

Washington West Supervisory Union Executive Committee
&
Act 46 Study Committee
APPROVED Meeting Minutes for October 28, 2015
Harwood Union High School Library

WWEC Board Members Present: Doug Mosle (Fayston), Rosemarie White (Harwood), Garrett MacCurtain (Harwood), Kate O'Neill (Moretown, arrived 6:05 p.m.), Christine Sullivan (alternate for Waitsfield), Alex Thomsen (Waterbury-Duxbury)

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 (alternate for Warren), Alex Thomsen (W-D for Waterbury), Sam Jackson (W-D for Duxbury)

Other Board Members Present: Dale Smeltzer (Harwood, WWEC minutes)

WWSU Administrators: Brigid Nease, Michelle Baker

Other: Jeff Mahre (ACT 46 consultant), Walter Nardelli (ACT 46 consultant), Channel 44, Moie Moulton-LaRock, Jessica Woodard, Tracy Brannstrom (Valley Reporter), Kaiya Korb (Waitsfield principal)

- 1) **Call to Order:** Gabe Gilman, chair of the Study Committee, and Garrett MacCurtain, vice chair of the WWEC, called the respective meetings to order at 5:41 p.m.
- 2) **Confirming Agenda:** Brigid noted that WWEC will need to have an Executive Session for a matter of personnel contract, and that Other Business should always be a part of the meeting.
- 3) **Approval of Minutes of 10/14/2015:**
 - a) **STUDY COMMITTEE ACTION:** Alex Thomsen moved and Gabe Gilman seconded to approve the minutes of 10/14/15 as amended. The motion passed unanimously.
 - b) **WWEC ACTION:** Rosemarie White moved and Doug Mosle seconded to approve the minutes of 10/14/15 as amended. The motion passed unanimously.
- 4) **Reports re Act 46 feedback from Local Boards:** Gabe asked board members to share their board feedback, reflections, questions:
 - a) Waitsfield - Christine reported that they need more direction and purpose, need input from building administrators, and have a question about what happens to Master Agreements if we don't merge (e.g. for Special Educators - which Brigid responded to). She thought they would have voted in favor.
 - b) Waterbury-Duxbury - Alex reported that the full board hasn't met yet, and shared her personal opinions concerns. She would vote for merger however, because it would happen in a way that we have control over since it appears that it will happen anyway. She needs more information, and presented a question about budget timing if some towns voted against (which Brigid responded to). She will have more info from the board next time. Sam said his thoughts have already been said; going to the community will be tricky especially around explaining the tax break. He is not convinced that this change will address the fiscal challenges at Harwood. He would vote to support it, personally, because it gives us some control, but did note a lack of clarity.
 - c) Harwood - Rosemarie reported that from Harwood's perspective this would be nothing but a positive. She personally would vote yes, even from her perspective from Warren, since it gives us control over what happens. She questioned how it would be ensured that funds are spent equitably, with a town like Waterbury having more votes. Garrett noted there would be benefits for Harwood, and that a merger is the best way to do that. He did suggest that going for major changes right now might better be put on the back burner, letting governance change being the first major change for people to absorb.
 - d) Warren - Alicia reported on the compilation of responses from board members (they haven't had a meeting yet). All board members are irked that the State is underhandedly forcing this. They don't feel

there are benefits that would be achieved by Warren, but they do see benefits for Harwood. It might provide some tax relief. They are concerned about rushing to a decision, and are concerned about impacts this will bring, including loss of local control. They would advocate for a local council for their school, and suggest magnet schools as an option to keeping the smaller schools open. **(Kate O'Neill arrived at 6:05 p.m.)**, using local expertise whenever possible, and waiting until more things are known before engaging the community since it is so complex and there is a need for real numbers. She would personally vote yes, very reluctantly.

