

LAMOILLE NORTH SUPERVISORY UNION
ACT 46 STUDY COMMITTEE MINUTES
GTMCC COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER
JANUARY 26, 2016

Committee members present: Bill Sander, Laura Miller, Ken McPherson, David Whitcomb, Peter Ingvaldstad, Raven Walters, Patti Hayford, Kristy Wrigley, Pierre Laflamme, Becky Penberthy

Others: Marilyn Frederick, Michelle Aumand, Steve Sanborn, Thad Tallman, Andrew Martin

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Announcements*

P. Laflamme called the meeting to order at 6:00.

MOTION: P. Ingvaldstad moved to add to the agenda a presentation about bond and fiscal issues and discussion of the agenda for the next meeting, seconded by B. Sander and the motion was passed.

P. Ingvaldstad said there was a question about people running for the new board needing to decide if they would run for the 1-year, 2-year, or 3-year term. Bernie Juskiwicz is researching that. At this point, it is law that they need to run for a specific term. There is not much to talk about now regarding that question.

MOTION: B. Sander moved to approve the agenda as amended, B. Penberthy seconded and the motion was passed.

2. *Approval of Consent Agenda Items (Board Committee Minutes 1-6-16)*

MOTION: D. Whitcomb moved to approve the consent agenda, B. Penberthy seconded and the motion was passed.

3. *Public Comment*

B. Sander said he wanted to bring up again the same issue he raised last time with respect to Article 7. The opinion expressed last time was that anything the town wants to hold onto has to be approved by voters. He believes M. Frederick talked to Paul Giuliani who said that would not be necessary for the trust left to CES. M. Frederick said P. Giuliani said the trust names Cambridge Elementary School, not any district. The intent was for it to be for the school. P. Giuliani believes it is restricted already. B. Sander said the Cambridge board decided not to have an article regarding the trust for that reason. M. Frederick said P. Giuliani likened it to scholarships at the high school. They aren't subject to voter approval. For boards that had articles about things like putting unassigned fund balance in capital reserve she named the specific school in the warning. K. McPherson asked who the executor of the bequest is. The school doesn't have any legal standing, does it? M. Frederick said the \$50K was given to the Cambridge school district for the use of Cambridge Elementary School. The person leaving the bequest has already named what it is to be used for.

4. ***Review Results of State Board Meeting***

P. Laflamme said we presented our articles of agreement to the Board of Education last week. P. Ingvoldstad said E. Beatty did the presentation and he believes she did an excellent job of telling the board about both the pros and the cons in our discussion. There was further conversation about some of the issues that seem to have come up quite a bit. He asked about why the focus is on both the physical plant and education. Why not just focus on educational benefits? P. Laflamme said it wasn't a glossed-over presentation. It presented both pros and cons. He thinks P. Ingvoldstad was thoughtful about presenting the issue of why we should not focus on students and student outcomes. They voted to accept our articles of agreement.

K. McPherson asked if there was any feedback on P. Ingvoldstad's question. P. Ingvoldstad said two of the board members were shaking their heads in agreement.

B. Sander asked if they accepted our idea of proportionality, with one full vote for Belvidere. P. Laflamme said yes. P. Ingvoldstad said they didn't even ask about it.

D. Whitcomb said he went to the legislative breakfast, where the Speaker of the House said people should stay tuned because legislators are unhappy about some of this and there could be changes. It is on the front burner.

5. ***Develop Strategies for Community Engagement***

S. Sanborn said there need to be public hearings 10 days prior to the vote. The committee needs to consider whether to actively pursue gathering public support for unification and, if so, to what extent. He has been working with Addison-Rutland as well. Their articles were also approved by the State Board. When he talked to their superintendent, they started thinking about common characteristics of those communities that have had their unifications approved by voters so far. He talked to committee members from communities that have had successful votes and asked them what they thought led to a successful vote.

