

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17
BOARD OF EDUCATION - EDUCATION SESSION
February 26, 2019

A meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on February 26, 2019 in the Haddam-Killingworth Middle School Cafeteria. Board of Education Chair, Joanne Nesti, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Members Present: Brenda Buzzi, Kathleen Zandi, Gerry Matthews, Eileen Blewett, Peter Sonski, Sue Williams, Joel D'Angelo, Maura Wallin, Eric Couture, Suzanne Sack, and Joanne Nesti

Members Absent: None.

Also Present: Superintendent of Schools, Howard Thiery, Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Holly Hageman, Berchem & Moses, PC, Attorney Floyd Dugas, and Board Clerk, Jamie Sciascia

Visitors: Approximately 125

Call to Order/Opening of Meeting: Board of Education Chair, Joanne Nesti, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment:

Ross Hanson of Haddam addressed the Board. He opened his comments by asking the Board for a motion to extend public comment. He spoke about how he is an educator for quite some time, and would like to Board to reconsider the current path and process the Board is taking with regard to the HES closure and sale. He also asked the Board for a motion to give the Swan Hill parcel back to the Town of Haddam.

Betty Devlin of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about how she has been a resident of Higganum for 25 years, and all three of her children went through HES. She also thanked the Board for their hard work. She further spoke about how Community members are upset with the closure, and feels that business owners and homeowners will be affected by this decision. She briefly spoke about how enrollment numbers fluctuate each year and asked to put a pause to the closure of HES.

Town of Haddam Selectwoman, Melissa Schlag, addressed the Board. She spoke about the many residents being upset with the current process. She addressed the Board of Selectmen's meeting and how there were 4 motions brought to the table. She stated that the BOS asked that the Board to pause for one year, that the HES building should be kept open as a school, the Right of First Refusal. She read the Right of First Refusal from 1972 to the Board and Community members that were in attendance. She expressed her and the Community members displeasure that the RFP was not made a public document and feels that it is a public document already. She spoke about the \$1Million in savings from closing HES and said it is not enough, and asked the Board to hold off for a year and reconsider the decision of closure. Lastly, Selectwoman Schlag asked for the Board to extend Public Comment to let the Community members speak.

Joe Rizzo of Higganum addressed the Board. He spoke about RAK Reality proposal and believes that it is too low, specifically, 15% of the HES property assessment value and stated that the building belongs to the Community. Joe spoke on the number of units in the proposal versus Rossi's units being put in right next door, the Zoning approval, building permits, and Higganum Market being sold. He asked the Board to pause the HES closure for a year and give the town the First Right of Refusal.

Jeff Sturges of Haddam addressed the Board. He spoke about how he feels that the Board had a lot of pressure to close HES to save some money and it is roughly 2% savings over the course of the budget. He addressed the Capital Fund, and feels that the Board should stop the process and start over again.

*Brenda Buzzi **MOVED** and Maura Williams **SECONDED** a motion to extend Public Comment for approximately 20 Minutes.*

Motion passed 9-2-0 by the following votes:

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| Suzanne Sack | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> | Joel D'Angelo | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Peter Sonski | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> | Eileen Blewett | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maura Wallin | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> | Brenda Buzzi | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eric Couture | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> | Gerry Matthews | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sue Williams | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> | Kathleen Zandi | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | | Joanne Nesti | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | A <input type="checkbox"/> |

Public Comment:

Katie Packtor of Higganum addressed the Board. She thanked the Board for extending Public Comment. She spoke about how the Board needs to pause the HES closure and reconsider its decision. She also feels that the Board should provide more detailed information to the Community. She spoke about the Bus contract being up next year, and the bills that are at the State level regarding school regionalization. She spoke briefly about the Town of Old Saybrook reversing its decision and feels that this Board can be more creative.

Bob Wallin of Higganum addressed the Board. He asked the Board the question if it makes any difference in their decision to close HES with having the Community Members in attendance asking questions and raising their concerns.

Jennifer Favalora of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about Scenario A and believed that the Board was 32 numbers off. She questioned using the 2010 students, speech only and outplaced students. She further addressed why KES has 210 students, and is concerned with the utilization of District resources when you have a school at 39% capacity. Jennifer stated that KES would have more open classrooms and HKIS, Burr and the Middle School would be at max capacity.

Lizz Bazazi of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about how she has lived her for 23 years and she feels that it is critical that HES remains open. She read key points in some articles to the Board on how developing affects school board strategies. Some examples are to know your data for your search, pull data from parents, students and staff and business owners, share data well before school closure is an option, take the Community along with you, share all information to limit rumors and misinformation, brainstorming sessions and hold Community meetings, allow the Community to have a voice in the plan if school closure is necessary, inform and listen to the Community and build a relationship with them to build support. She spoke about how she first got wind of closure after it was already made a motion from the Board, the meetings were held in certain spaces that community members had a hard time seeing and hearing the meeting.

Jennifer Petrillo of Haddam addressed the Board. She spoke about how no one wants HES to close, and how there is a petition with approximately 1500 signers stating same. She also spoke on the school budget,

the Community wasn't given enough time about the Board's decision to close the school and feels that the center will keep deteriorating.

