

MINUTES SUDBURY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
OPTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
OCTOBER 30, 2014 7:30 P.M.
FLYNN BUILDING
278 OLD SUDBURYROAD, SUDBURY

Present:

John K. Baranowsky

Stephen Lambert

Patricia Brown

Allison Scheff

Ivar Henningson

Robert Haarde (arrived 8:35)

Elena M. Kleifges

William E. Kneeland, Jr.

David Levington

Paul F. Lynch

David R. Manjarrez

Scott B. Nassa

Risa Burns (arrived 8:08)

Also present: Dr. Edward Bouquillon, Superintendent, Minuteman Regional H.S.

Kevin Mahoney, Asst. Sup. Finance, Minuteman Regional H.S.

Jeff Stulin, Chair. Minuteman School Committee; arrived at 7:45

Call To Order: Selectperson Brown called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. She noted that the committee needs to elect a chair. A motion was made and seconded to elect Selectperson Brown as Chair which motion was unanimously adopted.

Minuteman: Dr. Bouquillon then gave a report on Minuteman. Dr Bouquillon discussed October 1 enrollment - total enrollment of 743 students with 25 students from Sudbury. Dr. Bouquillon provided historical data on Minuteman and three nearby vocational schools as to size, sports, clubs, foreign languages, AP classes and MCAS scores for 2013. He also provided information on graduation requirements.

Dr. Bouquillon discussed the MSBA process and planning. He stated that an Educational Program Plan has been approved for 628 students. He said that planning is ongoing re building design concepts. He stated that the plan is for a building proposal vote at 2016 town meetings. He also said that the plan includes a proposal for 16 programs – Advanced Manufacturing and Multi-Media Engineering would be new programs

Dr. Bouquillon discussed the proposed revised regional agreement stating that 10 communities have approved, 5 have not voted and 1 (Wayland) has voted against and that it is expected that Wayland will revisit this issue next spring.

Dr. Bouquillon stated that there are new regs proposed by the Commissioner which would involve a capital assessment charge assessed to out of district students which the Commissioner wants effective July 1, 2015. He stated that in lieu of this charge

Minuteman plans to enter into inter-municipal agreements with the school committees of non-member towns that will include a facility fee as well as a guarantee of seats for out of district students from those towns. He discussed other changes proposed by the Commissioner of Education including changes to how exploratory programs are handled. He stated that the proposed regulations would be available November 18 and there would be a 90 day comment period.

In response to a question from Dave Manjarrez regarding tuition rates Dr. Bouquillon stated that tuition rates are individual for each school and based on end of year reports regarding expenditures. Kevin Mahoney stated that Minuteman is at 164% of the foundation level which puts Minuteman in the middle of the 16 sending communities. Dr. Bouquillon mentioned other cost factors including the middle school program, transportation needs for 16 member towns and a high percentage of special education students.

Dave Levington asked what would Minuteman do if the new regional agreement is not passed. Jeff Stulin stated that the school committee would reevaluate the building project and consider a plan of mini renovations. These are projects that have been delayed in hopes that the building project would get approved but there would have to be work done to comply with regulations such as fire regulations and handicap access. He stated that this work would cost millions or tens of millions which the district would have to pay without the help of the state. He stated that the building would then be safe but without improved educational facilities.

Jeff Stulin stated that the proposed agreement is a compromise among towns with different interests and concerns. He stated that this is the 3rd or 4th attempt at an agreement. He stated that this is the version that has received the most support and the version that most people agree should be presented to the towns. He said that while it may not be a perfect agreement, it is needed if there is to be a building project. He stated that the Commissioner has reviewed and is satisfied with the agreement.

Allison Scheff asked whether Minuteman is considering innovative methods of offsetting capital costs and other revenue generating streams. Dr. Bouquillon stated discussed revenue-generating mechanisms including rentals, day care, adult ed., etc. He also discussed that an effort is being made to design space that will be more efficient with an infrastructure that is more robust. He stated that the spaces now are not efficient for the current programs and that designs must be kept fairly simple so that there is flexibility to change in the future.

Dave Levington asked would the answer be to a resident who questions why some member towns will pay less under the new agreement. Jeff Stulin stated that while he is not happy with this, it is consistent with Chapter 74 in that not every town pays the same under Chapter 74.

In response to a question about future predictions on enrollment, Dr. Bouquillon stated that vocational education is changing and is generating a lot more interest than in the past. In response to a question from John Baranowsky regarding comments made before the Lincoln Sudbury Regional H.S. school committee by State Senator Barrett regarding bailout funding should Minuteman fail to achieve projected target enrollment numbers Dr. Bouquillon stated that Minuteman found 18 factual misstatements in Senator Barrett's statements and has sent him an email but there has been no response.

Regarding challenges facing Minuteman, Jeff Stulin stated that there have been two things acting against Minuteman recently: controversy and uncertainty and these things tend to have a negative impact on enrollment. He stated these result from the fact that sending towns do not know who will be in the district if the new agreement is passed. He stated that because the building is not up to standards, that impacts enrollment. He stated that when these issues are resolved and programs are improved, the school committee believes enrollment will increase. He stated that this should result in a lower number of out of district students. In response to a question from Allison Scheff, Dr. Bouquillon stated that the trend seems to be that enrollment goes up with a new building.

Jeff Stulin stated that based on his own rough calculations he believes that if a member town sends less than 5 students then it makes financial sense to withdraw from the district and send students as a non member town but as the number of students increases above 5 it makes greater financial sense to stay in the district. He said that he thinks communities will see that when they study the numbers.

Jeff Stulin stated that they are waiting for a number as to what the building could cost and he stated that the state would pay half.

In response to a question from Dave Manjarrez re admission criteria for out of district students Dr. Bouquillon stated that in the past they received the same admissions consideration as in district applicants but that will not be true going forward; he stated that in the future, out of district applicants will find it more difficult to enroll than in-district students.

The representatives from Minuteman left at 8:50.

Proposed Regional Agreement: Dave Levington initiated a discussion of the revised agreement. He stated that under the new agreement school committee representatives would be appointed by the Board of Selectmen. He said that the voting would be weighted with half based on enrollment such that given its current enrollment trends Sudbury would have a little less of a vote.

Bill Kneeland pointed out that Arlington sends almost 40% of the students but then there is a big drop off in the number of students per town and as he sees it this will not be a big shift for Sudbury but it does give Arlington more say. Bill Kneeland also

pointed out that the weighted vote does not apply to budget matters, debt and capital costs.

Dave Levington stated that typically on a school committee most other votes are unanimous or close to unanimous and so he does not have a problem with the weighted vote.

Dave Levington continued the review of the proposed agreement. He stated that withdrawal is easier than under the current agreement since the current agreement requires that all towns agree to allow a member to withdraw. The new agreement states that if a town wants to withdraw it can do so unless within 60 days a majority of towns vote no to the town doing so.

Dave Levington stated that he thinks the proposed agreement has a flaw regarding assessment of capital costs in that Sudbury would no longer pay based strictly on enrollment. The new plan would take into account assessment, enrollment and wealth of the town. Selectman Haarde indicated that it does not appear that the difference would be a lot of money. Dave Levington stated that while he did not like this provision other than this than this he does not have a problem with the revised agreement.

This was followed by a discussion of options including whether it makes sense for Sudbury to approve the new agreement and the in the future revisit whether to remain in the district after more is known about such things as the costs of the building project and the terms of an inter municipal agreement.

Scott Nassa then presented information from a 2013 Boston Globe article and an auditor's report regarding state procurement violation by Dr. Bouquillon related to dividing a marketing contract into smaller contracts to avoid regulations regarding obtaining bids. He stated that the report also cited Minuteman for the Superintendent's daughter and son in law being slow to pay bills for items such as auto repairs. Scott Nassa stated disapproval of the manner in which the Minuteman School Committee handled this matter and a raise that he understands Dr. Bouquillon received after this. Scott Nassa stated he will not promote sending Sudbury students to Minuteman unless the Superintendent and school committee resign.

Paul Lynch expressed dissatisfaction that this was not brought up while the Minuteman people, and in particular Jeff Stulin the Chair of the Minuteman school committee, were present to respond. He stated that based on his experience as a prior member of the Minuteman School committee and working with Jeff Stulin, he found him to be extremely dedicated to the Minuteman and its students as well as an honest person who takes great care to present information in an accurate and unbiased way. Paul Lynch stated that he would like to have Jeff Stulin back to respond to these criticisms. Scott Nassa responded that he did not think it was fair to blindside the school committee and superintendent without proper notice.

There followed a discussion on the type of recommendation this committee might make to the Board of Selectmen. Pat Brown stated that if the recommendation is to pull out of the Minuteman district then she would like the Committee to give an alternative as to where would Sudbury students would go. Dave Levington stated it might make most sense to have a cautious approach involving agreeing to the revised agreement and staying in the district now and making a decision in a year as to whether to pull out. Paul Lynch stated that in making this recommendation he thinks the Committee should recognize that being a member of a district brings certain advantages such as a seat and a vote on the school committee including a say in such matters as who is the Superintendent and other matters such as the ability to send post graduate students.

Paul Lynch suggested that the Committee find out if town counsel has reviewed the proposed agreement and whether the provisions regarding withdrawal are satisfactory from a legal standpoint. The Chair stated she would determine whether Town Counsel has reviewed the agreement. Risa Burns stated that the Committee still needs to compare the four schools to one another in terms of costs, educational issues, etc. so that we can determine whether Sudbury has an option that is equivalent to Minuteman and the subcommittees are still gathering this information. It was agreed that the Committee would go over these matters at the next meeting.

Pat Brown reiterated that if the Committee recommends pulling out of Minuteman she would like a recommendation as to where they would go and or whether the town should consider entering into an inter municipal agreement. Bob Haarde stated that he would like something in writing from a school district under consideration regarding admitting Sudbury students.

Next Meeting: It was agreed that at the next meeting the Committee would consider the information gathered by the subcommittees. The next meeting was scheduled for December 4 with the goal being to be able to make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen at their December 11 meeting. It was also agreed that the site visit subcommittee would meet on November 20 and that the meeting would be open to all.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at approximately 10:05.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul F. Lynch