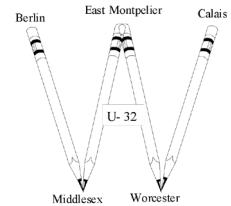


Washington Central Unified Union School District

WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.

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**WCUUSD Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
6.11.24 5:00-6:00 PM
In-Person
U-32
Rm 128/131
930 Gallison Hill Rd
Montpelier, VT**

Present: Flor Diaz Smith, Superintendent Roy, Principal Dellinger-Pate, Daniel Keeney, Ursula Stanley, Mckalyn Leclerc, Susanne Gann, Mark Kline, Michelle Ksepka, Chris McVeigh, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Alicia Lyford, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Natasha Eckart, John and Emily, John Boyles, Lila Richardson, Andrea Chandler, Erica Zimmerman, Anna Matheson, Allison Fayle, Kyle Landis-Marinello, Jordan Nobler, Scott S, Catherine, Gillian Fuqua, Richard R, Noah Weinstein, Ellen Knoedler, Robert M, Lauren Chabot, Deborah Bloom

1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

2. Discussion/Action

2.1. Configuration Study: Flor Diaz Smith noted that the dates/ locations/ logistics for forums are being discussed with town select boards. (First forum planned June 26). Chris McVeigh shared that he has spoken to select board representatives in Calais and East Montpelier and is currently working on connecting with other boards. He had shared the letter proposing to coordinate a meeting that he had sent to each town select board. Mckalyn Leclerc stated that she has gotten feedback and questions, particularly from the Worcester community. The composition of the forum groups (board representatives) will be discussed later tonight at the WCUUSD board meeting. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that it would be important to communicate that the forums are open discussions; that there is not a predetermined end at this point. Daniel Keeney stated that the Steering Committee had considered the idea of world cafe format where everyone has access to the list of parameters that were agreed upon, multiple tables with directed questions within the parameters that have been determined. Flor Diaz Smith stated that what she is hearing from the Steering Committee meetings is that people are wondering: What are the goals of the forums?

What is the structure of the public forum? She shared a draft of answers to these questions based on discussions to date. She asked for committee input. Natasha Eckart stated that people want to be able to have conversations and ask questions and provide feedback and she feels that the board members need to be prepared to do more listening and less talking. (E.g. a 70/30 proportion). Mckalyn Leclerc stated that she believes the more flexible we can be the better. We need to be prepared to answer questions; many questions have been raised and she does not want to be standing in the front of the group with no answers to provide; she would like to be prepared. Data on minimum class sizes continues to be an ask (re data.) Superintendent Roy reminded the committee that the agreement was that step one is a forum around concepts. Some of the questions that have been asked cannot be answered yet (e.g. tax rates for the next five years.) She stated that we can be clear - here are the questions we can answer at this time; here are the questions that can be answered going forward. She suggested that the forum's purpose is to create a parking lot of questions. Diane Nichols Fleming stated that if we are saying to the community - these are the questions that our process brought us to... it will be important to be authentic in the process. This is the moment when there is still time for open communication and brainstorming of questions and we have planned to allow another opportunity to come back together to answer some of the parking lot issues. Chris McVeigh asked so the forums are to get feedback to potential models. The committee reviewed: we have set the parameters; we will provide that information, provide the opportunity for our communities to go to the tables, and brainstorm in a larger group to answer pointed questions; not to respond at the tables to the potential models - it is to see, is there another way that we have not thought about? Then coming back to the committee to ask, is this a viable option? Ursula Stanley reviewed that the committee has created some brainstormed potential models - to clarify - are we asking for another iteration of potential models? If we are inviting this feedback - what are we going to do with that information? At this point when we are trying to envision different scenarios, how do we use the "I don't want my school to close" information? How do we further our work? We agreed at the last meeting, to let the public come and tell us what they would like to see, and what creative ideas would they like to consider. Then at the next forum, e.g. possibly bring back the outcome from the brainstorming with some feasibility responses. Then come back with more in-depth information, e.g. in August. Natasha Eckart asked - if the meetings next week are for gathering other ideas for other possible configurations, how is the timeline going to work over the summer months? Will the ideas be given the same airtime and consideration that the other options were given over time, to date? Access to people is limited over the summer. Ursula Stanley reminded that, during the months that we began this process, there were no configuration models; we talked a great deal about the process. The first potential models came about in December/ January, and then budget development took priority. Flor Diaz Smith stated that the committee has responded to the public, decided to step back and allow for the month of July to continue discussion. Chris McVeigh asked do we have to have a decision in August. Some discussion followed. Ursula Stanley asked how many years are we going to say "next year?" If we do not make a decision in a timely way then we are continuing to "kick the can." Some discussion followed around voting in March versus November. Alicia Lyford stated that if the goal is to hear from as many of our

