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BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2019
MEETING MINUTES
GLADYS L. HURRELL REHOBOTH SENIOR CENTER

Present: Selectman Gerry Schwall, Selectman James Muri, Selectman Michael Costello, and Helen Dennen, Town Administrator.

Also present: Mike Deignan, Jay Crandall, Doug Furtado, Richard Barrett, Nancy Muri, Mr. & Mrs. Santos, Michael McBride, Martin D'Amico

Absent: Chairman Vadnais and Selectmen David Perry

Roll Call Vote: Muri, aye; Schwall, aye; Costello, aye. Vote 3-0

Call to Order at 7:03 p.m.: The Board and the public participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

1.0) Consent Agenda

Business for Discussion: Proposed Revisions on the Regional School Agreement

Selectmen Schwall began by stating the purpose of the meeting, to make sure we are prepared for the scheduled meeting/workshop with the school committee sub-committee task force on the regional agreement and their purposed amendments.

Our sole purpose is to bring about an agreement that is fair and equitable to both member Towns. It is not about shifting burden of expenses from one town to another. It is recognizing that in an environment where our students receive equal services, then the support should come equally. That was the motivation behind our meeting and our recommendations.

We met with the Dighton Selectmen, exchanged ideas and nothing has happened since then. The goal is to pick up where we left off several months ago. We received documents, it's the same document we have been given; no changes made since October 2017. We'd like to give it another shot, get everyone back together to be sure nothing has changed.

G. Schwall expressed his concern with the meeting not being posted and the improbability of it being recorded for the public to see, questioning it conforming with open meeting law requirements. The meeting needs to be posted. Rehoboth is more than happy to participate in an open venue that will allow us to record and broadcast via Rehoboth Community TV. If this is not acceptable, we might need to reconsider whether we will be in attendance.

J. Muri- The meeting has to conform to open meeting law, and be recorded for total transparency on this issue. It's the law but it's also the right thing to do.

J. Muri motion to send a letter to the school committee that any such meetings be held with some sort of recording in place, preferably a real time streaming to the public. Second by M. Costello. Vote 3-0.

M. Deignan stated that he believes the Board has assessed the situation succinctly. People may not be familiar with open meeting law. The Attorney General does not want a committee to form sub-committees

to circumvent the open meeting law. This particular meeting has serious financial ramifications to the tax process. We want it recorded so it can be reviewed and people can make an informed decision. You can't hide behind closed doors. I don't know why they would object to that.

G. Schwall- We did not receive a response from the chair. It is not posted as of now. I'm concerned that it is being held in a conference room. Don't want anyone to think that it will not be posted or recorded, it just is not as of now.

Both member towns will be there. They only want 2 members representing each Rehoboth and Dighton. All 3 Selectmen from Dighton want to participate. School Committee said no, just 2. This is an important decision in both Towns. G. Schwall and George Solas will be there representing Rehoboth.

Mike McBride- I suspect that there are a sizable number of people in both Towns that are woefully ignorant of how it works and I don't see why it should not be open to the public.

G. Schwall informed and educated people with the facts.

J. Muri - 2/3 of our total operating budget is the school and I've sat in Town Meeting where we squabble over a couple hundred and school budget come up and its approved in 2 minutes. It deserves more discussion.

M. Costello- An uninformed voter is the worse voter. They should be informed and know the facts before they vote and give their honest vote. The only way is with openness and transparency.

M. Costello – The document here does not have any of the suggestions. 6 or 7 items were suggested. Dighton's suggestions are not here either.

G. Schwall- It has been confirmed that no work has been done on the agreement by the school committee.

M. Costello -Person running meeting has since resigned.

J. Muri - Thanks to the Finance Committee who has many hours on this.

G. Schwall- My role on the 29th will be to represent Rehoboth, particularly this work group and what they've put forward and see if we can move forward. I have here the four must-haves.

1. Preserve the right for a partial withdrawal by a member town and such a withdrawal would require an affirmative (majority) vote of that town's town meeting.
2. Alternative method built into the regional agreement. For a long time, Dighton paid for their K-8 and Rehoboth paid for their K-8, The total expense incurred resided 100% with their town. Now we've expanded to PreK-8. Our PreK-8 should be funded exclusively by those in Rehoboth, Dighton's by Dighton.
3. High School operating a capital expenditure budget to be apportioned by student population only and would not include equalized valuation. There would be an exception to that, and that would be for certain expenses that are carried in central office such as retirement and medical benefits and life insurance which would be apportioned based on the actual cost to that town that had incurred that employee. This is how we did it 15 years ago. But now we were told it was too difficult to split it out.

