

8 TOWN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANNING BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

December 14, 2022

1. Call to order

The Zoom meeting with remote attendance only was called to order by Lucy Prashker at 5:31 p.m. The following members were present as confirmed by Lucy Prashker, Chair by roll call:

Alford: Lucy Prashker, Charles Ketchen

Egremont: George McGurn, Tom Berkel (arrived 5:40pm), James DiPisa (arrived 5:57pm)

Great Barrington: Deb Phillips, Peter Taylor, Stephen Bannon

Monterey: Jonathan Sylbert, Donald Coburn, Kimberly Alcantara

New Marlborough: Tara White, Susan Smith, Nanci Worthington

Sheffield: Bonnie Silvers (arrived 5:37pm), Nadine Hawver, Colin Smith

Stockbridge: Patrick White

West Stockbridge: Marie Ryan, Andy Potter, Sarah Bourla

RSDPB Advisory Member: Julie Hannum

RSDPB members absent: Carl Stewart, Michael Canales

Superintendents:

SBRSD Superintendent Beth Regulbuto

BHRSD Superintendent Peter Dillon

Project Manager: H. Jake Eberwein

RSDPB Consultants: Frank Cote

Guest Speakers: Laura Rodriguez and Deisy Escobar

2. Approval of 10.25.2022 and 11.29.2022 minutes

A **MOTION** to approve the draft minutes of 10.25.2022 was made by Nadine Hawver and seconded by Charles Ketchen. Colin Smith abstained. There being no further discussion, it was

VOTED to approve the minutes of 10.25.2022 by roll call vote.

A **MOTION** to approve the draft minutes of 11.29.2022 was made by Deb Phillips and seconded by Marie Ryan. There being no further discussion and with three corrections from Ms. White

and Mr. Smith, it was unanimously (with Kimberly Alcantara abstaining)

VOTED to approve the minutes of 11.29.2022 by roll call vote.

3. Introduction of New Members

Ms. Prashker welcomed new members in attendance and invited each to introduce themselves to the board:

- Sarah Bourla, BHRSD School Committee Member, West Stockbridge
- Kimberly Alcantara, SBRSD School Committee Member, Monterey

Slides that provide an overview of updated membership and proposed subcommittees can be found [HERE](#).

a. Subcommittee membership

Ms. Prashker presented the updated proposed subcommittee slate with the addition of new members. Ms. Alcantara stated she would like to also join the Finance Subcommittee. Ms. Hawver stated she did not have opposition to Ms. Alcantara participating as an alternate member.

Mr. White suggested the Finance Subcommittee be increased from five to six members with the additional sixth member being a representative from BHRSD. Ms. Silvers stated she is pleased with the addition of Ms. Alcantara to the Finance Subcommittee and supports Mr. White's statement.

Mr. Potter stated his discomfort with the idea that the Finance Subcommittee needs to be balanced between the districts. He stated the board should operate on an assumption of good intent; ultimately the full board will have final say over subcommittee decisions. Mr. Sylbert agreed and reminded the board it should not be acting as a divided group. Ms. Hawver stated no one from the planning board is ever denied the opportunity to speak at Finance Subcommittee meetings and all ideas are valued and appreciated. She doesn't feel the need to increase the number of subcommittee members.

Mr. White withdrew his suggestion.

A **MOTION** to approve the RSDPB Subcommittee membership slate with the addition of Ms. Alcantara to the Finance Subcommittee as alternate was made by Deb Phillips and seconded by Bonnie Silvers. There being no further discussion, it was

VOTED to approve the RSDPB Subcommittee Membership Slate with the addition of Ms.

Alcantara to the Finance Subcommittee as alternate by roll call vote. (Mr. DiPisa abstained from this vote.)