One of the common characteristics he identified was that the study committee publicly supported unification. Before this committee brought articles to the state board not all members were sure they agreed on unification, but committee members agreed on making sure the question could be brought to the voters so the larger community could have a say. Franklin Central, after 4 months of deliberation, decided not to bring unification to a vote. The next day the editor of the St. Albans Messenger wrote a scathing editorial asking how they could dare to take that decision away from voters. Three days later they had an emergency meeting and decided to bring it to the voters. The decision this committee made was a good one.

Other common characteristics were that each local school board supported unification and was actively involved in recruiting the support of voters and that school principals supported it and encouraged parents to support it. In one community the town municipal government felt strongly that it was time for unification. Other characteristics were that the benefits of unification (educational and fiscal) were well articulated to voters before the vote and voters were clear about the consequences if they decided not to unify.

What S. Sanborn heard from Nicole Mace is that the legislature may adjust the caps but she doesn't think there will be any other movement on Act 46. There have been two more positive votes for unification in the state. The Secretary of Education and the State Board of Education are committed to moving forward in 2018 with their plan for communities that decide not to do anything.

S. Sanborn said we have to have 6 public hearings within 10 days of the vote. A couple of towns could have their hearings at the same time, with a joint presentation. His concern is getting in 6 meetings within 10 days. It would be a tight schedule.

L. Miller said she doesn't understand why two different hearings couldn't be on the same night in different locations. S. Sanborn said the whole committee doesn't have to be at each meeting but there has to be someone from the committee present. There could be two teams and hearings could be on 3 nights instead of 6. Hyde Park and Johnson had their informational meetings on the same night last time and that seemed to work well.

M. Frederick said the hearings have to take place from April 2 to April 11 and they have to be warned from March 4 to March 18.

S. Sanborn asked if the committee would like him to draft warnings and petitions for each community, run them by the lawyer to make sure the language is correct, and bring them back to the committee to look at. Committee members said yes.

L. Miller asked if the vote on unification will be an Australian ballot vote. S. Sanborn said it has to be, with the same voting times in each community. Each community will have its own voting place. B. Sander noted that the ballots will not be commingled.

D. Whitcomb asked who will print the ballots. M. Frederick said central office can print them.

S. Sanborn asked if the committee wants to actively pursue unification. D. Whitcomb said he likes to give the voters information and let them make the decision. He doesn't think it is our job to do a sales job. P. Laflamme asked what kinds of outreach D. Whitcomb sees as part of that. How do we get the voters the information they need? Just through the public hearing, or should we do more? D. Whitcomb said he thinks we need to start getting newspaper publicity right now, but we should not tell people to go out and vote for unification. M. Frederick said legally we can't tell people to vote for it. S. Sanborn said boards can advocate for it; they just can't spend money to advocate for it.

K. McPherson said he would be very reluctant to stand behind a lot of the purported benefits that have been cited. He thinks we could break the benefits down into 2 categories – those flowing immediately just from the merger with no other action needed and those that would be permitted, facilitated or enhanced by the merger. He would like to hear E. Beatty come in and talk about the most important things she could achieve with the merger that couldn't be achieved without it, what programs have been stifled by lack

of facilities that would be made available by the merger, and what she sees as costs. Our total analysis of benefits was people saying what they thought the benefits might be. There are ways to assess them. He thinks it would be better to go to the voters with an unhyped, fully supportable list of benefits, even if it is as limited as saying this is our last chance to have control over what happens to us. Let's keep it simple and something the voters can believe and understand. Then maybe we could talk about pie in the sky things that would be possible but we would say that it would be up to the voters to encourage the new board to put them in place. We should be conservative about what we are saying.

B. Penberthy said she likes that. She thinks the financial implications are what people will be interested in.

K. Wrigley said she agrees. She likes the idea of presenting objective material and letting people decide for themselves.

L. Miller said she knows several members of her board who are reluctant to unify. She doesn't think school board members, teachers, and principals will all come out in favor of unification, at least in Cambridge. She doesn't think we should put our opinions out there. She doesn't know if everyone on the committee is even on the same page.

