

Board of Education Minutes
Tri-Board Meeting
March 28, 2015

DRAFT

A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education was held on Saturday, March 28, 2015, at 9:00 a.m. in the Wheeler High School Media Center. Present for the Board of Selectmen were Mr. Mullane, Mr. Donahue and Mr. Testa; present for the Board of Finance were Mr. Spring, Mr. Pavlovics, Mr. Woodward, Mr. Main and Mr. Steinhart; and present for the Board of Education were Mr. Carlson, Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, and Mr. Mathwich. Also present was Mr. Nero and Mr. Caruso. The meeting was called to order at 9:06 a.m. by Mr. Donahue. He welcomed everyone and explained the flow of the meeting.

2. Recap of Last Session/Check of Priorities – R. Carlson (BOE) – Mr. Carlson said at the last meeting they reviewed priorities and the three Boards basically came to the same conclusions. He reviewed the priorities: moving the elementary school office, the tunnel was a concern, safety updates were varied and it was explained that those could be covered through a project, moving the sixth grade back to the elementary school, and the number one priority was the science labs. A tour of the labs will be done shortly.

3. Tour of School Science Labs – P. Nero – Mr. Nero said he will take them to the high school science labs first and then to the middle school labs. He had further comment. He spoke of the NEASC study. He had further comment. He spoke of the lack of science lab updates and elaborated. He began the tour.

The tour concluded after review of the sciences labs in each school and the tunnel. (Mr. Steinhart did not return after the tour.)

4. Financial Parameters/3 – 5 Year Look-Ahead – D. Spring (BOF) – Mr. Spring said he appreciated Mr. Nero taking them on the tour to highlight certain areas. As he has said in the past we are stewards to our Town and he elaborated. Based on what was seen this morning he asked what a dollar amount would be that the Town could handle. Mr. Main said he couldn't put a dollar amount to it without seeing further information. Mr. Mathwich said 30 million dollars for discussion's sake. Mr. Spring spoke of the past referenda. He thought maybe 30 million dollars was not a bad number. He said we have need on one side and cost on the other side and somewhere in between needs to be a balance. During the past discussions of the referenda, he said it has to be the willingness of the townspeople to fund it. Even as we have gone through meetings in the past, there was tremendous distortion and he elaborated. Mr. Spring continued and said what we are trying to do is define the need and balance the cost to get the willingness of the taxpayers to step up. The school is a huge part of the Town budget and he elaborated. He said the Board of Education came in with a flat budget. It was remarkable how much they have done to lift the educational value. He had further comment. He commented on items the Board has done to make a difference in education. He said being smart in our investment does yield. Mrs. Wagner had comment. She said people do move to towns with strong school systems. She wondered how we could get the energy out there that this is a great

place. Mr. Spring said we are seeing success in our students. He elaborated. He spoke of the last referendum. He said it spoke to outside communities that we do not invest in our schools. He said all of these things are connected. We want to maintain the rural aspect of our Town but we should not forfeit advancement; it should act as a catalyst for better things to come. He continued. Mr. Spring said if 30 million dollars was the number, the reimbursement is 46.1%. He thought we would be at 16-17 million dollars. For ease, he used 15 million dollars. He reviewed the numbers as to how it would translate to the Town. Mr. Spring explained the handout he passed out to Board members. He reviewed an amortization schedule and thought the rates were pretty accurate. It would mean a 2 mil increase for this scenario. He had further explanation. Mr. Nero had comment about the possibility of space waivers. Mr. Spring reviewed a sheet as to what it would mean for individual homeowners and he explained. He said these are parameters and hypotheticals. He wanted to put in it a framework that was understandable. He said there has been no growth in the grand list. It means that our resources are restricted. The Town has been very conservative. We have an excellent balance sheet, audit, and credit rating. He feels the emergency center will be debt neutral and explained. The current mil rate is 25.85. He felt it would remain level for the current season. He had further explanation. Mr. Karpinski clarified the fire complex scenario with the budget. Mr. Pavlovics had comment. Mrs. Wagner had comment. There was discussion of taxes and that they will eventually go up. Mr. Testa commented on the mil rate and the current rate being used to balance the budget. Mr. Spring said the current mil rate should accommodate the EMS facility payment. Mr. Nero had comment. Mr. Spring clarified. He said the budget is a living document and things change through the course of the year. In this transition year, we are defending our undesignated fund balance amount and he elaborated. He said that money is not being put into other expenses – that is not the case. Mr. Spring wondered if 30 million dollars was the right number and thought we might not be far off from that. He said this was just a scenario as to what is possible. He spoke of the need being well-articulated and there is a good chance it could happen. He said it was a failed referendum the second time but the highest voter turnout of any referendum in Town. Mr. Spring said the gap between voters collapsed by 50%. He had further comment. We are just formulating and shaping. Mr. Testa clarified his point. There was further comment from Board members. Mr. Spring said the Town is in a very good place.

