

Date: March 2, 2015
To: School Committee Members
From: Michael Harvey, Superintendent of Schools
Re: Thursday, March 5, 2015

CALL TO ORDER: Sheila MacDonald called the meeting to order at 7:03 in the Buker Elementary School Multi-Purpose Room.

Present: Larry Swartz, Barbara Lawrence, Sheila MacDonald, Deb Evans, Stacey Metternick and Jeanise Bertrand

Absent: Bill Wilson, Roger Kuebel

Others Present: Michael Harvey, Celeste Bowler, and Jeffrey Sands; and student representative Erin Mason.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance

NEW BUSINESS:

1. **OVERVIEW OF GRADUATION LOCATION ISSUE** – Sheila reviewed the meeting when Principal Eric Tracy brought the issue to the school committee. She thanked the public for letters and emails as the committee appreciates hearing from the citizens.

2. **UPDATE/FEEDBACK ON WORK DONE TO ADDRESS AND UNDERSTAND STUDENT CONCERNS – MICHAEL HARVEY & ERIC TRACY**

Eric Tracy, Principal HWRHS, was asked to find a way to gather more information from students. He went back to each senior homeroom and spoke about the two issues: 1. related to Supreme Court case (WI 7th circuit) regarding holding graduation in a church; 2. Having graduation at Gordon College in response to the letter to President Obama signed by Dr. Lindsay. Students took time to meet and discuss the issues and opinions fell on both side of the fence. Students have the family connection and tradition of graduating at the Gordon chapel, yet kids were concerned with the stance of Gordon College and what their beliefs stand for. Students also wrote emails; Eric had eight direct communications from students. The School Committee student representative created a survey, again with results on both sides. There was nothing dramatic; some students are uncomfortable for their friends who might be uncomfortable with the venue. Tracy asked them to come talk to him because homeroom is only 10 minutes long. A kid might not be comfortable speaking in front of peers on this issue.

Deb Evans asked- how fact based- how accurate were students concerns? Eric responded, there was a lot of emotion on both sides- family connection and this is what I know, this is what I believe. Some of the kids had a very solid understanding of the issue; they researched the letter and made their own decision. Deb stated the majority of kids didn't respond. Eric further explained the student survey had three choices: Yes, No, or Don't care either way - and the survey results were divided evenly.

Mike Harvey said even prior to the Lindsay letter, Eric and he had concerns related to the Wisconsin 7th circuit court decision and asked counsel's opinion on the issue. Mike contacted former high school principal John Elwell for his recollection of why the venue was changed to Gordon College. It was based on tickets. This was before the new MRMS and new larger gym construction and the gym was the current library space. President of Gordon

made offer at the time to use the chapel and not have to limit number of guests. Mike also thanked all who wrote. He confirmed we are only discussing graduation and candlelight. We are not talking about cutting any ties with Gordon College (e.g. Swim, Buker student teachers).

Larry asked did anything change during the time of information gathering? Eric stated the initial issue is still there and kids have stayed focused on it. Barbara expressed concerns about logistics; is it possible to host graduation at our own facilities? Yes, the current seating in the gym is about 800 with additional seating on the floor; even with six guests with every graduate, there is still plenty of room to run graduation inside or out. When asked about the cost, Mike responded we pay whatever police detail costs; Gordon provides the venue at cost. Deb stated we need to make a decision based on the merits of this discussion.

