

MINUTES SUBURY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
OPTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 4, 2014 7:30 P.M., DPW CONFERENCE ROOM
275 OLD LANCASTER ROAD, SUDBURY

Present:

John K. Baranowsky

Risa Burns

Patricia Brown

Robert C. Haarde

Ivar Henningson

Elena M. Kleifges

William E. Kneeland, Jr.

David Levington

Paul F. Lynch

David R. Manjarrez

Scott B. Nassa

Allison Scheff

Bella Wong

Stephen Lambert

Also Present Jeff Stulin, Chair Minuteman School Committee

Call To Order: Chairperson Patricia Brown called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. She stated that the first item would be to allow Jeff Stulin and Scott Nassa to address the concerns Scott Nassa raised at the previous meeting regarding the Minuteman School Committee's handling of matters related to Minuteman Superintendent.

Jeff Stulin addressed the Committee. He started by stating that he understands that there has been a concern raised that the Minuteman School Committee acts a "rubber stamp" for the Superintendent. He stated that he disputes that notion. He then discussed the qualifications and experience of a number of the members of the Minuteman School Committee stating that among those on the committee there is a retired public school principal, a former selectman, a six year member of a town school committee, another former school committee member and town administrator and finance committee member. He stated that these people do not rubber stamp the Superintendent's decisions. Mr. Stulin then discussed the decision to retain the Superintendent. He said the decision was made after months of deliberations and that while the vote was not unanimous the majority voted to retain the Superintendent. He stated that he voted in favor of retaining the Superintendent as he felt that was the best course for the students and taxpayers.

Scott Nassa then posed a number of questions which he suggested that Mr. Stulin could respond to at a future time including: why after it was discovered that there were numerous violations, the Superintendent was still given a pay raise (Jeff Stulin responded that the Superintendent had not been given a pay raise but instead of not being charged rent he was now being charged rent and receiving that amount in pay so that there was no net increase in his compensation); why a full audit was not done; why teachers at Minuteman are working without a new contract. He also stated that he felt that the Minuteman School Committee's letter to the Sudbury Town Administrator regarding not being able to work with Dave Manjarrez and the vote by the Minuteman School Committee opposing Dave Manjarrez' appointment to the Building Committee were improper. Mr. Nassa asked Mr. Stulin if he agreed with

a comment made by Paul Lynch at a prior meeting that Mr. Stulin would prefer that Minuteman had a different Superintendent. There was then an exchange between Paul Lynch and Scott Nassa as to whether at the prior meeting Paul Lynch had made that statement – Scott Nassa stating Paul Lynch made the statement and Paul Lynch stating that Mr. Nassa was misquoting Mr. Lynch. Mr. Stulin responded by stating that he disagreed with the statement since he had voted in favor of keeping the current Superintendent.

Allison Scheff presented the report of the Educational Subcommittee. She stated that the subcommittee found Nashoba, Assabet and Minuteman to be very close and that any of the three would be acceptable. She noted that Minuteman does not currently offer Advanced Placement classes but plans to offer them in the future. She stated that one school was Level 1 and the others were Level 2 but the difference was minimal and, despite this, the subcommittee felt that all three were on a par with each other. John Baransowsky stated that he would give a slight edge to Nashoba and Allison Scheff stated that she would give a slight edge to Assabet.

Bill Kneeland then presented the findings of the Financial Subcommittee. He stated that they had gathered a lot of data. He stated that Minuteman is considerably more expensive than Assabet and Nashoba but he is not sure that should be a driving reason and he pointed out that Sudbury pays more to educate its students than do the towns that comprise those school districts. He stated that there is a lot of uncertainty at Minuteman such as what facilities' charges will be approved in the future. There is also uncertainty over who will be in the district and the extent of the capital improvement project that is in the planning stages. He said that until some of these and other unknowns are determined it is hard to assess costs. He said that the subcommittee is still gathering data and that it will be pulled together into a single spreadsheet.

John Baransowsky and Chairperson Brown presented the results of the School Tours Subcommittee. They stated that the subcommittee found that Nashoba, Assabet and Keefe were essentially comparable with a slight preference for Assabet. Chairperson Brown stated that the subcommittee was very impressed with all three. Elena Kleifges noted that the subcommittee had looked at and compared these three schools but did not rank them against Minuteman. Pat Brown stated that she had a slight preference for Assabet. Scott Nassa said he was very impressed especially with the medical training opportunities at Assabet. He was also impressed with the AP programs and the partnership with Quinsigamond Community College and the fact that the school is trying to add Mandarin as a language elective. He stated that he thought the leadership was excellent at all three schools though two (Assabet and Nashoba) of the three will soon have new Superintendents. He stated that while Nashoba is a Level I school, and Assabet only missed Level I by one student.

Dave Manjarrez stated that Sudbury could send students to Assabet and Nashoba tomorrow and eliminate all uncertainty – that these schools are “ready to go” with programs like Advanced Manufacturing that are up and running.

Dave Levington stated that nothing he has seen leads him to conclude that Sudbury should leave the Minuteman district for educational reasons. He stated that he feels there are political and financial issues that are behind the push for a change which he feels are not justified. He agrees that Minuteman is not inexpensive but neither is L.S. He feels you need to look at what the constituent towns pay to educate their students in assessing the costs.

At that point Dan Mathews, a member of the Needham Board of Selectmen was asked by the Chair to address the Committee. Chairperson Brown noted that she had spoken with Mr. Mathews on the telephone and he had offered to share his knowledge with the Committee.