4. Role / status of “advisory members” (tabled)

5. Project Manager / Chair Update

a. Award of Community Compact Grant

Mr. Eberwein stated the RSDPB was awarded the Community Compact Regionalization and Efficiency Grant. BHRSD will serve as the fiscal agent. The grant was submitted with a request for \$200,000. RSDPB received \$125,000, which he is appreciative of and thankful for.

b. Adjusted budget

Mr. Eberwein presented updated slides (found [HERE](#)) which included the adjusted award. He stated that with the additional \$125,000, RSDPB has the ability to extend finances through Summer 2023, likely into early fall. Mr. Eberwein stated funds from BERK12 do not expire and can be protected and, as needed, used in the future. He asked for a formal vote as a final budget needs to be submitted to the state.

A **MOTION** to approve the RSDPB budget as adjusted was made by Andy Potter and seconded by Stephen Bannon. There being no further discussion, it was unanimously

VOTED to approve the RSDPB budget as adjusted by roll call vote.

6. Subcommittee Updates

a. Finance / Update on assessment modeling (tabled)

b. Community Outreach / Update on monthly RSDPB Updates and Other Outreach

Ms. Rodriguez, Director of the Southern Berkshire Community Health Coalition, stated the youth forums are youth-led coalitions which are both a fun and liberating way to operate. Two students, one from each of the high schools, are currently co-chairs. Ms. Rodriguez recapped that three youth forums have been held to date: the first at Railroad Street Youth Project (13 attendees), the second at Mt. Everett Regional High School (20 attendees) and, most recently, the third at Simon’s Rock (8 attendees). Deisy Escobar, co-chair from Mt. Everett, and transition team member with (the new Attorney General of the Commonwealth) Andrea Campbell, gave an update on the youth forums held at Mt. Everett and Simon’s Rock.

Ms. Escobar recapped the recently held youth forum at Mt. Everett (previously reported in RSDPB minutes). Participants discussed resources, what is missing, what is lacking in both schools and situations that could come from the merger.

Mt. Everett:

Have	Missing
Culinary Program	Mental health resources
Woodshop	Bi-Lingual staff
Small classes	Auto shop
Early-College Designation Program	Different sports programs: track & field
FFA Program	Graduation / College prep
Small campus	Not enough guidance counselors
Diverse sports programs	
Theater Program	

Monument Mountain:

Have	Missing
Mental health resources / clinical team	Diverse staff
Wellness Program	FFA program
Therapy Animals	Fair distribution of resources for sports vs other programs
Supportive Teachers	Considerations for lower income students without advocacy
Student advocacy opportunities	

What students would like to see in a potential merger:

Culinary program with internships leading to certification	Diverse programming around FFA, agriculture, working with local farms
Expanded curriculum	More club participation opportunities

Better diversity of interest that could lead to connections among students	Different ways sports and theater could improve
Better mental health overall	Having a pet program, diversity of art programs
CVTA programs that could lead to jobs in the community	More diversity
More acceptance	More developed ELA department; having translators on staff
More of a non-eurocentric history	More people from marginalized groups
More school trips abroad	More foreign language course opportunities

What students are afraid of or afraid you might lose in a merger:

Mt. Everett	Monument Mountain	Both
The essence of what Mt. Everett represents; generations of families, community	Racial tension and culture	
Deep connections with staff	Transition	Tension of Transition
Not making sports teams	Fear of integration with both cultures	Fear of integration with both cultures
Being left out or not prioritized	Farmington River and Richmond student experience could be the same for Mt. Everett students	Past school identity will be lost
Being on MMRHS territory		Forced integration
Feeling of being absorbed into MMRHS culture		Rivalry
Losing identity		
Early-College Designation Program		

Ski Program		
Curriculum style		
Afraid of parents (teachers) losing their jobs		
[Mt. Everett student perception of a] drug culture		

Students identified a merger will be difficult but it could also make younger students better people. They could create a more accepting and integrated culture, more cultural competency, with more diversity.

Mock vote results (not anonymous): No: 15 (most being Mt. Everett students); Yes: 5.