Board Liaison Reports:

A. Curriculum Council

No Report.

A. Curriculum Subcommittee

Kathleen Zandi updated the Board. She said the Committee met last night, and spoke about HKHS blended learning, piloting two courses, and Principal Donna Hayward will come back to give an update regarding same to the Board. Further, Kathy addressed the HKHS adding a Calculus BC course which the Committee approved and stated that the AB/BC courses will use the same book. Also, spoke about the Freshman Health half course and the second step health program between K-4 which the Committee already approved.

Old Business:

A. High School Energy and Facilities Upgrade

a) Report from Public Building Committee

No Report.

B. Strategic Capital Planning Committee Report

Suzanne Sack updated the Board. She stated that the Committee met this afternoon, and spoke about District Restructuring Staffing implications, and would be finalizing this in the next couple weeks as individuals are identified. She further spoke about how in the months of March, April and May there would be planned activities, and Dr. Hageman would be making a presentation of same. Suzanne further spoke about the receiving a proposal of their RFP, and the Committee was comfortable with making it public. Lastly, she briefly addressed the 1972 Right to First Refusal for the Town of Haddam.

New Business:

A. Blue Ribbon Signage for the Haddam-Killingworth High School

Superintendent Thiery updated the Board. He spoke about the HKHS winning the Blue Ribbon of Excellence for High Achievement and asked the Board to review two signs for display at the High School roughly around \$4,700 for both signs and installation. Principal Donna Hayward will come to one of the Board meetings to speak further on this achievement and Vice Chair, Suzanne Sack congratulated all administrators, staff and students for this huge accomplishment.

B. Discussion of Process to Consider Proposal for HES Property*

Board Chair, Nesti, updated the Board. She spoke about how the Board made a motion a year ago to move forward with the District restructuring while sustaining excellence. The SCPC reviewed declining enrollment, and diminished State support and also held many Community input sessions. Board Chair, Nesti, addressed the future use of HES, and having received one proposal for the building and grounds. The proposal will be posted and then a discussion with Town Leaders will follow.

*Suzanne Sack **MOVED** and Gerry Matthews **SECONDED** a motion to make available to the public the RFP via the RSD17 website link.*

Motion passed unanimously 11-0-0 by the following votes:

Suzanne Sack YES NO A
 Peter Sonski YES NO A
 Maura Wallin YES NO A
 Eric Couture YES NO A
 Sue Williams YES NO A

Joel D'Angelo YES NO A
 Eileen Blewett YES NO A
 Brenda Buzzi YES NO A
 Gerry Matthews YES NO A
 Kathleen Zandi YES NO A
 Joanne Nesti YES NO A

Board Chair, Nesti, spoke on the RFP criteria for assessing the proposal and what the next steps should be.

Board Member, Brenda Buzzi, addressed a letter from an employee of RSD17 who worked from 2010-2017; and spoke about how she feels that this has been a long standing plan to close HES which lacks transparency and honesty. Further, she stated that it would be best to keep HES operating as a school in Higganum Center since there is no professional data to close HES. Also, she spoke about low proposal offer for the school and waiting a year to see what happens on the State level etc. Spoke on Haddam's First Right of Refusal, the letter from First Selectwoman for the Town of Haddam, Lizz Milardo, dated February 15th, and the motions made at the BOS meeting. Brenda briefly went over losing Swan Hill, and the minimal cost savings the Town will see from the closing HES.

Board Members had discussions about the SCPC working with Town Leaders and making a meeting to go over the RAK proposal a full Board meeting where the public can listen and speak on it.

*Brenda Buzzi **MOVED** and Maura Wallin **SECONDED** a motion to add to the Agenda, the discussion of HES Closure and Sale.*

Motion passed 7-4-0 by the following votes:

Suzanne Sack YES NO A
 Peter Sonski YES NO A
 Maura Wallin YES NO A
 Eric Couture YES NO A
 Sue Williams YES NO A

Joel D'Angelo YES NO A
 Eileen Blewett YES NO A
 Brenda Buzzi YES NO A
 Gerry Matthews YES NO A
 Kathleen Zandi YES NO A
 Joanne Nesti YES NO A

*Brenda Buzzi **MOVED** and Maura Wallin **SECONDED** a motion to halt the closure of HES for the 2019-2020 School Year.*

Attorney Floyd Dugas briefly spoke about following the process in order to rescind or amend the original motion to close HES under Robert Rules of Order.

*Motion **WITHDRAWN** by Brenda Buzzi.*

*Maura Wallin **MOVED** and Brenda Buzzi **SECONDED** a motion to pause the closure of HES for the 2019-2020 school year which includes the restructuring of District and the creation of the Haddam-Killingworth Intermediate School.*

Motion failed 4-7-0 by the following votes:

Suzanne Sack YES NO A
 Peter Sonski YES NO A
 Maura Wallin YES NO A

Joel D'Angelo YES NO A
 Eileen Blewett YES NO A
 Brenda Buzzi YES NO A

Eric Couture YES ___ NO A ___
 Sue Williams YES NO ___ A ___

Gerry Matthews YES NO ___ A ___
 Kathleen Zandi YES ___ NO A ___
 Joanne Nesti YES ___ NO A ___

A discussion with the Board on the RFP process, next steps and communication to Community and Town Committees followed.

