

TOWN OF LITCHFIELD
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
October 25, 2021

Temporary Regional Study Committee

- 1) Call to Order The Temporary Regional Study Committee meeting held in the Wamogo auditorium and via teleconference was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Venhorst.

Members present: Mr. Venhorst, Mr. Bergin, Mr. DeLayo, Mr. Davenport, Ms. Hunt, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Weik, Mr. Morosani, Ms. Stone, Mrs. Sideris, and Mr. Tracy. Also present: Mr. Leone, Superintendent.

- 2) Temporary Regional School Study Committee Process - Matt Venhorst, CSDE Consultant
Mr. Venhorst, from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), provided a brief overview of the role and process of a Temporary Regional Study Committee that can be defined in three parts.

Part 1 – Process. The Temporary Regional Study Committee is a legally empowered entity that studies the advisability to form a regional school district. The committee would look at process, finance, curriculum, culture, and community and reports on the issue. There are 8-9 items the report must contain and adhere to set requirements. The committee has two years to do its work, and if need, this can be extended up to four years.

Part 2 – Procedures and Timing. The committee prepares a report and submits the final report to the town(s) and the State Board of Education (SBOE). Upon receipt, the SBOE has within 30 days to vote up or down to accept the report. The SBOE is not looking to like or dislike the report, rather the SBOE determines if the report follows the State Statute. Assuming the report is approved by the SBOE, a referendum is held within 45-90 days post-approval. A public hearing must be held in each town before a referendum vote. Each town must hold its referendum vote on the same date, time and to continue forward with creating a new Regional School District, an affirmative vote is required in each town.

Next, a new Regional Board of Education is formed and will have two years to develop the roll-out plan and take over the responsibility of education of students.

Ms. Hunt questioned who governs each district while the new Board of Education is working toward the creation of the new district. Mr. Venhorst responded that the status quo would continue, and the current Boards of Education would continue the work of oversight.

Mr. Bergin inquired if a current Board of Education member can serve on both Boards of Education. Mr. Venhorst said he is not familiar with any regulation or statute prohibiting this.

Part 3 – Legal Consequences of Plan. Mr. Venhorst explained the report this committee produces now becomes the Charter for the new district. Once the district is formed, if the towns would like to make a significant change to the plan, for example, close a school, a change of this significance would need to be done so by referendum vote. Mr. Venhorst reinforced the importance of the details in the final plan.

3) Election of Officers

Prior to the Election of Officers, Mr. Venhorst spoke to the three levels of officers who could be nominated and lead this committee. They are Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer, who shall be bonded as required by law. Mr. Venhorst went on to say the committee could elect Co-Chairs or Vice Chairs.

Mr. Leone commented in an order to show good faith, the committee may want to nominate Co-Chairs; one from the Town of Litchfield and the other from Regional School District No. 6.

Mrs. Sideris made a motion to nominate Mr. Tracy, from the town of Goshen as a Co-Chair. Mr. Bergin seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Ms. Hunt made a motion to nominate Mr. Davenport, from the town of Litchfield. Mrs. Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Morosani made a motion to nominate Ms. Hunt as Secretary. Mr. Bergin seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Mrs. Weik made a motion to nominate Mr. Bergin as Treasurer. Mrs. Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

4) Discussion Session (Including questions from Committee)

Mr. Leone opened the Discussion Session commenting there are some areas in the previous work that need to be addressed and added. First is a one-year budget that needs to extend out to a five-year budget. Second is to have a combined (Litchfield and Region 6) longer enrollment study. The third is to look at the reconciliation of the debt because that has changed since the last work conducted. More information has been received which will put the debt between Litchfield and Region 6 at about \$100k difference two years from this coming June 2022. To clarify, by June of 2024 there will be about a \$100k difference in debt between Litchfield and Region 6, not several million as previously reported. The fourth piece is to look at other items not included in the original work. For example, Litchfield's contribution to capital as more savings were not gleaned in the current report and the second piece is what to do with the solar projects. The last piece is the valuation of buildings. It was recommended the Boards go out and get new valuations of the buildings.

Mr. Leone would like direction from the group if they would like the district to pick up this work and go forward. The only piece of this work that requires expense at this point is the new valuations of the buildings.

Mr. Morosani questioned, "For the extended enrollment study, would you have each district fund the extended enrollment work?" Mr. Leone replied this work is already underway as a new enrollment study was needed. Litchfield is funding its enrollment work and Region 6 is funding its enrollment work. Mr. Leone will have a draft of the new enrollment reports no later than November 10th.