3. CITIZENS COMMENTS ON GRADUATION LOCATION

1. Jane Powers Burnam Rd Wenham- Gordon's building is a building, I don't look at it as a church. It is unique and spectacular. If we cut ties with Gordon for graduation, it's a slippery slope - we have to cut all ties. Pool space is at a premium.
2. Norm Kramer Forest St Hamilton- Respect others and their culture no matter what. Gordon College discriminates against LGBT. We want our children to grow up respecting others; our school district will not tolerate discrimination of any kind.
3. Peter Fisher Greenbrook Rd So Hamilton- Love thy neighbor. Concerned [moving graduation] would close the door on our relationship. We can discuss details and differences as long as the door is open. The clause that excludes Faith-Based organizations was left off the Obama legislation. The same exclusion was in the Senate bill- signed by Obama and both our state senators.
4. Jenny Beauregard Moulton St Hamilton- The struggle for LGBT rights is the civil rights struggle of our kids' generation. Gordon has the right to their policies; however, we are a public institution. This is a contrast we cannot ignore; we must decide the ethical thing to do, even if we have no gay students. She proposed a compromise- have graduation at Gordon, make difference-- have rainbow flag prominently displayed on stage. Ask my church to borrow the flag, or 1st church Wenham.
5. IeIa Ziegenhals school choice student from Essex- I cannot speak to legality or on the LGBT issues. It would be a shame to cut ties for graduation as it would set a precedent. There is a conflict between freedom of religion and freedom of speech. We need to live in community with others even with our differences.
6. Bobby Grinnell Martell Rd Hamilton. HW must maintain its relationship with Gordon. We are using Gordon College as a facility. Regarding Gordon's policies, graduates have enjoyed cigars as form of celebration- yet Gordon maintains a policy of no smoking. We also use Gordon for the pool. Would this decision end swimming and practices? The swim team won 2nd in the past two years and won CAL open last year. It would be catastrophic to end ties with Gordon.
7. Remy Beauregard Hamilton Ave Hamilton- I am an openly gay student and am accepted by teachers and peers. I've had very positive experiences with Gordon. I went to camp at Gordon, I've been a camp counselor for two years. Never have I heard a condemnatory comment. I've been asked to explain myself and what it means to be gay and have had fruitful conversations. We have strong family ties to Gordon and it would be a shame to cut ties. However, graduation is a very specific celebration. As an organization that has publically stated it is against complete tolerance in hiring, it is discriminatory. Having graduation as it is now would be a

- sign that this intolerance is not important enough to make a statement to the students; we should come to a compromise. The entire high school needs to be taken into consideration, not just seniors.
8. Carrie Jelsma Hilltop Dr. Wenham- according to the CDC, gay youth are four times more likely to commit suicide than their straight peers; 2.5 times more likely to hurt themselves after being victimized. How does a gay youth feel accepted and protected? Connected family, feeling safe at school, and having a community of caring adults surrounding them. Agreeing to have graduation at Gordon is tacitly accepting Gordon's institutionalized discrimination, or at best remaining neutral. Desmond Tutu stated, "if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor". Let's choose to celebrate our gay youth who are perfect the way they are.
 9. Peter Nawoichick Maple Ave Hamilton- all HWRSD and now Gordon. Worked at camp at Gordon. If we stop this one (graduation) afternoon from happening, it will divide community.
 10. Neil Hubacker Village Lane S Hamilton- pastor at the Harbor church in Beverly, which is attended by 30-80 Gordon students and faculty and members from Hamilton and Wenham. Who loses when exclusionary decisions are made? Look at what happened in Lynn- their schools are now deprived of quality education and mentoring and student teaching from Gordon's education majors. Who will lose if the district charts a course that distances itself from Gordon? He shared an anecdote about sharing with his neighbors.
 11. Iris Antonucci Stanton St Wenham- Who are the oppressors and who are the victims? It flips. It seems Gordon is the victim with character defamation. If any business was under this kind of attack, it would seem wrong and unfair. Would we withhold business from them? The high school does hold things at churches, like concerts. I hope this relationship will last.
 12. John Tobey Whipple Rd Hamilton- 3 children went through HW system. We've seen much evidence of the cooperative spirit between HW and Gordon College. At the time graduation was held at the gym; it was hot, overcrowded, and an unpleasant experience. I urge the school committee to uphold the tradition of holding graduation ceremony at Gordon. We live in a world of conflict, violence, and confrontation. The school committee can provide a tangible example to our students of agreeing to work together in respect even if we don't agree on every issue.
 13. Andrew Beckwith Batchelder Park Wenham- As an officer in the military and an attorney, I swore an oath to uphold and defend the constitution; I was troubled to see Dr. Lindsay receiving ostracism, even punishment for exercising his first amend rights. He used his free speech to petition gov't for freedom of religion; there is also a right, freedom of press to disparage Gordon and Dr. Lindsay over the past eight months. It would be something entirely different if school committee, an elected body, were to punish a community of faith because they disagree with that faith. The 7th circuit court decision shouldn't apply. You can't discriminate against people based on their faith. It would brand everyone in the Gordon community as a second class citizen. I ask you not to cut ties with Gordon.
 14. Dan Dark Norman Rd So Hamilton- The committee should consider the vote at stake may not lean toward a protest against Gordon College. I teach at Gordon College- I have gay students. Some face some challenges. There are minority instances where they feel uncomfortable. Do not sever the ties with Gordon College. How will that speak to how we are perceived? We are not homophobic. We teach that gays are

