

## **RSU Exploratory and Review Committee Meeting minutes of November 16, 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), Gary Blau (Budget Review representative).

Others - Residents - Kaylee Kitell, Stephanie Holmes, Amanda Pendleton, Jeff Bickford. Michael Wing (Richmond School Withdrawal representative) and Shari Lilly (Recording Secretary).

The meeting was opened at 6:05 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Michael Wing is a Richmond resident who had been involved with the proposed withdrawal process from RSU2 for their schools. Jeff had asked him to join this meeting so our Committee members could ask questions about the process they went through and why he thought it may not have passed.

*Mr. Wing* explained that a lot of what happened was through the Superintendent. He told the group that we need to stay right on this as one problem they had was that it took a long time which caused their committee to miss the elective time slot.

*Jeff P.*, referring to them going through the process, asked what helped them and what was not important. Mr. Wing said one thing that really helped was they hired a lawyer who had done this type of work for another school. He didn't remember his name at this meeting, but will get it to Jeff as soon as he can. He added that resident, Martha Witham who had previously been with the Richmond School Department had a lot of information that helped.

*Jeff P.* asked if their committee had a budget for this. Mr. Wing said yes, he thinks around \$50,000.00, but he's not sure exactly how much was spent. He said that Neil LaPlante would probably have that information. Jeff asked him if he could give him Mr. LaPlante's number to call. Mr. Wing mentioned that Russ Hughes, a member of the Richmond School Board, is another person who would be able to give us a lot of information.

*Lisa H.* asked him what sort of data did they share with the public. Mr. Wing said the financial, however they couldn't answer many questions as they were too far out of reach in the process. Jeff then asked if, looking at the data, did you check the per capita for each student. Mr. Wing said they went back a few years to help them figure a plan for the future. He added that the RSU's main concern was to keep Richmond in and a lot of what they got from them was a stall tactic.

*Jeff* then questioned if we want to keep the assets up. We have an elementary school, but do we want to keep it or just tuition all of our students?

It was then asked what the DOE (Department of Education) would want. Kathryn M. said the DOE just wants all of the steps completed as outlined in: Title 20-A MRS #1466: Withdrawal of a Single Municipality from a Regional School Unit. Jeff asked if the DOE would consider anything other than what is on the list. Lisa & Kathryn both stated the DOE requires only the steps provided in the statute.

*Kathryn M.* - responding to Mike Wings' comments, said that, in her perspective, the difficulty Richmond had getting financial information from the RSU when they were going through the process for withdrawal, was due to the RSU's focus on meeting the DOE & federal requirements for Covid funds. She said the RSU will not want to keep our school building if we are not part of the RSU.

Gary Blau's concern is where our children are going to get the best education. People want to be able to understand what the future of our kids are as well as the cost. He feels we should

get in touch with the lawyer to find out if he can help us and how much it will cost. Gary has spoken with Russ Hughes and he knows how passionate Russ is about the education of our children. *Kathryn* added that we need to decide if this is what the town wants, how much it will cost, and if we can do this on our own. Jeff said if we do it, we have to realize there is a cost-driver. Plus, we have to look at what schools can take our kids, as well as, consider the students who may want to finish school with the classmates they have now. *Kathryn* noted that the RSU did take the transition of those students into consideration. Jeff then said that we also have to consider transportation for our students.

*Lisa* asked Mr. Wing how many public hearings they held. He replied it was about fifteen (15). *Lisa* then asked him it was mainly the same people in attendance and if there was a lot of parents. He told her it varied with some being Zoom meetings.

*Gary* said it seems the place to start is to contact the attorney, talk to Russ Hughes and then talk to the Select Board. *Lisa* said we need to get on a parallel path with everything. Jeff suggested asking the Superintendent to come to a meeting, but most members do not feel that would be feasible to us.

*From the parents* - *Amanda Pendleton* asked, where Richmond's proposal failed, is there ways we could do better as far as getting it out to the residents to provide them with the information we have and how far we are in the process? Jeff said that would come from postings and public hearings.

