

REGULAR MEETING OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

Library, Amherst Regional High School

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair

Kathleen Traphagen, Vice-Chair (arrived at 6:18)

Stephen Sullivan

Katherine Appy

Vira Douangmany Cage

Phoebe Hazzard

Kip Fonsh

Rick Hood

Stephen Sullivan

Dan Robb

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent

Sean Mangano, Finance Director

Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal

Elaine Puleo, Shutesbury RAWG Member

Michael DeChiara, Shutesbury RAWG Member

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Public and Press

A. Welcome

6:04 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Ms. Geryk called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.; however, reorganization was delayed in the hopes that Ms. Traphagen would arrive so the full committee can vote. Mr. Fonsh called for a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the Charleston, South Carolina shooting, which was observed by all.

B. Approve Minutes

Ms. Appy moved to approve the minutes of June 9, 2015. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Announcements and Public Comments

6:07 PM

Marylou Theilman, Amherst Town Meeting member, noted that the governance change in the proposed Regional Agreement is in conflict with the Amherst Town Charter, which would mean that the request to amend the Regional Agreement would be subject to a town-wide election, not just a Town Meeting vote.

Since Ms. Traphagen had not yet arrived, Mr. Baptiste made a motion to move reorganization to the end of the agenda. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Robb noted that he believes it is best to wait until the end of the meeting. Mr. Fonsh agreed, noting that he wants to be sure; however, that reorganization happens tonight. At that time, the motion was unanimously approved, and Ms. Geryk turned the meeting over to Mr. Baptiste to Chair.

3. New and Continuing Business

6:16 PM

A. Regionalization Discussion Wrap-Up

DOCUMENT: RAWG Report to the Regional School Committee, dated January 2015

Mr. Baptiste opened the floor for discussion. Ms. Appy moved to accept the recommendations of the RAWG as presented. Mr. Fonsh seconded and discussion followed, with Mr. Baptiste calling for amendments to the motion as part of the discussion. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if an amendment to the governance structure is necessary based on Ms. Theilman's comments. Ms. Appy clarified that RAWG was under the impression that the vote is a Town Meeting vote in Amherst; however, the point would be clarified with the Town Counsel prior to moving forward. Mr. Hood moved to amend the proposed regional agreement on page five, paragraph one by reducing the number of Amherst representatives from seven to five and the number of representatives from the smaller towns from two to one. Additionally, he would change the agreement to provide representatives of towns in the full region with one vote and representatives from towns in the 7-12 region with only a half-vote. Ms. Traphagen seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Robb asked how the number of votes to close a school would be impacted by Mr. Hood's amendment. Mr. Hood noted that it would need to be included as an amendment, but he would recommend changing it from a vote of eight to a vote of 5 or of 2/3. Mr. Appy noted that she believes this change would cause regionalization to fail due to opposition to a reduction in representation of the smaller towns. Mr. Fonsh noted that the Leverett School Committee and the Leverett RAWG members voted unanimously to oppose

