

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, November 4, 2013 at Bethlehem Elementary School, 92 East Street, Bethlehem, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members Sophiezane Bartlett, George Bauer, Carol Ann Brown, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, John Swendsen, and Maryanne Van Aken; Director of Finance and Operations Wayne McAllister; Director of Instruction Susan Domanico; Director of Buildings/Grounds Mike Molzon; R14 legal counsel Mark Sommaruga, Esq., and Board Clerk Deb Carlton

Absent: Board member Janet Morgan

Audience members included: Bethlehem BoF member Mike Devine, one member of the press, and about 6 additional members of the public

I. Call to Order

Mr. Chapman called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Presentation

Mr. Chapman introduced Attorney Sommaruga, who had come to the meeting, gratis, to provide information on the status of the legal proceedings underway in the two courts. Mr. Chapman felt that, given the situation and with new members on the board, he wanted to review how we got here.

Attorney Sommaruga reviewed the background that led to the district being sued over lack of notice for the NHS building referendum. He addressed the suggestion that the district should, on its own, redo the referendum and explained that the referendum was a binding vote and it is not within the district's power to throw out the results. The vote represents a snapshot in time and reflects how people felt on 6/18/13. The two towns, in their action against the district, have contended the vote was illegal and have kept that argument simple in court; the fact that the referendum was not legally noticed is not in dispute. The case was heard on one day, 10/9, and is now over, awaiting the judge's decision. The Waterbury case, for which he has been to court multiple times with no progress being made, involves allegations of a grand conspiracy, includes personal suits against Mr. Goeler, Mr. Chapman and Mr. Bauer, as well as the towns, Jerry Stomski, and Jeff Hamel, and seeks monetary and punitive damages. We must defend ourselves against these charges, he said, and although he filed to stay the Waterbury case, and attempted to have those plaintiffs join the Litchfield case, Arras et al have not been willing to do that. Attorney Sommaruga described the Litchfield case as one with strong opinions on both sides and vehement arguments, but one marked by mutual respect and civility. The Waterbury case, on the other hand, has been among the most frustrating and time consuming of his career and is costing the district and the towns a great deal of money.

He took questions from the board.

Ms. Brown asked, if the judge rules that the referendum must be redone, does the question have to be identical?

Attorney Sommaruga said it does not; the court would not involve itself in the wording of future referendum questions.

Ms. Van Aken asked when a decision in Litchfield is expected and was told hopefully this month. It was suggested that the briefs filed in the Litchfield court could be added to our website for public review. (at the time of filing these minutes, briefs have been added to the website, on the BoE homepage)

Mr. Goeler asked Attorney Sommaruga to address questions about whether the district was authorized to seek a court decision. Attorney Sommaruga replied that the district was sued and, therefore, entered a counterclaim that the referendum results are valid.

Mr. McAllister asked whether legal cost breakouts are available and was told they are not as yet; however, as the Litchfield case is concluded, all legal bills going forward can be attributed to the Waterbury case, he said.

Mr. Bauer clarified the previous statement that the referendum results cannot simply be overthrown. He took the opportunity to note all the effort made for the project, the work of the building committee, and all the publicity leading up to the referendum in order to achieve a fair and informed vote. He appreciates the need to confirm the legitimacy of the result to ensure bonding for the project. Attorney Sommaruga agreed completely and cited this as the towns' concern. A judge's decision is sought to ensure that bonding for the project will not be denied.

III. Review of Minutes

Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 21, 2013*, entered by Mr. Cosgriff and seconded by Ms. Van Aken, who also cited a correction needed: under **New Business**, approval of policy revisions, Policy 4100 had been previously approved by the board. The motion to approve that policy and vote needs to be stricken from this set of minutes. As corrected, the motion carried 7-0.

IV. Correspondence

Mr. Chapman noted two items of correspondence. Student Sara Velleca, recipient of a Region 14's Finest award at the last meeting, wrote a thank you note to the Board expressing her appreciation for being chosen for that award. The Board was also copied on a letter sent to Paul Ciotti from Alex DeSorbo of the Woodbury Business Association, expressing that group's gratitude for his assistance in arranging and broadcasting the WBA Candidate's Forum on NEAT TV. He also thanked students JR Lucera and Brandon Simmons for their efforts in setting up and operating the equipment for taping. Mr. DeSorbo wrote, "It is through cooperative events such as this that the community can fully appreciate the value of our high school facilities, its faculty, and the dedication of its student body."

V. Report from the Chairman

Mr. Chapman reported on a productive retreat with members of the leadership team last Friday, which was a continuation of the BoE retreat and an opportunity for identifying goals and challenges, and to engage in honest dialogue.

VI. Report from the Superintendent

Mr. Goeler noted various Halloween happenings - an outstanding Trick or Treat Street collecting much needed goods to replenish the food bank's shelves; and Lions Club's very successful Haunted Hayride and their extreme generosity in donating close to half of what they earn to our students in the form of scholarships.

