

North Stonington Board of Education  
Tri-Board Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
January 29, 2015

**DRAFT**

A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education was held on Thursday, January 29, 2015, at 7:00 p.m. in the Wheeler High School Media Center. Present for the Board of Selectmen were Mr. Donahue and Mr. Mullane, present for the Board of Finance were Mr. Pavlovics, Mr. Woodward, Mr. Spring, and Mr. Main, and present for the Board of Education were Mr. Carlson, Mrs. Wagner, Mrs. Buzzee, Mr. Karpinski, Mr. Mathwich, and Mr. Mendolia (7:30 p.m.). The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m.

2. Introduction/Opening Remarks - M. Donahue (BOS) – Mr. Donahue opened the meeting and explained the purpose of the meeting which was trying to get the Boards talking to each other. He spoke of using a facilitated discussion. There will also be discussion of a timetable. He reviewed the agenda items and explained them.

Objective of Joint Meetings - R. Carlson (BOE) – Mr. Carlson, acting chair, spoke of the objective of the joint meetings. He said they hope everyone will be working in the same direction. Hoping the end means will be an affordable way to modernize the school facilities. Everyone will have a chance to comment.

Role of Facilitator - D. Spring (BOF) – Mr. Spring said there is a person here this evening that will act as the role of a facilitator. He said more importantly it will keep a tempo to the meeting. Things will start to move in a productive way. He had further comment. He introduced the facilitator, Nick Caruso, and had further comment.

3. Ground Rules for Discussion - N. Caruso – Mr. Caruso said he has enjoyed the process so far. They have been meeting regularly for the last month or so. The importance of working together and the need for transparency were the group's concerns. He gave his biography. He reviewed a quote from Lafayette and felt it was very appropriate.

Expectations of Facilitated Discussion - N. Caruso - The committee talked about ground rules. He said everyone was here for the same reason. Part of his job is if he sees something breaking down is to bring it back together again. He reviewed the ground rules/meeting norms. They will not be trying to do it all tonight. He said together they can make this work. The best time to start about solutions is when you have already the issues.

1. Outline of Discussion Points to Address - R. Carlson (BOE)/D. Spring (BOF) – Mr. Spring said in developing the discussion they wanted to move toward some outcome. They want to develop some forward and active thinking and perhaps take some action. They are trying to accomplish a sense of vision and what is important to the school. It's easy to get trapped in time and he elaborated. Their thoughts and actions will impact the school and community. It will impact the students of North Stonington. They are trying to develop a platform.

Proposed Timetable for Tri-Board Meetings - R. Carlson (BOE)/D Spring (BOF) – Mr. Carlson spoke of the referendums and elaborated. He said they did not want to fast track this but didn't want to set it on the back burner. This group will be meeting maybe every 4-5 weeks to keep the ball rolling until we get to where we need to be.