R. Walters said it is pretty clear we are not going to have a unified position on the committee. She agrees with much that has been said, but she thinks there is value in boards and the committee communicating to the public why they have drawn the conclusions they have. We have continued to agree as a group to move this forward. That indicates there is some value in it. She appreciates reading letters to the editor from school boards in other districts explaining why they are advocating certain things. Boards have access to more information than the general public and sharing their rationale is an aspect of leadership.

P. Ingvaldstad said he agrees with R. Walters. He suggested that two or three committee members try to summarize what has been discussed here and present it to the committee to review at the next meeting. P. Laflamme asked if the committee thinks a few people should craft something to be disseminated to the public after committee approval. K. Wrigley asked for clarification about what exactly is to be drafted. It is to mail out, or for the public meeting? S. Sanborn said Rutland NE just had a positive vote. Three weeks before the vote they sent out a trifold flyer with information about what would happen with unification – the possibilities and the finances. There was a part that applied to all communities and then a specific fiscal piece that was different for each community. They used that as the basis of their presentation at the public hearing.

K. McPherson said there are two things we need to work on. There is quantitative work about, for example, what we can do with the faculty. That will take a little time. There is another piece we can begin to draft and circulate about what we think the benefits will be. Then we can come together as a larger group to hash it out and come to a finished statement. M. Frederick suggested February 16 as a possible date for the next full committee meeting. R. Walters said the committee can delegate administrative tasks to a

small group between meetings without having to warn the meetings of that small working group.

P. Ingvaldstad, K. McPherson, and R. Walters agreed to be in the working group. S. Sanborn asked if they would like him to work with them. P. Ingvaldstad said yes. K. McPherson asked if the working group will be trying to come up with something that will unanimously be accepted by the committee. S. Sanborn said yes, as much as possible. D. Whitcomb suggested notifying everyone when the working group will meet because other committee members might be free and want to drop in.

L. Miller said she would like Cambridge's public hearing to be on April 6, their normal meeting night. B. Penberthy suggested that Waterville have its public hearing on April 7 and figure out how to do it in partnership with Belvidere, either at the same place and time or one after the other. She will call Angie Evans and see what she thinks about that. R. Walters asked if the public hearings must be warned as distinct from a regular meeting or if they can be an agenda item at a regular meeting. S. Sanborn said they must be distinct. P. Laflamme said he is considering April 11 for Johnson's public hearing but he has to check with the other members of his board. D. Whitcomb suggested that maybe Eden, Belvidere and Waterville could all meet together. He will get back to S. Sanborn about when Eden would like to have its hearing. S. Sanborn said he also has to go to Addison-Rutland's public hearings, at least some of them, so he will have to work out how to do that and also go to our hearings. P. Ingvaldstad suggested maybe Cambridge could have its meeting on Saturday; maybe they would get a better turnout. K. Wrigley said if we want Mary Anderson there that would be a consideration with a Saturday meeting. P. Ingvaldstad said those from Cambridge can discuss it further. He thinks M. Anderson should be there. S. Sanborn suggested that each board share the date they decide on once they make a decision so he can draft a calendar.

P. Laflamme said Johnson warned a discussion on Act 46 at town meeting, but he doesn't know if other boards did the same. M. Frederick said she wrote all the annual meeting warnings and all have Act 46 discussion.

P. Laflamme said the small work group will meet right after this meeting to decide when to get together to start drafting something to put out to voters about benefits, changes we know will happen, and fiscal information. It will be put before the committee at the next meeting.

S. Sanborn said he cannot come to a meeting on February 16. If the committee sends him the information communication after the meeting he can comment on it.

T. Tallman said he has had at least 3 board members ask him what Act 46 is about because they don't know. Is there a way the committee can communicate more with board members to give them information? P. Ingvaldstad said he has presented information to the high school board several times. D. Whitcomb said it is on the agenda every time at Eden and LUSD board meetings. B. Penberthy said some board members

are not regularly attending. Or paying attention, added R. Walters. P. Laflamme said he will try to make sure Johnson is regularly informed.

