

Board of Education Minutes
Tri-Board Meeting
March 24, 2016

DRAFT

A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education was held on Thursday, March 24, 2016, at 7:00 p.m. in the Wheeler High School Shaw Media Center. Present for the Board of Selectmen were Mr. Murphy, Mr. Mullane, and Mr. Donahue; present for the Board of Finance were Mr. Pavlovics, Mr. Main, Mr. Testa, Mr. Pelland, and Mrs. Howell; and present for the Board of Education were Mr. Carlson, Mr. Karpinski, Mr. Mathwich, and Mr. McCord (7:37). Also present were Mr. Nero and members of the Ad Hoc Committee. The meeting started at 7:04 p.m. Mr. Donahue introduced Mr. Carlson, the chairperson of the Board of Education who had a statement to make. Mr. Carlson told everyone present that the Board of Education voted again last evening to reaffirm that the school system will remain; all our students will remain in our district.

2. Public Comments – M. Donahue (BOS) – A citizen had comment on the mil rates in the state. She had comment on the vote that was taken and hoped it was based on data. She elaborated. Amy Kimball, citizen, asked if it were all or nothing. She wondered if the project didn't go through, would Wheeler close. Mr. Carlson said it was the Board's intent to keep the school open. She had further comment and questions. Mr. Carlson said there were many factors to consider but we would keep the school open. Andrew Carlson, student, said the academics and data don't lie. He spoke of comparing his schedule with Stonington's and that they didn't offer three classes that he is taking at Wheeler. He asked them to consider the entire district.

3. Ad Hoc Committee Recommendation Status – M. Urgo – Mr. Urgo thanked everyone for coming. He wanted to give a quick overview of the project and process. He said they are at the point now that they have come up with a plan to move forward. He elaborated and had comment. He said there were some changes made based on feedback and input from teachers and others. Mr. Urgo reviewed the construction approaches for the project. He reviewed a capital improvements project approach and stated that it would cost more. He reviewed the tour they took of the Mashantucket Pequot space and the results of that tour. He said the committee voted unanimously to bring this project forward. Mr. Rusty Malik, architect with Quisenberry Arcari, continued with the presentation. He reviewed enrollment projections. He went over the site plan. He said they were trying to keep the students on one side of the street. He elaborated. He reviewed the floor plans of the high school/middle school. He went in-depth on why rooms were configured certain ways. He said there would be no disruption to education during this construction process. He elaborated. He went over the project scope and budget. He reviewed the first-floor plan at the elementary school. He spoke of the reconfiguration of the space. He reviewed the floor plan of the second floor of the elementary school. He reviewed the project scope and budget of the elementary school. He elaborated. Mr. Urgo gave a comparison of the last project costs versus this project cost in today's dollars. He had further comment and explanation. Mr. Urgo spoke of other benefits to the project such as increased instructional opportunities, positive economic development activity, modernized facilities produce smarter kids, and energy efficient buildings. Mr. Urgo went over the project rationale. He summarized the project benefits of the high school/middle school and the elementary school. Mr. Urgo spoke of the plan of conservation and development and how it supported educating the students in town. He elaborated and had further comment.

4. General Discussion – Boards – Mr. Donahue spoke of the sequence of events. It would go to the Board of Education, to the Board of Selectmen, and to the Board of Finance to recommend going to referendum. Mr. Carlson spoke of the people that made public comment. He said with a larger district with empty chairs, you can find room to put the students. He said if you are a proponent of closing the high school, do you close the middle school? He said you would have to have some type of building plan. He had further comment. He spoke of sending the students elsewhere and the associated costs with that along with a building plan that you would have to have. He said some of the alternatives will not be so nice either. Mr. Urgo said every time they have come to the Tri-Board, they have come with a lower cost. Mr. Pelland said he was speaking as a resident and spoke to the students and said he appreciated them being there and to stay involved. He said he has been a resident for 30 years. His concern is the population stagnation. He said we need to do something but we also need to gain our population to support this. Mr. Karpinski had previously asked the Economic Development Commission to present something. Mr. Donahue asked if the Board of Education had all the information they needed. He asked the other boards if they needed additional information. Mr. Donahue said the Ad Hoc Committee had been presenting the project for quite some time. Mrs. Howell said she has been living in town for 24 years. She was pleased to see all the students here. She was disappointed in the number of people that voted in the last referendum. She said whether you are for or against it people need to participate. She elaborated. She hoped people come out to support it but let the town know where you stand. She had further comment. Mr. Donahue said we needed to remind ourselves of the timeline. He said the Board of Selectmen is not scheduled to meet next week. Mr. Murphy said he would be open to having a meeting. He said it is one thing to fast track the meetings but there are some restrictions to voting and we have to take that into consideration. He elaborated and explained. Mr. Donahue said the Board of Finance will be meeting every week in April. There was discussion of the voting machine lockouts. Mr. Donahue also spoke of the ballots being printed and the lead time on that. Mr. Mullane said we have to consider the sequence of events; Board of Education to Board of Selectmen to Board of Finance who in turn tell the Board of Selectmen to convene a town meeting. The Board of Selectmen will have to make the announcement about the town meeting and then going to referendum. He elaborated and had further comment. Mr. McCord wondered about borrowing machines. Mr. Murphy said it was \$1,600 to rent two machines. Mr. Urgo had comment on moving the project to a vote by the boards. There was discussion of the resolution that needed to be passed by the boards. There was discussion on the timeline. Mr. Pavlovics said he was speaking for himself and thought the Board of Finance could move their schedule around so the school project could take precedence. There was further discussion.