He reported it was learned today that NHS is one of 477 school districts in the US and Canada being honored by the College Board with placement on the 4th Annual AP District Honor Roll for increasing access to AP course work while simultaneously maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning scores of "3" or higher on AP exams. As one of 18 schools cited in CT, Nonnewaug was commended for successfully identifying motivated, academically prepared students who are likely to benefit from rigorous AP course work. College Board's senior vice president of AP and Instruction said, "We applaud the extraordinary efforts of the devoted teachers and administrators in this district who are offering more students the opportunity to engage in rigorous college-level course work," adding, "These outcomes are a powerful testament to educators' belief that a more diverse population of students is ready for the sort of rigor that will prepare them for success in college."

Mr. Chapman proudly noted that, as one of 18 schools in CT, out of about 165 districts, this puts NHS in the top 10% of the state.

Mr. Goeler gave dates of the safety update meetings in the schools: 11/21/13 at MES; 11/25/13 at BES; 11/26/13 at NHS; 12/3/13 at WMS.

He met with his Superintendent's Advisory Council on 10/30; two areas that group would like to see addressed are digitizing all information sent to families, and getting the word out about what is going on in our schools.

He thanked Mr. Ciotti and student Brandon Simmons for filming tonight under more difficult conditions.

Ms. Domanico reported on the 11/1 teacher professional development day. She highlighted activities at each school and explained what future PD time will be used for.

Mr. Chapman asked her to comment on the process for choosing textbooks. She replied that there is a wide variety of instructional materials used in today's classrooms, and anchor texts are just one resource, not the curriculum.

VII. Privilege of the Floor (agenda specific)

Karen Miller, Bethlehem, read and delivered to Mr. Goeler an FOI request for an organizational chart, figures on per pupil expenditures, online resources for middle and high school students, amount of food wasted through the school lunch program, and procedures for confirming residency of students.

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Tom Arras, Woodbury, responded to Attorney Sommaruga's remarks, saying that since Woodbury residents pay for 75% of any project Region 14 takes on it must be handled properly; contended that the Waterbury case was filed there because Waterbury handles Woodbury; and said it has not been resolved who forgot to post the legal notice.

Art McNally, Woodbury, sent two emails to the Board this week and expected these to be recognized under correspondence. Mr. Chapman agreed and apologized for not having done so. Mr. McNally reiterated that the referendum was not properly posted as required by law and this shouldn't be challenged. If the project is given the go ahead, it will open Pandora's Box. He read a prepared statement, attached hereto.

VIII. Report from Director of Finance and Operations

Mr. McAllister reported that he is establishing Requests for Qualifications (RFQ) and will post them on the State and district websites. He will be looking for up to 3 companies to submit proposals in 5 categories: food service, actuary, health insurance, pension investments, and property/casualty insurance. By reducing the number to 3, each company will know it has a real opportunity and will offer their best numbers.

He also received proposals for snow removal from Logue, who has cleared snow for the district since 1973, and Haley Properties, who has plowed at BES since 2005. They have held their rates for 3 years: \$1900/storm for the 3 Woodbury schools, and \$430/storm at BES. At the request of the Facilities Committee, additional written proposals were obtained, and he recommends extending a 3 year contract to Logue and Haley Properties. Asked if they are both holding their 2010 price for 3 years, he indicated both are. Mr. Molzon added that both have shown a track record of reliability and are happy to stay with us because we pay our bills on time.

IX. Committee Reports

For **Policy**, Mr. Swendsen reported the wellness policy is with the wellness group for review. Next meeting is 11/12 at 7 pm in the central office conference room.

For **Community/Public Relations**, Ms. Brown reported on a news story about NHS graduate Aaron Kodz and his success as a film maker at NYU's prestigious film school. She has posted the schedule for the safety update meetings in the library and there is a lot of interest in this event. Next meeting is 11/21 at 6:30 pm

For **Finance**, Mr. Bauer reported having met on 10/22 to review RFQs and RFP and discussed the possibility of the member towns joining in some of these services to leverage more savings. Mr. Ciotti provided a tech lease update, and ideas were shared for providing the public with financial info on the website. PTO insurance was also discussed, as was the budget timeline, capital reserve transfer, and current budget and line item transfers.

For **Planning/Personnel**, Ms. Van Aken reported having met tonight about how educational materials are chosen, progress with the economic development committee, the possibility of offering credit for team sports, and leveling of classes at the high school.

For **Ad hoc Safety**, Ms. Van Aken noted having met on 10/25. The emergency response plan has been referred to Sgt. Roden and Offr. D'Elia, Ms. Morgan, and the leadership team, with a target completion date of 12/1. At that meeting, the safety meetings were also planned, and the committee discussed cameras in the buildings, access controls and procedures for ensuring sign in at the schools is done consistently.

For **Negotiations**, Mr. Cosgriff reported on today's mediation with the instructional assistants group which has hopefully reached a successful conclusion.

