

**REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE
MINUTES
October 18, 2007**

Eric L. Haley, Superintendent of Schools for the Waterville Public Schools, called the meeting of the Regional Planning Committee to order at 5:00 p.m. in the cafeteria at Winslow Elementary School in Winslow.

Those in Attendance: Maryanne Bernier, Lawrence Brown, Lee Cabana, Doug Carville, Charley Clark, Robin Colby, Judy Coombs, Don Dufour, Steve Dyer, Elwood Ellis, Doug Eugley, Lori Fowle, Jeffrey Frost, Monique Gilbert, Michael Gosselin, Michael Heavener, Dennis Keschl, Linda Laughlin, Mike McQuarrie, Libby Mitchell, Robert Moreau, Nora Murray, Constance Packard, Paula Pooler, Marie Pulsifer, William Pulsifer, Gerald Saint Amand, Debrajean Scheibel, Joel Selwood, Gary Smith, Phil St. Onge, Jack Sutton, Peter Thiboutot, Michael Thurston, Lauchlin Titus, and Pamela Trinward

Gerry St. Amand made a motion, and Phil St. Onge seconded the motion, to approve the minutes of the October 4, 2007 meeting as amended. Motion carried.

The meeting turned to Subcommittee reports.

Linda Laughlin noted that on October 11 through October 13, 2007 a Future Search Conference was held. Thirty-eight people from China, Messalonskee, Vassalboro, Waterville, and Winslow participated, representing a variety of stakeholders, including parents, students, businesses, town officials, community members, teachers, school staff and administration. The focus of the conference was to engage the communities in a dialogue about the future direction of our schools, with the outcome being a community-based vision for our students' learning. As participants facilitated through the three-day process, they discussed what an educational program would look like. There is a small group that will get together on Monday, October 22, to write the mission statement. The details will be shared at the next meeting of the Regional Planning Committee (RPC). Photos of individuals who attended the event were viewed.

Nora Murray noted that there were similarities in terms of what people wanted for their children. All communities were represented at the workshop. She noted that several high school students attended as well, and took on their roles very seriously.

Jeff Frost noted that it was interesting to see all the different cultures represented at the Conference.

Eric Haley noted that even before the Governor's proposal regarding consolidation, Waterville and Messalonskee were working on collaborative efforts, including quality programming and what can be done to make our educational program that much better through this process. There were common themes that came from all the communities involved and what everyone wants for our students.

Jim Morse noted that there are numerous bills that have been presented to the Legislature in consideration of modifying the consolidation law. Pam Trinward could bring some real life experience to the Legislature. The educational programming piece needs to be in the law. What participants spent three days doing was focusing in on students. It was suggested that Libby Mitchell and Pam Trinward bring that suggestion to the Legislature.

Connie Packard reviewed the work of the Finance Subcommittee. Discussed were the buildings, enrollments, square feet, additions and future needs. An overview of the VFA Facility Management Software used by all districts was provided. It provides information regarding the condition of the districts' buildings. Also discussed was the concept of a building's facility condition index (FCI), which is a measure in place for all buildings. FCI is a measure of a building's condition using a standardized approach, which reflects the ratio between the amount of repairs, renovations requirements, deficiencies, life safety issues and other issues. All that needs to be addressed in a building and costed out compared to the replacement value. As a building's FCI approaches 1.0, typically around 70%, the building is approaching the end of its useful life. At that point, the recommendation would be for a new building. The lower the FCI, the better. Ms. Packard noted that the Subcommittee identified projects needed in each town, which reflect needs for the next seven years. This is a snapshot of how five SAUs rate with all their buildings.

The recommendation of the Finance Subcommittee is that the Regional School Unit assume transfer and title of the collective school facilities/sites provided in the summary lists prepared for this meeting (refer to spreadsheets for SAD 47, Waterville, and Union 52). All preexisting arrangements/joint use agreements to be maintained/honored as currently done in each District.

Eric Haley asked how the cost sharing method in the consolidation law is adversely affecting some communities. There have been two articles recently in the paper regarding this issue. The Commissioner has said the Legislature will review the law and make adjustments to it regarding cost sharing and EPS.

