

**Regional District 11
Strategic Planning Group**

**COMPREHENSIVE NOTES
April 4, 2005**

Time: 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Location: Legislative Office Building, Hartford

Town & RD-11 Members Present: Leslie Wertam, Chair, RD-11 Board of Education; Margaret Haraghey, First Selectman, Hampton; Rusty Lanzit, First Selectman, Chaplin; Liz Wilson, First Selectman, Scotland; Charles Bruckerhoff, facilitator, RD-11 Board of Education.

Legislators Present: Senator Don Williams, President Pro Tempore; Senator Tony Guglielmo, Assistant Minority Leader; Senator Thomas Gaffee, Chief Deputy Majority Leader, Chairman, Education Committee; Representative Denise Merrill, Representative Mike Alberts; and three legislative aids.

State Department of Education Member Present: Attorney Mark Stapleton.

The meeting began when Rep. Merrill asked the group to have someone present the issue. Attorney Stapleton began by explaining the circumstances pertaining to Regional District 11, namely the recent history and current status of accreditation from NEASC for Parish Hill Middle High School, the work completed on the physical plant by parents and volunteers, and the work of the Strategic Planning Group (SPG), which lead to this meeting. He noted that the SPG's work on March 16-17, 2005 resulted in a well-worked plan. Additionally, he noted that today he would present a list of requests for assistance from the legislators, which he had developed with the group at its last meeting held on March 23, 2005. The plan and list of requests are presented immediately below.

The Plan for Regional District 11 has the following components:

- A new facility for regional education will be built with increased capacity (middle school at 300-400 and high school at 450-600) preferably on or near the present location of the RD-11 middle and high schools, with linkage between a middle and a high school.
- The comprehensive high school will provide a challenging, cutting-edge curriculum, including a high quality academic program with special emphasis in areas such as information technology, science/math/engineering, and career exploration and development.
- Nearby towns will be actively pursued to become members of RD-11 and may help determine educational specifications.
- Depending on availability of space, non-member towns will be invited to tuition in their students.

- The most appropriate school governance structure for RD-11 will be implemented with legal counsel from the State Department of Education and member towns.

The Request for Assistance has the following components:

- Invoke the provisions of CGS Section 10-283(c)(1) and add to the school construction priority list a school building project for Regional District 11.
- Do “notwithstanding language” that would permit inclusion of this project on the school construction priority list despite the absence of local approval for the financial match requirements as a necessary precondition.
- Permit emergency expenditures for repair and improvement required as a condition of accreditation to be eligible for a school construction grant.
- Pause the study being conducted by the Town of Scotland concerning withdrawal from Regional District 11 until September 1, 2005.
- Consider a special grant to Regional District 11 for the purpose of hiring an educational consultant to assist in the educational programming development for the new facility and the recruitment of additional towns and students to support the new facility.
- Facilitate a meeting with state legislators from adjoining towns and encourage their participation in this project.
- Encourage public support for our plan through public statements and news releases.

After Attorney Stapleton presented the plan and list of requests, an open discussion ensued that was focused on the situation at Regional District 11. Key concerns that were expressed by First Selectmen and Board of Education members were that one or more towns must be added to the district in order to increase the number of students enrolled in the high school and also ease the tax burden for local citizens, that the educational program at the school had to be designed for a high quality curriculum (notably with a focus or theme as indicated in the plan) and for attractiveness to students and parents in the area, and that the SPG would welcome support from the legislators to disseminate the plan and secure the additional towns for the district.

The response of legislators to the group’s quick and collaborative action on the plan was highly positive. The plan was described as a “good solution, providing a real plus for the northeast region’s education needs.” Also, legislators stated that “none of this (plan) is impossible.” The definitive pronouncement on the issue by Senator Williams was: “Do it, and do it right.”

Equally important, the legislators noted that action on the Request for Assistance had to be taken quickly – immediately, in fact – because the Education Committee would be recommending legislation for the current session on Friday of this week (April 8, 2005). Thus, when this meeting was ended, they planned to meet with Senator Gaffee to discuss what to do to take action on the list of requests. Additionally, Attorney Stapleton would provide the legislators with language before Friday for their consideration that would constitute the law to be voted on before this legislative session ended.

There was also discussion about the importance of getting a “change agent” in place in Regional District 11 to facilitate development of the educational program and the facility. Qualifications for this person must include substantial and successful experience with educational program development and school building construction like that envisioned for Regional District 11, namely a high quality theme-based facility. Also, this individual must have strong personal relations skills in order to help the SPG and legislators to convince local citizens that this plan is the best opportunity for the regional district.

In order to build support for the idea (namely to get additional towns to join the district) among their colleagues, the legislators pledged to take up this specific topic at their next Northeast Delegation meeting.

Also, Ms. Haraghey noted that she had received a letter recently notifying her and other local citizens that the Town of Woodstock was soliciting interest in a building plan for a new high school. Did this pose a threat to the viability of the SPG’s plan for Regional District 11? No. The actions taken by the SPG, notably developing their plan and taking their appeal for assistance at this time to the legislators for action in this session, places the district far ahead of any other “plans.”

At the end of the meeting, the legislators went to meet with Senator Gaffee concerning taking action on the SPG’s request for assistance. Town and Board of Education members continued meeting with Attorney Stapleton and legislative aids to discuss what actions they should take next.

Next steps: within 1-2 weeks the SPG, joined by Attorney Stapleton, would convene a meeting of educational leaders in the towns surrounding of Regional District 11 that have high schools to inform them of the plans for this educational program and building, and to explain to them that it will be an asset to the area – not a competitive force programmatically, but taking pressures off overcrowded systems. Subsequent to that meeting, the SPG plans to meet with educational leaders from districts in the area that do not have high schools to solicit their membership in the district.

This meeting ended at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charles Bruckerhoff
(April 4, 2005)