Mr. Morosani also commented that given there needs to be a longer-term financial plan the committee should consider the level of inflation and impact on budgets. Mr. Leone responded that the individual school budgets have been shared with a 2% increase. Mr. Leone could show increases of 3%, 4%, 5% increases to the individual school budgets and the larger budget in a relatively short period of time.

Mr. Davenport inquired about the valuation of buildings, and would Region 6 cover the cost of appraisals for their buildings and Litchfield Board of Education cover the costs for the Litchfield buildings? Mr. Leone commented he would need to ask the Boards of Education for approval. Mr. Leone went on to say it would be cheaper if both districts used one vendor for the valuations and split the costs. Mr. Morosani added it would be important to use one firm for consistency of work on valuations.

Ms. Hunt questioned how would the district divvy up the payments. Is splitting the payment in half appropriate or does it make sense to go by student enrollment? Mr. Leone responded that when you are looking at the square footage of the building across both districts, they are relatively the same. Mr. Leone said he would leave this decision up to the Boards but believes splitting payments in half for valuation expenses makes sense.

Mr. Venhorst added the statute says committee expenses are covered by the towns based on proportion to student enrollment.

The committee members agreed and requested Mr. Leone, by way of the districts, take on the work of the five items identified earlier in the meeting discussion. Mr. Leone will request approval for the building valuation expenses at the next Boards of Education meetings. Litchfield's next meeting is November 4, 2021, and Regional School District No. 6 next Board of Education meeting is November 15, 2021.

Mr. Davenport asked Mr. Leone to provide background information on the solar projects. Mr. Leone explained Region 6 owns the solar fields through Power Purchasing Agreements. The town of Litchfield owns the solar fields in Litchfield. The town of Litchfield receives credits from the benefits of the solar fields but also took over the electrical expenses of \$194k a year. In the event this moves forward, solar would need to be addressed with the town of Litchfield. Mr. Leone negotiated the contracts for solar with Region 6. He is not familiar with the contract of Litchfield as this is a town contract and not a school district contract. Mrs. Sideris inquired about how the solar contracts would be transferred if Region 20 moved forward. Mr. Leone indicated via an assignment clause.

5) Public Participation/Comment

Before the committee opened the floor to Public Participation/Comment Mr. Leone read an email in its entirety from Kara Cruoglio, town of Litchfield, relating to the Board of Education voting structure. Ms. Cruoglio commented that while the original Workgroup ensured no single town could carry every decision with their student-population-weighted vote, she has a concern to balance the other side that no individual town could be completely left out of an important decision and in her email message offered several different options to achieve a better balance.

Mr. Leone offered to put forth different scenarios to address Ms. Cruoglio's concerns.

Mr. Morosani then asked Mr. Venhorst to clarify the statute on the makeup of the Boards of Education. Mr. Venhorst said the committee basically can devise its own approach, but the makeup of the new board does need to be consistent with the federal "one person, one vote" principle. Mr. Venhorst went on to say the CSDE analyzes the centennial census to determine if there are any population changes or shifts that need to be addressed with the Regional School Districts' Boards of Education. Discussion ensued. It was recommended the committee review the 2020 Census Data at its next meeting before addressing the Board of Education voting structure.

Mr. Jeff Zullo, from the town of Litchfield, requested the committee review and consider, Plumb Hill Playing Fields and its relationship with the Town of Litchfield when doing future evaluation work on regionalization. Plumb Hill Playing Fields, Inc., a non-profit organization athletic facility, maintains and upkeeps the fields, track, and athletic equipment. The Town of Litchfield owns the land and pays a lease fee to Plumb Hill Playing Fields that helps fund maintenance of the facility. The Plumb Hill Fields are used by Litchfield Public Schools for athletic events as well as by other organizations within the community.

Mr. Leone commented he has been in contact with Plumb Hill Playing Fields and requested a copy of the lease agreement with the Town of Litchfield and will provide an initial update at the next committee meeting.

Mr. Pat McGowan, from the Town of Morris, inquired about the \$100k debt Mr. Leone spoke to earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Leone explained earlier in the meeting he spoke to the Debt of the Town of Litchfield and Regional School District No. 6 that was reported in the Workgroup on Collaboration Report given in June 2021. Since the original report, payment has been made toward the debt. If the referendum passes in all towns and moves forward creating Region 20, the gap in debt between the Town of Litchfield and Regional School District No. 6 would be approximately \$100k. The original report showed a much larger number based on the information provided at that time.

6) Discussion Session (including questions from Committee)

There was no further discussion items post Public Participation/Comment.

7) Next Meeting Date

The next committee meeting will be held on Monday, November 1 at 6:00 p.m. in Litchfield. The meeting location will be communicated to the committee mid-week.

8) Adjournment There being no further business to come before this committee, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Escobar
Secretary, pro-tem