Mr. Mathews stated that he has been involved in Minuteman issues on behalf of the town of Needham for a long time. He stated that while Needham had some issues in the past there has been a lot of communication and the town now has a good relationship with Minuteman. He stated that he was involved in the drafting of the new regional agreement and that while in his mind it is not perfect, he thinks the end result is good. He stated that in his mind there it is very clear that Minuteman needs a new facility or else it will end up in a downward spiral. To achieve this, the first thing that had to be done was to a new agreement which would allow towns to leave.

Mr. Mathews stated that a new assessment formula breaks the capital assessment share into three areas – one based on enrollment, the second based on the ability to pay. He stated that this is akin to how state aid is allocated so that a town like Weston will pay more than a town like Lancaster but in raw numbers the amount is not a lot. The third factor is a 1% charge which is why towns with only a few students may want to withdraw as it will not make economic sense to stay in and be assessed the 1% fee. He said that you can put in hypothetical numbers and at some point you will find a “tipping point”. He believes that the number is about 5 to 10 students. Below that number a town will probably want to pull out and above that number it will make more financial sense to stay in.

Mr. Mathews then discussed what he referred to as the Needham Resolution in which the Boards of Selectman of a majority of the towns voted not to initiate an opposition to any town pulling out for a period of one year after the new agreement goes into effect.

Mr. Mathews next discussed the proposed size of Minuteman in the future stating that Needham believes that a newly renovated school will result in significant growth and that Needham believes that 628 students is a realistic enrollment number going forward. He stated that this will require capital assessment surcharges assessed to non-member towns that send students in the future and that at this point there is agreement that unless a non-member town agrees to the surcharge in an Inter-Municipal Agreement, Minuteman will not accept its students.

In response to a question from the Chair as to whether Minuteman can legally do that Mr. Matthews stated that the Department of Education has stated that it will allow the school to refuse to accept students if the town will not agree to the assessment. Mr. Matthews stated that Weston has stated that they would pay the assessment.

In response to a question from Dave Manjarrez, Mr. Matthews said that the plan is for the school committee to calculate the charge and it will be the same for every non-member town that wants to send students to Minuteman. He also noted that while there are draft regulations that would allow DESE to decide on a capital assessment/payment amount, it is unclear if those will be adopted. He also stated that Minuteman has been told by DESE that it will not block any town leaving the district after signing the new agreement.

Mr. Mathews then discussed the fact that Arlington accounts for about 1/3 of the students and Arlington is unwilling to be responsible for 1/3 of all costs with only 1/16 of the vote and that therefore he does not believe the capital improvement project will pass without the revised agreement.

Pat Brown asked whether it is accurate to state that if Sudbury ratifies the agreement then it has one year to request to leave the Minuteman District. Mr. Mathews stated that a town can leave one year after ratification of the agreement. As to whether Sudbury would know the costs by that date Mr. Mathews stated that he expects a final decision on the design will probably be made next June and that the basic data will be known by late this winter. He stated that the goal is for the capital improvement plan to be brought before towns during the Spring 2016 Town Meetings.

Mr. Matthews stated that he feels that 628 is a reasonable enrollment number and he is optimistic that with a new school, member-town enrollment will go up with the remaining seats being filled with non-member students. In response to a question from Bella Wong Mr. Mathews stated that Waltham appears committed to having a comprehensive school though Minuteman could still get some kids if they want a program not offered in Waltham. He said he does not think Watertown will join the district but he expects they will still send some students to Minuteman. He again stated that DESE has stated that if a town will not agree to the capital assessment in an Inter-Municipal Agreement then Minuteman does not have to accept its students. Bella Wong stated that towns such as Medford and Watertown might hold out rather than pay the capital fee and, while they may bend if their comprehensive models do not work, this may take some time. Dan Matthews stated that there has been resentment as Minutemen has recruited students from these towns in the past and that these towns may actually welcome the idea of a smaller (628 student) Minuteman.

There was a discussion as to how the 628 number was arrived at and Mr. Matthews stated that the MSBA is a partner in a building project but does not tell the district

what the size of the school should be and did not tell Minutemen to reduce from 800 to a 628 student school.

Pat Brown stated that in her mind there is an enormous black hole in that we do not know what will happen – that we do not know what the number of in district students will be and do not know if the Inter-Municipal Agreements will be signed. Dan Matthews stated that first we need the new agreement. Then some towns will drop out and then the new school will be built with an enrollment that results from having a new school. In-district students will get first priority. Then there will be some seats for non-member students and if their town pays the \$5,000 a year fee, those students will be admitted if there is room.

In response to a question from Dave Manjarrez as to whether he considers the 628 enrollment number to be realistic, Mr. Matthews stated that he is satisfied with that number. At that point Mr. Mathews concluded his remarks. The Chair then thanked him for his input and his generosity in spending time with the committee.

The Chair then asked for a motion as to what recommendation this Committee would make regarding whether Sudbury should sign the revised regional agreement for the Minuteman School District. Dave Levington made a motion that the Committee recommend to the Board of Selectman that Sudbury sign the revised agreement subject to review by town counsel. The Motion was seconded by Elena Kleifges and passed unanimously. Dave Manjarrez stated that he would also like Town Counsel to look at the effect of the Needham resolution so that Sudbury's exit strategy is vetted.

The Chair then stated that in her mind the Committee did not need to make a recommendation at this time as to whether Sudbury should withdraw from the District and/or where it should send its students in the future other than to say Sudbury has options but that these recommendation could be made in the future. All present were in agreement on the need not to vote on that issue at this time.

The Chair then stated that the Committee should be able to meet before the January Board of Selectman meeting. She also stated that she would have the documents considered at the meeting including the Needham Resolution and the Educational Sub Committee spreadsheet posted. Elena Kleifges then moved to adjourn which was seconded by the Chair and passed unanimously. There being no further business the meeting adjourned at approximately 9:45.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul F. Lynch