- e) Fayston - Doug noted that Jill would be providing the report, but expressed general support. Jill reported from their board meeting the previous night. There is concern about acting to best support Harwood. School choice for everyone in the community might be a valuable benefit for students and families, and a more nimble board could help steer the options optimally and be a help for the community at large. There would be benefits from everyone thinking preK-12. Disadvantages would be: perceptions of lack of local control; the Town Meeting Day conversation could be very important which we must be sensitive to; and the perception around having more members on the board from Waterbury. They feel that an accelerated merger is the way to go, since a merger will happen regardless. Helping the public understand that "consolidation" can just mean governance, not necessarily the schools themselves, is a need. She feels that we should bring it to the public to vote.
 - f) Moretown - Kate noted that their board hasn't met to discuss this yet, but feels that board would support it going to a vote. Gabe blended his comments with how he is suggesting the committee should move forward.
 - i) What is the scope of the work? Go big or go home? In talking with his community, the benefits down the road are impossible to quantify but he has faith that the administrators will work it out and provide them. He is currently thinking that a scaled down scope would be the best move.
 - ii) The job would be to write a "constitution" as to how a merged board would function, and what the Articles should address. There are 13 necessary criteria that we must address, for governance - and any structural or administration changes can be dealt with in the future. A set of rules that retain local voice and re-define territorial integrity appears to be the majority view as to how to proceed. This will do the most to mitigate the uncertainty for voters.
 - g) Brigid - She thinks we are in a good place given the few number of meetings, and has tried to provide the information that has been needed as well as learn from what others have done who have merged. She noted that all towns believe we should go for a vote, based on the feedback at this meeting. The vote cannot be Town Meeting as that would be too soon, but does not allow time for "go big". The structure has to be determined, and she has provided materials in the board packet that can be used as guides.
 - i) Communication Plan: She is going to work on a side by side document that will compare what will happen if we move forward according to the agreed upon Articles, and what will happen if we don't. It will include the system capacity and flexibility for both options, and it will be able to serve as a cheat sheet when talking to voters. It will also address specific local benefits and/or impact. She will start with the communication plan in December, writing weekly on her blog that will also be posted on Front Porch Forum and in the local weeklies and parent portal for the schools.
 - h) Discussion: There was discussion around using the 13 criteria as a framework for the work as well as for presenting to the public perhaps starting in January.
 - i) Communication Plan: There was also discussion about how to make sure the communication validates the need for voters to know that local board members are involved with the information being given, and that it would be good for the public to receive info from local boards at some point. There will be a repository email, set up by Gabe, to receive all questions and comments so that responses can be dealt with in a more efficient manner given the number of questions coming in. NOTE: Thought needs to be given about how best to communicate during Town Meetings, given the different ways they are held.
- 5) **Project Plan for Articles**: Brigid provided handouts of the Articles developed by other schools that have been successfully approved, as well as a Summary Template of Progress Sheet for all the Articles, and it was agreed to work on all of them as a group rather than divide into sub-groups.

- a) Article 1 - The complexity for this one will be naming the "core" schools required to comply with Act 46 accelerated merger. These would obviously include Harwood, however it is unclear what students this would include if an individual town voted out. Having wording for going to a default RED should define what would result in a RED rather than dealing with individual scenarios. For an accelerated merger, all towns would have to vote in favor. It might not be advisable to have a RED without 4 districts voting in favor.
 - i) How would the W-D District towns' vote be counted for this purpose - would the votes be co-mingled?
 - ii) What would be the name of the Unified Union School District?
 - b) Article 2 - Have a simple statement saying that it wouldn't make sense to incorporate other school districts, after consideration. This could also simply be answered in the report and doesn't have to be included as an Article.
 - c) Article 3 - PreK-12
 - d) Article 4 - There are no expected new schools to be constructed or changes needed to the schools due to the merger, however there are renovations expected at Harwood and Warren with an unknown timeline. A bond vote for either of these projects will not likely be ready for Town Meeting. Include a statement in the report saying these projects are under consideration, but the new unified district would be responsible for any future renovations needed by the schools. Possibly a simple, general statement in an Article.
 - e) Article 5 - Things will be substantially unchanged except for the governance. Existing contracts and agreements will be honored, comply with state and federal law. The two examples split the various components out into separate articles. It was agreed to try separate sections within an article.
 - f) Article 6 - This will rely on info from the consultants. This issue is being worked on statewide and more information (in a white paper) will be forthcoming regarding recommendations as to how to proceed. Questions were generated:
 - i) What happens to current fund balances? Will everything just come together?
 - ii) What happens to maintenance reserve funds - what prevents them from being spent out before the merger? Should they all be given back to the voters before the merger?
 - iii) What happens with the constraints for voter approval required for spending of the W-D maintenance reserve funds?
 - g) Article 7 – Brigid and Michelle will draft some language.
 - i) Who owns the assets in the case of the two current union school districts - especially for Waterbury and Duxbury - if the unified union is dissolved and there is language that says the school buildings revert to the "towns".
 - ii) What does state statute language provide for these situations? The language from the Essex articles might be used.
 - h) Article 8 - This is also a valuation issue, just like Articles 6 and 7.
 - i) Article 9 - The issue of how big a board there should be is the first issue to consider. Suggested benefits of a larger board were: people needed for the committee work, advantages of having more than one person for each town. The thinking at the end of the discussion was for a larger (14 member approx) board.
- 6) **STUDY COMMITTEE ACTION - ADJOURNMENT** -The Study Committee was adjourned at 8:56 p.m. by motion of Christine Sullivan seconded by Gabe Gilman and passed by unanimous Study Committee vote.
 - 7) **EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR WWEC:** Garrett MacCurtain moved and Alex Thomsen seconded to go into executive session to discuss a matter of personnel contract with Brigid invited at 9:06 p.m. The motion passed unanimously. It was agreed to come out of executive session at 9:40 p.m. with no action taken.
 - 8) **WWEC ACTION - ADJOURNMENT** – Garrett MacCurtain moved and Rosemarie seconded to adjourn at 9:41 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Dale Smeltzer