5. Discussion – Boards – Mr. Caruso said the goal is just not to have a number or percent per say but also whether you go with a new architect or the old architect. We are almost at the point where we need to give the numbers to someone. He had comment about a statement he made at the first meeting. Mr. Mullane commented on things he had learned this morning. He didn't really realize the extent of the deficiencies. He listed them. He felt we need to promote the success of our graduates. Mr. Mullane thought a different architect was a great idea. He was recommending an outside educator to walk-through and elaborated. We need to emphasize a zero budget and he had further comment. He said all we have talked about is bricks and mortar but it has to be more than that. Mr. Caruso clarified Mr. Mullane's statement as emphasizing the needs with better communication. Mr. Mullane said he was not properly educated on these issues himself. He said it has to be a comprehensive package. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner wanted to make sure everyone on the Boards understands the need. Mr. Caruso wanted to make sure nobody has changed their opinion about the labs. Mr. Donahue said he has not changed his

opinion. Mr. Carlson said we have success now with what we have but wondered what we could do with more. Mr. Carlson agreed on the labs. Mr. Spring said yes. Mr. Pavlovics said yes. Mr. Karpinski said yes. Mr. Mathwich said yes. Mr. Testa said it was a need and elaborated. There was conversation between Mr. Testa and Mr. Caruso. Mr. Testa had further comment about the labs not being the only need and having to look at the big picture. Mr. Caruso said these meetings are to come up with a plan that everyone agrees on. Mr. Main agreed it was a priority but there are other needs as well. There was discussion. Mr. Nero had comment about the process of a project. Mr. Caruso said if you can come up with the parameters of the budget, you can come up with the needs and then get pricing. He elaborated. Mr. Caruso wanted feedback on Mr. Spring's presentation. Mr. Testa commented including the mixed message with level-funding, not being able to afford your budget, and how can you afford more debt. He had further comment. Mr. Caruso said it appears everyone previously agreed that communication is key. He thought a communications committee may need to be set up. He had further comment about ability to pay. Mr. Testa had further comment. Mr. Caruso had further comment as did other Board members. Mr. Caruso said there is a lot of interaction between the needs. Mr. Spring said we have been very effective at debt management. We know the project will have an impact and we have to communicate and recognize that no debt is not a good thing for the Town. We have to invest in our community. He had further comment. Mr. Woodward passed out a handout based on what Mr. Ricker, citizen, had said at a previous meeting. He explained the handout and had further comment. Mr. Caruso said he is trying to collect the wisdom of the group. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner commented on the number and could that be a place to start. Mr. Pavlovics disagreed and wanted to start based on needs and not a number. There was discussion. Mr. Pavlovics explained Mr. Spring's comment that we don't have enough debt. He thought a forward-thinking community was an indebted community and elaborated on his comment. Mr. Testa clarified Mrs. Wagner's comment and elaborated. Mr. Spring said the needs we can begin to identify and we have done that. What we are doing today is how we can optimize what we learned in the two referendums. He elaborated. He commented that we can't second guess the priorities and dollar amount. The ultimate number is the well-defined needs list and what the professional can do. Mr. Nero said the previous building projects there was no bulls-eye on the wall. He elaborated. We were looking at interest rates. We can't go back twenty years. We need to put the other building project aside. Somewhere along the line are basic priorities. Mr. Nero said we need to sit with an architect. We need to get closer to the bulls-eye. He said it is still going to be an issue. Mr. Pavlovics spoke of Mr. Mathwich's comment about paralysis by analysis. Mr. Mathwich felt we are there now and he expanded on that. Mr. Mathwich wondered what we had to do to defend a need. There was discussion. Mr. Mathwich said the need has always been there. He elaborated. Mr. Caruso had comment. He summarized what has happened in the past and that it did not work. He said when we started the session, it sounded like we were closer than we are now. Mr. Karpinski wanted to get someone commissioned to start this. He elaborated and said we need to do something. Mr. Caruso wondered if the group wanted to leave the dollar amount off and base it on the needs and go from there. There was discussion. There was further comment. Mr. Main commented that it is always the same faces that we see at all the meetings. Mrs. Wagner thought that would be where the communications committee came in to play. Mr. Caruso