5. Next Meeting – R. Carlson (BOE) – Mr. Carlson didn't think we needed to meet in April. He said it has been a pleasure meeting with all the boards and thought maybe we should continue with quarterly meetings. Mr. Pavlovics thought we should schedule another meeting. He thought there was enough happening that another meeting would be helpful. A meeting will be scheduled for Thursday, April 28th at 7:00 p.m. in the media center at the high school.

6. Public Comments – Mr. Van Brown, taxpayer, asked about the cost savings talked about at the selectmen's meeting. Mr. Urgo thought he was speaking of the renovations to the current wing of the high school and the reasoning that a renter would be coming in. He said they adjusted hallway sizes as well and that played in to the cost savings. Mr. Mathwich pointed out that the building use would still be educational. Mr. Brown asked about who would be paying for the maintenance. It was clarified. Mr. Brown asked about the roofs. Mr. Urgo spoke of the roof and they didn't feel they

should put in that part as long-term. (He was referring to the portion of the building to be rented.) Mr. Urgo had further comment. He said they are budgeting for a roof in the single story part of the building and not the second story. A citizen asked about the timeframe if the project passed. Mr. Urgo said this is an 18-month plan. He said the costs are lower because of the time frame. She asked about the sixth graders while this was happening. Mr. Nero said they would be here until the elementary school is opened. She had further questions. Mr. Urgo said the last thing they would do is demo the middle school so they would have the swing space. He elaborated. Mr. Brown referred to the chart of the student population flattening out and how do they compare to the chart of enrollment provided by Mr. Nero. Mr. Malik explained how it is figured. He said that formula allows for the highest amount of reimbursement. Mr. Brian Rathbun, citizen, said the Board of Education's vote to keep the school open didn't surprise him. He said we have been talking about a project for the last 10-15 years. He had comment about the federal government and state government being in debt. He had further comment and spoke of the senior citizens in town and not being able to afford this. He had further comment. He said it will come down to what people can afford. A citizen spoke and wondered if the state didn't come through with funding if we would have to take out more bonds. Mr. Urgo said there have been no instances of schools not receiving their funding. Representative Urban had been at the public hearing and she said there has been no precedent for that. She spoke to someday having to send our students elsewhere and spoke of other towns she researched. She had further comment. There was further comment. Mr. Urgo spoke of North Stonington and how some of the changes made in town will take a couple of years to take hold. There are some exciting things taking hold. Mrs. Nita Kincaid, citizen, said the North Stonington Quarterly will be arriving next week. She said the tax benefits spoken about are addressed in the assessors' office portion. She said there is a whole list of presentations on You Tube. She said that the information shared since December is online. She had further comment. A citizen spoke and said he didn't think this was the right solution. Mrs. Debbie Karpinski, citizen and employee, spoke and said that if the school closed the town would crumble. She had further comment. She said the school is the heart of the community. If you close the school, families will move out of town. Mike Anderson, Ad Hoc Committee member, said the committee is willing to meet with folks to give more information on a one-on-one basis. He elaborated. The Ad Hoc is meeting Monday at 7:00 p.m. in the town hall. Mr. Mullane wanted to clarify the state reimbursement. He said in 1995 when we did the project, we were at 67% and 65%. Each year, it has gone down. The rate we are quoted is good if we take action by this June. He figures the rates will continue to go down each year. He said the bonding rates are significantly lower right now. Kristen St. Germain, Wheeler Principal, wanted to acknowledge the students that were present. She said she went through a project in her town and thought she couldn't afford it but it was the best thing to happen. These are the students to lead the future. A citizen commented that when the senior citizens went to school, there were senior citizens that paid for them to go to school just like has been done in the past. Everybody has to take this into consideration. A citizen wanted to thank the teachers for the excellent education her children receive. She elaborated. Sheri Tardiff, kindergarten teacher in North Stonington, said she wanted to comment on this special group and town. She said it is worth the time and love to give the students and the town. Mr. Van Brown asked about air quality. He said Mr. Nero has been very helpful. Mr. Nero told him there is no air quality problem or soil problem. He wondered about the reference to air quality in the project. Mr. Malik had explanation of air exchange. He said there are numerous studies. There are codes now for air quality. He elaborated and had further explanation. Mrs. Pat Ostrout, citizen and teacher in North Stonington, came here 19 years ago. They elected to move here because of the education system. The first event they attended was graduation. She elaborated. She said

she is fortunate to have been teaching here for 17 years. She said there isn't a better place to be. Each new teacher that comes in is amazed. She said they can't believe that the teachers know each and every student. She elaborated. She elaborated on the students and the universities, colleges and military academies our graduates attend. She reiterated that she chose this town. She said she would like to hear "when this project passes" not "if the project passes." A citizen commented on the middle school budget being lower and wondered about that. Mr. Nero said many of the services are shared. He had further comment. The citizen said if the high school closed, the middle school budget would have to be adjusted. Shannon Curioso, teacher, commented that she knows 95% of the students after being here a year. The family atmosphere is real and the students appreciate being in that kind of environment. Kylie Garcia, senior at Wheeler, said coming to Wheeler was the best choice that her parents could have made. She said they could have gone to other schools but they chose here because of the education. She said the teachers are wonderful. There are so many opportunities available to students. Mr. Mullane said he has been in town for 48 years and in government for many of them. He commended the students for attending. He said you do not have job stability unless you can compete. He elaborated. He told the students today have a challenge that he would not want to have. He elaborated. He said the responsibility of the community is to provide them with an education. He said we have more successes from the students. He had further comment. He said we have a phenomenal environment in North Stonington. He said the investment is worth it. Mr. Mullane said he thinks this project is the right thing to do; it is a good investment. He had further comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education