

TOWN OF HAMILTON
HAMILTON and WENHAM Boards of Selectmen and HWRSD
JULY 12, 2011

The Hamilton and Wenham Boards of Selectmen met at Hamilton-Wenham Public Library at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, July 12, 2011 with Hamilton Board of Selectmen Jeff Hubbard, Jeff Stinson, Jennifer Scuteri, Marc Johnson, Town Manager Michael Lombardo and Finance Director Deborah Nippes-Mena present. HWRSD members or school district administrators did not attend.

Adult Education Outreach Program

Rebecca Borden, Director of Institutional Partnerships at Pingree School, presented information on programs, which will be available to the H-W community, and facility rental possibilities at Pingree, and mentioned global competence initiatives that Pingree would do with the HWRSD and Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary.

Review/Discussion of Regional Agreement(s)

Hamilton's Town Counsel Donna Brewer had reviewed M.G.L. Chapter 71 relative to the relationship with Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District. The regional school district agreement was drafted in 1959.

The discussion was on whether the two towns and HWRSD have drifted from the original intent of the regional agreement and whether relevant MGL and CMR provisions are being followed. A combination of the three seems to indicate that more collaboration should be occurring. For example, the chairs from the Boards of Selectmen and Finance Committees are supposed to be receiving monthly budget updates from the regional School Committee. Separate processes have been occurring rather than collaboration amongst the three entities.

In addition, regarding the collective bargaining process undertaken by the school district, in alternating fashion, Hamilton's Town manager and Wenham's Town administrator from the regional communities each have a vote and can be on the bargaining team. Hamilton Selectmen Chair Jennifer Scuteri said there should be an involved collaborative process between the two towns and regional School Committee.

She suggested this be done starting in July so by March information on budget process can be communicated to the communities.

Town officials also polled other regional school districts including Manchester-Essex, Nashoba, and Mendon-Upton. Scuteri noted that in one instance, if the Selectmen and/or Finance Committee in one of these contributing towns finds the school district budget unaffordable they can ask the School Committee to call a meeting and discuss the matter. The comparison of other regional school districts was done to identify if there is a better process or opportunity for better practices in the HWRSD budget development.

Marc Johnson said the information provide by the analyzed school districts to their member communities is vastly different from the regional school budget content provided to Hamilton and Wenham. If a similar practice were adopted locally, this could lessen the current divisiveness found with the HWRSD and district member communities and increase trust in the regional School Committee.

Jeff Stinson was in favor of basing the school allocation cost on income versus property values since Hamilton has lost population and Wenham has gained residents and there is a \$30,000 a year disparity in income per household between Hamilton and Wenham. This could lessen the burden on those who cannot afford to pay the high property taxes in Hamilton especially since a great deal of this funding supports the regional school district.

Jeff Hubbard thought the Nashoba budget was a good example of what could be provided by the HWRSD School Committee. He noted that relationship building between all three entities is key in the budget process.

Some of the financial reports from the regional school districts reviewed illustrated that benchmarking is being done (i.e., comparison of costs per pupil and performance) and trend data is provided.

Next steps are to hold a meeting with a smaller group including the Chair of the regional School Committee to change the flow of information to the regional school district communities. Conference would include Alexa McCloughan, Peter Gray, Michael Lombardo, Jennifer Scuteri, Jeff Chelgren and Molly Martins. Lombardo said objective would be to build discussion for a broader group.

Town officials noted the importance of providing information earlier in the school budget process especially to the two towns' Finance Committees. At this point the regional school agreement will not be changed but emphasis will be placed on fostering better communication and demonstrating cooperation amongst the three entities. In addition, action will be taken to ensure that all aspects of existing regional school agreement are implemented.

Budget Process Committee – Discussion regarding amended charge

Hamilton Finance Committee Chair John McWane summarized the FY'12 budget process between the two towns and school district. He mentioned that change in school administration caused a departure in the budget process including the revelation of the flaw in the school's revolving fund. He felt there is a reactivation of the commitment by the BPC regarding the allocation of school budget costs for the two towns. Also, that there have been options proposed for consideration including smoothing the shift of more student cost based on higher pupil numbers in Wenham.

Hamilton residents Richard Boroff, Rick Mitchell and Tracey Mayor spoke individually. Boroff stated that revolving accounts should not be part of the school budget; Mitchell felt that a factual explanation of what the school budget dollars are used for should be presented to taxpayers, and that working group meetings between the three entities (Hamilton, Wenham and regional School Committee) to discuss the charge of the BPC should be scheduled. Tracey Mayor felt that these meetings should occur when representatives from all factions can attend. Town officials agreed that the charge of the BPC would not be changed without brainstorming and conversation occurring.

Discussion about former Hamilton Selectman Jim Bryant as creator of the BPC and Long Range Planning Committee in 2003 that were merged into one committee with the intent of improving the budget process and facilitating transparency about actions taken on budget development for voters.

Former Hamilton Selectman and former BPC Chair Bill Bowler emphasized that there should be entity buy-in and commitment from members for BPC success. He characterized the draft proposed change to BPC charge as ambivalent and recommended ideas be discussed. He noted that the BPC is not a statutory committee so it has no authority. Therefore, the BPC had been limited when it proposed a five-year rolling average on the percentage the two communities would contribute toward the regional school budget.

Discussion about having working group rather than outside consultant analyze the existing regional school district agreement to ensure it is fully implemented and guarantee financial information is provided in a useful format relative to cost allocation. To supply the two towns and school district with necessary information to make best budget decisions.

Operational Audit

Lombardo said the regional School Committee and school administration are obligated to provide a response to the finalized operational audit report of the HWRSD. Due to the authority given to a regional school district by state law, the two towns do not have any authority to enforce recommendations in the audit.

Discussion about the impossibility of implementing all recommended changes in audit at the same time to realize savings and need to prioritize these items.

H-W Capital Management Committee – Ongoing review of the CMC recommendation regarding Building Maintenance collaboration

CMC subcommittee member and regional School Committee member William Dery reported that the cost of using contractors versus direct labor to maintain the public facilities in the two towns and school department was nearly twice as expensive.

Discussion was about the value of exploring collaborative Building Maintenance between three entities. Lombardo will schedule meeting with Wenham Town Administrator Jeff Chelgren and Interim Superintendent of Schools Peter Gray to work out details on proposal (i.e., substance of what is needed operationally). Selectmen supported Lombardo’s initiative to analyze if a proposed Building Maintenance collaboration with Wenham and the school district makes sense.

Johnson moved for the Hamilton Board of Selectmen to adjourn at 9:15 p.m. Stinson seconded motion. VOTE: Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by Jane Dooley, Minutes Secretary

ATTEST: _____

Clerk