

MINUTES SUBURY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
OPTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 8, 2015; 7:30 P.M., DPW CONFERENCE ROOM
275 OLD LANCASTER ROAD, SUDBURY

Present:

John K. Baranowsky

Risa Burns

Patricia Brown

Elena M. Kleifges

William E. Kneeland, Jr.

David Levington

Paul F. Lynch

David R. Manjarrez

Scott B. Nassa

Allison Scheff

Bella Wong

Call To Order: Chairperson Patricia Brown called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Chairperson Brown then informed the Committee that she had heard back from town counsel Barbara Saint Andre regarding the Revised Minuteman Regional Agreement and had received a preliminary report that Sudbury would be able to withdraw from the District under the new agreement. Chairperson Brown also summarized discussions she had taken place between her and Kris Luota, the Director of Business Operations at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School. Kris Luota had stated that Assabet was transitioning to a new Superintendent but that he was able to provide information regarding Assabet potentially admitting Sudbury students. He said that the Assabet school committee had discussed the matter and was prepared to accept Sudbury students if Sudbury withdrew from the Minuteman district. He also stated that the Assabet school committee had not discussed whether or under what conditions Sudbury might join the Assabet regional school district as a member town.

There was then a discussion as to whether the VEOC would meet again before it reported to the Sudbury Board of Directors and it was agreed that the committee would meet one more time on January 15, 2014.

Next there was a discussion as to finalizing subcommittee reports and it was agreed that the Tours and Educational subcommittees would present their final reports at the next meeting. Bill Kneeland discussed spreadsheets prepared by the Financial Subcommittee that consist of a comparison of the cost of sending students to Minuteman verses the costs of possibly sending students to Assabet and Nashoba. He stressed that the comparison is based on known current costs and that because there are so many uncertainties, the sub-committee did not try to determine what the costs might be in the future.

Mr. Kneeland further explained that the spreadsheets look at the cost of sending 22 students and the \$541,000 assessment to Sudbury. He stated that while the costs per student have not changed much in recent years at Minuteman, the number of Sudbury students attending Minuteman has increased and this is what has driven the increased assessment in recent years. He stated that Minuteman is very

expensive. He stated that Assabet educates approximately 1000 students on the same operating budget as Minuteman has for approximately 700 students. He noted that Minuteman has a \$4,500 assessment for special education students and that Sudbury sends a high number of Special Education students to Minuteman. He also noted that transportation costs are included in the Sudbury assessment. Chairperson Brown noted that if Sudbury sends students as non-members of one of these districts, then Sudbury pays for transportation.

There was then a discussion as to what recommendation the committee should make to the Board of Selectmen. The Chair stated that while we will make a recommendation at the upcoming Board of Selectmen meeting things could change between now and when this is presented at town meeting and that information may need to be updated. Bill Kneeland stated that in addition to stating we support Sudbury agreeing to the new regional agreement, it might also be proper to say why we support the agreement. Elena Kleifges pointed out that changes would take place only if every town agrees to the new regional agreement.

Dave Levington stated that if Minuteman starts to charge a facilities charge as it has stated it will, then this would offset costs. Bill Kneeland agreed but stated that this is one of the uncertainties that they did not try to include in the analysis. Bill Kneeland concluded that while Minuteman is more costly he does not feel that this should be the driving factor in making a determination as to where to send students. Dave Manjarrez stated that the costs are significant and that the savings at one of these schools would be significant and felt that this should be a determining factor. Bill Kneeland stated that he respectfully disagreed. There was then a discussion of some changes and fine-tuning of the Financial Committee spreadsheets that would be accomplished prior to the next meeting.

There was then a discussion of the costs associated with joining a district and Elena Kleifges pointed out that there was a buy-in charge for towns joining other districts and Sudbury would incur such a charge. The Chair stated that this was one of the unknowns. Dave Manjarrez stated that buy-in costs are a reality whatever Sudbury does and that there is no way to avoid capital costs.

Bella Wong stated that it seems like the committee should make it clear that the capital assessment is unknown and that even Minuteman does not know how the capital costs will be divided so there is no way this committee can make a prediction as to capital costs.

