

TOWN OF HEBRON
SELECT BOARD PUBLIC MEETING
HB 349
FEBRUARY 6, 2024

PRESENT: Paul Hazelton, Pat Moriarty, Rich James, and Karen Sanborn, Town Administrator

OTHERS PRESENT: Terry Murphy, Jennifer Larochelle, Deborah James, Audrey Johnson, Rich Wurtz, Michael and Martha Riess, Jan Collins, Barbara and Fred Kohout, Bob and Janet Wisniewski, Kathleen and Tom Tawa, Parker Griffin, Camile Bharucha, Martha Twombly, Mark Coulson, Lindsie Santamaria, Curtis and Abigail Mooney, Henry and Gail Lynch, Don Franklin, Solveig Wolstenholme, Maynard Young, Donna Luti, Wendy Werner, Paul and Kathleen Connor, David Brittelli, Derry Riddle, Bridget Barnard, Cheryl Esty, Bill Drake, and others.

6:00 P.M. **MEETING COMMENCED:** Chair Hazelton commenced the public meeting.

6:00 P.M. **PUBLIC MEETING – HB349:** Chair Hazleton informed the audience that this meeting was to given an update on HB349 withdrawing from the Newfound Area School District (NASD) to form the Bridgewater, Hebron, Groton Special School District.

Vice-Chair Moriarty informed the audience that this is a ~~catalyst withdrawal~~ unique opportunity to withdraw, and the three towns would only be given this one-time opportunity. Vice-Chair Moriarty complimented the past Select Boards foresight in 1999 to establish the Bridgewater – Hebron Village District (BHVD) that in the future could be expanded to operate as a separate school independent of the Newfound Area School District. There was contention amongst the seven towns at that time with regards to funding formulas for the Newfound Area School District as well. The village district was established pursuant to RSA 52. There is an opportunity here for the towns of Bridgewater, Hebron, and Groton to leave the Newfound Area School District, which would give the towns more control over educating the children and finances used for educating the children. Vice-Chair Moriarty stated that Plymouth High School and the Newfound Area School District have agreed to tuition agreements for the ninth through twelfth grade students. The Steering Committee is very active which meets weekly, and the public is invited to attend any of the meetings held in the three towns.

Jennifer Larochelle (Bridgewater, Hebron, Groton Steering Committee member) informed the audience that the NASD has prepared tailing out agreements and the Steering Committee has agreed to a tailing out agreement with students that currently attend the BHVS. Mrs. Larochelle noted that the Steering Committee has agreed to keep the school open to students from the Newfound Area School District to continue to attend Bridgewater-Hebron Village School.

Vice-Chair Moriarty noted that the committee has been studying the Town of Ashland which has the same number of students (160) to educate, a K-8 School, the high school students attend Plymouth Regional High School, and the Inter-Lakes School District handles the administrative functions. Amongst the three towns, ~~they-we~~ their-our currently raise just under four million dollars as ~~their-our~~ their-our portion to fund the NASD and currently the Town of Ashland educates their students on around four million dollars including the administrative costs. If the formula changes, as proposed during the Article 5 Committee meetings, the Town of Hebron's property taxes would double and the cost per student would increase to \$51,000 per student. The Steering Committee

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is working on the administrative part of the equation by hiring an outside company to perform the administrative functions or will be negotiating with another school district.

Mike Reiss asked the Board about the passing of the warrant article where the Towns of Bridgewater and Groton will vote in March and the Town of Hebron will vote in May. Vice-Chair Moriarty stated that unfortunately the towns of Bridgewater and Groton will hold their vote in March which would make the decision on the warrant article passing or not. To pass it needs to be a simple majority in each town. Each town will be putting the same warrant article on their warrant which cannot be amended.

Mr. Reiss inquired would the property taxes be the same or close to the current rate. Mrs. Larochelle responded that the upcoming NASD Budget is \$28 million with 16% of the population paying \$4.6 million. Mrs. Larochelle informed the audience that the estimated cost of operating a K-8 school with tuition to the high school is \$4.4 million. Mrs. Larochelle noted that Terry Murphy and she are going to the State of NH Department of Education to discuss the revenue part of operating a school district to be able to present a better number to the voters.