thought a communication plan needed to be put in place now. There was discussion on going to an architect. Mr. Caruso commented on the priorities that the group had set. He had further comment. Mr. Mullane commented. He said he is not going to second-guess the Board of Education's needs and he elaborated.

6. Next Step – Process Going Forward – Mr. Caruso said it would go through committee. The consensus was that it is the Ad Hoc Committee that would get the architect. Mr. Nero would suggest that the BOS and BOF should be a part of that committee. He elaborated. Mr. Caruso said communications keep coming back as an issue. He said now it is a matter of the process so if there were something to report there would be a place to go for that. There was discussion. At the next meeting there will be a recommendation for a communications committee. There was comment. There was comment about using a different architect with a new set of eyes. There was further comment. The Ad Hoc Committee should have enough time within the next month to get the list of priorities.

7. Session Summary – N. Caruso – Covered above.

8. Assignments – N. Caruso – Covered above.

9. Next Meeting – M. Donahue – Mr. Donahue said a suggestion was made to get together at the elementary school next time. He elaborated. He was looking at April 23rd at 7:00 p.m. in the multipurpose room.

10. Public Comment – Mr. Jim Patton had comment on communications, facilities, safety, and Town spirit. He had further comment. He didn't see anything wrong with a top-down and top-up analysis. Mrs. Nita Kincaid said she has attended the three meetings. She commented on the lack of public involvement. She said we will lose again unless they are involved now. She suggested doing a You Tube video. She had further comment on communications. Mrs. Vilma Gregorapoulos thanked Mr. Woodward for his handout. She had comment including the sixth grade moving back to the elementary school. She agreed that having something visual to show would be very helpful. A citizen commented on getting a new architect. He had suggestions. He spoke of the cost and what you get for the cost. He suggested getting a list of key factors and elaborated. Mr. Brian Rathbun commented on the ability of people to pay. He didn't know why you just couldn't fix certain items. He had further comment about being compared to Stonington and Waterford, and a grant writer. Mr. Mike Uργο thought it was exciting to see everyone getting together and communicating. He elaborated. He thought moving forward the Selectmen have to get behind this and he elaborated. He said we are wasting our time trying to get people to come to meetings. He also spoke of communicating in a different way, the cost of the project and our reimbursement rate, doing some things now on the list and putting more funding in the PSPBC line item. He elaborated. Mrs. Lisa Mazzella said it would be great to continue to see the Tri-Board working together and she elaborated. She said there was not a lot of communication about this meeting. She made suggestions about getting the word out and the need to focus on bringing the information to the public. She had further comment about communication. A citizen spoke of Mr.

Spring's presentation of the mil rate. He said it may make a lot more sense to people if they see that. Mr. Spring had comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:03 p.m. (Mr. Carlson left at 11:00 a.m. and Mr. Main left at 11:38 a.m.)

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education