

Washington West Supervisory Union Executive Committee
&
Act 46 Study Committee
Approved Minutes for January 27, 2016
Harwood Union High School Library

WWEC Board Members Present: Doug Mosle (Fayston), Rosemarie White (Harwood), Garrett MacCurtain (Harwood), Kate O'Neill (Moretown), Christine Sullivan (alternate for Waitsfield), Rob Rosen (Warren), Alex Thomsen (Waterbury-Duxbury), Jason Gibbs (Waterbury-Duxbury)

Act 46 Study Committee Members Present: Jill Ellis (Fayston), Rosemarie White (Harwood ex-officio), Garrett MacCurtain (Harwood ex-officio), Gabe Gilman (Moretown, arrived 5:47 p.m.), Christine Sullivan (Waitsfield), Rob Rosen (Warren), Alex Thomsen (W-D for Waterbury), Jason Gibbs (W-D for Waterbury), Sam Jackson (W-D for Duxbury, arrived at 6:27 p.m.)

Other Board Members Present: Alycia Biondo (Warren), Dale Smeltzer (Harwood)

WWSU Administrators: Brigid Nease, Michelle Baker

Consultants: Walter Nardelli

Other: Lisa Italiano, Tracy Brannstron (Valley Reporter), Channel 44 camera person

- 1) **Call to Order:** Christine Sullivan, vice-chair of the Study Committee, and Garrett MacCurtain, vice-chair of the WWEC, called the respective meetings to order at 5:42 p.m.
- 2) **Confirming Agenda:** The agenda was shifted to allow WWEC business to occur first.
- 3) **ACTION ITEMS:**
 - a) Approval of Minutes:
 - i) **STUDY COMMITTEE ACTION:** Rob Rosen moved to approve the minutes of January 13, 2016 as written. Alex Thomsen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
 - ii) **WWEC ACTION:** Rosemarie White moved to approve the minutes of December 17, 2015 as written. Christine Sullivan seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
 - b) **Approve the WWSU Board Warrants:** Alex Thomsen moved to approve Board Warrant #1107 dated 1/20/16 in the amount of \$324,994.05 as recommended by Rosemarie White. Kate O'Neill seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- 4) **Executive Committee Work**
 - a) **WWSU Fiscal Management State Auditor Annual Assurances:** Michelle Baker reviewed all items of the Financial Management Questionnaire for WWSU dated 1/27/16, for board member information. WWEC ACTION: Rob Rosen moved to authorize the vice-chair to sign as certification that the board has reviewed the Questionnaire. Rosemarie White seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- 5) **Adjournment of WWEC:** Rosemarie White moved to adjourn WWEC at 5:50 p.m. Rob Rosen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- 6) **Study Committee Work:**
 - a) **Act 46 Timeline - Where Do We Go From Here?** A PowerPoint was presented to summarize the work needed for this meeting and upcoming meetings before the vote anticipated for May 3. Brigid reported that she, Michelle and the two consultants had been working in the two days previous to prepare for this meeting.
 - b) **Reports from Consultants** - Brigid distributed copies of the report prepared by Walter Nardelli, titled "Questions from Jan 13 and Responses". Attached to this handout was a sheet from the VT AOE titled "Frequently Asked Questions, Reconsideration of Merger Votes". The handout was reviewed by Walter for the board members.
 - c) **Financial Information relating to existing Long Term Debt preliminary information regarding the proposed Warren Bond Project** - Michelle distributed a handout titled "WWSU Information for Act 46 Meeting" dated 1/27/16. It covered Warren's existing long term debt, its current impact and projected

impact if spread out throughout the SU, and then estimated possible long term debt associated with work that is still in the RFP stage using an example of a \$3 million bond for 20 or 30 years. It then covered the cost impacts of existing debt in Moretown and W-D being spread out over the SU, as well as the impact of doing the same with Warren's debt.

(Sam Jackson arrived at 6:27 p.m.)

Board members asked about the reasons for the Warren deficit, which Michelle noted is due to a number of factors - the building study, two employee related expenses, PreK, retirement packages. The next page in the handout was a summary of the results of the final budgets being put out to voters in all of the districts. Lastly, there was a summary of the values for Buildings, Contents and Site Value along with Long Term Debt, and a combination of the debt impacts specific to each district resulting from the redistribution of these costs over the SU.

Gabe then asked for board feedback on the data provided on the long-term debt impacts, plus Warren's projected upcoming bond costs. He suggested that it will be important to present clear information to the voters, and that Warren should limit their bond to urgent health and safety concerns to allay possible concerns from voters in other districts. Rob and Alycia pointed out that some of the required improvements are code violations; the RFP and reports detailing the problems are on the website. There were comments from other board members about how the information helps show the interaction of costs for ALL current debt in the districts besides just Warren, rather than the misunderstandings around the Warren debt impact that have started to come up by members of the public. Brigid pointed out that even if districts decide to vote against a merger this spring, it will happen anyway in 2019 and the debt will have to be taken over by everyone then anyway. Jason asked about the feasibility of refinancing the Warren bond if a merger happens. Kate suggested that a slightly later voting date might help have full information available for voters if the Warren bond vote is only a week before the proposed Act 46 vote. A slightly later Act 46 vote could have advantage in terms of timing around possible rescission petitions and summer vacation. Alex pointed out that the communication about this issue of the Warren bond - how it could be presented as information that has been considered and reviewed by the committee and recommended within a dollar cap, which might make the close timeline of the votes not as critical. There was continued discussion about language relating to closing schools.

Question: What does closing a school mean - Could changing the programs offered within a school building through consolidation be interpreted in any way as closing a school?

- d) **Town by Town Story Cards:** Brigid provided a handout titled "Act 46: A Town by Town Comparison of the Pros and Cons of Merged Governance with One Board", which is a first draft of the story cards for what a unified district would provide as a whole, and the pros and cons for each individual town. Feedback was provided as to content and formatting of the information for most effective presentation. Gabe suggested that committee members go back to their local boards and review their district's story card, plus come up with a frank assessment of the cons of merging (rather than the cons of not merging, as in the handout). He asked them to bring their ideas to the next meeting. There was consensus that the format will lead with the local story, then general impacts that will occur for all districts.
 - e) **Questions for legal counsel** – Brigid and Walter provided a slide with the current list, which was reviewed and added to during the discussion.
- 7) **Adjournment of Study Committee:** Alex Thomsen moved to adjourn the Study Committee meeting at 9:38 p.m. Rob Rosen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Dale Smeltzer