Mr. Reiss inquired about the addition to the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School to house the seventh and eighth graders. Mrs. Larochelle replied that if an addition was needed the addition would be a room for a grade each year. Mrs. Larochelle stated the caveat in the additions is that the utilities have been installed in preparation for a future addition to the school.

Selectman James commented that if this article does not pass to withdraw from the NASD, the possibility of a formula change and the proposed new school for 30 million is still in the plans for NASD.

Vice-Chair Moriarty informed the audience that the tuition estimates for grades 9-12 to attend NASD or Plymouth Regional High School is \$23,000 per student.

Mrs. Connor inquired about an agreement with NASD ten years into the future. Vice-Chair Moriarty stated that the Steering Committee had a difficult time discussing with the NASD School Board a tailing out agreement and an agreement for tuition on the high school students. This would have to be negotiated once the special school district was approved.

Maynard Young asked about the PreK tailing out of the BHVD. Mrs. Larochelle stated that it is state law that developmentally delayed children as young as three years old be given the assistance needed to prepare them for elementary school. These classes are only given at the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School.

Parker Griffin commented that the room is filled with many taxpayers, but not many parents. What other efforts are being made to get this information to the parents and teachers to avoid the potential of misinformation getting to them.

Mrs. Larochelle noted that Steering Committee members had met with the teachers a couple of times. The information in Hebron is distributed through their email list and there is a link on each town's website to the Town of Bridgewater HB349 page where all the minutes, notices, and other pertinent documents are held.

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Don Franklin asked if the start-up costs are calculated into the \$4,000,000 budget like technology, music, and shop. Mrs. Larochelle replied that the Steering Committee is working on the plan, but they are still in the early stages where concrete negotiations cannot be made.

Chair Hazelton informed the audience that another meeting will be held in March as this will be closer to the town meeting vote in Hebron.

Bill Drake inquired about the sports programs that would be offered to the students. Mrs. Larochelle noted that the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School utilizes Tapply-Thompson Community Center for sports. TTCC also utilizes the BHVS gymnasium for games and practices.

Abigail Mooney inquired about renegotiating, at the end of the teachers' contract, teachers and staff wages with increases for the additional work that would be placed on them as a result of increasing the grades to BHVS. Mrs. Larochelle replied that wages and health insurance plans will be discussed during contract negotiations.

Mark Coulson informed the group of the important dates coming up: March 12, 2024 the vote on the NASD budget and warrant, March 12, 2024 the vote by the towns of Bridgewater and Groton on the withdrawal from the NASD, and May 16, 2024 Town Meeting in Hebron on the withdrawal from the NASD.

Selectman James commented that moving forward staying in the NASD could mean a large increase in property taxes as there are many unknowns if this does not pass. Vice-Chair Moriarty stated that this is a one-time opportunity to leave the district and gain more control over ~~your~~ voted education. Chair Hazelton stated that NH relies on property taxes to fund education, which is a regressive tax, the largest impact is to the poorest population.

Wendy Werner requested more emails to the taxpayers on this matter to reach a larger group of people.

Henry Lynch asked about bus transportation for the students. Vice-Chair Moriarty replied that First Student was the first to negotiate a price. Currently there are 280 square miles in the NASD.

Chair Hazelton commented that the towns of Bridgewater, Hebron, and Groton dodged a bullet with the warrant article brought to the NASD last year by forming a study committee regarding changing the formula as opposed to just voting on the article of a formula change.

Jan Collins asked for clarification on the vote of the warrant article. Chair Hazelton stated that each town would be voting on the warrant article, and it would need to pass by simple majority in each of the three towns to withdraw from the NASD. If the article fails to pass in one town the article fails in all three towns.

Don Franklin noted that the NASD already has a tuition agreement with the Town of Hill and the precedence has been set.

Martha Twombly thanked the town Select Boards and the Steering Committee for all the work and research that has been done.

6:50 P.M. **MEETING ADJOURNED:** Chair Hazelton moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 p.m., seconded by Vice-Chair Moriarty. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Sanborn
Town Administrator

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