K. McPherson said we are presumably trying to get a document all the board members will sign onto also. Is there some way we could get feedback from each board? It would be nice to know if there are positions on consolidation that are based on lack of knowledge as opposed to different values or judgments so we could address that and work towards a larger consensus. As far as he knows we are working without knowledge of where individual boards are. P. Ingvoldstad said the issues he heard from the CES board were not around common curriculum and so forth. They were around the physical plant, school buses, etc. and giving up their right to run that school themselves. Adam Howard on the high school board agrees with the curriculum and educational pieces but is having a hard time with the issue of whose debt will be whose.

K. McPherson said it would be nice if by February 16 we could have a sense of what other board members are feeling so we can frame a consensus view. L. Miller asked, he would like us to either formally or informally poll the board to see what they are feeling? K. McPherson said he is suggesting just talking to other board members, nothing formal, maybe going around the table at a board meeting. It would be nice to have a sense of where individual boards are and if they have reservations we can address. L. Miller asked, what about administration? K. McPherson said any information is helpful. We would like as much consensus as we can get. P. Laflamme said it will be part of the conversation at Johnson.

L. Miller asked if P. Ingvoldstad had talked to any more staff members. He said he talked to one. He hasn't gone to any more staff meetings, but that might be a good idea. Is it okay with the committee if he talks to CES staff and would the committee want him to talk to staff at other schools? He has talked to high school staff. K. Wrigley said she would be in support, but she would want to make sure M. Anderson thought it would be beneficial and helpful. B. Penberthy said she was thinking of talking to Kate Torrey about discussing Act 46 at a staff meeting at WES. Maybe P. Ingvoldstad could come. P. Ingvoldstad said he thought that was a good idea.

D. Whitcomb said this is in every newspaper. If people don't know about it they aren't paying attention.

M. Frederick suggested the committee could use GMATV to get information to the public. K. McPherson asked if we could put it on YouTube. M. Frederick said that isn't a bad idea.

6. *Fiscal/Bond Impacts*

M. Frederick said every year when she looks at budgets she looks at what the budget and tax rate changes would be if the SU were a single district. For FY17, ed fund spending went down for Lamoille Union and Belvidere and there were increases of around 2% or 4% for other districts. If we were a single district, with the same budgets the overall budget increase would be less than half a percent. Ed spending per equalized pupil would be \$14,700. Eden's per pupil figure, for comparison, is \$16,400. She discussed what tax

rates would be if we were a single district, not taking into account tax incentives for consolidation, just based on the cost per pupil calculation. Cambridge's tax rate would go up in FY17 compared to FY16. Eden's would go down 7 cents. Hyde Park's would be relatively even. Belvidere's would go down. Johnson's would be pretty even. Waterville's would go down 8 cents. LUSD's rate would go down. The way our funding system works, the more students you have the better off you are.

M. Frederick said when Johnson went out for a new bond they said they would not bring it on at the same time they were paying principal on the old bond. They have a bond retiring in 2017. A couple of years ago when they went out for the new bond they said for the first 2 years they would only pay the interest on it. As the old bond interest rate goes down, the interest on the new bond will keep payments relatively even and not change the tax rate. When the old bond retires, they will start paying principal on the new bond. If Hyde Park goes out to bond, we can delay principal payments for up to 5 years. She would suggest just paying interest until LUSD's big bond retires and then start paying the principal so the tax rate would remain relatively even. That would be the strategy she would suggest if consolidation happens.

D. Whitcomb asked S. Sanborn if he brought a sample petition. It was mentioned in the minutes that he would do so. S. Sanborn said he emailed them out. His thought is to draft petitions and warnings for each community and have them available on February 16 even though he won't be here.

7. ***Develop Strategies for Community Engagement (continued)***

D. Whitcomb asked when people need to start getting names on a petition if they are running on April 12. S. Sanborn said he needs to get that information.

M. Frederick asked if the legal notice in the paper needs to appear for just one week or multiple weeks. S. Sanborn said he will get that information and let her know.

8. ***Adjourn***

It was moved and seconded to adjourn at 7:37 and the motion was passed.