

OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT – COMMITTEE MEETING
Marion – Mattapoisett –Rochester, Massachusetts

BY: ZOOM

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
April 13, 2021

Special school committee meeting of the Old Rochester Regional School Committee was held on Tuesday, April 13, 2021, and called to order by Chairperson Cary Humphrey at 6:30 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT: All by Remote/Zoom: Cary Humphrey, Chairperson; Heather Burke, Vice-Chairperson; Joseph Pires; Margaret McSweeny; Michelle Smith; James Muse; Frances Kearns; and Suzanne Tseki

OTHERS PRESENT: All by Remote/Zoom: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools; Howard Barber – Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations; teachers; staff; parents; members of the press and public; and, Toni Bailey, Recording Secretary

MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairperson, Cary Humphrey stated in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, the Agenda has been set, the meeting is being video-taped, and unless there are any emergencies that need to be added, the Agenda will be followed as outlined.

V. General

A. Approval of the Old Rochester Regional Agreement

Recommendation:

That the School Committee review and approve the newly revised Old Rochester Regional Agreement.

Michael S. Nelson – Superintendent:

“Good evening everyone. We are here for a special reason, which is the Regional Agreement Amendment proposal. Sometime ago, meaning multiple years ago, a sub-committee comprised of school committee members and administrators, started the process of revising the Regional Agreement for Old Rochester – a document that has not been amended since 1986.

Ideally, and per the recommendation of the Department of Education, a regional agreement is looked at and possibly amended approximately every five (5) years. With that being said, much has been accomplished in recent years. Although the pace has not always been as fast as we would like here as a school committee and administration, we have made great progress.

Since finalizing a draft Regional Agreement Amendment last year, this school committee voted to submit the proposed Amendment to the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education in the spring of 2020.

After submission, the Department of Education provided feedback and recommendations on our proposal numerous times. As a result, the superintendent’s office, in working with school committee member representation, Heather Burke, Tina Rood and Cary Humphrey, and also our legal counsel, continuously assessed the feedback and recommendations and adjusted the proposal as needed and appropriate as we worked towards preliminary approval from the Department of Education.

Tonight it is important for the school committee to understand the major changes that have been made to the Regional Agreement. Most of the changes you will see in the backup information reflect current legal requirements, Department of Education’s expectations and current regulations, and ultimately what we were looking for, a Regional Agreement Amendment that we believe meets our school district needs and also our three towns moving forward.

As we worked through the process, it was important for us to not only have a Regional Agreement that is in compliance with legal statutes and requirements, but also an Agreement that preserves local control. We advocated strongly for an Agreement to preserve historic practices and

preferences while addressing new language that will allow us to move our schools forward in a more efficient, responsible fiscal school manner.

Ultimately tonight, I am asking the school committee to once again approve the Regional Agreement as presented and preliminary approved by the Department of Education. If approved, I will then notify the three towns of the official action taken by the school committee here tonight, and then ask for them to submit the Regional Agreement Amendment and associated articles for the town warrants.

At this time, I would like Heather Burke, who has been part of the process since the beginning to present the major aspects of the Regional Agreement Amendment to the committee, as we currently stand.”

Vice-Chair, Heather Burke stated as follows:

- The majority of the changes made to the Regional Agreement were to bring it up to current law standards and current DESE standards, as well as cleanup odd language.
- Ms. Burke extended a “thank you” to Tina Rood who went through not only these Agreements word for word but Regional Agreements that were provided to us by DESE, (which were considered best practices), to see where we could improve ours, based on these exemplars.
- The reason why we started this effort was at the request of the Tri-town governments – they see major fluctuations in their assessments and that causes them to not be able to budget or plan for town activities and projects. They wanted to have a system that was more smooth and predictable.

Ms. Burke stated the following are the four (4) major changes in the Agreement that we proposed:

Apportionment Method of Operating Costs:

Ms. Burke stated our current method of providing the towns their assessment figures was by looking year in/year out at our current enrollment, go through our formula, and then we gave the towns their assessment figures, at which time they scrambled to fit it into their budget puzzle. Ms. Burke stated this new model would be a three-year rolling average and all of the town administrators and selectman have endorsed this time period and methodology. Ms. Burke noted if there is a huge bump in one year, this “bump” would be paid for over years, as oppose to one massive hit in one year.

School Committee Elected Members:

Ms. Burke stated the Elected School Committee terms would now start on July 1st and run through June 30th, so that people can finish out the school year.

One Person One Vote State Law:

Ms. Burke stated with this change, we are forced to proportion our committee votes according to town population. Ms. Burke noted this is a state law and it is true for all elected positions – you can refer to Mass. General Laws, Section 1G, for details. Ms. Burke stated what you need to know is that as a town gets smaller, their elected members of the school committee vote gets smaller – as a town gets bigger, than their vote gets bigger. Ms. Burke stated the population in our three towns are fairly equal, so we have set it up that the votes are equal.