5. Discussion – Boards – Mr. Caruso had the Boards introduce themselves. Mr. Caruso said he has heard from everyone that something needs to be done with the facilities. Mr. Pavlovics said speaking for those that are absent there is a certain element that would not agree with that. Mr. Karpinski felt all the Boards thought some type of effort was needed. He elaborated. Mr. Spring said they take their position as town officials seriously and understand their responsibilities. Mr. Woodward asked for clarification. Mr. Caruso said his understanding was that it was school facilities modernization. Mr. Woodward spoke of the things they have heard that need to be repaired and agreed. Mr. Caruso had comment. His expectation for this evening was some general brainstorming. He gave some examples of items to be considered. Mr. Mullane had comment on what the schools offer. He said we have to have an end and asked what we need to do and what will we gain. He said we need a project. We have to educate the residents. We have to pull everyone in at the start. He spoke of safety issues. He elaborated and gave examples. He had further comment. He would like to have things posted online so people could remain up-to-date on what is happening. If we lay out some kind of outline, people would get more involved and we can sell the project. Without a good education for a young child, they don't stand a chance. Mr. Karpinski said we don't want to rush it but asked about phasing it with perhaps some safety issues. He wasn't sure about not doing anything this year. Mr. Caruso clarified. Mr. Spring spoke of our resources and optimizing them for what needs to be done. He spoke of not overextending. The end result will be making our facilities better than they are. Mr. Caruso summarized Mr. Spring's comments. It is also about defining what resources are available. Mr. Woodward said this project was such a puzzle. He elaborated about the presentations by the architect and how elaborate they are. He wondered about piece-mealing and if that would work. Mrs. Wagner didn't want to spend a lot of time going backwards. She said the most effective way is to do the project in its entirety but the town has spoken. There has to be another way. She reiterated again about not going backward and moving forward. Mr. Caruso had comment. Mr. Spring said he doesn't think they have a handle on their current assessment. It may be very hard to separate the priorities. He said he feels everything has to be looked at with a critical eye in order for it to be successful. Mr. Mathwich said for the last 10+ years they have been suffering from analysis paralysis and in that time nothing is being done. The only thing that has changed is time. He would like to avoid that. Mr. Karpinski said the attendance at the Board of Education meetings was with the same 4-5 people. He elaborated. In the invitation aspects we need to change our way of communicating with the people. He elaborated and wondered how to do that. Mr. Caruso said you would come up with a communication plan. Mr. Donahue said the importance of these meetings is to show the town representatives are working together. Mr. Main said they see the same participation. In the end it was the cost that drove the last project down. He brought up the remediation items. We need to get the people more educated about the remediation such as cost, etc. because it is a big fear of them. Mr. Karpinski spoke and commented it needs to be packaged in a palatable way. That needs to be a big part of the discussion. Mr. Spring said we need to come to some thinking regarding the actual scope. He felt the scope of the last presentation was that it was too much. We need to develop what is palatable in terms of the scope and what is agreeable. He spoke about priorities. We have to start thinking about how to chunk it down. Mr. Caruso clarified. He said that may be part of the Board of Finance's duties to determine what may be a reasonable amount and then work within the scope. He had further comment. Mr.

Spring said it is what the market will bear. He elaborated and had further comment. Mr. Karpinski spoke of the zero percent increases and then coming in with a project. Mr. Spring gave his observations. He spoke of the referendums and the difference in the voting. It seemed we were a little bit outside the boundary. It wasn't a flat no. Mr. Mendolia said with the second vote it seemed people were more aware. His fear was that if it was voted down again, what direction will they go. It will be a lot of work again. Mr. Spring said in their vote they spoke. As town officials we have to respond. He elaborated. Mr. Donahue thought that was the challenge going forward. He had further comment. Mr. Carlson said when they saw the dollar figure, it was a big number. If we could have done more of a breakdown, it may have been better. Maybe prioritize. Mr. Donahue said this was just not limited to the school. It is a big issue all around. Mrs. Wagner spoke of the older population maybe feeling like they were getting squeezed with nothing in return. Mr. Pavlovics said it was brought up about many different options and letting the people choose. He felt people would vote for more. We need to ask the people what they want done. While it may not be a good idea for a referendum it may be for some type of advisory. He elaborated. Instead of us prioritizing, we could maybe let the public prioritize first. Mr. Mathwich had comment. Mr. Caruso clarified about needing some sort of filter. Mr. Pavlovics had further comment about options coming from the public. Mr. Spring said coming out of the community conversations they have had was the community leaders coming out with a vision and moving forward. He elaborated. Mr. Caruso had comment. He said when there are so many immediate needs and little money, there may not be much left. It would help to hear what each different item costs. Mr. Donahue said there was not much discussion about the cost of doing nothing. He said that may need to be made clear. Mr. Caruso had comment. Mr. Spring had further comment on the cost to do nothing. Mr. Caruso spoke of a study done of the fiscal value of schools. Mr. Spring had comment. Mrs. Wagner spoke of the story we can tell about our schools and how wonderful we are. She spoke of the facts that are in black and white. She spoke of needing to find creative ways to have people come out to meetings other than at the usual meeting times. Mr. Spring commented on the op-ed piece Mr. Nero did and saw there was a tremendous sense of pride in the community. He elaborated. He spoke of 10-80-10; 10% won't like it, 10% will like it, and the group in the middle will come out and support you if you give them enough information. They wouldn't gravitate voting against it, but they are not vested in coming out to vote. He thought maybe a session on communications moving forward may be helpful. Mr. Spring had comment. Mr. Caruso said we need to refine the plans and the fiscal information and how do we communicate that. Mr. Woodward commented on Ledyard's successful bid at a building project. Mr. Karpinski asked if there is a way to extend the schools so the community has the use of the schools and wondered if that would help sell the project. Mr. Caruso said you could make the schools a community center. Mr. Spring said it doesn't hurt to develop some point of distinction. He elaborated. There was discussion. There was talk of starting to prioritize items this evening. Mr. Karpinski thought we needed to define out charter first. There was further discussion. Mr. Spring said it has come out that the middle school is really lacking. In observation we really know where we are lacking. Mr. Caruso said the more guidance you can give an architect the better. Mr. Main said it is more the vision of the educators. Mr. Karpinski said there is a shopping list but his whole thing for tonight was to get a direction first. He thought they would go back and talk about that. Mr. Nero said in his opinion the middle school is the worst – beyond repair. It is the oldest facility. Mr. Caruso said the whole idea behind this meeting

