Committee to Study Dissolution

Regional School District No. 11

Minutes of the Meeting of December 4, 2017

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m.

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

Absent: William Fazioli

II. Audience for Citizens

Various community members expressed opinions regarding the Committee's work and the prospect of dissolving the regional district. Mr. Venhorst repeated his view that the matter would proceed to referendum only in the event that the Committee votes to recommend dissolution. One community member reported that are more than 4,000 voters in the town and that voters should have a say as to whether the district should be dissolved, so the Committee should recommend dissolution so that the voters have an opportunity to decide this issue. Other members of the community reported that the Parish Hill School is a good school, a positive force in the community, and should remain in place. Other community members reported that the persistent discussion in the community of possible dissolution will cause teachers to leave the regional district. Another community member reported that stability in the community is important and that the ongoing discussions regarding dissolution have a negative effect on the school community.

Mr. Venhorst responded to questions about the timing of the Committee's report submission. Mr. Venhorst said that Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-63c, provides that the Committee "shall prepare a written report," which must occur "[w]ithin one year after its appointment." Mr. Venhorst noted that Ms. Nelson had raised the possibility of an extension to the one-year timeline for report submission. Mr. Venhorst reported that there is some ambiguity in the law regarding the operation of the one year time period. Mr. Venhorst reported that his view is that the one-year time limit may not be strictly mandatory under the law, but that failing to adhere to the one-year time period could expose the Committee and its report to some degree of legal risk, as a court could view the matter differently. Mr. Venhorst advised that the best course of action would be to submit the report within the one-year time period so as not to expose the Committee/report to unnecessary legal risk. Committee members generally agreed with this sentiment

III. Working Session – Drafting of Report

The Committee discussed the proposed report and the provisions of C.G.S. 10-63c that must be satisfied and addressed in the report. Items 2 and 3 relate to a determination of the net assets of the district and an apportionment thereof. Mr. Brown reported that he has this information and has included it in his section of the report. Mr. Hooper reported that he believes the building needs to be brought up to code in order to sell the property. Mr. Hooper further said that he received costs for unemployment and severance from the school district. Unemployment costs would be a maximum of $683,000, and severance would be a maximum of $68,000.

The Committee next discussed Section 10-63c, item 5, which is the timetable for the orderly withdrawal or dissolution of the regional district. Some members of the Committee suggested that the process could take place over a one-year period. Some members responded that it would be beneficial for the process to be completed quickly, while others indicated that it could be problematic for the district to be dissolved this quickly. This could present problems for students who could have difficulty in making future educational plans given the absence of lead time of the implementation of the dissolution plan.

The Committee reviewed Mr. Roberts' report regarding the ownership of the Parish Hill facility in the event of dissolution, and a question was raised regarding whether property ownership would go to the boards of education for the towns or the towns themselves. Ms. Nelson indicated that she would contact Mr. Roberts and ask him to clarify his report in this regard.

Mr. Bronisz said that a number of community members had voiced their opinions regarding why the regional district should not be dissolved, but she did not have a strong sense of the arguments in favor of dissolution. Ms. Nelson responded that, given demographic projections, the only population that is increasing in the coming years is that which is age 65 and over, and noted that there is a decreasing tax base to address increasing costs in the district. The student population is declining as well, which will lead to fewer opportunities for students. Other committee members responded that it is not clear that dissolution will result in the anticipated savings.

IV. Next Steps

The Committee agreed that it would be ideal to have a draft of the Committee's report by 12/11 and that every effort would be made to produce a report by that time. The Committee's next meeting is 12/11/17 at 6 p.m. in the Parish Hill library.

V. Adjourn

Ms. D'Appollonio moved, and Mr. Kurcinik seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.