Why did you vote no?	Why did you vote yes?
Don't have enough information	Exciting opportunities
The transition is daunting and scary	Integrating new students
Job loss for teachers	Incorporating student voice and student needs in the community
Not feeling included into the current culture	

Miss Escobar recapped the recent youth forum at Simon's Rock. As participation was low, students were able to have intimate and close conversations about values and different aspects of a new school that were important to students. They held the following visioning activities to include them in the planning process:

Draw your ideal school with your core values inside	Discussion about new school mascot
Discussion about new school name	Discussion of what schools would look like with or without the merger
Discussion of what could change if merger does not happen	Discussion of what progress could or could not happen

Ideas presented pertaining to the physical elements of a new school:

Warm and welcoming feeling to all	Open air	Various places for mental health	private/confidential offices
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Natural lighting	Quiet study spaces	Pond	Hockey Rink
Roof-Top Terrace	Community Connections	Plants	Garden/Greenhouse
Solar	Athletic Center	Fountains	Natural garden
Gender-inclusive bathrooms	Better AC/heating	Meeting rooms	Cultural center
Designated student/senior center	Culinary Program	Vending Machines	School store
Comfortable chairs			

What could integrate both schools if they came together as one:

History of both schools with Hall of Fame with photos, awards, trophies	Kindness	Welcoming and respectful values
Passion, drive	Communication	Resources for college, CVTE

What would you like to see if merger doesn't happen:

Needing more conversations between administrators and students	Connections between both schools
Having more student input on decisions	More information on school happenings
Mental health resources	Student voice and leadership
Cultural competency	Interchangeable model between both schools
Equal connection to community organizations	

What do you think would help with transition prior to merger:

Shared clubs	Shared school events
Include middle school students in discussions	Providing merger information to younger students
Enlist teachers to remove their bias from the process when discussing the merger with	Provide more information and more inclusion in the merger process

students	
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Anonymous Vote: on whether to merge 7 Yes, 1 No

Ms. Rodriguez stated the importance of student input in this process. In the new year, she plans to organize youth forums for middle school students. Mr. Potter asked Ms. Rodriguez about the status of the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey. Ms. Rodriguez stated it was administered in all the schools over the past month and results should be available in 6-8 weeks. Ms. Rodriguez verified the aggregate level and perceptions for the survey is for all of Berkshire County not just Southern Berkshire. Note: School level reports are provided to the Superintendents/Principals.

Ms. Prashker thanked Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. Escobar for the ongoing youth forum work and her hope that the student co-chairs stay engaged in the process going forward.

- c. **Operations / any additional comments on Transportation report (tabled)**
- d. **Educational Quality (tabled)**

7. Continued discussion of 8 Town Regional School District Agreement

a. School Committee composition (poll on preferred approach)

Mr. Eberwein presented the current School Committee Options as a slide, available [HERE](#).

3A: 11 committee members each with a vote, one each from Alford, Monterey, New Marlborough, Egremont, West Stockbridge and Stockbridge, three from Great Barrington and two from Sheffield.

3A:** 13 members on the board with the same composition as 3A but with two additional members who would be elected “at large” with no residency requirement.

Kavanagh proposal: 11-member committee. One member from each town, three at-large members.

Ms. Prashker asked board members to speak in favor of one of the options and others offer counterpoints.

Ms. Phillips suggested that if there is to be equal representation in voting, the Kavanagh proposal should apportion the votes each representative receives instead of having more

members and apportioning the number of representatives. It is a way to keep the board smaller. The two at-large seats may/may not come from the larger towns.

Ms. Prashker stated what Ms. Phillips is proposing sounds like weighted voting, which was not one of the preferred approaches identified by the board. Ms. Phillips agreed that the goal is to look out for the interests of all the students in a combined district.

Mr. Bannon stated “at large” has some merits but voters may be confused with the concept of “at large.” He confirmed 3A is his favorite option.

Mr. Coburn stated 3A has the advantage of being closest to what is currently in place. 3A** adds a concept that the districts have never had and people will not understand. He stated the Kavanagh proposal disregards the legitimate interest in the larger towns and, if selected, it could be the end of the merger project.

Mr. Smith agreed that choosing something very different from what is currently in place will be difficult for people to digest.