was collective thought. He elaborated. Mrs. Wagner spoke. Mr. Carlson said there was a health and safety issue. He thought they could put each of the items into categories. Things that had to get done, things that they would like to get done, etc. Mr. Caruso had comment. There was comment and questions were asked and answered. Mr. Carlson said we need to put these priorities together as a group. Mr. Caruso clarified. Mr. Spring said nobody was denying we were not producing a good product in the students and had further comment. He was more concerned about the educational component and what was being improved there. Mrs. Wagner commented and agreed with Mr. Spring. There was comment. Mr. Woodward had comment about focusing on the middle school. Mr. Karpinski had comment. There was discussion. Mr. Nero clarified his statement on the middle school. Mr. Spring had comment. Mrs. Wagner commented. She said the groups did not work together last time. She elaborated. She said if we all know the final numbers and are all on the same page, whatever project we come up with the people will have a better understanding of the project. Mr. Donahue said that highlights why the Boards have to work together. Mr. Nero had comment. He said he is not going to go through what they did last time and elaborated. Mr. Caruso had comment. Mr. Spring had comment. He said the other piece is how this integrates to what we have committed to already as far as the other financial debt. He had further comment. He spoke of 70% of high school graduates are not eligible to join the military because they cannot pass the entrance exam. He elaborated on why he brought that up. He had further comment. There was further comment by members. Mr. Caruso had comment on the phasing comment brought up earlier. Mr. Mullane spoke of regional meetings he has attended. He spoke of New London wanting support from the others for the June 30<sup>th</sup> date. He spoke to that at the meeting about new magnet schools taking students. He elaborated. He spoke further on magnet schools. Mr. Mullane spoke that we don't fit into any niche and he elaborated. He spoke of the system not helping us. Mr. Nero spoke on magnet schools. There was further discussion. Mr. Mullane spoke of a movement to remove the June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline for submittal. He had further comment. There was comment about getting our local representatives involved in this. Mr. Caruso summed it up that the community should be looking to prevent any roadblocks put up by the legislature. Mr. Karpinski asked should they expect or want 100% buy-on of all board members on this. Mr. Spring said to be successful, the three boards need to be united and have consensus. Mr. Caruso had comment to that.

6. Session Summary - N. Caruso – Mr. Caruso said there are two things to be done next – 1. The Board of Finance needs to go back and do a little work on what a referendum would look like for mil rate and taxes. Consolidating what is on this list could be done at the next meeting. Mrs. Wagner wondered while the Board of Finance was working the numbers, a smaller group could be working on prioritizing. There was comment. Mr. Nero had comment. Mr. Mullane spoke of budgeting for this. Mr. Nero spoke of changing architects. There was comment. Mr. Carlson spoke of the architects. By changing architects, it is a different set of eyes.

Assignments/Next Topics - N. Caruso – Mr. Caruso said the Board of Finance will do some homework. Mr. Mullane will do work on the bonds. Mr. Nero said we are not at the point yet about an architect. Mr. Mullane had comment on architects and the process. A small group will get together and review and try to prioritize some things.

Next Meeting - M. Donahue (BOS) – The next meeting will be the last Thursday of February which is the 26<sup>th</sup>. They will meet at 7:00 p.m. in the high school media center. The working group will get together in the meantime.

7. Public Comments - M. Donahue (BOS) – Mr. Gross spoke of the public’s knowledge of the other meetings. He spoke of items covered in the meeting. He spoke of communicating in language the public can understand. He had further comment on other points of the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to  
The Board of Education