4. Also, then the central office and the district wide expense would be 50/50. None of these challenges the concept of state minimum spent on education.

G. Schwall asked those present if that touches on what we are hoping to accomplish.

J. Muri – In regards to alternative method being part of the agreement, if negotiations don't allow for that then we have to seriously consider breaking the K-8 out of the district so that we can do that, we have several finance committee members who have done a lot of work with spreadsheets looking at the cost imposed by the district and how the budgets are calculated. And right now, we are effectively on the K- 8, and the high school side, we are paying a disproportionately larger amount for our schoolchildren than Dighton is. And that is a function of the wealth formula that the state uses. And if we pull out of K-8 then effectively the wealth formula goes away for K-8 and we would be paying based on what the cost is for K-8. So, over the course of a year, Beckwith and Palmer River incur X number of dollars of cost, then that's what we're paying, we're not subsidizing Dighton, were just paying what we incur. I think we really need to consider that. At the next BOS meeting I'm going to suggest that we put a nonbinding referendum question on the town meeting floor and ask the people of Rehoboth if they want to pursue that.

M. Deignan asked that J. Muri not encourage that at this time, only because it is such a complex issue, and that even a non-binding question, I don't think people are informed enough about it to make a fully informed decision. I don't believe that you'd get an accurate representation, you'd get an emotional knee jerk reaction. M. Deignan stressed that the alternative assessment that J. Muri just went through really is what the cost would be to the town if it de-regionalized its K-8. Because of the way the budget is calculated at the school level and the way reimbursements are taken off the total budget of the school, what ends up happening is we effectively subsidize Dighton's educational system by about \$1M a year. Whereas if the Town of Rehoboth paid, without changing a dollar of the budget, our full K-8, every single dime that was requested, and we paid for our portion of the high school that we use based upon student population, again not changing a dime of what was requested, we would actually pay about a 1 million to 1.5 million less. All we want to do is pay our fair share. There are no Dighton students that goes to Rehoboth K-8 schools and there are no Rehoboth students that go to Dighton K-8.

M. Costello and M. Deignan discussed the fairness of the wealth formula.

G. Schwall spoke of his concerns with the loose definition their business office now has concerning capital expenses versus operating expenses, as well as the percentage that their budgets have increased from FY17 to FY19.

- Dighton K-8 has increased 24%
- Rehoboth K-8 has increased 14.4%
- High School has increased 7.3%
- Central Office expense has increased \$1M or 13% (administration)
- District Wide is up 6%
- District Budget from 2017 to 2019 increased is 13.2% or \$5M

Susan McBride- Our job now is to educate as many people as possible of the inequities of the agreement that is being brought forth, so that if they bring it to town meeting, as many people as possible will know what's at stake. Because I'm sure over half the voters don't realize how much more we pay, and then we get no say in how things are done.

D. Furtado – I think another important point here is even the potential for partial withdraw from the regional agreement shouldn't be seen as pro or anti schools in any way, this is a Rehoboth taxpayer matter as to where the funds are being allocated. So that difference isn't about picking on the school district or being pro-schools. This is about where your taxpayer dollars are going and where you wish them to go in the future, until it is renegotiated.

J. Muri- the budget stays the same, the only thing that changes are how much gets paid by Rehoboth and how much gets paid by Dighton. So, what we're arguing for is we should pay our percent of the cost based on our percentage of students. In the K-8 we have 100% and should pay 100%.

M. D'Amico – Giving some sort of presentation of this would help educate people and make a change.

G. Schwall – Important election coming up, the most important of which is school committee. They should represent the interests of Rehoboth, not the district.

M. Deignan – It's important to note that the DRRSD and the elected officials of the DRRSC are a separate legal/corporate entity than the TOR, their duty is to represent Rehoboth in the District.

The Board agreed we need to provide more information about how the budgets are computed and how allocation is done and how it's spent, and figure out how to get it out to the most people.

S. McBride mentioned that as with the RACC committee, it might be a good idea to take their presentation to the COA and Lion's Club to reach those groups. She already has a PowerPoint presentation put together that we can tweak.

G. Schwall thanked everyone for coming and noted that he would report back after the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: Selectmen M. Costello made a motion to adjourn the Meeting at 8:07 PM., Second by Selectmen J. Muri. Costello – aye; Muri – aye, and Schwall – aye.

absent

Frederick E. Vadnais, Jr., Chairman

James Muri, Vice Chairman

absent

David A. Perry, Jr., Clerk



Gerald V. Schwall, Member



Michael Costello, Member

Respectfully Submitted,
Cindy McDonough
Assistant to the Town Administrator

Approved: 12/21/2020