

RSU Exploratory and Review Committee Meeting minutes of October 21, 2021

Present - Jeffrey Pierce (Chairman & PB member), Kathryn Marseglia (School Board representative for Dresden), Lisa Hewitt (Resident-at-Large & Board Secretary), Leah Bickford (Resident-at-Large & Vice Chairperson) Karen Moody (Resident-at-Large).

Others - Residents - Kaylee Kitell, Stephanie Holmes, Amanda Pendleton, Jeff Bickford, and Neal Clark.

Shari Lilly (Recording Secretary).

The meeting was opened at 6:05 p.m.

Kathryn M. asked if we would be able to have a laptop from the town to provide ZOOM meetings. Lisa H. said the select board will not allow the laptops to be removed from the town office. It was then suggested to use a personal laptop, but Jeff P. added that if you bring a personal laptop to record town committee business, your personal laptop then falls under FOAA for public viewing. He will ask the select board about use of one they have.

Minutes of the September 16, 2021 meeting were read and approved via email as was voted by the membership in order to have them available to the public in a timely manner.

By-Laws for the committee were approved and signed by the Select Board on October 12, 2021. These by-laws are available for public viewing at the Town Office.

Jeff noted, for the record, that Committee Member, Gary Blau is absent. Also, we are still looking for another Resident-at-Large to fill a vacancy on this committee. It would be good to have someone who has children in the school system as we only have one member at this time who has children of school ages. Jeff added that, as we are getting into the holiday months, we will decide about any upcoming meetings.

Kathryn M. asked if we are looking at the contract for all the schools or the one for the teachers. The members want the original contract when we became part of RSU2 to see if any of the terms could be changed. Kathryn said the terms state they are non-negotiable, so it would appear we cannot make any changes leaving only the option that we would have to explore the withdrawal. Lisa H. asked if there may be a possibility we could suggest a change or amend any of the terms. Jeff said, no, we would have to go through the withdrawal unless we could get all the towns and their officials in the RSU to agree on all the changes and then the DOE (Department of Education) would also have to approve.

Although much of the material can be large packets, we need to have all the material printed out for each meeting. One we want to get is the withdrawal process so we can discuss each part. Having a checklist to go through item by item would be a benefit to the committee.

Jeff P. said we need to get figures of the costs to see what our expenses are; such as for our own elementary building, even though we don't own it. Also, to take into consideration if it is more feasible to tuition our students. Kathryn added that tuition rates are set by the State, to which Jeff added that the rates also depend on the State subsidy. He added that we can find out the figures for teacher contracts, etc. We would want figures as to the amount of tuition, could we still tuition students to Hall-Dale if we withdraw. What would town funds be; cost of bussing, etc. Karen M. asked about the cost for those who can't afford to transport. Jeff said that is what we have to figure out. Kathryn said Richmond got their buildings and all other items back without a cost. She added it was 'Like an amicable divorce'. Jeff said it might be a good idea if we could get a copy of their agreement. However, Kathryn said that due to it

being their private agreement, they may not want to provide us with a copy for the public; however, she can provide copies to the members. Lisa & others stated they would like to have someone from Richmond attend our meeting. They would like to know their reasons to see if any would apply to us. Jeff said he had asked a few of the people involved with their withdrawal, but no one has responded. He will contact the Richmond Town Manager.

Our next two (2) months have some holidays. Asked if we want to hold off on meetings, the membership all agreed we need to continue so that we don't lose focus or time on this. It was then decided our November meeting will be on Tuesday, November 16 and our December meeting will be on Thursday, December 16. Time will be 6:00 p.m. at Pownalborough Hall. We will start looking over the paperwork on the process for withdrawal.

Resident, Amanda Pendleton, asked how we crossed over from a School Union to an RSU. Kathryn told her it was from a vote of the townspeople. We first signed the contract as part of RSU2 on April 11, 2008. Lisa added that the total vote from each town is on the original contract. Karen said the big push for it was the reducing of our costs.

Jeff, again, mentioned that the Committee would like to have another parent to fill the vacancy in order to bring more perspective to our discussions. Leah is the only member who does have students in various grades, but having additional parents of school-aged children would be beneficial. He suggested that perhaps one of the residents here tonight would consider the position as they have shown a great interest.

