

BRIDGEWATER, HEBRON & GROTON STEERING COMMITTEE

297 Mayhew Turnpike
Bridgewater, NH 03222

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Terence Murphy
Bridgewater Selectman

Patrick Moriarty
Hebron Selectman

John Rescigno
Groton Selectman

Erick Piper
Bridgewater Representative

Jennifer Larochelle
Hebron Representative

Virginia Parker
Groton Representative

Derry Riddle
BHVD – Ex Officio

William White
BHVD – Ex Officio

October 11, 2023: Meeting called to order at 6pm

Committee Members Present: Jennifer Larochelle, Terence Murphy, and John Rescigno.

Ms. Larochelle called the meeting to order.

Ms. Larochelle informed the public that was present that unfortunately there isn't a quorum present and therefore we cannot proceed with reviewing minutes and providing committee reports.

Ms. Larochelle continued what we could do is open the meeting up to the public for a question and answer session.

Robert Brooks asked Why are you leaving SAU #4.

Ms. Larochelle went through the history of the building of the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School and the original intent of the school was to have a K-8 option within the school district. Every time they attempted to increase the grades the school board voted against it. Then there is always the threat of the current ADM method being changed and this increase in the three town's tax base would not be for the betterment of the student's education. She then went on to compare us to the Ashland school district. They are a K-8 and then tuition to High School. They are part of SAU #2 which also includes Inter-Lakes School District. Having their own meetings and own decision making for their individual school districts within the SAU.

Robert Brooks added Are we approving of the way SAU #4 is currently run.

Ms. Larochelle answered we are looking to work with them and continue to have students from the other towns attend BHVS. Currently Alexandria has the most students attending BHVS.

Mr. Murphy added that he attended the SAU #4 HB349 Sub Committee meeting the other evening and they agreed to begin forming a tailings agreement. This would allow students currently in BHVS from the other towns to continue and would also allow students currently in the NMMS or NRHS to continue their schooling there. This is something parents have requested.

Only issue is the discussions came to an end when superintendent services were brought up.

Our goal is to have our own school district so our three towns will have the voting rights of what happens at BHVS. Right now, all seven towns vote, and school board can make some decisions without a vote.

Bridgewater-Hebron Village District completes all of the maintenance at the BHVS and owns all of the furniture and fixtures. The current lease contract does not allow the village district to interfere with the school in regards to education.

Recently the Bridgewater-Hebron Village District submitted a grant for \$185,000 for a new playground to include handicap access.

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Deborah Rangel asked what is the cost going to be. I have heard it's going to be double.

Ms. Larochelle informed Ms. Rangel that statement is referring to when the Article 5 committee was formed and they couldn't reach an agreement on what the formula should be. She went on to say the last formula presented would've increased the tax rate to nearly double.

Currently if we form our own special purpose school district, we can operate everything on our current contribution amounts that each town contributes to SAU #4.

Mr. Murphy stated it could increase maybe \$1 that would be just to make sure we can have added services.

Currently we have two wings in the school and we could have them be the older and younger students. In fact the west wing was constructed so that we can add two more classrooms on if necessary.

Tom Caldwell asked what the tuition amount could be and what does superintendent services cost.

Mr. Murphy answered the NH Department of Education governs what the maximum tuition amount can be.

We have been in a holding pattern waiting on SAU #4 since HB349 was approved. We are attempting to convince the school board to work together.

Tom Caldwell asked why there isn't a steering committee member that is a parent.

Ms. Larochelle answered that there have been discussions of possibly appointing a parent representative.

Mr. Rescigno stated that the current committee exists of a selectman from each of the three towns and a representative from the HB349 committee.

Tom Caldwell asked What happens if SAU #4 says no. Why haven't you sought out any other SAU's for these services.

Ms. Larochelle stated that the committee wanted to give SAU #4 a good chance. But we have recently had other school district reach out directly to us.

Mr. Murphy added although the Department of Education has been wonderful, we are still in a holding pattern.

Caitlin Simula asked have you talked to staff at BHVS or done any surveys.

Ms. Larochelle responded that we have been in communications with the teachers.

Deborah Rangel stated that being new to the community, I do not know how to take the recent handout. Is this someone's opinion or what is this.

Mr. Murphy replied that it is a local article written by a local newspaper reporter.

Joe Wilkas asked do we know where the high school students will go.

Ms. Larochelle answered that SAU #4 has recently agreed to negotiate a tailings agreement which would allow students to finish through Newfound. Otherwise there may be other options.

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Rebecca McFarland asked what are the other options.

Ms. Larochelle stated that we cannot comment at this time.

Mr. Murphy replied there used to be 1,500 students enrolled the counts are a lot lower now. Schools are looking for tuition students.

Caitlin Simula asked if SAU #4 takes an agreement does that mean they would stay in SAU #4 and finish school there. Do they need to stay with SAU #4 or will there be a choice.

Mr. Murphy & Ms. Larochelle both answered we would like to provide multiple options.

Mr. Murphy further explained that the original concern came from the parents. They want students to continue we can work out an arrangement there and others want options for High School so we like to make other arrangements available.

Ms. Larochelle expressed that she taught at the Middle School for many years and it does not work for everyone and that is why we would also like to provide choice of a K-8 model.

Deborah Hart stated by voting time everyone will be well aware of what we are facing and what the monetary impact will be. Because the current FB rumors are ridiculous.

Discussions ensued around the resident meetings that will be held over the next few weeks and ongoing communications with residents.

Additional discussions were had around voting and when that may happen in the town of Hebron. The three towns voters need to vote in person and it cannot be a ballot vote and submitted by absentee ballot.

Mr. Murphy explained that it would be a warrant article, but once the warrant article is read, the towns voters could request that a secret vote be taken by yes or no votes being entered in the ballot box.

Kathleen Connor asked if the Steering Committee would be reviewing their committee reports this evening.

Ms. Larochelle answered that at the beginning of the meeting that they found out one member would not be able to attend and therefore we do not have a quorum. We chose to at least answer some questions from the public.

Mark Coulson asked the question what happens if one of the 3 towns votes comes out no. Does that mean it's done and doesn't move forward.

Ms. Larochelle stated you are correct and that is why we are attempting to educate our voters.

Mr. Murphy stated once the vote takes place, if the vote is yes, then there are additional steps we need to go through. We will need to elect a school board, create contracts, agreements, etc.

Ms. Larochelle asked if there were any more public comments or questions. There being none she adjourned the meeting at 7:05 pm.