Libby Mitchell noted the Commissioner stated there is a possibility of being able to return to cost sharing prior to EPS and calculating it in a different way. That seems to be a barrier for lots of schools. Senator Mitchell noted the Commissioner is committed to bringing legislation in January because this is an issue for lots of schools.

Several questions were asked. What would go if consolidation took place? What about the football field in Waterville, for example? It is used by the Parks and Recreation Department. Would the City have to give the field to the RSU? What happens to a building if it is not being used and the City paid for building? Would it go to the RSU?

Jim Morse noted that the representatives from the school systems that currently exist need to discuss with town government officials the parameters of what they see as being transferred.

Gary Smith noted that there were also projects completed with federal money. The RSU would have to work that out.

Elaine Miller noted that there is also the superintendent's office in Winslow, which is owned by Winslow, China, and Vassalboro, but sits on Winslow land.

Jim Morse noted that these issues will need to be reviewed by town and city governments to determine what will be school property.

Eric Haley noted that Elwood Ellis will discuss transfer issues with Mike Roy, Waterville City Administrator, to determine what would be considered RSU land, school land, municipal land and what transfers to the RSU.

Gerry St. Amand asked if it was premature to vote tonight regarding the RPC's intent.

Jim Morse recommended that representatives of the Subcommittee have a discussion with town leaders to define school property.

Joel Selwood noted that whatever the entities end up being, it would require title work and all legalities to transfer the titles. He asked where expenses would be borne.

Don Dufour asked how this will go through and what the impact will be. The feeling is to postpone the vote.

Judy Coombs noted that if the RPC is trying to work with the towns and maintain good relations, it would be wise to get their input before a formal vote.

Doug Eugley noted that when the Finance Subcommittee met, it was discussed that any town owned properties could be deeded to the RSU. He has no problem with delaying the vote and getting a more detailed listing. He asked if there are any fields that are town owned or part of Recreation Departments.

Eric Haley noted that fields would still be used as they are now.

A motion was made by Phil St. Onge and seconded by Dennis Keschl that the Regional Planning Committee table action regarding the recommendation of the Finance Subcommittee that the RSU assume transfer and title of the collective school facilities/sites provided in the summary lists prepared for this meeting, until such time as representatives of the Subcommittee have had an opportunity to discuss with town leaders the definition of school property and provide them the opportunity for discussion prior to a vote by the RPC. Motion carried unanimously.

Eric Haley asked if there were any delegations to be heard. Bill Pulsifer of Belgrade asked how this will affect different sports programs and if the sports programs will become one budget.

Jim Morse noted that the vision is to bring athletic programs under one budget but to have three separate programs to maintain identity.

Eric Haley noted that schools would still have their booster groups supporting teams within their communities because those teams would all exist. The vision is to run sports programs as they are currently run, but under one budget.

Jim Morse noted that it does open the opportunity for districts to save money. For example, athletic tape and services with Red Cross. Can we get a better deal on those services if we run the program together?

Jim Morse provided a report of the Governance Subcommittee meeting held on October 9, 2007. The Subcommittee had two tasks that they needed to work through: school choice and governance in terms of how many members each town will have represented on the RSU Board. Unresolved at the last meeting was how to proceed through the election of Board members, and whether this Committee can establish the structure of a new board. The Commissioner, in addition to the Planning Committee report she will approve, has to make sure it meets the law. There currently are three-year cycles for election of Board members. This deals with how territories of elected representatives will be defined. The idea is communities with multiple representatives for three different voting methods, as long as it follows one-man one vote rule.

The Governance Subcommittee recommends the Board voting pattern noted below with the understanding that Waterville, Winslow and Oakland Board members will need to draw lots to determine who is on the RSU Board for one, two or three year terms once they have been elected.

