

8 Town School Consolidation Committee
October 15, 2019
Stockbridge Town Hall

FINAL

The following members of the committee were present: N. Hawver--Sheffield, C. Cardillo--Stockbridge, P. Dillion, Superintendent BHRSD, B. Regulbuto, Superintendent SBRSD, M. Thomas--West Stockbridge, L. Prashker--Alford, Tom Berkel--Egremont, J. Sylbert—Monterey, E. Abrahams--Great Barrington, S. Bannon--BHRSD School Committee and T. White--New Marlborough.

Steve Hemman & Dr. Jay Barry from MA Assoc. of Regional Schools (MARS) and Glenn Koocher from the MA Assoc. of School Committees (MASC) were in attendance to give presentations to the group.

Mr. Hemman began with a slide presentation outlining the process on regionalization and how to form a new regional district. He listed 3 options:

Option 1. The Regional School Committee from District A may form a Regional Agreement Amendment Committee (and invite members from Regional School District B to join the Amendment Committee)

Option 2. The Regional School Committee from District B may form a Regional Agreement Amendment Committee (and invite members from Regional School District A to join the Amendment Committee)

Option 3. Towns form a Regional District Planning Committee (Chapter 71, Section 14). Regional District Planning Committee from two or more towns may join together to form a Regional School District Planning Board. (Chapter 71 Section 14A and 14B)

Jon Sylbert asked about a point of order—stating that his understanding from the last meeting was that we were going to hear from potential facilitators to the process. A couple of others also thought this is what was to be discussed in this meeting. Mr. Hemman and Ms. Hawver indicated that facilitation would be part of the present as it went further.

Mr. Hemman from MARS discussed issues such re-districting of assets, how to decide debt and whether it needs to be combined or stay separate, how voting would be decided between the Towns (2/3 vote/super majority), analyzing current collective bargaining agreements, other post employee benefits (OPEB), how school buildings would be used or potentially closed, amending current regional school district agreements and drafting new regional agreements.

Dr. Barry then spoke on the Southwick/Tolland/Granville consolidation. Granville had K-6 and the Selectmen wanted to combine with the other 2 Towns due to debt and lower enrollment. This could be done with Option 1 or 2 and seemed advantageous to all Towns. Although the Granville School was originally scheduled to stay open, it was closed after consolidation. This is the hardest part of any school consolidation process and the language for how a school is closed must be thought about carefully. Option 3 was used for the Amherst municipal and Pelham schools last year. They studied forming a regional district for almost 1 ½ years and voted not to pursue the regionalization.

The pathway forward has to include how the group wants to study the process and the priorities both financial and educational. It was clear that the group thought looking at the financial data first was important.

Discussion by the group: It seems like Option 3 would be the most likely for the 2 regional districts. The first step would be for each Town to appoint 3 people (total of 24 for all 8 Towns), 1 school committee member and 2 at-large members from the communities. These appointees would be brought forward by the Selectboards, but would be appointed by the Moderator of each Town. Step 2 would be electing a chair, vice chair and secretary and establish who will be the voting members of the new group. Sub-committees can be established and an attorney versed in this issue would need to be hired.

MARS has developed an RFP and their services would provide a facilitator, consultant and attorney.

Mr. Koocher from MASC stated that they could assist with the process, but would not offer the services that MARS has discussed in detail. He stated there is grant money available from the State for proceeding with this, but cautioned that we would want to be sure that by applying for a grant does not allow or obligate us

to the Department of Education on what they want for us to do going forward. Mr. Koocher handed out a document for everyone to read on strategies for looking at School District Regionalization/Reorganization.

The minutes from September 25th were reviewed for corrections and amendments. Jon Sylbert pointed out the differences in the presentations that were expected at this meeting and what was presented. Motion to approve was made by Ed Abrahams, seconded by Jon Sylbert. Motion approved unanimously.

The minutes of these meetings will be posted in each Town after they are approved for all residents to keep up and follow what is happening and being discussed by the group.

Next Steps:

- 1) Discuss the document given to the group by MASC after everyone has had an opportunity to review
- 2) Discuss which Option would be the best before preparing and RFP
- 3) Tara White will get the information regarding the grant funding available for the process
- 4) SBRSD has already made voted to proceed with the formal process of studying regionalization. BHRSD has not formally done, but will bring up at their next meeting.

Ed Abrahams suggested that we think about defining success of this committee. At this point, success should be thought of as studying the entire concept of regionalization, not on what the outcome may be.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, November 19th at 5pm in Stockbridge.

Respectively Submitted:



Tara White
Town of New Marlborough Rep