Committee to Study Dissolution

Regional School District No. 11

Minutes of the Meeting of November 27, 2017

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m.

Present: Cesar Beltran, Nick Brown, Clare D'Appollonio, Stephanie Harrington, Jennifer Nelson, Steven Kurcinik, Rose Bisson, Matthew Venhorst, Bettina Bronisz (for Sheree Mailhot), William Hooper (for John Bolduc)

Absent: William Fazioli

II. Discussion of Update of Information for 2017 Study

a. Enrollment Data

Ms. Nelson distributed documents showing enrollment trends in the Region 11 school district and in the towns of Chaplin, Hampton and Scotland. The materials distributed also included a grand list comparison of the three towns.

b. Asset Distribution per 10-63c Report Requirements

Ms. Nelson reported that she made an inquiry with the State Department of Education to obtain enrollment data for each of the three towns as of October 1, 2017. She has not received a response, but expects to receive this information soon.

c. Halloran and Sage Update

Ms. Nelson distributed the November 22, 2017, written opinion of Attorney Richard Roberts of Halloran and Sage regarding the ownership of the Parish Hill school building in the event of district dissolution.

d. Cost Comparisons

Mr. Brown reported that he advised using the appraisal of Mainstreet Maps, in the amount of $5.8 million for the Parish Hill property. He reported that this figure represents the appraised value of the real property only, and that fixed assets are valued at an additional $2.625 million. Mr. Hooper said he believes that additional funds need to be allocated to bring the building up to code in the event it is no longer used as a school. Discussion ensued regarding the potential use of funds from member towns to be used to maintain the building once it is no longer used as a school.

III. Straw Poll Regarding Advisability of Dissolution

Committee members were asked to state briefly whether or not they supported dissolution, bearing in mind that abstention is possible given that the Committee's report is not yet complete. Members provided the following potential views:

- Ms. D'Appollonio: leaning towards dissolution but needs additional information
- Mr. Brown: abstain
- Mr. Kurcinik: leaning towards dissolution
- Mr. Hooper: abstain; would like more concrete information on the cost to the three towns
- Ms. Harrington: likely would not vote for dissolution because dissolution would adversely affect students
- Mr. Beltran: would vote against dissolution because there is an insufficient plan for what would happen following dissolution of the school district
- Mr. Bronisz: abstain
- Ms. Bisson: leaning against dissolution
- Mr. Venhorst: leaning toward dissolution given high anticipated costs and good educational alternatives elsewhere
- Ms. Nelson: leaning toward dissolution given greater anticipated opportunities for students in a larger school

IV. Next Steps

Mr. Venhorst gave a brief overview of the referendum process and indicated that he interprets Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-43 to provide that no referendum is held if the Committee finds dissolution to be inadvisable. A referendum must be held if the Committee finds dissolution to be advisable and the State Board of Education approves the Committee's recommendation.

Ms. Nelson reported that she is not prepared to disseminate a draft report and that she has not received written input from some members of the Committee. Ms. Nelson reported that she hopes to circulate a draft of the report within the next 10 days. Mr. Hooper indicated that he believed that the Committee should have data from the Windham school district regarding student attendance before the Committee completes its work. The next meeting would be Monday, December 4, and it will be a working meeting.

V. Audience for Citizens

A number of audience members voiced their opinions regarding the proposed dissolution. Superintendent Henrici requested of Ms. Nelson that the Committee respond in a timely way to any questions he has of the Committee in the upcoming days. He reported that student enrollment drops are not unique to Region 11 and are occurring throughout the state. He further said that he received a legal opinion in 2009, indicating that the SBE's acceptance of the Committee report is not endorsement of the report but rather is agreement that all statutory steps had been followed. Mr. Henrici further said that he believed many of the surrounding districts would refuse to take some of the district's high needs special education students. He also indicated that he believed the Committee was placing excessive emphasis on cost and that the dissolution would also have non-monetary costs to students and members of the community.

A number of residents talked about the benefits to students of the small community at Parish Hill, including opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and the sense of vitality that is created by having Parish Hill in the community. Other community members pointed out that there would be significant costs associated with dissolving the school district, including longer bus rides for students, more driving for parents, failure to achieve anticipated levels of savings, and costs associated with the unemployment of teachers and other school staff. Another resident said parents and students would have less of a voice in the operations of a larger school district.

Other residents spoke in favor of dissolution, indicating that enrollment continues to decline and that it is not clear how long the status quo can be sustained, and that the communities have been considering this issue for many years and that it is time that dissolution finally be undertaken.

Other residents spoke regarding the report the Committee would be completing, noting that the Committee should employ clear definitions, rather than acronyms, in the body of the report. Another audience member said that the school district should engage in talks with Brooklyn about starting a new regional district, and that other towns would be interested in coming to Parish Hill if the communities stop raising the possibility of dissolution.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.