

TEMPORARY REGIONAL SCHOOL STUDY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
January 19, 2022

- 1) Call to Order The Temporary Regional School District Study Committee meeting held at the Warren School and via teleconference was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Stephen Tracy.

Members present: Stephen Tracy, Co-Chairman, William Davenport, Co-Chairman, Margaret Hunt, Secretary, Michael Bergin, Treasurer, Robert DeLayo, Denise Weik, John Morosani, Billie Jean Sideris, and Lynn Stone. Also present: Christopher Leone, Superintendent, and Matthew Venhorst, CSDE.

- 2) Approval of Minutes (from December 15, 2021)

Ms. Hunt made a motion to approve the minutes from December 15, 2021. Mrs. Sideris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- 3) Public Comment

Jim Stedronsky of Litchfield, who identified himself as a senior member of the Board of Finance in Litchfield, commended the two Boards of Education, the administration, and the Superintendent for what has been achieved through cooperative efforts. Mr. Stedronsky went onto say it has been extraordinary and impressive to see the merging administrations, the districts saving money, all during a pandemic. Since it appears we are at the point of whether to move forward to consolidate, perhaps consideration could be on whether to intensify efforts on cooperation along the lines of extra curricular activities, perhaps STEM and foreign language classes, versus consolidation.

Speaking as a member of the Board of Finance, Mr. Stedronsky hopes the committee brings forth why it is economically beneficial because at the present time it is hard to speak to the reasons to consolidate. Litchfield will have only three members on the Board of Education versus nine members, and while he understands voting will be weighted, it is very, very hard to sell to the taxpayers of Litchfield. Mr. Stedronsky would like to see two sheets of papers where one outlines the operational savings for Litchfield and the other outlines the capital savings for Litchfield. Mr. Stedronsky said he has seen the numbers and it doesn't look like it is worthwhile for Litchfield to consolidate though he does hope further collaboration efforts will continue.

Mr. Leone responded that he had heard Mr. Stedronsky's concern at the Board of Selectman meeting the evening prior on January 18, 2022. Mr. Leone has sent an invitation to Denise Raap, the Board of Selectman, and the Board of Finance to attend a meeting whereby Mr. Leone can address the concerns that were raised and he will provide a clear explanation to their concerns.

Julia Hrica of Litchfield wanted to reiterate comments she has made at past meetings. The point of consolidation has nothing to do with adult power. The point of consolidation is to benefit the children. And in order to consolidate, all four towns need to be on an equal playing field and need equal members on the new board of education to share power. History has shown cooperative efforts are difficult, such as transporting high school students to and from the two

schools. The past effort of the original Workgroup on Collaboration demonstrates there are far greater academic and extra curricular benefits and opportunities for the children under consolidation. Ms. Hrica went onto say as a taxpayer, if she saves a little money, that is awesome but the point of this work is for the children and not adult power. There will be savings, but it is really about the children.

4) Superintendent Update

a. Governance Language

Mr. Leone referred the committee members to the working document previously shared and directed them to view page 9 for the most up to date Governance Language. Mr. Leone commented this is the third or fourth version. Mr. Leone's last update from Fred Dorsey, attorney for Litchfield, is that the suggested revisions have been shared with the State (Matt Venhorst) and they are awaiting response. The Action Item for Language on Governance is not needed at this meeting as this item is still pending. Mr. Leone read aloud the highlights of this language and addressed questions from the committee members. Once Attorneys Dorsey (Litchfield) and Chinni (Region 6) hear back formally from the state, the proposed Governance Language will then be sent to the committee.

b. Appraisals & Assessment Language

Mr. Leone commented that he has received the seven building appraisal reports and will send them to committee members electronically given the size of the documents.

The committee went on to review the Appraisals & Assessment Language found on page 7 of the working document. Mr. Leone noted that there are problems with equalizing the money value of the school buildings. He added that an empty school building has no value, and in fact, if the building use is changed from being a school, any federal bonding money must be paid back. Mr. Morosani asked if there might be forgiveness of paying back federal bonding if the loss of use results from regionalizing. Mr. Leone responded that it is not likely but would require special legislation. Mr. Morosani noted that the "concept" school underutilizes classrooms and Mr. Leone said they are underutilized now. Mr. Leone said that Mr. Venhorst would work with Attorneys Dorsey and Chinni on State Statue language as it relates to capital contribution methodology of the regional school district. Mr. Leone will create two sheets per district to address Mr. Stedronsky's request of addressing operational savings and capital savings of consolidation.

5) Action Items

a. Language on Governance

b. Language on Building and Land

Mrs. Sideris made a motion to table Action Items 5) a. and 5) b. for the next meeting.

Ms. Hunt seconded the motion to table Action Items 5) a. and 5) b. for the next meeting.

The motion passed unanimously.

6) Public Comment

Julia Hrica, Litchfield commented about the concern raised at the Litchfield Selectmen's meeting on underutilization of schools if there is a consolidation. She questioned that

wouldn't the underutilization of schools issue still exists if there is no consolidation.

7) Next Steps

Homework for committee members is to read through the working document and provide any feedback and suggestions to Mr. Leone by January 26, 2022. Mr. Leone will incorporate all suggestions into the working document. Mr. Leone further requested committee members provide any additions or changes to the Appendix by January 26, 2022. Co-Chairs Stephen Tracey and Bill Davenport will write the cover letter of the report. Finally, Mr. Leone encouraged committee members to bring a friend to the next public meeting in order to help engage the public in the process.

8) Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on February 9, 2022, at Litchfield Intermediate School auditorium at 6:00 p.m.

- 9) Adjournment There being no further business to come before this committee, **Ms. Hunt made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Morosani seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.** The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Escobar
Secretary, pro-tem