any amendment to reduce the number of representatives in the proposed Regional Agreement. Ms. Hazzard noted that there is a district in Massachusetts with a 22 member board. Mr. Baptiste said that this board configuration was seen by the RAWG as a benefit to Amherst as well as the smaller towns. He noted that 60% of the Pelham town budget goes to the schools, which makes this a significant issue. Mr. Robb agreed, noting that having only one person responsible for representing the whole town is asking too much. Ms. Traphagen noted that the whole point of having a seat on the school committee is to talk to members of your town to guide how you vote. She said that she will not vote to approve Mr. Hood's motion because she can see how passionately the smaller towns feel about having two representatives; however, she believes that a 13 member board will not be functional. Mr. Baptiste asked for a vote on Mr. Hood's motion, and it failed with a vote of one (Hood) to eight. Ms. Traphagen moved to change the School Committee terms from four years, as included in the proposed regional agreement, to two years. Mr. Robb seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Appy noted that the RAWG discussed having both two and four year terms so people could run for either. Mr. Hood noted that having to run a campaign every two years would be difficult. Mr. Robb noted that having two year terms seems like a good compromise. Ms. Puleo, RAWG member, noted that having two year terms would mean that Amherst would potentially have new members coming on the board every year. After further discussion, Ms. Traphagen's motion was defeated by a vote of three in favor (Hood, Robb and Traphagen) to five, with Ms. Douangmany Cage abstaining. Ms. Hazzard made a motion to have staggered two and four year terms. After brief discussion, the motion was approved by a vote of seven to two (Fonsh and Douangmany Cage). Mr. Robb asked members of the RAWG to speak to how they developed the language around how a school would be closed and how the school closure process would be codified. Ms. Appy, Mr. Baptiste, Mr. DeChiara and Mr. Fonsh provided background for the committee. Mr. Robb made a motion to change the number of votes required to close a school from eight to nine. There was no second to the motion. Mr. Hood asked for clarification of why RAWG decided to give members of only the 7-12 region a full vote on elementary issues. Ms. Appy explained that RAWG believed that it would be very difficult to separate out elementary versus secondary issues in a full Region. Mr. Robb spoke to the reason he wanted to change the requirement to close a school to nine votes. He said that since the Town of Amherst has the vast majority of the voting power it seems right to raise the bar for closing a beloved school. Ms. Traphagen made a motion that representatives in towns that are members of only the 7-12 region will not have a vote on issues that are clearly elementary only. There was no second to the motion. Ms. Hazzard asked if it may be more likely that regionalization will pass in the smaller towns if the number of votes to close a school is increased. Mr. Fonsh noted that, as a member of one of those towns, they are willing to accept the number of votes as included in the agreement draft. Ms. Traphagen asked why the vote to appoint a superintendent is changed to a 2/3 vote in the agreement. Ms. Puleo explained that it will ensure that the smaller towns have some say in which person is hired as superintendent. Discussion followed regarding whether the vote tonight is simply to approve the RAWG recommendation, with or without amendments, or to send it to the attorney to be developed into a legal Regional Agreement draft. Mr. Hood moved to amend the original motion to include "and to forward the amended document to the attorney for development into a Regional Agreement." Ms. Appy seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Theilman noted that she takes exception to the assertion that the public knows about this document since it was not on the Town Meeting website. She stated that she believes having a draft Regional Agreement would actually be easier for the public to discuss and comment on, but encouraged the Amherst members to ensure that the draft is posted on the Town Meeting site. Mr. Fonsh agreed that it is vital to develop a timeline that will bring members of all of the four towns into the conversation. Mr. Baptiste asked for a vote on Mr. Hood's motion and it was approved seven to two (Baptiste and Sullivan). Janet McGowen, attorney and community member, said she would wait to send the draft to the attorney since it may be a waste of funds if the town feedback is negative. She encouraged the committee to have a strong, real process of outreach for public input if this is approved to move forward. After further discussion, Ms. Traphagen moved to call the question on Ms. Appy's original motion, as amended, and Mr. Hood seconded. The motion to end discussion was approved by a vote of six to three (Robb, Baptiste and Douangmany Cage). At that time, Ms. Appy's original motion, as amended by Ms. Hazzard and Mr. Hood, was approved by a vote of five to four (Robb, Sullivan, Douangmany Cage and Baptiste). Mr. Fonsh moved that the School Committee charge the Chair to 1) discuss the proposal with legal counsel between June and August in order to complete a revised Regional Agreement draft by September 1; 2) in consultation with the Superintendent, construct a schedule for the Regional School Committee to review the legal draft from September to December; 3) consult with representatives from all four towns to conduct public forums between September and December; 4) in consultation with the Superintendent, schedule Regional Agreement agenda items with the Regional School Committee between January and February; and 5) if approved

by majority vote of the Regional School Committee, charge the Chair with submitting to all four Town Meetings no later than March 1 a revised Regional Agreement. Ms. Appy seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Traphagen noted that she believes the committee needs to hire someone to help them with the public outreach around regionalization so that all forms of input are taken, not just public forums. Mr. Hood called the question on Mr. Fonsh's motion, and Ms. Traphagen seconded. The motion to end discussion was approved unanimously. Mr. Fonsh's motion was then approved five to three (Sullivan, Robb and Baptiste) with Ms. Douangmany Cage abstaining. Mr. Sullivan noted for the record that as the Regional representative, with the full support of the Shutesbury School Committee, they would like to see the agreement tabled until a future time.