- made in the image of God. We should meet on a mutual ground. If some students feel threatened, real or perceived, we should reassure them to create accommodations for them. There is internal dialogue at Gordon College on how we create conditions that make LGBT feel welcome. We are a community that is robust in making all students feel welcome.
15. Julie Kerhoulas Essex st. I'd like to offer personal insight in favor of maintaining the strong bond. Will Hamilton-Wenham be an example where we acknowledge our differences and work together or will it be example where we let this one decision lead to a long decline to the detriment of our community? We are intertwined in work and play. Gordon College and Wenham coexist and share resources; we provide economic vitality, preservice teachers to the benefit of our children. We live in a pluralistic society. What is the benefit to our children if we sever ties? It could lead to a long slippery slope. Are we being a good model to our children?
 16. Dr. Miguel Martinez Grapevine-- 6 children received great education; 5 graduated at the Gordon College chapel. I fail to see the harm to our children from Gordon's unconditional grace to use their facility. Please do not deny our daughter (8th grade) and future classes the relationship and opportunity of candlelight and graduation day at Gordon College.
 17. Michael Zagami Birch Rd So Hamilton. I have a unique experience to share. I like to think about Gordon as an institution growing children (alum 2004). Hired by lesbian, simply because I went to Gordon. Gordon graduates students who interact with others and understand compassion. It would be a disservice to the area to create a perception that Gordon doesn't graduate students or conduct itself in a manner of compassion.
 18. Tom Star Pleasant St Wenham- My concerns go back before this issue. It's a fundamental question should graduation be held in any place of worship. I have no particular issue with Gordon College. You would have some students be uncomfortable regardless of court case or actual legalities.
 19. Charlie Pepler Meyer Rd Hamilton- I hold a classic christian worldview. We say the Pledge of Allegiance to the Republic, which constitutes many documents, under God, with liberty and justice for all. I want to contrast that to a separate document as a warning, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, some animals are more equal than others. If you take one view point and raise it above all the others, you tend to fight against the original principle.
 20. Abraham Liew Gordon College So Hamilton. Before I came here two years ago, I was under house arrest for two years in China. I enjoy my freedom here. I am amazed here you say one nation, you face the flag here and talk the topic (facing opposite). I am learning the "Spirit of America". In a Christianity culture, there are logistics. It is a core issue-- what is your brain thinking; what is your spirit thinking? I stand not just for Gordon College, but stand for the nation. What we are fighting for in China is the spirit you need to protect. The Christian culture is your foundation. If today's vote changes the facility, that's a shame.
 21. Peter Smith Linden St. Hamilton- I have no official relationship with Gordon. The overarching goal of education is growing students to their full potential: physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually and morally. It is your responsibility to authorize this growth in our schools. It happens best in environments that expose students to a diversity of ideas and experiences; students expand their grasp of the world and respond to its challenges, successfully engaging in overlapping communities as citizens in a pluralistic society. For years Hamilton-Wenham has fulfilled this inclusive and virtuous educational mandate in an exemplary way; now, however, I am

