

HEART Committee Minutes 12/19/2018

Members present: Julia Blyth, Alan Genovese, Cheryl George, Michele Giarusso, Bob Keir, Jess Marshall, Sue O'Reilly-McRae, Jean Page, Shalee Pratt, Ginger Robinson, Tom Wyatt

Members not present: Tony Matteo

Others attending: Recorder reporter Max Marcus, and three concerned citizens

Meeting to order 6:38 p.m.

Minutes of 11/7, 11/19, and 12/5/18 : correction of Sue O'Reilly-McRae's name. Motion to accept with correction, made by Bob, seconded by Julia, motion passed.

Review of 12/5 Public Forum

The committee acknowledged the summary written by our facilitator Cate Woolner.

Alan stated : several good points were made. In regards to school closing(s), it is valid to wonder about the #'s. Are the projected savings really that, or a shifting of costs over to the town(s)? Next steps should be more research, by the central office. It should be clear that savings are NOT estimated to be \$600K, more like \$200K. This budget change would equal setting a new baseline, not saving that same \$200K every year.

Julia questioned what is the status of the Gill Montague study in terms of regionalization, as that will need serious consideration in our goal of sustainability.

Sue updated us re: Gill Montague. A forum is to be held by the civic leaders and GM study group, in January, to review their possible regionalization ideas, and the finance officials are currently meeting to explore transportation/bus routes and potential combinations for efficiency and savings.

Alan stated there are benefits to be had by combining the efficiencies of each administrative office in the regionalizing of superintendencies. He feels that the educational impact of school closure needs to be strongly considered and that the district needs to promote the advantages which are possible versus allowing the focus to be on the negatives. Examples include the benefits of more social interactions for students, and the potential for more extensive curriculum offerings.

New Items

Michele questioned what HEART's role is in regards to the Warwick Community letter questioning several points in the financial study. Tom reiterated that what Warwick wants are validated budgetary #'s. Ginger stated that it is up to the school committee AND each town to determine what is needed at each school.

Having attended the budget subcommittee meeting earlier today, Michele reported that the district auditors did verify the financial numbers that Tanya had calculated.

Cheryl expressed concern that we keep the stated purpose of the HEART committee in mind, not just a reworking of the district agreement, but working toward the goal of sustainability. She feels that although none of us want to close a school, the situation now dictates that it needs to happen.

In going forward, Julia mentioned that our next step is the district agreement, which is already a work in progress. Bob concurs that this is our immediate mission, and when achieved we will present an updated regional agreement in accord with the laws of the state. Tom noted that as a committee we need to be caretakers of the four areas of change with which MARS is charged: district agreement update, school closing analysis, models of administrative structure, and analysis of school choice impact.

Sue informed the committee that the district is working on energy efficiencies, that the state acknowledges the escalating costs of energy. She wants the four towns to each consider their own sustainability and participate in formulating steps to move toward it, as opposed to merely stating that

absolutely no increase in the budget will be considered. In terms of the possibility of school closure(s) and the questioning of the study's cost figures, currently MARS is working with the superintendent, financial director, and principals to fine tune the numbers.

Jess brought up that we need to keep people informed, sharing information with the intent of transparency, so that we can provide a bridge of information between the HEART committee and school committee. Our intent is to provide data and input to assist the decision making of the SC.

Cheryl is maintaining our Facebook page and had no updates at this time.

Michele mentioned that we will schedule a public meeting with a facilitator when the district agreement has been reworked.

Upcoming public meetings mentioned include: next HEART mtg 1 / 2 /19, Pearl Rhodes forum 1 /3, a "Fund our Future" event 1 /7 at Mahar Regional, and school committee 1 /10.

Motion to adjourn made by Bob, seconded by Ginger, passed. Mtg adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Next HEART committee meeting 1 / 2 /19 at Nfld Town Hall, 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Page