At Ms. Douangmany Cage's request, Ms. Geryk reported on an incident at Wildwood with regard to bus transportation. Ms. Geryk reported that two weeks ago the police were called to the school at the request of one of the bus drivers since the driver was concerned about driving due to student behavior. She explained that, while the police have to be called in such situations if the bus is already on the roads driving in order to ensure student safety, the correct procedure when the bus is still on school grounds would have been to access assistance from the school administration. In the case in question, the police came to the school but did not enter the bus or address the students. Mr. Yaffe addressed the students instead. Ms. Geryk noted that she will be meeting with the bus company and our transportation department over the summer to clarify bus safety protocols and procedures.

B. Summer Work—Later Start Time

Mr. Baptiste shared some topics he would like the School Committee to consider as summer homework to find information to assist in substantive discussions at future meetings: high stakes testing, how other school districts are dealing with declining enrollments, later start time, and the funding model for school choice and charter schools. Ms. Douagnmany Cage noted that she would like to see the School Committee members attend the MASC trainings, with the district covering the expenses for the members. Ms. Geyrk noted that the district does have funding to assist with those expenses, there just were not any members who could attend this year.

C. Bond Vote Update

This item was tabled.

D. Accept Gifts (Amherst only)

DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Mary Wallace, Treasurer, dated June 11, 2015

Ms. Appy called the Amherst School Committee to order at 8:10 p.m. Ms. Traphagen moved to accept \$100 from Nicole Singer for the Fort River Art program and \$609.60. from Stop and Shop for Fort River Principal's discretion. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

E. Reorganize

At 8:10 p.m., Mr. Baptiste noted that last year the School Committee chose to have an interim chair until the summer retreat so he wanted to offer that up as a possibility. Ms. Douangmany Cage moved to suspend School Committee policy and postpone reorganization until the retreat later in the summer. Ms. Traphagen seconded and discussion followed. After discussion, Ms. Douangmany Cage called the question. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion to end discussion was approved unanimously. Ms. Douangmany Cage's motion failed with a vote of four opposed, three in favor (Douagnmany Cage, Sullivan and Robb) and two abstaining (Hood and Hazzard). Mr. Baptiste then turned the meeting over to Superintendent Geryk for reorganization. Mr. Fonsh nominated Ms. Appy for Chair. Ms. Douagnmany Cage nominated Mr. Baptiste. Mr. Baptiste was appointed as Chair by roll call vote as follows:

Sullivan—Baptiste
Hood—Baptiste
Douangmany Cage—Baptiste
Fonsh—Appy
Robb—Baptiste
Baptiste—Baptiste
Traphagen—Baptiste
Appy—Appy

Hazzard—Baptiste

Mr. Baptiste asked for nominations for Vice-Chair. Ms. Douangmany Cage nominated Ms. Traphagen as Vice-Chair. Mr. Fonsh nominated Ms. Appy. Ms. Traphagen was appointed as Chair by roll-call vote as follows:

Sullivan—Traphagen

Hood—Traphagen

Douangmany Cage—Traphagen

Fonsh—Appy

Robb—Traphagen

Baptiste—Traphagen

Traphagen—Traphagen

Appy—Appy

Hazzard—Traphagen

It was agreed unanimously that Ms. Westmoreland will continue to serve as secretary for the Regional School Committee.

Discussion followed regarding subcommittee assignments. Members maintained their current assignments with the following additions to the subcommittees:

Douangmany Cage—Budget Subcommittee, SETF, Amherst Collaborative Representative

Hazzard—Policy Subcommittee

Fonsh—Negotiations Subcommittee, Regional Collaborative Representative

4. School Committee Planning

8:24 PM

Mr. Hood noted that on August 14 he will engage in mediation with the NAACP to hear their issues and to discuss their goals to see if we can reach consensus.

5. Adjournment

8:30 PM

Ms. Traphagen moved to adjourn at 8:30 p.m. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Hood moved to adjourn the Amherst School Committee meeting at 8:30 p.m. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland