

Minutes of the Meeting of the Heath Finance Committee
September 8, 2015

Time: 7:01

Place: Office Room, 2nd floor Sawyer Hall

Present: Ned Wolf, Gloria Fisher, Don Freeman (chair), Jan Carr, Kara Leistyna, Sheila Litchfield, Brian DeVriese, Bill Lattrell, and at 7:25 Budge Litchfield, and Ken Rocke

Members agreed to defer a review of the minutes.

Members reviewed a document prepared by Russell Dupere, counsel for the Mohawk Trail Regional School District (MTRSD). The document contains proposed changes to the regional agreement that are related to 'housekeeping', expansion of pre-K, and the admission of Rowe. Budge mentioned questions related to Rowe's possibly becoming a member. Would Rowe be expected to contribute to the capital project at the 7 – 12 level that the current member towns have voted to undertake? If Rowe were to join, would there then be any problem in having the 3 towns Rowe, Charlemont, and Hawley in the District at the 7- 12 level with the power to vote on Heath's elementary school budget? Don asked about the possible willingness of Rowe, Charlemont, and Hawley to join the District pre-K – 12 instead of just 7 – 12. Ken said that he could not predict what the towns might do but that in joining pre-K – 12 the 3 towns would lose the power to make important staffing decisions at the elementary level. Ken said that the present regional agreement allows for such things as a 'regionalizing committee' to study such things as forming a Heath, Rowe, Hawlemont Elementary District. Members said that they would like the current School Committee to invite opinions on ways to exclude Rowe, Charlemont, and Hawley from voting on elementary budget items.

There was a consensus that Rowe should be asked to join the District and that to continue with the tuition agreement the tuition needs to be increased so that it better reflects capital costs.

Budge turned to the matter of having "district wide pre-K" in the wording of the agreement. He said that town counsel Mark Reich has said that the agreement should refer to the District as Pre-K – 12. He said that the assessment formulas would stay the same. Budge suggested that since pre-K is not required by the state, there would be local control over whether or not pre-school is free. Jan said that having MTRSD called a pre-K – 12 district would be good branding in competing for kids. Other suggested descriptors were "Pre-K – 6 Responsive Classroom" and "Developmentally Appropriate District".

Brian brought up the issue of underutilizing facilities. Are class sizes viable? Does the principal determine the viability of a class size? Jan requested population data on the other schools in the District.

Members noted that the percentage of children in the District who do not attend public school may be as high as 30%.

Ken spoke of an effort to create language in the agreement so that under certain circumstances the costs and benefits of a project such as replacing a school's boiler would go to the same place.

The next Select Board/Finance Committee meeting on possible changes to the regional agreement will be on September 22nd.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Wolf, Secretary