Town	Population	# of Votes	# of Members	Votes per member	% per member	Equal weight per member	Equal % per member	Excess over equal
Belgrade	3209	69	1	69	6.86%	77	7.69%	-0.84%
China	4408	94	1	94	9.42%	77	7.69%	1.73%
Oakland	6202	133	2	66	6.63%	77	7.69%	-1.07%
Rome	1101	24	1	24	2.35%	77	7.69%	-5.34%
Sidney	3966	85	1	85	8.47%	77	7.69%	0.78%
Vassalboro	4337	93	1	93	9.27%	77	7.69%	1.57%
Waterville	15639	334	4	84	8.35%	77	7.69%	0.66%
Winslow	7944	170	2	85	8.49%	77	7.69%	0.79%
Totals	46806	1000	13					

The Governance Subcommittee recommends that the city and towns with multiple Board members determine whether they wish to use at-large representation, a ward system, or some combination, noting that whatever method is chosen must adhere to the one man one vote principle.

The Governance Subcommittee recommends that the official ten-year census be used to adjust the votes per member and that the updated U.S. Census figures be used to adjust votes per member mid-way through the official census. Such adjustments will be made the first year after the official census and the 6th year after the official census using updated numbers generated by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Gerald Saint Amand speaking on behalf of representatives of China, Vassalboro and Winslow stated that the group gave its consensus to move forward as recommended.

Lee Cabana speaking on behalf of representatives of the Waterville Public Schools stated that the group gave its consensus to move forward as recommended.

Jack Sutton speaking on behalf of representatives of MSAD 47 stated that the group gave its consensus to move forward as recommended.

Motion carried unanimously to support the Governance Subcommittee recommendations relating to governance in terms of how many members each town will have represented on the RSU Board.

Jim Morse noted that the Governance Subcommittee also discussed the issue of school choice and tuition contracts. This issue needs to be addressed based on the plan put forth. There are currently no tuition contracts in existence in any of the districts. However, two of the towns offer school choice. Dr. Morse reviewed a description of school choice. For China "All students 9-12 may choose to attend any secondary school approved for tuition purposes. China pays the maximum allowable tuition for each student plus insured value factor for students attending Erskine. They also pay Erskine an additional amount for any special education students enrolled at Erskine. Transportation is also provided to Erskine, paid for by the towns." The same language was duplicated for the Town of Vassalboro. The vast majority of youngsters in China and Vassalboro make the choice to attend Erskine.

Dr. Morse reviewed with the RPC the recommendations of the Governance Subcommittee related to school choice.

1. The Governance Subcommittee recommends "choice" among the three public high schools as long as no students who would have traditionally attended Messalonskee, Waterville, or Winslow would be displaced by a student from one of the other communities, and as long as there is available space in the school requested.
2. The Governance Subcommittee recommends that students from China and Vassalboro who choose to participate in vocational technical education do so at Mid-Maine Technical Center in Waterville. Students who are enrolled at the Capital Area Technical Center in Augusta at the time this agreement becomes operational may continue to participate in the program in Augusta.
3. The Governance Subcommittee discussed transportation of students enrolled at Erskine. Currently those costs are embedded in the school budgets of China and Vassalboro. As per the consolidation law, it is understood that the RSU is responsible for the average high school tuition cost for each student attending a school of choice. The RSU would not be responsible for transportation of any student who has chosen to attend any school other than those public schools within the RSU.
4. The Governance Subcommittee discussed the additional costs being charged by Erskine for educating special needs students. Currently those costs are embedded in the school budgets of China and Vassalboro. As per the consolidation law, it is understood that the RSU is responsible for the average high school tuition cost for each student attending a school of choice. The RSU would not be responsible for additional costs of any student who has chosen to attend any school other than those public schools within the RSU.

Mike Gosselin asked how the Committee proposed to have that enforced in terms of schools that traditionally attend. For example, what happens if a student from China and attends Waterville High School and makes the varsity basketball team and causes a Waterville student to be placed on the JV team?

Pam Trinward noted that students would be accepted based on space in the school, not space in the specific programs.

Mike Gosselin asked what would happen if all three schools said there was no room.

Pam Trinward noted that it would be the responsibility of the RSU. If there were room at Waterville and Winslow but not at Messalonskee, then students would have to go to Waterville or Winslow.

Mike Thurston asked if recommendation #1 speaks to China and Vassalboro only.

Jim Morse noted that it did not. He, Eric Haley and Elaine Miller have philosophically done this. What currently happens is if a child from Winslow wants to go to Messalonskee or Waterville, the student generally does based on the best interests of that child. It is an exchange between the schools now.

