

Board of Education Minutes
Tri-Board Meeting
February 25, 2016

DRAFT

A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education was held on Thursday, February 25, 2016, at 7:00 p.m. in the Wheeler High School Shaw Media Center. Present for the Board of Selectmen were Mr. Murphy and Mr. Donahue; present for the Board of Finance were Mrs. Howell and Mr. Pavlovics ; and present for the Board of Education were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Carlson, Mr. Karpinski, Mr. McCord, and Mr. Mathwich, Also present were Mr. Nero and members of the Ad Hoc Committee. The meeting started at 7:04 p.m. Mr. Donahue welcomed everyone and explained the flow of the meeting.

2. Public Comments – M. Donahue (BOS) – None.

3. Ad Hoc Committee Plan Updates – M. Urgo – Mr. Urgo thanked everyone for coming. He gave an overview of the aerial photo of the grounds.

Communications – Mr. Urgo went over items the communications committee has been working on as well as their outreach efforts.

Existing Facilities Use – Mr. Urgo gave an update on the potential leasing of the current building. He reviewed the meetings with LEARN and said they will also be meeting with the Wheeler Library Board of Trustees.

Finance – Mr. Urgo said the committee as a whole is committed to keeping the cost down. The Finance committee has visited one permanent modular today with plans to see another one next week. They saw a presentation on reverse auctioning and he explained that process.

Mr. Urgo said there was a very good turnout at the hearing. He put together a chart with the concerns presented by the public at the hearing. Some of the concerns were the cost of the project as well as the possibility of not receiving the state reimbursement. Representative Urban was present at the hearing and she explained that once the state commits, the town will get the money. He felt the committee needed a couple of more weeks to put the final touches on it. He reviewed a proposed timeline. Mr. Urgo reviewed a proposed project schedule because there were questions about what happens when the project is approved by the town. He had further comment. Mr. Urgo said affordability comes up at every meeting. They are doing their best to keep the costs down. He elaborated on items that are available to townspeople that are struggling. Mr. Urgo spoke to not doing anything. He said that is not an option. There is a very large cost of doing nothing and he had further comment on that. Mr. Urgo said they are in good shape as a board. They have a commitment and they want to see it through.

4. General Discussion/Feedback on Updates – Boards – Mr. Karpinski commented on reverse auctioning and advised caution in that area based on his past experiences. Mr. Urgo had comment. Mrs. Howell asked about the affordability items available to the townspeople. Mr. Murphy said the town participates in a state program for the elderly and totally disabled. There are income levels and other thresholds to be adhered to. There is also a veteran's discount on taxes. There was comment. Mr. Murphy had comment on the program the affordable housing committee has put in place

for low income families. Mrs. Howell commented on the proposed education budget and elaborated. Mr. Urgo commented on that. Mr. Nero spoke and said it was his budget, not the Board of Education budget at this point. He had additional comment and said the Board of Education is still reviewing it. He gave numbers of surrounding towns' budgets. He said the budget would not be at 4.4 when it is passed. Mrs. Howell had further comment. Mr. Urgo had comment. Mr. Donahue asked what they saw their next steps to be. He said the Ad Hoc Committee is almost ready to make their recommendation and asked if there were any other information they would like to have. Mr. Karpinski asked if they would be seeing anything else before it came to the Board of Education and Mr. Urgo answered. Mr. Murphy asked when there might be a revised number based on revised building techniques. Mr. Urgo thought two weeks from now. Mr. Carlson said if and when the building project has passed how does the building committee get appointed? Mr. Donahue said there is a town ordinance that the Board of Selectmen would appoint a building committee as they did for the EMS building. He elaborated. Mrs. Wagner asked when the EMS town meeting is and was told March 7th. She said the goal of these meetings has been to understand the project and to be united as a Tri-Board. She worried that it would get hung up in one of those committees. Mr. Donahue said now is the time for members to raise their hands with things they would like to see. Mr. Pavlovics spoke to the proposed scheduled. There was comment about there being a little bit of room in the proposed project schedule. Mrs. Wagner said she hoped there would not be slippage on the Board of Finance or on the board of Selectmen. Mr. Pavlovics felt there would be on the Board of Finance. Unfortunately, he said there are only two people in attendance this evening although they have had good attendance in the past. He said they are doing pretty well and if any of the boards need another week or so there would be time. He said the push should not be to do it quick. There were questions asked if it can go to a referendum without the Board of Finance's approval and the answer was no. This project would go to the Board of Education, then to the Board of Selectmen, and then to the Board of Finance to recommend to town meeting and then to referendum. He elaborated on the process to go to referendum. Mrs. Howell said she is speaking for herself and she believes in letting the people decide. She said you still may want to consider two separate projects. She had further comment. Mr. Donahue said each of the boards has a process to bring this forward. He expects the Ad Hoc Committee to address the feedback they have heard over the past months. He elaborated. Mr. Murphy commented on splitting the two projects. He said if one project is not approved, wouldn't the elementary project look different? He elaborated. Mr. Murphy believes this project as a whole is what the town needs to maintain a pre-k to 12 system. He had further comment. If the high school and middle school project was voted on separately and failed, there would be no option but to send them out. He felt it was best to go with one project. Mrs. Wagner said if this doesn't pass, status quo is not option. Mrs. Wagner said they may end up with a K-8 system. She elaborated. People need to understand that keeping it as it is would not be an option. She had further explanation. People need to understand that holding the line as is would not be the answer. Mrs. Howell asked if it were done in two separate projects could they accomplish the same thing. Mr. Nero commented and said this has been going on since 2002 and when would you do the second project? He said we would end up going on probation. The application was signed in June of 1990 for the last project. Mr. Nero said if you look at that history, the second project would not get done. He had further comment. Mr. Donahue said there has been a good exchange and he summed it up. He had further comment. Mr. Donahue pointed out the costs associated with a capital improvements projects approach. Mr. McCord said those are basically the minimum things that need to be done and he elaborated. Mr. Urgo had comment. Mr. Urgo complemented the Ad Hoc Committee. They are getting the same answers as previous Ad Hoc Committees. He felt the town should not