- concerned that the school committee is making a decision regarding the district's relationship with Gordon College that will mark a departure from free inquiry, openness and inclusion. Curtailing the district's relationship with Gordon College is not sound educational policy. First, such actions would diminish opportunities for growth that flow from mutual respect, agreement and learn and discover; second, Gordon College enriches the learning environment available to Hamilton-Wenham students offering valuable resources; finally, it sets the stage for greater misunderstanding. We are neighbors; assume the best about each other. Keep talking to them.
22. Mark Cannister Lois St Hamilton-- I am a Gordon faculty member for 23 years, I am here as a citizen not employee. When my kids entered kindergarten here at Buker, the school committee ensured they learn to respect and accept the differences. They were taught empathy and compassion in the framework of accepting those who hold different beliefs. I ask that you model the same. Regardless of your feelings about the college's policies, I would implore you refrain from religious discrimination tonight. For those who feel uncomfortable in chapel, this is a great opportunity to understand the lessons of religious tolerances that you've worked so hard on in K-12. It's ironic on the district's agenda letterhead at the bottom it says the district does not engage in discrimination based on religion. Don't enter into the discrimination; two wrongs don't make a right. Let's find a compromise and a way to make the chapel acceptable to the community.
 23. Gary Shearer Maple Ave So Hamilton- We had five sons graduated all the way through Hamilton-Wenham. I have high standards of expectations. We expect the schools to stand up to high standards. Graduation: it's a difference of holding a cock fight in a gymnasium vs. an opera house. It's about quality. The first thing I saw in this room was the red banner that says, "understand and celebrate differences". Why doesn't that apply to everyone? Not just one side.
 24. Elizabeth Mulley Whipple Rd So Hamilton- current senior. I think about tolerance-recognizing we all have differences and living in a community and having dialogue with each other. What if this had happened the other way around? What if Gordon came to us and said we're not going to send our student teachers to you because we don't agree with your hiring policy. People would be upset. It doesn't make sense that we don't have graduation at Gordon because we don't agree with their hiring policy. That would be cutting dialogue.
 25. Mary Shearer Maple Ave Hamilton- 3 of our sons graduated from Gordon; I'm going to talk about something no one has mentioned--sweat. Graduation in the gym - my mother was appalled.-Disrespectful kids running around with ping pong balls. The gym is great for basketball, not graduation. Gordon pulled our graduation out of the mire.
 26. Meirwyn Walters Veranda Circle Hamilton- Grew up in Hamilton; teaches business law at Gordon; speaking personally tonight. My favorite class was Critical Thinking with Kevin O'Reilly where we were taught to dissect arguments, challenge assumptions and conclusions, engage with ideas- even ones we vehemently disagree. My diploma was a pledge they had prepared me to go into the world and engage in ideas, even with ones we disagree. Moving graduation will be sending message to the students that there are ideas to be feared and that you have not prepared them to engage with ideas they may disagree.
 27. Michelle Bailey Remington Rd. Wenham- You've hit on a hot topic- identity, religion, and community. This is an important decision- not because where we're