Elaine Miller noted that what is currently done is based on academic courses, not sports. For example students who go to Waterville for the strings program or for an AP bio class it is because those are courses that are not currently offered at their own high school.

Eric Haley noted that Waterville has superintendents' agreements for ten students who are coming for one course only. The law says if two superintendents agree, it is in the child's best interest.

Elaine Miller also noted that if there are homeless students, the homeless law must be followed.

Doug Eugley asked about transportation for choice schools. What about transportation to other schools? What if a Sidney child goes to Winslow all day?

Jim Morse noted that primarily Belgrade buses serve Belgrade and Rome; Sidney buses serve almost exclusively all of Sidney. Parents may need to provide transportation. For example, if someone will want to go from Summer Haven to Winslow, it doesn't necessarily mean that the District would pick up transportation costs.

Pam Trinward noted that if there is a student who is failing in terms of social behavior issues in Winslow, for example, that student now will have the opportunity to attend Waterville or Messalonskee to try to get the student out of a situation where he/she is failing and put him/her in a place where the student will succeed.

Mike Gosselin noted that people from China and Vassalboro would have to pick up what's left. If choice is to be given, then it should be a choice among the three high schools. If China and Vassalboro students want to go to Waterville, why can't they now?

Mr. Haley noted that students should go to the high school in the town where they reside. In viewing communities with multiple middle schools, for example, those middle schools are organized such that students go to the ones that are in their regions or wards. If choice is allowed, the expectation is that the students would go to the schools in the towns where they reside.

Judy Coombs noted that she is a teacher, taxpayer and has a student in the system. She has 32 years of teaching experience and has seen a lot of changes. One of her concerns is that communities will separate and lose diversity. All the "haves" cannot be in one school. What happens to the "have-nots" is not acceptable. That needs to be supported for our schools.

Libby Mitchell noted that people do, indeed, move to China and Vassalboro because of school choice. Choice is very cherished by parents and by students. It is so important that people move. Where do these children go? Mostly to Waterville, Winslow, Messalonskee, and Erskine. It is schools where parents feel they are welcome. According to the law, opportunities for school choice provided by a previous school unit must be maintained by the RSU for students in those municipalities that offered choice. You are willing to compete for our kids. One of the things we are being asked to consider is to give up our choice to all schools to Messalonskee, Waterville, Winslow, and Erskine. That is a much smaller universe than before. It is okay to give up the universe because we will have three great high schools. They are all good schools. We can overcome that if we keep the vision.

Charley Clark noted that his understanding is that the benefit of being in an RSU is because of special education and the way the law was written. If we would end up with a high student cost, would it go back to the town?

Jim Morse noted that with regard to school choice, the issue is more complicated. For students choosing a public school in a different school unit the RSU must pay tuition not to exceed its own secondary tuition rate. If the tuition payable to the choice school exceeds the RSU's tuition rate, the additional expense must be paid by the responsible municipality. It is about special education students from private schools only. If a child continues to attend Erskine, for example, then the community would pick up the cost. The RSU would not be responsible under the statute. Special education law states that the municipality has to cover the cost.

Jack Sutton asked if the adoption of any or all recommendations would be binding for future Boards or if future Boards would have the option to make adjustments.

Jim Morse noted that whatever is included in these organizational plans becomes binding contracts. All these sections that have been approved ultimately will go before our school boards before a final plan is adopted. This is something that we can live with, but once Board and voters approve the future RSU is bound.

Eric Haley noted that if something is not required to be in the plan, it is not necessarily binding. If it's mandated by the consolidation law to be in the organization plan, then it probably binds the RSU. If not required, then RSU Board may change.

Lori Fowle asked about China and Vassalboro students who choose to participate in vocational technical education programs in Augusta. If they were currently enrolled there, would their transportation be picked up by the RSU?

Jim Morse noted that an assumption was made that the RSU would be responsible for transporting high school students because it is the law related to SADs not the law for municipal school systems. The law is unclear regarding this issue, but it makes sense that one would come to that conclusion.