X. Old Business None.

XI. New Business

Mr. Bauer entered a *motion to add approval of snow plowing services to the agenda*. Seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the motion carried 7-0.

Mr. Bauer entered a *motion to move \$134,236.11 to the capital reserve fund*. Second by Mr. Cosgriff. Mr. Bauer noted that this figure is comprised of a 2011-12 surplus of .06% and 2012-13 surplus of .38%. The total amount in the capital reserve will now be \$176,167.94. Motion carried 7-0.

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to approve the 2014 regular meeting dates for the Board of Education*. Second by Mr. Cosgriff. Discussion of a quarterly rotation in Bethlehem was discussed and the need to amend policy if meeting dates are to be changed to accommodate Woodbury town meetings. The motion was withdrawn to allow for further considerations of the meeting dates.

Mr. Goeler reviewed that the board has already seen the changes, none substantive, required by the state for the educator evaluation document. The changes require board approval and so he is seeking that tonight. The teacher evaluation committee has reviewed and supports them, and he feels it is important to have the teachers on board. Mr. Chapman entered a *motion to approve the changes to the Educator Evaluation document*. Seconded by Mr. Bauer, the motion carried 7-0.

Mr. Bauer entered a *motion to waive the Region 14 bid policy in order to extend contracts to Logue and Haley Properties for snow plowing service at Region 14 schools for three school years*. Second by Ms. Van Aken who thanked both groups for holding their rates and providing great service. Motion carried 7-0.

XII. Board Announcements

Mr. Chapman commented on the Legislative Open House as a very interesting experience. The professionalism of the students is phenomenal, he said, and they are outstanding kids. There is a culture of success in the agriscience center and a pride that you can feel, and they speak of their affection for Bill Davenport and the program.

Ms. Brown thought it was great that this event is combined with an 8th grade open house, with great food and great tours of the facility.

Mr. Swendsen added that many agriscience grads are local business owners who hire local people, a great tribute to our school system.

XIII. Privilege of the Floor

Ms. Miller returned to clarify that a quarterly rotation of meetings in Bethlehem would amount to about 1 in 6 meetings held there. She noted that Bethlehem often feels slighted and it is not good community relations to meet here only 1/6 of the time. She asked the board to consider more often than this for equal representation.

Mr. McNally asked for clarification of changes to the evaluation document approved and waived. Mr. Chapman explained that the approved changes are non-substantive and administratively handled.

XIV. Adjournment

Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to adjourn*. Entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Mr. Bauer, the motion carried 7-0.

The meeting of the Board of Education adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol Ann Brown, Secretary
Regional School District #14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 11/6/13

To: The Region 14 Superintendent and BOE Members for inclusion in Meeting minutes of Monday, November 4, 2013

Board of Education Meeting

Date: Monday, November 4, 2013

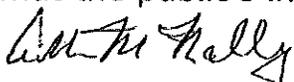
Time: 7:30 pm

Place: Bethlehem Elementary School

For those of us who are concerned about the Region 14 BOE's lawsuit(S) and their cost (\$23K+ as of 9-30-2013) for the validation of your Illegal High School Rebuilding Bond Vote, be aware you gave us a problem here in Woodbury and Bethlehem with voicing our opinions. The Region 14 BOE brought in a lawyer from CABA at your October 21st meeting, who instructed you that:

- 1) you are representatives of the State of Connecticut and not subject to the members of the towns you represent, that you must do the bidding of the state and not the towns who elect you
- 2) you are not required to answer any questions presented at your public meetings under Privilege of the Floor
- 3) you can use the script, which she provided at the meeting, on how to limit the public's time and how you were not required to answer the public's questions that night
- 4) that your meeting minutes could be a summary of what takes place, are not required to include the public's comments. Conveniently this permits you to omit items which might be embarrassing and you don't want the non-attending public to be informed
- 5) however, you were told that you must include any public comments submitted in writing by the public at your meetings, as part of your meeting minutes
- 6) you were also told that if there was a public concern, you should put it on the next meetings agenda or schedule a special meeting for the public to voice concerns. So must we e-mail the chairman reminding him of what CABA said and ask if he is going to put on the agenda to discuss: "as to if you will put the Illegal High School Rebuilding Bond Vote on the agenda with under it action to be taken? After all, this has been brought up by the public at the last four meetings, and the board has refused to put this on the agenda for the full board to vote as to if they want to continue to waste tax payers educational and town money or will they drop it and reschedule another vote."

So now as required, I have prepared in writing what I want the greater Region 14 BOE public to be informed about, for inclusion in your meeting minutes. In the future Region 14 public, please check all meeting attachments, if you want to know what the public's input actually is at these meetings.



Art McNally, Concerned Woodbury Resident

PS The links for CABA comments on October 21, 2013:

<<http://youtu.be/-46DQbgGpX0>>

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daooYnYrWho>>