- going to hold it-- the kids are going to graduate no matter where they graduate. Flags at BUKER state Be your best; Understand and Celebrate Differences; Keep the School Neat and Clean; Encourage others; Respond with Kindness. That's what we need to do. We need to engage in dialogue with people who think differently than us with kindness. I encourage you to vote to have relationship and graduation at Gordon; I also encourage you to ask why choral fest was moved from Gordon and sports relationships.
28. Tracy Mayer Fox Run Rd. Hamilton- I'm a writer and editor so I look at this from a language point of view. What if we were saying as a community we're going to have graduation in a Muslim mosque, or a Jewish temple, a Buddhist ashram. Those thoughts might seem more radical than what we are saying; a lot of people may be comfortable with Christianity, so if you change the words around. The public school is supposed to be separated church and state. Instead of talking about LGBT and gay people, what if we were saying people with disabilities, or African Americans, women, labor people? Those are all people who gained their civil rights in the 20th century. The 21st century civil rights issue is LGBT. Graduation is one day. This issue is going to go on much longer. What are we going to say when asked what did you do during the civil rights movement of the 21st century? Is the answer, nothing, we just went back to that lovely air conditioned building? Or did we do something outside our comfort zone that is part of a bigger project, not just this community?
 29. Merrill Darko Norman Rd So Hamilton-I'd like to speak about practical and philosophical things. Practical: who attends graduation? Family members. The gym bleachers are not comfortable; not ADA accessible; and acoustics are noisy. In a comparison we have a college in town that makes the chapel available. Who loses? Basic environment is uncomfortable. Philosophy: These banners represent the district schools' value system; through the antibullying campaign they have learned the message. Some are trying to accuse Gordon of being the bully; they are not. Their hiring policies are based on faith; let religious organizations have parameters of hiring practices.
 30. Dave Ketcham Old Cart Rd Hamilton- graduated H-W in 196; have 3 children all graduated at the chapel. At the time, Principal John Elwell was having meetings about the new venue; he kept repeating, "and it's air conditioned." I have experienced nothing but wonderful things with Gordon; I think you should continue talking and having a good relationship with Gordon College.
 31. Joel Whitman 180 Main St Wenham--; I'm not a minority, the US was made for me as a white Christian man. In Massachusetts, marriage equality law passed 10 years ago. The school committee represents a public school district in the state of MA that holds a graduation ceremony at Gordon. I'm not gay, no one in my family is gay, so no one was inconvenienced holding a ceremony in a place that made them unwelcomed. A college is making a decision about what you can and cannot do in your marital chambers. The state of MA says its ok. We should not be celebrating graduation there. Every kid and every family member should be treated equally. I would not mind the 90 minutes of a little sweat if everyone else there is comfortable and welcomed.
 32. Mariah Gross Berrywood Lane S Hamilton- HW grad now at Gordon. I support Gordon and not ending dialogue. When we look back, did we encourage our students to promote uniformity of opinion? Or are we accepting differences and maintaining a loving neighborly relationship?

33. Bailey Grinnell Martell Rd. So Hamilton- HWRHS 2012, now at Gordon. I'm a representative of both communities; I love these towns and I love Gordon College; it breaks my heart to see this conflict and division. It also helps to look at it from a biological perspective. In the biological world a mutualistic relationship both species benefit. Gordon benefits being in our school community; HW benefits from community involvement and use such a beautiful facility. I hope you continue to support this relationship.
34. Kaitlin McCarthy Homestead Circle Hamilton- I wanted to go back to an earlier point when Choralfest moved from Gordon College. I don't want that to happen to seniors. Regarding performances we've given throughout the years at First Church in Wenham- those places could have the same standpoint as Gordon.
35. Sarah Henkles Kimball Ave Wenham- HW 2012 grad and current Gordon student but I don't hold the same beliefs on human sexuality as the college. The way Gordon has been presented in the media is very different than my own experience. Gordon's campus is a space where we can have open conversations with people whose opinions differ. I've never felt any pressure to conform to Gordon's stance, nor have I ever been insulted, bullied, or belittled for my beliefs. I don't agree with Gordon's stance, but that hasn't prevented me from seeing all the good that Gordon has done in this community.