put the brakes on anymore. He had further comment. Mr. Urgo said the project they are presenting is the one to go forward. They voted unanimously to bring it forward. Mr. McCord commented that the project is less but it is scaled back. He said we get a better reimbursement from the state as well. Mr. Donahue commented on the financial management of this all. He suggested the Board of Finance look at the financial load. The Selectmen have some role in that as well. They have to look at how to accommodate other projects. Mr. Donahue said as we start to move into the next phase, we have to have some answers as to what some of the other priorities are in town. As this goes forward, the other boards have to look at this. He elaborated and had further comment. He said a lot of things get rolled into this. We have to figure out what you want from the future. Mr. McCord commented on the plan of conservation and development and one of the things that came up was the quality education. He had further comment. Mr. Karpinski asked if there were any way to get some feedback from the economic development committee. Mr. Donahue had comment. Mr. Urgo mentioned that this goes to the Board of Education before the Tri-Board meets again. Mr. Pavlovics would caution about the Ad Hoc Committee not including the modular costs. The proper strategy is this is the amount we need but not cut it to bare bones. Mr. Urgo said they were not going to include the reverse auctioning. Mr. Pavlovics commented again about not cutting to bare bones. Mr. Urgo said it was important that the town and committees have faith in what they are doing. He said they are taking a lot of time with the modular. They would not lowball it to try to get it through. They are going with actual costs. Mr. Urgo said if the committee feels comfortable with this approach they want to include it. They are still working through that and to not include it would be a disservice. Mr. Carlson said the more information we get to the community the better. He had further comment. Mr. Urgo had comment on permanent modulars. He said the way it works is like regular construction. It is built inside a structure and put together on site. He said this is equal to or better than normal construction. He said the committee is vetting again. Mrs. Wagner had comment and said she is open to look at it sooner rather than later. There was discussion. Mr. Murphy asked again that a cost for a new roof be included as part of this project. He elaborated. Mr. Urgo had comment.

5. Next Meeting – R. Carlson (BOE) – March 24th will be the next meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Wheeler High School Shaw media center.

6. Public Comments – Mrs. Nita Kincaid wanted more clarity on the Board of Finance’s recommendation to go to town meeting. When they vote, is it for approval or just to go to town meeting? Mr. Pavlovics based on the past, it is recommending that the town adopt the project and he believed the state statute says the same. She asked to clarify that and Mr. Pavlovics said they recommend to the town. She said we really need to understand that. She said it is ultimately to allow the town to make the decision. Mr. Pavlovics said the board has no authority. Mr. Nero paraphrased her that it goes to the town. Mr. Pavlovics said they would recommend it to the town. Mrs. Kincaid said the majority must approve the composition of the proposal. Mr. Pavlovics had further comment. A citizen commented on the work the committee has done. He said there is a lot of pressure for the EMS building and the school building. He appreciated Mr. Donahue speaking of the trade- offs of getting back to the town. He asked when it goes to the referendum would it be a bare bones project. Mr. Donahue said the Board of Education needs to put a number on the project for an additional appropriation, to go to the Selectmen and then to the Board of Finance. Mr. Osborn, member of the Ad Hoc Committee, had comment and questioned the Board of Finance if they have projected a mil rate if both projects passed and if one passed and the other one didn’t. Mr. Testa, citizen, clarified what was trying to be asked. Mr. Donahue said that is not available tonight but