The Chair then presented the assumptions that she had circulated. She stated that the assumptions that she believes are proper are the following:

1. If Sudbury adopts the new regional agreement, whether it will be allowed to leave the district: Chairperson Brown stated that Barbara Saint Andre said the answer to this is yes.
Whether the Needham Resolution passed by over half of the member town Boards of Selectmen regarding allowing members to leave within one year is

enforceable: Chairperson Brown stated that she had not received an opinion on whether this is enforceable but she assumes it is a “gentleman’s agreement” and is not enforceable.

2. Assuming Sudbury votes to approve the revised agreement and then votes to withdraw, whether the Massachusetts Department of Education would approve Sudbury’s withdrawal: There was a discussion on this point in which Paul Lynch stated that Dave Matthews from the Needham Board of Selectman had told this Committee at the last meeting that DESE had confirmed this. Dave Manjarrez stated that he thought he had seen something in writing and he would look for that.
3. That Minuteman will build a 628-student school.
4. That Minuteman would accept tuition students under an inter-municipal agreement. Dave Levington stated that if inter-municipal agreements were put in place then Sudbury would no longer subsidize capital costs as much.

The Chair then asked committee members to consider the assumptions and bring up any additional assumptions that they feel should be added.

Scott Nassa stated that this committee has voted that it recommends that Sudbury approve the revised agreement. He stated that there are then two options – to say or leave. If Sudbury decides to leave then the Committee can make a recommendation as to what Sudbury should do. He stated that he recommends that at the next meeting committee members give pros and cons.

Elena Kleifges stated that by October there would be more information available that will allow Sudbury to make a decision. Allison Scheff suggested that the Board should consider renewing the Committee so that it can look at the new information that will be available in the future.

Chairperson Brown stated that this Committee is more focused on these issues than the Board of Selectman. She stated that in her mind one strong issue is the way the finances are laid out as it is not necessarily in the town’s best interest to pay so much money. She further stated that she expects a lot of push back.

Bella Wong pointed out that the Committee could suggest that there is an 18-month window (12 months from the date the new regional agreement is approved by all towns) and that during this window the town can review information and resolve these issues.

The Chair pointed out that there is a deadline to notify the Department of Education and that could come before town meeting so it is important to make sure to comply with that provision in the revised regional agreement.

Scott Nassa pointed out that there is a warrant article on this that was introduced last year and was tabled. There was a discussion as to whether that warrant article could be reused.

There was then a discussion on how this committee should report its recommendations. Allison Scheff read the original mission statement to the committee. Dave Levington and John Baranowsky volunteered to draft a document (narrative and executive summary) that will include the three subcommittee reports and which will address the tasks set out in the mission statement. They agreed to circulate a draft prior to the next meeting.

There was further discussion by Scott Nassa regarding the prior warrant article on Minuteman and Chairperson Brown stated that she would look into whether that can be used.

There was further discussion regarding what the committee's recommendation should look like with Dave Levington stating that perhaps there should be an explanation as to what is different now vs. one year ago when the warrant article was tabled. Dave Levington further stated that in his mind we now have enough information to recommend whether to approve the revised agreement but not enough information to make a recommendation regarding staying in the Minuteman district.

Scott Nassa pointed out that the Minuteman School Committee submitted the prior warrant article. Dave Manjarrez stated that the same article was submitted to each member town for consideration last year.

Chairperson Brown stated this it is important that Sudbury understands and adheres to the time line and the notice requirement to DESE and if necessary to consider scheduling a special town meeting. Dave Levington stated that the time to vote whether to leave will be after Minuteman asks for a vote on the new building. Allison Scheff stated that Sudbury should keep pressure on Minuteman to get Sudbury the information that it needs as soon as possible.

There was then Motion by Elena Kleifges seconded by Scott Nassa to approve the 12/4 minutes with one typo noted by the Chair to be corrected. The motion passed unanimously.

Dave Levington then moved to adjourn which motion was seconded by the Chair and then approved unanimously. There being no further business the meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul F. Lynch