4. STATEMENT FROM GORDON COLLEGE AND QUESTIONS FROM SCHOOL COMMITTEE – DR. LINDSAY, PRESIDENT GORDON COLLEGE

We are grateful for the significant work you do on behalf of our kids. I am Gordon president and a parent and am grateful for the high quality educational excellence here. I am here tonight because Gordon College deeply values the relationship with the school community. This is not a vote about a graduation venue. The reason you have all these people here tonight is because we care deeply about being a good neighbor. Part of our faith commands us to seek the peace and prosperity of the cities where we live. If our neighbor prospers, we too will prosper. We want Hamilton Wenham to flourish. Over the last decade there have been about 90 Hamilton Wenham students who have become Gordon College students. Scores of our employees have their families in these communities. More of our alumni are deeply connected to Hamilton Wenham. We are a significant part of the constituency that you are helping to serve. We want this relationship to be a deep, strong partnership. We don't all think alike, even at Gordon College. It's important to have honest, serious dialog; you can't have dialogue if you don't have a relationship. One of the reasons we want to have this opportunity to serve the high school community is because we see it as a public symbol of a much deeper relationship. Our chapel is the largest meeting space north of Boston. It's a beautiful facility. If you decide you don't want to hold graduation at Gordon this year, we will continue to have it reserved for you so that you have a rain location available. We care deeply about this relationship, much more deeply than a single vote. It is an important symbol how you work together across differences. Behind you is a map of the world. We must prepare students to go out into that world and work across differences and disagreements. How will young people be able to serve in various communities if they can't even with folks two miles down the road from them. America was founded on freedom of thought and freedom from religious persecution. I recognize not everyone here or on campus agrees with our policies. We have lots of disagreement and dialogue; it doesn't mean we can't work together to advance the common good. My main hope as you deliberate is that

you will be reminded of the important work we do in helping to shape the horizons of the next generation. One of the key things we can figure tonight is a way to share a partnership to advance the common good.

Sheila thanked Dr. Lindsay for speaking and being a great neighbor. This is a huge decision. Barbara had some concerns and reservations, and believes in working them out. What might you suggest to find compromise for those who see things differently? Dr. Lindsay responded we'd be happy visit with students, families; he's not really sure what the concerns are. He doesn't believe it's about safety, it's really about politics. I'm willing to hear what would be the concern, that by coming to graduation on our campus it would be endorsing our convictions. We would not have a problem having a flag up on our stage We would not be providing it. Use the facility at cost. We want to be good neighbors. We are willing to figure out a way that students would feel comfortable at Gordon.

Larry commented there was a discussion this summer at Gordon to examine the behavior standards. On the Stand With Gordon Facebook page it states you're going to stay with the standards as they are. Dr. Lindsay responded that the college changing its theological position is not really up for grabs. We have to think about how do we best care for our students. We have gay students, gay employees. This conversation has brought to my attention that we have alumni for whom we didn't live up to our ideals. We can be a place that is more loving. The key thing Gordon is trying to do is be a place full of grace and truth. We're an evangelical institution, a Billy Graham kind of Christianity. Over the past eight or nine months we've been thinking about how we can better serve all of students where everyone would feel comfortable and welcome. Larry said from the school committee's perspective we read the letter, but might not have understood what the behavioral standards were. We've come to educate ourselves on what the standard does say. Larry quoted the Life and Conduct behavioral standards, "Those words and actions which are expressly forbidden in Scripture, including but not limited to ... sexual relations outside marriage, and homosexual practice, will not be tolerated in the lives of Gordon community members, either on or off campus." Larry asked about employees and Dr. Lindsay responded they don't have anyone in a gay marriage employed at Gordon. Dr. Lindsay continued that we're not asking you to endorse our behavioral standards. Larry clarified that he was not suggesting Gordon not be allowed to do exactly what they want to do. We have a responsibility to our students and what they may be feeling in terms of what it means to graduate on the campus of Gordon in the context of those behavior standards. Dr. Lindsay said Larry hit upon the essential educational point. All of our students will encounter individuals who may disagree with them. The very fact that you would make a decision based on the voluntary moral commitments of a place that would host something feels significant. We reached out to Principal Tracy to hear what the students would be concerned about. We're happy to have that conversation. We want them to feel comfortable. We're here because we want to be good neighbors and we gently ask you to reciprocate that. We value our relationship. For the school committee to decide to not hold graduation at Gordon will feel like a referendum on our institution.