Mr. McGurn spoke in favor of the Kavanagh proposal stating the SBRSD school committee members are voted at large. Ms. Prashker clarified that all three of the proposals include *district-wide* voting. That is, voters in all towns cast votes for all candidates, not just those from the town within which they reside. The “at large” component, which would be a new approach, would add two school committee members who would have no residency requirements, meaning they would not have to come from any specified town, but could reside in any one of the eight towns. She reinforced all members would be elected *district-wide* under each of the proposals under consideration, but 3A** and the Kavanagh proposal would allow two of the school committee members to come from *any* of the eight towns. She clarified “at large” is another way of saying some members would not have a specified town residency requirement.

Ms. Smith spoke against 3A as she felt the way it is structured, it could be a situation where Great Barrington could tip the scales on any potential issue with a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote. Ms. Prashker clarified if it is an 11-member school committee, $\frac{2}{3}$ would require eight votes, so Great Barrington resident members (3) alone would not be able to dictate the result. Mr. Sylbert disagreed stating if Great Barrington has three votes, one other vote from any other town could kill a budget, but if everyone has the same, that would not be possible.

Mr. White stated he fully supports a model that gives Sheffield and Great Barrington a stronger voice. He stated Sheffield and Great Barrington will pay for the majority of the district, and feels it is not unreasonable for them to have a majority of the say in how the district is run.

Ms. Hawver pointed out this could potentially happen right now in SBRSD with Sheffield and New Marlborough. She stated it is highly unlikely for two towns to get together at a school committee meeting and vote down a budget presented by the superintendent.

Mr. Taylor stated his views for 3A are aligned with Mr. Bannon, Mr. Coburn, Ms. Hawver and Mr. White.

Mr. Potter spoke in favor of 3A stating ultimately the budgets go to the eight towns where school committees are trying to get a budget passed.

Ms. Silvers spoke in favor of 3A and seconded Mr. Coburn and Mr. Smith with their concerns about voters being confused (with the at-large concept).

Mr. Sylbert asked to make an amendment to the Kavanagh proposal. He proposed an increase to 11 members with three members "at large". He stated 3A and Kavanagh are not that different and will appear less different if there are 11 members on both. He stated his preference for the Kavanagh proposal is that each town is guaranteed one seat on the committee. In 3A, the larger towns would have an advantage in voting over smaller towns. This amendment increases the competition for, at least, the three at-large seats for any given town. If the at-large seats above the eight minimum (one for each town) is competitive, the candidates within the larger towns are going to have to make a case for their candidates during the process. Mr. Sylbert stated it will make the elections more competitive and will increase the quality and the commitment of the at-large members; otherwise, additional seats that are guaranteed to larger towns can attract uncommitted candidates and would make for a more interesting election every four years.

Mr. McGurn stated after hearing comments from Mr. Sylbert, Mr. Coburn, Ms. Hawver, Ms. Smith, each member town should receive one vote.

Mr. Bannon stated Great Barrington has five out of the 10 votes in Berkshire Hills; Stockbridge has three and West Stockbridge has two. In his 25 years on the BHRSD school committee, there has never been a time the budget was blocked. He does not feel it is a legitimate problem as neither SBRSD nor BHRSD has experienced the issue.

Mr. Smith stated he agrees with Mr. Sylbert and feels the Kavanagh proposal is the superior way to proceed, but he is concerned people are not going to take the time to understand it before voting. Therefore, he prefers 3A. Mr. Sylbert stated he is reluctant to underestimate the capacity of voters to understand the concept of three “at large” voters.

Mr. Coburn stated the amendment of the motion is merely the modification of something that no rational voter in Great Barrington would vote for. They are paying for more than half of the school district. He does not feel the modified motion improves the Kavanagh proposal.

A **MOTION** to amend the Kavanagh proposal (under consideration) from a 10-member committee with 2 at-large members to an 11-member committee with 3 at-large members was made by Jonathan Sylbert and seconded by Colin Smith. There being no further discussion, it was unanimously

VOTED to amend the Kavanagh proposal from a 10-member committee with 2 at-large members to an 11-member committee with 3 at-large members passed 16:4 with one abstention by roll call vote.