*Brenda Buzzi **MOVED** and Gerry Matthews **SECONDED** a motion to add to the Agenda for topic of discussion of the Swan Hill Parcel.*

Motion failed 2-9-0 by the following votes:

Suzanne Sack YES ___ NO A ___
 Peter Sonski YES ___ NO A ___
 Maura Wallin YES ___ NO A ___
 Eric Couture YES ___ NO A ___
 Sue Williams YES ___ NO A ___

Joel D'Angelo YES ___ NO A ___
 Eileen Blewett YES ___ NO A ___
 Brenda Buzzi YES NO ___ A ___
 Gerry Matthews YES NO ___ A ___
 Kathleen Zandi YES ___ NO A ___
 Joanne Nesti YES ___ NO A ___

Public Comment:

Town of Haddam Selectwoman, Melissa Schlag, addressed the Board. She spoke about the Right of First Refusal for the Town of Haddam and feels there is no process until the Town addresses it first as to what their interests are.

First Selectwoman for the Town of Haddam, Lizz Milardo, addressed the Board. She suggested Monday, March 11th to the Board which allows the Town Planner and others that would have a say in this process to be in attendance. She asked the Board for a copy of the RFP and also briefly spoke about the Town Budget.

Jeff Sturges of Haddam addressed the Board. He spoke about creating the time to assess the situation at hand and stressed the importance of these decisions. He also spoke about Robert Rules of Order and tabling a motion.

State Representative for the Town of Haddam, Chester, Deep River, Essex, Christine Palm, addressed the Board. She thanked Board Chair, Nesti, for the data she provided to her. She also addressed the bills from the State regarding District regionalization and feels that closing a school prior to these passing wouldn't be the best way. Lastly, she stated how she is here for the Community and thanked the Board for its hard work.

Myles Crete of Higganum addressed the Board. He spoke about how he feels that the Community isn't being heard and asked for a pause in closure of HES. He also believes 4th graders do not belong with older children.

Krystna Medina of Killingworth addressed the Board. She said that she has been in touch with Superintendents in prior areas, specifically, one in New Jersey which didn't work. She spoke about how the Old Saybrook school is putting 4th graders back into the elementary school since the age group is not working. She asked the Board to think about its decision more.

Helen Rouke of Haddam addressed the Board. (Didn't sign in so unsure of spelling of last name.) She stated that she graduated from HKHS and is a grange member who is the landlord of Higganum Market. She spoke about how she feels that the Board has a hard time following their own by bylaws and asked the Board to assess their approach.

Rebecca Drew of Killingworth addressed the Board. She asked the Board to prove to the Community why sending 4th graders with 8th graders is good for them, why it's good for their education and why it's good for playgrounds and parenting.

Heather Pach of Haddam addressed the Board. She spoke about how there are so many other things that are going on within the District that are being ignored. She spoke on students using bad language to teachers and asked the Board to pause its decision and listen to the Community.

Todd Blewett resident of Killingworth. He spoke about how his four children all went through the HK District and all have had an outstanding education 3 under Mr. Thiery's leadership. He is confident that the Board can exonerate an excellent restructuring plan and also thanked Suzanne Sack and Committee for their hard work.

Joe Dalton of Haddam addressed the Board. He spoke about how he chose the Haddam Community to raise his family, because of the wonderful schools, etc. He believes that the Board should be listening to the community and taking a pause with the closure/restructuring plan. He also spoke about the young families that are moving back to town to raise their families and to consider that point of it.

Ross Hanson of Haddam addressed the Board. He spoke about the importance of small class sizes and the petition that has been signed by so many Community members to stop the closure of HES.

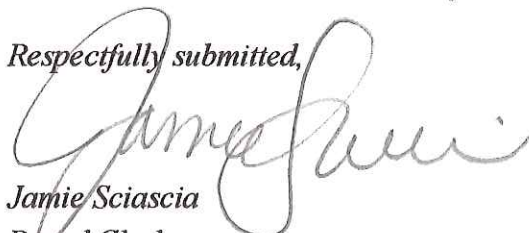
Lori Chadwick of Haddam addressed the Board. She said she lived in Haddam for 15 years and raised her two children in the HK District. She now has her grandchildren in the school system and believes it is a wonderful education system. She feels disappointed right now about not taking the time to look at everything and living up to Cougar Values. She further spoke on not receiving the RFP via link on the RSD17 website and is disappointed with the amount the HES building might be sold at.

Sally Jordan of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke briefly on the article written about the Connecticut's top schools performance and said that HES was listed as the highest school in the District.

Adjournment:

Board Chair, Joanne Nesti, called for the meeting to adjourn at approximately 9:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,


Jamie Sciascia
Board Clerk

Approval:  Date: 5/7/19
Eileen Blewett, Secretary