Barbara has been troubled by the feeling I've gotten through emails- I don't see it as a referendum; Gordon has been a wonderful neighbor. There are many ways in which these communities can support each other. I see graduation being able to be back at Hamilton Wenham as really what should be; students have been going to schools in Hamilton-Wenham since Kindergarten. I was amazed that it was at the chapel and not on school campus. The

facilities problems have been corrected; we are a public institution and that's where should our kids graduate from. It has nothing to do with severing ties with Gordon.

Deb responded that she disagrees why we're having this conversation. There wasn't a genesis of people who wanted to bring graduation back to the high school. Barbara agreed it was not the reason the conversation has been teed up now.

5. SCHOOL COMMITTEE DELIBERATION AND VOTE

Jeanise commented she attended candlelight and graduation at Gordon; it's not appropriate; it's what they use for a church; it's not where you hold a public school graduation. She was corrected that Gordon doesn't hold church service at the chapel. This is not a conversation about severing all ties; it is specifically about graduation- we should hold it at the high school.

Stacey stated she has gone back and forth on both sides. Gordon College is a very good neighbor; she walks her dog through the campus. We are talking about this as a graduation site. Kids have some concerns; I think we may be able to get past some of them. I don't know the concerns, whether it's a civil rights conversation, but it is a beautiful place. I keep going back and forth.

Deb said this is not a moratorium for the committee or individual thoughts on religion, sexuality, societal issues of our time not to be resolved no matter what happens here. What is our responsibility? To our children. The questions surrounding the issue tonight and the graduation venue- is it a church? There are no church services on Sundays. Students encouraged to go out into the community to the denominations of their choices. It's a chapel built in the meeting house style of New England. By using that location, nobody is asking anyone to subscribe to values we don't want to have. There are no hymnals in the pews and the cross gets covered. There is no proselytizing. I am very comfortable with Gordon as a venue. The questions were there students who felt uncomfortable? I can't judge that. The piece that brought this to the limelight is the hiring practice; we've heard no one is being asked to conform from our student body. Being good neighbor and doing the right thing for our kids is the same thing. Continuing that dialog and perhaps making some of the modifications discussed tonight to make it a more inclusive place. It's a very limited number of hours and we can make it ours. The other piece of being a good neighbor is continuing the conversation. Putting the brakes on by changing the venue would put an end to the conversation. We can keep dialogue going.

Barbara said that in no way does she see this as a referendum; I ran for school committee on the slogan "kids and community." I care about that. We are a public institution and have the obligation to follow requirements and laws of the state. This is an opportunity to bring graduation back to school where it was. That's what we should do for our own students. It's an important issue and it's important to keep talking about it. Graduation is actually quite limited in our commonality with the college. I believe graduation should be at the high school.

Larry commented we all have different perspectives. My initial thought was to do a survey to see if we had a majority of kids who wanted to stay at the high school. The more that I heard of the students through voices of Eric and Mike that emanated from the behavior standard that basically says you cannot participate in homosexual practice on or off campus. They're our students; the administrators brought it to our attention rightly. The seniors were concerned. It's an issue centered on graduation, nothing to do with swim team or student teaching. Students who identify as gay or LGBT may feel uncomfortable and unwelcome

graduating at the Gordon chapel for simply being who they are. This is not a minor issue. This goes to the essence of their being. We have an obligation to provide an environment that is consistent with whom our students are- just as Gordon does, correctly and rightfully, provide their views for their community. I feel the obligations of the two communities conflict and we should move graduation from the Gordon chapel.

