PARCC tests; there is a dearth of practice material for them to get used to and limited examples provided online.

Mare suggested bringing the students into the preparation, perhaps through School Council, so that they know what to expect about the tests; they need a roadmap. Discussing the situation with them could help dispel their stress. Jackie affirmed that the teachers will do what's best for the kids; they are really amazing with this stuff with the kids.

Jackie said that the school was forming a Response Training Intervention (RTI) built around social-emotional components; the teachers are excited about this and will be visiting sites with good model programs already.

The school is also using Positive Behavior Systems expectations so that the whole school knows how to treat each other; this will also be tied in with school spirit and the newly-selected mascot (a moose).

School Council is examining the community survey; they are considering responses as well as how to revamp the tool itself. The current thinking is to distribute it in May.

## 2. Superintendent's Report

Bob reported that we did not get the safety grant. If we want to buy the radios, we will have to do so ourselves.

However, we are now eligible for the Excellence in Teaching Award through the Harold Greenspoon Foundation. An internal nominating process will be created. Now that we've been invited, this will be an annual award.

## 3. Regional School District Planning Board Report

Steve reported that according to the proposal, there's no answer for a town whose school is chosen to be closed. Michael responded that that's not the case; there's a regimented process for deciding whether to close a school (the school committee votes to do this), and the town would still have the option to pay the difference in order to keep its school open.

Steve continued that the on-ramp timing (choosing later to join the region) was still to be determined. Michael responded that it's been set as a "reasonable" amount of time, which could be a long time.

The committee directed Steve to express its unanimous concern about the timeframe of the proposal. Also, it seems counterproductive to review a draft proposal that will be changed two weeks later by an updated version. Furthermore, the numbers being used to support the report are outdated, rendering the financial consequences ambiguous at best.

Bob repeated that the consequences are enormous for the other U28 towns, and that these consequences have not been a part of the deliberative process.

Dan expressed great concern over the numbers in particular, which has been picked apart by consultants. All of the claims based on this data will have to be corroborated.

**DAN MOVED TO DIRECT STEVE TO EXPRESS TO THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE THAT SSC HAS CONCERNS ABOUT THE TIMEFRAME AS WELL AS THE PERCEIVED CONTENT OF THE PROPOSAL, AND TO REQUEST THAT THE TIMELINE FOR THE PROPOSAL BE EXTENDED. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

#### 4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report

Steve reported that postings for the meetings are now being done via website. Also, there are two new electives being offered in the high school: Digital Photography and Engineering III. The regional budget was made available.

There are also big changes coming to the middle school: Chinese is being dropped, Spanish and French are being made exploratory for one year, and students can either take drama or art or a foreign language in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This is reshuffling the schedule for SPED students, which will be challenging. Many parents have already contacted Steve to express their upset at these changes.

Steve also attended the Calvin Tyrell presentation; it was good, but tough when he had the audience visualize the school shooting. This was a brand-new presentation.

#### 6. Union #28 Report – including Budget and Personnel

Dan reported that he has been charged with spearheading the process; if there's a good process, there will be a good outcome. The committee discussed how the public forum will flow, agreed on interview questions, looked at feedback forms, and worked out other details of the process.

#### 7. CES Report

Dan reported that he attended the foundation formula hearing in Northampton and found it refreshing and hopeful that the funding formulas written in 1993 are probably going to be revisited. Also, it was inspiring to hear so much testimony from the public about a broad range of concerns. The process was well run, and Dan commented that to ensure progress on school funding, people need to discuss the problems openly and communicate with their legislators. In addition, we should communicate our concerns as well as solutions through all of our associations as well.

#### **J. Future Business**

1. Shutesbury School Committee – February 26, 2015
2. Budget and Personnel Committee – Wednesday, February 11, 2015 6 P.M. SES
3. Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Wednesday, February 11, 2015 7 P.M. SES
4. Future agenda items?

**DAN MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 10:17 P.M. FRED SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

**Adjournment at 10:17 P.M.**