

**Act 46 Study Committee**  
**APPROVED Minutes for March 9, 2016**  
Harwood Union High School Library

**Act 46 Study Committee Members Present:** Jill Ellis (Fayston), Rosemarie White (Harwood ex-officio), Garrett MacCurtain (Harwood ex-officio), Gabe Gilman (Moretown), Christine Sullivan (Waitsfield), Alycia Biondo (Warren), Alex Thomsen (W-D for Waterbury), Sam Jackson (W-D for Duxbury)

**Other Board Members Present:** Jen Watkins (Warren), Doug Mosle (Fayston)

**WWSU Administrators:** Brigid Nease, Michelle Baker

**Consultants:** Walter Nardelli

**Other:** Channel 44 camera person, Dale Smeltzer

- 1) **Call to Order:** Gabe Gilman, chair of the Study Committee, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- 2) **Confirming Agenda:** Gabe noted that the agenda has to be amended, due to new updates received from the attorney and an update on the Warren bond, which will mean that some items need to be postponed.
- 3) **ACTION ITEMS:**
  - a) Approval of Minutes:
    - i) **STUDY COMMITTEE ACTION:** Jill Ellis moved to approve the minutes of February 18, 2016 as written. Christine Sullivan seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- 4) **Study Committee Discussion Items:**
  - a) **Update from Attorney**
    - i) The date for voting needs to be shifted later to June 7 (instead of May 3), to meet all the timing deadlines.
    - ii) Proportional representation has to be adjusted to use a point system (based on 100 total), to give Waterbury more accurate proportional representation.
    - iii) The tax savings are more complicated for a dissenting town, in terms of which students of their towns get the tax incentives.
  - b) **Warren Bond** - The current estimate for renovations at Warren is \$3.8 to \$4.8 million, which is larger than originally reported. The renovations are broken down into two categories. Jen Watkins noted that the plans are still evolving and their board has not taken any action yet. She notes that \$1.8 million is the minimum needed to bring up to code, and suggested that perhaps this is what should be bonded this spring. She is concerned about the timing with the bond vote, and wonders if the larger bond decision should be made by the unified district. She and Alycia will bring this suggestion to their local board. Gabe noted that a majority of his board would not support the accelerated merger planned by this committee due to concerns about the high cost of projected bond at Warren which would end up being a net negative building liability plus limiting the flexibility of the future unified board. There was concern expressed about how a Warren bond decision will be viewed by voters, with a bonding decision made before the merger. Brigid noted that there are a number of financially related incentives from an accelerated merger that need to be considered, not just the tax rate reductions. There was discussion about the possible ways to proceed given all the issues. Brigid reported on the statewide success of merger votes which have been successful by a large margin, and that very few districts are not in the process of considering mergers. Many board members thought that despite the issues needing to be resolved, that it is important to bring an accelerated merger to the voters and let them decide rather than shift gears to a different merger that would delay the vote and reduce the financial incentives available.

MOTION: Gabe moved that the committee alter its aim and that it intend to pursue a Section 7 merger instead of the accelerated merger. The motion failed for lack of a second.

- c) **Articles of Agreement and Report** - Our attorney has provided edits to the Articles and Report, and these documents have now been submitted to the Agency of Education attorney who will make edits before giving it to the State Board of Education for their approval. State Board of Education approval is needed before a vote can be warned. Christine reviewed the edits that have been made to the Articles. The edited Articles of Agreement are available on the WWSU website. The State Board of Education meets April 19 to consider our Articles and Report. The date for submission to voters has been updated to June 7, 2016. There was discussion about how, if there were Non Member Districts, costs would be split up for voters, and how Chittenden East handles this will be reviewed. The appendices were then quickly reviewed, as some of the information is now being included there. There were three main sections in the Appendices – 1) Student Enrollment Information; 2) School Assets and Debts, and Financial Information; and 3) Warren Capital Improvement Information and Proposed Debt.

STUDY COMMITTEE ACTION: Alycia Biondo moved to approve the Articles of Agreement in their current form, including the appendices. Alex Thomsen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

- d) **Updated Forum Schedule** – Due to the new voting date, the forum schedule was revised as listed below. Alycia noted that Warren voters have requested that a forum be held in their town; also a request from a group opposed to the merger that they be allowed to speak. It was suggested that local boards could schedule additional forums if they want, but there should be a standard format agreed upon. There was discussion about the optimal timing of forums, and how to address misinformation that is already out there, and how to oversee the spending of funds.

**Forums:**

Mar. 31 - Kick-off public forum at Harwood, in the library, after the WWSU reorganization meeting.

April 27 at Harwood (forum starting at 6:30; committee meeting at 5:30)

May 11 at TBPS

May 25 - at Big Picture in Waitsfield

Requirements for vote: The warning for the vote will be done by each individual town school district. A Public Hearing must be scheduled within 10 days of the vote – planned to be held at Harwood - (*need to confirm that there can be just one for all the towns*)

- 5) **Communication, Publicity** – The timing of mailed information or newspaper insert needs to be decided. There were questions about how to phrase the information being given to voters, and discussion of the importance of presenting objective information for voters to learn from, reporting on the recommendation of the committee and the local boards, versus telling voters how to vote.

MOTION: Gabe moved that any discreet expenditure in excess of \$300 be voted on by the committee. The motion was seconded by Alycia. The motion failed, with Gabe Gilman voting in favor and Alex Thomsen, Sam Jackson, Alycia Blondo, Jill Ellis and Christine Sullivan voted in opposition with no abstentions.

- 6) **Next Meeting** - Mar 23 meeting - finalize story cards; mailer/insert
- 7) **Adjournment of Study Committee:** Alex Thomsen moved to adjourn the Study Committee meeting at 9:24 p.m. Christine Sullivan seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Dale Smeltzer