- Shari (the recording secretary) will get copies of the withdrawal process for all members.
- Leah B. has offered to let the Committee use a laptop for ZOOM meetings. We will ask the town to pay for the Zoom and all printed materials. We'll discuss how we will handle the Q & A for the ZOOM meetings once we know if we can do them in a fashion that will allow interaction from the public in the manner that would be most beneficial to the meeting. Jeff said these meetings are open to the public, but doesn't require having Q & A as they are not public hearings.
- Lisa will ask to have the Zoom request put on the next Select Board meeting agenda to get this taken care in the public.
- Karen & Leah will help with the Zoom meetings if they are done.

Kathryn asked if we are looking to do this mainly due to finances or are there other issues that have also triggered the idea of withdrawal. Jeff said the budget is one thing, but also, some families feel their children were not given the same consideration as the others. Plus, we would like to have more of a voice in the decision making. We can get a better look at the points of interest if we pin-point each issue. Jeff said the main issues are money, treatment of our students and issues with the budgeting vote. Kathryn will check into whatever financial information she can get.

Lisa noted that, although the budget didn't pass on the ballot in Dresden, the overall voting of all towns accepted it. However, she added that we need to engage with the parents to see what their perspectives are about the school and what value is placed on our children from a small town. Mrs. Pendleton said that is a factor, adding that for people who don't have children in school, it is about the finances. Also, she wonders what would happen to our elementary school and the education of our kids. She feels we are getting left behind as far as the treatment of our students. Neal Clark mentioned that it is very difficult to have our children participate in sports or other after-school curriculum, between the traveling and no

transportation availability. Plus, it was mentioned, having to find child care in this area, makes it difficult for many parents. There are concerns that our Dresden students are being dropped off at the elementary school and not at their homes. Some bus drivers don't want to turn around in certain areas. Some students are dropped off on Calls' Hill Road and then have to walk down the Old County Road because of them not wanting to use the turnaround on that road.

We need to investigate the best system for our kids that will provide them with the atmosphere we feel is beneficial to our children. Where will our students become more successful?

Lisa, referencing the financial aspect, said we need to first find out how much it would cost us to withdraw, what we would get out of it and what the future costs would be. As to the educational part, we need to find out if our kids are happy in this school; how do they feel about their inclusion at Hall-Dale.

- Kathryn will get research on the financial status.

As an F.Y.I, resident Jeffrey Bickford (also on the Dresden School Board), mentioned there are currently 72 students in the Dresden Elementary. He added that this past year has shown a 13% reduction in student enrollment; (2017-18 / 83), (2018-19 /93), (2019-20 /90), (2020-21 /75)(Home-schooled ?). Jeff P. noted that we need to look at future years as right now we have to consider that the Co-Vid pandemic issue has presented different facts and figures. However, we should look at these numbers for a trend. Also, we should look at what the cycle is. Karen Moody asked if we have ever thought of bringing the middle school students back to the elementary if we have the room for them? It was said that has not been anything discussed as an alternative. We may not have the room now or in the future. It was also mentioned that tuitioning needs to have Superintendent approval.

- Jeff P. will contact the Richmond Town Manager
He said that hopefully we will have someone here from Richmond who can provide information on their statistics for the withdrawal. Seems like many of the schools in this RSU are looking into alternatives.

Resident, Stephanie Holmes, noted that this is a lot of information and asked if we have a format for these meetings. Jeff said, the recording secretary records the meetings, then types minutes that are reviewed and voted on by the members. Then they are available for public viewing. As we get further into this, we will formulate a format for the meetings. He added, no deadline has been set as to when it will be presented for public hearings. As a reference, the Committee members are appointed by the Select Board for a term of three years. The feeling is that this could take that long. That's why we want to gather as much information as possible to guide us, as well as, questions from parents and the general public. There could realistically be a long process before we get to the possible approval by the DOE who has the final say. Lisa would like to see more parents attend these meetings or have someone bring their list of concerns. Jeff P. added that input from parents is invaluable. Also wondering if the parents are happy, or could they be better educated elsewhere. Lisa commented that if the majority of parents are happy with Hall-Dale, this could all be a mute situation.

Next meeting will be Tuesday, November 16, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Pownalborough Hall.

Respectfully submitted,
Shari Lilly (recording secretary)