that is what is going to be worked on. Mr. Donahue had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said this will go to the town at the cost of the project and elaborated. Mr. Urgo said they are very sensitive to this. They are planning on having a flyer go out before the town meeting to communicate everything. Mr. Van Brown, taxpayer, said you need to go to referendum as soon as possible. He had questions on the permanent modules. Mr. Urgo said there are different ways to get them built but they need to further educate themselves. Mr. Urgo said you would not know the difference. Their life span is more than regular construction. He said the Ad Hoc Committee meets every Monday. Another meeting is on Monday on permanent modules. Mr. Brown had questions on what happens between the application and the state approval. Mr. Urgo said a lot of work has to be done between. He said if you delay starting the work, there will be costs incurred. He had further comment. Questions were asked and answered about the reimbursement process for costs incurred. Mr. Brian Rathbun, citizen, commented that it is going to come down to the taxpayers options. He elaborated. He attended a lot of these meetings and said he feels sorry for those that didn't attend. He appreciated the time the committee has put in. Mr. Rathbun spoke of tax increases and budgets. He said it is very important to have the figures there and he elaborated. A citizen asked what happens if it gets voted down. Mr. Donahue said he doesn't know what happens and had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had said it previously that they would have to take a hard look at things. Mr. Donahue had further comment on previous comments that were made. A citizen commented that she has five children and they did not move her for the schools but for the town atmosphere and asked if the board had considered those families that will move out because the taxes would go up and she elaborated. Mr. Donahue said that is one of the things that have to be looked at among other things. He had further comment. Mr. Jay Peterson, Ad Hoc Committee member, commented and said he is retired and his taxes will go up. He would be paying for her five kids to go to school. He said when he was young other people paid to have him go to school and what he has come to realize that those favors that were done when he was young are those that are to be passed along. He spoke of the modulars. There was discussion. Mr. Nero said any studies on regionalization that has been done show there are negligible savings. He said you will have no say in the cost to you. He had further comment. He spoke of participation at our school versus participation at another school. There are many things to take into account when you close a school and regionalize. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said a lot of comment is made about taxes going up and people leaving. There will be a lot of people leaving if there is no school. It is going to have to be a personal decision for everyone. Mrs. Wagner said there will be an exodus if it doesn't pass as well. Mr. Donahue had further comment. Mr. Pavlovics said 2/3 of the towns in Connecticut have higher mil rates than North Stonington and he wondered where they will move to for lower taxes. He said over and over again it has been demonstrated that towns with no higher education have lower property values. If you compare the mil rates in the state of Connecticut about 130 towns have higher rates than we do. Mr. Urgo appreciated everyone's comments. He said there are costs to this but there are also costs if we don't do anything. He elaborated and said there is a great risk to not doing this. Mr. Urgo said it was good to understand what those other costs are. Mr. Rathbun had further comment. The citizen said if our students are doing well, why do we need new facilities. Mr. Nero had a response to that and listed off some of the many issues. Mr. Donahue had further comment. Mrs. Howell said she hopes the town really comes together. She hopes we get more economic development in town. She elaborated. Mrs. Howell said she doesn't think closing the school is a good idea. We need to get businesses in town to help defray the cost to the taxpayer. She had further comment. She hopes everyone can sharpen their pencils and really come together in all areas of the town. We need to compromise and give a little. Mr. Brown asked what another school district would charge us. Mr. Nero said it would be

more than our per pupil expenditure and said it is a complex formula. He said you have no input into the curriculum. If you have a beef with an administrator in another district, there may not be a lot of recourse. A citizen commented on someone else's comment that North Stonington needs to grow their tax base. She said the first thing they always looked for were the schools and having businesses is another. Her revenue goes to other communities because there is nothing to buy in North Stonington. She commented on the people she spoke to about leaving due to the high taxes in North Stonington. She mentioned the classroom space from the tribe. She also asked about the economic growth. She mentioned housing the students in another facility but it would still be out students. She had further comment. She spoke of the revaluation and how some houses went up and some went down. She spoke highly of the community. Mr. Carlson spoke of the visit to the classrooms. He explained the rooms and the scenarios that they came across. Mr. Carlson said there would be a lot of money spent on renovations without getting anything out of it. That is a sovereign land and they don't have to follow the same rules. He had further comment on the tour of the facility. He said it didn't make a lot of sense and had further explanation. He felt it was not a great option. The citizen said that would be great information to get out to the public that we did investigate that. Mrs. Pat Lewis, citizen, had a major concern about bussing our students anywhere. She said we have an obligation to keep them in town and give them an education. Pam Potemri, Ad Hoc Committee member, said they also moved to town for the education. She had comment on building aesthetics. She said we need to look long-term at economic development and the strategic plan for the community. She had further comment on the community. She said if we don't do this, we won't be able to maintain status quo. This is one piece of a much bigger picture.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education