Creates a System for a Capital Stabilization Fund:

Ms. Burke stated for Capital Costs, it has been changed to a five-year rolling average based on enrollment. Ms. Burke noted this time frame was used in the other Regional Agreements that were recommended to us by DESE, and the Stabilization Fund was also recommended in the UMass Boston Assessment of the Regional Assessment that we received a couple of years ago.

Questions/Comments by School Committee Members:

Question by: Frances Kearns

Ms. Kearns’ question relates to the new members beginning on July 1st - Training has be to completed within a certain time frame (30 days) – Would the July 1st timeframe allow newly elected members enough time to get their training completed and be able to start at the next scheduled meeting?

Ms. Burke stated most of the town elections are held in early May, and in the past the School Committee does not tend to meet over the summer, therefore, “re-organization” would take place at the first meeting in the fall, which would give newly elected members approximately six weeks to get trained.

Chairperson Cary Humphrey stated once the election happens and a person(s) gets sworn in, technically that person(s) is in, and the other person(s) is dismissed, whether training has taken place or not. Mr. Humphrey noted in years past, we have had sub-committees and we have lost members at the elementary and district levels, and we still had things to do in the month of June. Mr. Humphrey stated this caused holes into the fall.

Ms. Burke stated after we vote tonight, and if it is passed, it would be put on each of the town warrants to be presented at each of the town meetings. Ms. Burke noted it does need to pass in all three towns, and hopes that everyone at this meeting tonight will go to their town meetings and help answer any questions regarding these proposed changes.

Superintendent Nelson stated in anticipation of approval tonight, based off of the current Regional Agreement that is in place, he would notify the Board of Selectman in writing that the committee has taken such action to propose an Amendment to the Regional Agreement. Mr. Nelson stated he would then work with the individual towns based off of where they are at with their next scheduled town meetings. Mr. Nelson stated if all three towns agree to the Amendment, he would send it back with evidence of the three towns’ approval – and the last piece would be to have the Commission sign off on the Agreement to put it into full effect.

Mr. Humphrey stated Ms. Burke and Ms. Rood did 99.9% of the work along with Mr. Nelson and noted it has been a lot of work. Mr. Humphrey gave “kudos” to all of them for their perseverance.

MOTION: by Ms. Smith to approve the Old Rochester Regional Agreement Amendment as presented and preliminary approved by the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

SECONDED: James Muse

OPPOSED: None

MOTION PASSED – 8:0

Roll Call Vote: Heather Burke – Yes; Joseph Pires – Yes; Michelle Smith – Yes; James Muse – Yes; Suzanne Tseki – Yes; Margaret McSweeney – Yes; Frances Kearns – Yes; Cary Humphrey – Yes

B. Capital Stabilization Funds Account Approved

Recommendation:

That the School Committee approve the creation of a Capital Stabilization Funds Account.

Chair, Cary Humphrey:

That the Old Rochester Regional School District establish a Capital Stabilization Fund pursuant to the provisions of Mass. General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 16G1/2 to be known as the Regional School District Capital Fund to pay costs of capital repairs, renovations and improvements to the regional district school and its associated facilities in accordance with the provisions of such law.

MOTION: by James Muse to approve as presented

SECONDED: Michelle Smith

OPPOSED: None

MOTION PASSED – 8:0

Roll Call: Heather Burke – Yes; Joseph Pires – Yes; Michelle Smith – Yes; James Muse – Yes; Suzanne Tseki – Yes; Margaret McSweeney – Yes; Frances Kearns – Yes; Cary Humphrey – Yes

Comment/Question by Frances Kearns:

Ms. Burke did a great job summarizing the key points on the changes – Can Ms. Burke share those key points just in case any of my constituents ask any questions and/or I have the opportunity to speak at Town Meeting?

Ms. Burke stated she would be happy to write up the key points and forward them to Ms. Russo so that Ms. Russo can forward them to all of the school committee members.

IX. Future Business

A. Timeline

The next meeting(s) of the Committee will be held as follows:

<u>ORR School Committee</u>	<u>Joint School Committee</u>
May 12, 2021	TBD

Mr. Humphrey sent out condolences to Mr. Nelson and his family.

X. Open Comments

Ms. McSweeney announced she is expecting her third child on June 7th, and informed the committee that she will be at the May 12th school committee meeting, as well as the Town Meeting and will **continue** her elected position in the fall.

MOTION: by Michelle Smith to adjourn at 6:52pm

SECONDED: James Muse

OPPOSED: None

MOTION PASSED – 8:0

Roll Call: Heather Burke – Yes; Joseph Pires – Yes; Michelle Smith – Yes; James Muse – Yes; Suzanne Tseki – Yes; Margaret McSweeney – Yes; Frances Kearns – Yes; Cary Humphrey – Yes

Submitted by:

Toni Bailey, Recording Secretary