constituents as possible, she envisions frontloading the strategic plan, and other information, to allow for hearing what the people in the room have to say - she suggests allowing as much time as possible in the forum focused on hearing what the people are wanting to say/ ask. Steven Dellinger Pate suggested using the FAQ document to address some of the questions and provide a period for when the questions will be answered. Superintendent Roy suggested that a lot of the comments are around the timeline. It doesn't hurt to still aim for the timeline that was decided. It may be that in September we decide to further pursue some other scenarios. She feels that we are not tying our hands by at least aiming for September. Daniel Keeney stated that he would like to give the benefit of the doubt to the people who are critiquing the timeline/ process. He hopes to frame part of the forum as a possibility of other ideas/ scenarios coming to the surface. Susanne Gann stated, regarding budget development for FY26; she believes that if we continue with this same process, the chance for budget failure again is very high. She suggests coming up with something palatable regarding expenses and opportunistic for students. Diane Nichols-Fleming - one of the big questions, the elephant in the room, is what will the tax impact be? If it is not viable, then it is not. However, if it *is* viable and we need more time to explore, then we should consider taking more time. Diane Nichols-Fleming: "I understand that to do __, my tax rate will go to __." This is important information for people. Ursula Stanley- we need to have a mechanism to know how many of our constituents are not represented at the forum. Daniel Keeney - if we do not have an answer, and we do not have a mechanism to find an answer (e.g. tax rate), then this is information that we need to share with the legislature. Mckalyn Leclerc stated, that if we do not have any tangible data to speak specifically about the impact on tax rate, then we could not use it to influence one way or the other. (E.g. to say, "this is viable" or "this is not viable" through the lens of tax impact). Ursula Stanley asked, to what degree of exactness do we need data? e.g. per pupil spending, tax rate, etc. Flor Diaz Smith stated that the only thing we can control is per-pupil spending. Diane Nichols-Fleming - then we cannot keep saying that our towns cannot afford the tax rate if we cannot control it. Susanne Gann stated that we should use expenditures as the data that we know and can control. Flor Diaz Smith: we have agreed that we are doing year-round budgeting and that we can focus on using expenditures as our focus. Flor Diaz Smith invited public input: Deborah Bloom - did not hear any conversation about what is happening at the state. Why are we moving at this speed - at the state level there is a committee that could change our entire process - why are we moving this quickly? Within a year, there could be a huge change in the process from the state - we do not know what that committee will decide. Kyle Landis-Marinello stated that the input that is needed for major decisions like this is community input . He has heard a lot from people in Worcester and Calais that they value their schools . We need to listen to that input before a recommendation is given to the voters. He also noted that Montpelier is considering a completely new building (due to flood plain) and they are open to talking with us about some huge savings. Would like to see more discussion about merging with Montpelier. Scott Starr - we do have at least some historical data - he spoke about a Yale student who did a study about the effects of Act 46 and found that it really did not reduce administrative costs as expected/ promised. Reductions in pupil spending and in contracted services, but increases in other areas. He expressed concern that we do not discuss per pupil

spending (we talk more about something we cannot control which is tax rate.) Noah Weinstein spoke regarding community forums, being summer, many people go away, please at the very least provide an opportunity for online participation. It is hard to say what we want without having more information to be able to assess what we want - hard to say, e.g. I want this apple or this orange, when I have no idea how much the apple or the orange costs. He believes the question that will come up is the idea of merging with Montpelier - that seems to be the only solution. It has been confusing to hear on the one hand this is not about the finances, but on the other hand, that it *is* about the finances. If we talk about the well-being of the students; then there is a lot of pushback from families with concerns about their students' well-being when they attend the school in their community. If there is a portion of the tax rate that comes from school spending, then it will be useful to share what information we do know. Richard R: - hearing the backsliding begin - every year we hear "Next year we are going to fix it." These all feel like ways to stall, to put it off for yet another year. Even if we merge with Montpelier, it is not going to change the status of Doty or Calais. There is no reason to not just move forward, that is your role as the board. You have to make decisions and move forward, not to stall. Daniel Keeney stated that we have heard all of these comments and we consider them. He thanked the community for their feedback.

3. Future Agenda Items

4. Adjourn: Ursula Stanley moved/ Daniel Keeney seconded, and the committee adjourned by consensus at 6:00

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Committee Recording Secretary