*Karen M.* said we should find out what the lawyer will cost so we can provide that information to the Select Board. She feels \$50,000.00 isn't bad for a lawyer these days.

*Kathryn* asked the parents in attendance if they know of any parents that are against Dresden withdrawing from the RSU. No one is aware of anyone personally. *Kathryn* then asked if they have heard of any others who say they prefer to stay with Hall-Dale? The response was that, so far, no one has said they are happy to stay.

*Lisa* said Gary does have a point about the cost. It was mentioned that right now we are paying \$152,000.00 a month to the RSU. This is a significant amount.

*Kathryn* again stated that we would need to make sure that we find the school that will have the room to take our students. She noted that when we first were considering joining a RSU, meetings were held with Gardiner, Hall-Dale & Wiscasset. At the time, Richmond didn't have the space.

*Gary* said we need to set key dates so we can get structure for getting things in order.

*Karen* said she thinks the biggest hurdle is going to be the funding. Jeff said we have to have a public vote on anything over \$7500.00 for any funding.

Question regarding the other schools -

- \* Does Hall-Dale want to keep us?
- \* Would Gardiner want to give us a proposal?
- \* Richmond - Do they have the space? Still should ask them to meet with us.
- \* Wiscasset is another school system to check with.

See what the benefits are from each school. What do they have to offer our children?

*Kathryn* noted, in response to Jeff P's statement that Dresden money pays for things in other schools, Dresden Elementary receives funding from the RSU above the State's EPS formula.

*Jeff P.* said we need to have proposals from each town. Mike Wing added that we need to get written information as to the reason they are not able to accept us.

*Gary* said we need to set dates so that we have feasibility for our proposed ending time limit.

*Lisa* said it takes about 2 - 3 years to do this process.

- \* Jeff asked Gary to put something together for the time line of critical dates.
- \* Jeff will contact the lawyer as soon as he gets his name from Mr. Wing.
- \* He will also contact a representative from DOE.

Gary asked if Monmouth is in withdrawal mode? Jeff Bickford (Dresden RSU2 School Board) said they had a meeting with the Superintendent about the budget. There has been some rumbling about withdrawal, but nothing has been said recently. He said that the Superintendent also wants to do a budget presentation in Dresden and Richmond to try to ease the feelings in each town.

*Resident*, Stephanie Holmes asked if the RSU meetings included discussion on issues such as busses, computers, etc. Jeff Bickford said they asked, but because those items were not on the agenda, they would not have any discussion on them.

Jeff P. asked where the money goes for the students who are home-schooled? Jeff Bickford, Dresden School Board member, said that is a good question. No one seems to know where it is going. Jeff P. added that if we have more than 15 students home-schooled, we can lose one teacher's contract. And if we have appropriated for about 26 teachers and not all the positions are filled, where does that money go? These are things we should have information on. Jeff Bickford also commented on this issue.

#### **Assignments -**

- \**Jeff* - Contact the lawyer for availability, cost and other information.
- \**Kathryn* - call Russ Hughes for possible meeting or info he can provide.
- \**Gary* - Timetable for critical preliminary dates.
- \**Jeff* - Call Richmond, Gardiner, Hall-Dale, Wiscasset to request proposals if they want our students.
- \**Karen* - Create a survey for the residents. (Other members to send their suggested questions to Shari for compiling before submitting to Karen for final survey.)
- \**Lisa* - Research the last three (3) years' costs - how much has our entire education budget changed?
- \**Leah Bickford* - Contact person with Tonya and the DOE.

Gary asked about having a Selectman on this committee, but Jeff told him they are the overseers of this committee and are not able to serve as a member.

Lisa notified everyone that due to the change of her position with the Town, she will be resigning from this Committee as it would be a conflict of interest. She will still be able to provide some limited help. Her knowledge will be missed by all.

We have asked Stephanie Holmes and Amanda Pendleton to consider joining this Committee to fill Lisa's position and the last resident-at-large vacancy as they have been attending all meetings and the members feel they would have great insight and input for the group. (Amanda has offered to join.)

Minutes of the October 14, 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.

**Next meeting will be Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Pownalborough Hall.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Shari Lilly (recording secretary)