Sheila stated she has a personal side and a School Committee side with an obligation to do the best what we can do. First, to be very clear, we are discussing graduation only; at no time are we discussing cutting communication with Gordon, we would never do that. We are not asking Gordon College to change any policy; we are a public school and we have to do what's right for our kids. We're talking about liberty and justice for all. All kids, including our homosexual, LGBT kids. We've talked about the freedom from religious persecution, but no one talked about the freedom of sexual identity for our kids. Every argument I've heard could have been turned around completely for the other side. I don't see that Gordon would be punished in any way for not having graduation there; our students would be punished by our continuing to have it there. It's hard to have our differences and truly have what we see to be discrimination and take no action. That's what it finally came down for me. We also have a Commonwealth of Massachusetts regulation that says, "No school shall sponsor or participate in the organization of outside extracurricular activities conducted at such school that restrict student participation on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation." (603 CMR 26.06). When I read that, was shown that, it was the final decision for me. We have been charged my Massachusetts to make sure that doesn't happen.

Deb said what Sheila read doesn't jibe with Gordon and their practices. I have read their behavioral practices and standards. They aren't filtering their students based on sexual orientation. Their premise is that there should be no sexuality outside of marriage, gay or straight. I'm not seeing this discrimination.

Larry this regulation was introduced at the end of the discussion. It influenced Sheila's opinion, I don't know if it impacted anyone else's opinion. It's not productive to analyze what that says; it's the first time I'm hearing it.

Deb responded, I understand the hiring piece, that's not what we're here about. From a student support perspective, what I heard are heterosexual and homosexual students are both supported on that campus.

I don't see it as discriminatory.

Larry replied, it's not a relevant discussion. How will the students react and feel whether they feel comfortable and welcome? That's what's relevant.

Deb asked what if they didn't have the facts right? Larry answered Principal Tracy pointed them in the direction where they could find that information. Barbara added I tried to do my best; I talked to people associated with Gordon, some who were reluctant to be public with their concerns. How can we continue good relationships with Gordon? We are a public institution and we need to honor what we are. We need to graduate our kids from our own high school and we can do that now.

Deb prepared to read the motion, and clarified it could be worded either for or against. She asked procedurally, do we have to vote tonight? Mike answered if someone makes a motion to vote, yes; or we can make a motion to adjourn. Deb asked if procedurally someone would be sharing Bill Wilson's point of view, which she would do. Sheila responded that if he's not there he can't. They have a quorum of members at the table.

Larry MOVED THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE to move the high school graduation from the Gordon chapel to the high school. Jeanise seconded the motion.

Deb feels Bill Wilson has been working closely with Mike and he isn't here to vote. We're doing ourselves a disservice to make a significant decision, binding for this year, without the benefit of his thinking. Deb is not comfortable about that at all.

Stacey added that she would like to see Bill's information. Deb said he's done a lot of background work with Mike and getting Dr. Lindsay here. She feel his insight is missing; he doesn't have a voice in the vote. He emailed from Buffalo. His perspective was not to move, unless he was swayed by something new tonight.

Larry said there was a practical issue. Four members have indicated they want to move graduation; Bill's vote wouldn't change the outcome. Deb responded it would change the discussion. Barbara felt it would be useful to find out what the vote would be. We've all struggled with this. We need to move forward one way or the other. The Leadership Team needs to get to work. Eric Tracy and the students need to get to work. Traditions- there can be new traditions- there will be an impact on students- want them to have as much time as possible, to make it their own. There's nothing we can do about Bill. I don't know if it would be useful to have a straw count of the vote.

Jeanise asked Mike if we were to push the decision two weeks, would the administration be able to pull it together? Mike answered it's getting close, that's why I asked to have a decision tonight.

Larry added it's an act of nature none of us can control that Bill can't be here.

Deb stated it wasn't set in stone that a vote was going to happen tonight. Barbara responded we postponed it because of budget season. I feel we're really late already.

Stacey stated our precedent is, if someone's not here, we still take a vote. We put a motion out; it was seconded it; I feel we take a vote.

Deb went on record to say she completely disagrees. Bill has played such a critical role as the head of this committee working with Dr. Lindsay and Mike; he might have information that informed his decision.

Vote: 4 in favor (Larry, Barbara, Sheila, Jeanise); 2 against (Stacey and Deb)

Motion carries.

Adjournment

Deb MOVED THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN

6-0-0

9:36pm