Eric Haley noted that given the amount of concerns expressed with the recommendations presented this evening, that the Governance Subcommittee take this input and make amendments to the recommendations for the next meeting.

Peter Thiboutot asked if there was additional language to that first recommendation regarding school choice. If a student wants to attend another school why is that? What does that other school offer that we don't have? The RSU needs to discuss equity to level the playing field in those areas that are in question. What will philosophy be in terms of providing opportunities for students?

Lori Fowle made a motion, and Phil St. Onge seconded, to table the recommendations until the Governance Subcommittee has had an opportunity to review them further and make amendments if necessary.

The RPC gave its consensus to table the recommendations of the Governance Subcommittee until such time as the Subcommittee has had time to review those matters and return with amended recommendations as necessary.

The next meeting of the Governance Subcommittee is scheduled for Thursday, October 25, 2007 at 4:00 p.m. at the George J. Mitchell School in Waterville.

The Personnel and Transition Subcommittee continued to work on trying to come up with a solution to merge employee contracts and what should occur as contracts are negotiated. Mr. Haley noted that the three teachers' association presidents, Robin Colby for MSAD 47, Judy Coombs for Waterville, and Mike Thurston for China, Vassalboro and Winslow, have been very helpful. Contracts are very different, and Mr. Haley noted that these meetings are not considered negotiations meetings. What is being discussed is the creation of a 20-step teacher contract, giving them an increase from wherever they are on their current scales, regardless of how that compares to where they are on the scale. Eventually, all teachers would be paid the same. The Committee is working through regarding what those costs would be. Mr. Haley noted that another issue being discussed is health insurance. There is about a \$2,300 difference between the top insurance plan and the lower plan.

The Subcommittee was charged with looking at a transition plan, and has not yet done anything with the transition plan. The Subcommittee needs to determine what services will be provided to local municipalities and schools. Real estate and title to properties are issues as well. There is also the issue of liability insurance and whether it will be more or less expensive than what is currently in place. The RPC needs to insure that there are no lapses in coverage.

The transition plan also needs to address the development of personnel policies. In order to determine what the transition plan is we need to know dates and timelines. Will we be ready for December 1, with a referendum vote by January 15? If not ready by then, when?

Jim Morse noted that the RPC should consider a deadline of June. This would give school systems a full year for coming to conclusion on this work.

Phil St. Onge asked if there was any sentiment in Augusta to let up on this date.

Libby Mitchell said there is not at this time. Perhaps if more people report back about honest efforts to get the work done, maybe. What there is not support for is that school districts may have forever to complete their work.

Pam Trinward noted that this was one of the compromises in the Legislature with December and a referendum in June. We should continue to work as hard as we can. It is possible that if it does not pass in the community, that November election will be needed.

Eric Haley noted that this RPC is so far ahead of everybody else in terms of completing its work. The work has been good. He received a call from a reporter from the Portland Press Herald yesterday, and the reporter noted that this RPC has completed more work than anyone else with whom he has spoken.

Dennis Keschl noted that the press is not taking this seriously. They should be. It will be difficult to bring the public along. The education process needs to start now to let the public know what work has been completed and where we stand.

Mr. Keschl suggested that a common product be put together that is at the polls on November 6 to at least make the public aware of these discussions. There can be a display at each polling location. This would allow time to educate the public as to what is being proposed and the amount of work needing to be done. It would also allow time to provide for public education and awareness in order for the public to make an informed decision and for community leaders to answer their questions.

Pam Trinward suggested that the polls should be manned. People should be told when the RPC meets and to please come to the meetings.

Dennis Keschl noted that the press needs to be brought into these meetings because they are part of the public process.

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Eric Haley asked if the RPC would like the Personnel and Transition Subcommittee to develop a transition plan based on a June referendum vote on the plan and a November referendum vote on the school board. At the next Subcommittee meeting a timeline will be drafted based on those benchmarks.

Libby Mitchell noted that Laughlin Titus writes an email message. Each town might do some of that as well. His letter is published in the *Town Line*, a local paper. The Paper prints his letter verbatim.

The next meeting of the RPC is scheduled for Thursday, November 1, 2007 at Messalonskee Middle School in Oakland.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.