Mr. Taylor addressed the political feasibility undertones in the short term and stated there are going to be bigger issues that will impact whichever recommendation comes through.

Mr. McGurn stated he disagrees with comments that voters will be confused and believes the voters are very well informed.

Ms. Prashker again clarified all options are district-wide and biennial elections.

In response to a question about the process, Ms Prashker said that the board will discuss the vote after board members rank the 3 proposals to determine whether a simple majority vote for one of the proposals will decide the question for the board.

Members were then asked to rank their top three choices. Below is a count of that process. Note, some members only chose their top, or top two choices.

	3A: 11 committee members each with a vote, one each from Alford, Monterey, New Marlborough,	3A** (double prime): 13 members on the board, with the same composition as 3A but with two	Kavanagh Proposal: 11-member committee. One member from each town, three at-large
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	Egremont, West Stockbridge and Stockbridge, three from Great Barrington and two from Sheffield	additional members who would be elected at-large.	members.
Charles Ketchen	2		1
George McGurn			1
Thomas Berkel			1
James DiPisa	2		1
Deb Phillips	1		2
Peter Taylor	1	2	3
Stephen Bannon	1		
Donald Coburn	1	2	
Jonathan Sylbert		2	1
Kimberly Alcantara		2	1
Susan Smith	1		2
Tara White	1		2
Nanci Worthington	2		1
Colin Smith	1		2
Nadine Hawver	1		2
Bonnie Silvers	1		
Patrick White	1		
Marie Ryan	1		
Andy Potter	2	1	3
Sarah Bourla	1		2
Lucy Prashker	1	2	3

	1st Choice - 13	1st Choice - 1	1st Choice - 7
	2nd Choice - 4	2nd Choice - 5	2nd Choice - 6
			3rd Choice - 3

Following some additional discussion, a **MOTION** was then made to approve the majority vote accepting 3A: 11 committee members each with a vote, one each from Alford, Monterey, New Marlborough, Egremont, West Stockbridge and Stockbridge, three from Great Barrington and two from Sheffield was made by Donald Coburn and seconded by Deb Phillips.

Mr. McGurn said he believed the motion was out of order.

Mr. Coburn said he felt a majority of the ranked voting should be sufficient.

Mr. McGurn stated the board voted in ranked order assuming that was how the votes would be counted and tabulated but now it is moving toward a majority vote so at the very least there should be another vote.

Mr. Coburn stated there is a misunderstanding for ranked voting. In ranked voting you go to the ranking process if there is no response that yields a majority; when that occurs you take the lowest person, eliminate that person, then assign that person's votes to the other two proportionally until you reach a majority, even in a ranked-voting system. Mr. McGurn stated everyone voted in ranked order.

Mr. Potter offered that it makes sense to have a confirmatory vote as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts does not have ranked voting and it is just a way of organizing the thoughts of the board. He felt the board did need a majority vote to confirm 3A as the majority vote.

A **MOTION** was made to confirm the selection in the above voting of 3A: 11 committee members each with a vote, one each from Alford, Monterey, New Marlborough, Egremont, West Stockbridge and Stockbridge, three from Great Barrington and two from Sheffield was made by Donald Coburn and seconded by Andy Potter. There being no further discussion, it was

VOTED to confirm the selection in the above voting of 3A: 11 committee members each with a vote, one each from Alford, Monterey, New Marlborough, Egremont, West Stockbridge and Stockbridge, three from Great Barrington and two from Sheffield passed 18:2 by roll call vote.

- b.** Transition Period and Transition Committee (tabled)
- c.** Working Name of New 8 Town Regional School District (tabled)
- d.** Decisions Requiring Supermajority Vote (tabled)

8. Public Comments

There were no public comments

9. Adjourn

A **MOTION** to adjourn was made by Andy Potter and seconded by Deb Phillips. There being no further discussion, it was unanimously

VOTED to adjourn by roll call vote at 7:52pm

Submitted by:

Christine Kelly, RSDPB Recorder

Approved: 1.4.2023