

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

September 20, 2023: Meeting called to order at 6pm

Committee Members Present: Jennifer Larochelle, Terence Murphy, Patrick Moriarty, Virginia Parker and John Rescigno

BHVD Ex-Officio Representatives Present: Derry Riddle, and William White.

Ms. Larochelle called the meeting to order.

Ms. Larochelle asked for any updates to the minutes of the September 13, 2023 meeting.

Ms. Larochelle asked for a motion to accept the public meeting minutes as presented.

Mr. Moriarty moved to accept the minutes. Mr. Murphy seconded.

5 approvals

Ms. Larochelle asked for a motion to accept the executive session minutes as amended.

Mr. Murphy moved to accept the executive session minutes as amended. Ms. Parker seconded
4 approvals and 2 abstentions

Ms. Larochelle moved to discuss communication in each of the three towns to update the public/tax payers.

Mr. Rescigno stated that the Groton Community meeting will take place at their town hall and they will finalize their meeting date at their next selectman meeting.

Mr. Murphy stated that the town of Bridgewater will need to have at least a River Road meeting and a meeting for the Whittemore Point and Lakeside individuals. He will discuss meeting dates at their next selectman meeting.

Mr. Moriarty stated that their selectmen meeting is tomorrow night and he will confirm dates then.

Ms. Larochelle moved to open the meeting up for public comment. She stated that they will answer questions that they are currently able and obtain answers for other questions.

Christina Reynolds said that she has many close relationships throughout the towns and that she had a hard time finding anyone that is for this.

Ms. Larochelle stated that we continue to update information constantly. Individuals should view the webpage and continue to come out to meetings as we will present updates as they become available. But currently we are awaiting a response from SAU #4 as to whether or not they would like to continue a cooperative relationship.

Britta Matthews exclaimed that if Executive sessions are going to be sealed, they need to state 91-A and they shouldn't be executive session as the current contract would only be for current contract year. Not to mention that such a small group may not be able to form a collective bargaining unit.

Ms. Larochelle made a clarification that whatever contract is in place at 7/1/25 must be honored by the newly formed special purpose school district, till that contract's end date. At that time the

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new special purpose school district will negotiate the new contract. We do not want to compete with contract and all contracts will be negotiated in good faith.

Britta Matthews said we do not want rumors. A Groton selectman told me that our taxes will double if we do not vote for this.

Mr. Murphy said the Article 5 committee wanted to change from ADM to some combination of ADM and property valuations. We will provide more information on that as soon as we can. Currently each town pays based on the number of students from their town enrolled in the school district. The other four towns in the district wanted to change to more of an equalized value method. In those calculations our town would go to between \$49,000 and \$60,000 per student, from our current \$21,000 per student. The remaining four towns would go down significantly and one town would be approximately \$13,000 per student. How is that cost equally shared. This has been put forth a few times and can be attempted every five years. We have moved forward with forming the special purpose school district in order to prevent the huge disparity in per student costs.

Mr. Rescigno added you must realize the Article 5 committee worked that summer completing various methods of calculating the per student cost and in each scenario our three towns always suffered.

Deb Hart mentioned that she remembers seeing an item that showed the actual numbers.

Mr. Murphy assured that we will locate the document and show the current method and the other methods discussed.

Sharon Nelson stated that from the beginning some years ago during one of the other attempts, she remembers reading that SAU #4 could close the BHVS. I thought they rented, if that is the case, then how could they vote to close the school.

Mr. Murphy offered the clarification that the Bridgewater-Hebron Village District owns the school and performs all of the required maintenance on the building. The building is also fully furnished by the Bridgewater-Hebron Village District. Whereas SAU #4 leases the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School, they have the say in schooling. The only item in the agreement is that students from Bridgewater and Hebron come first for enrollments at BHVS.

Ms. Parker stated further discussions at SAU #4 state they would have an independent campus style which hosts concerns for children from Groton that will travel on buses for over an hour.

Mr. Murphy said we should not get involved in what the school district does. We will have our own school board and would have the say of what happens in our new school district. BHVD will form a new lease with our new school district.

Sharon Nelson asked who said they can do whatever they want with that school.

Mr. Murphy explained some history from back when John Davis came to Bridgewater and Hebron

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looking to have a new school built in our area. That is when we formed Bridgewater-Hebron Village District and built the school.

Ms. Riddle added that was in 1999.

Tom Edwards let everyone know that he is currently a member of the SAU #4 building committee and stated that the current thinking has not discussed closing of BHVS. He then proceeded to state that he like to go back and state that they are making all of this out of **IF** it's going to happen.

Ms. Larochelle requested that Mr. Edwards please curb his sarcasm.

Tom Edwards asked why it hasn't happened before.

Mr. murphy stated they have brought it forward before and they keep bringing it forward. We can only win so many times.

Tom Edwards let everyone know that he was pivotal in stopping the current try. Then he stated that the committee is comparing everything as it will fully go through. You don't know what it costs to run a district. You need to educate yourself.

Mr. Rescigno asked Tom to let's start talking facts. Have you ever attended the Article 5 committee meetings.

Tom Edwards asked why so I can listen to people argue.

Mr. Rescigno added the four towns were pushing to change the formula. The calculations presented were evident that they were pushing that hard.

Tom Edwards continued but that was only a maybe. IF it will happen.

Jim Koch stated I didn't see what is happening. Isn't that what this committee is focused on.

Mr. Rescigno answered we need stabilization and we are focused on the greater good for the children.

Jim Koch said at the other meeting, some mentioned you are going to research budget numbers.

Ms. Parker said that was me and I am a current member of the school board budget committee. We are talking to other school districts, the department of education and we would be foolish to say we know all the answers. We have developed sub-committees and you are watching the process as it is happening. The legislation was only enacted a little over a month ago. Let's work together.

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Rick Alpers – Thank you for having us. First you have stated four towns. This hasn't happened in Bristol. Second I find it odd that you are not meeting at a school or town building. Lastly I find a conflict in the steering committee that some of their members are budget committee members of SAU #4 and they will have to wear two hats with two different motives. I am trying to be professional.

Mr. Murphy said a member of the Bristol select board told me it would happen. There is no harm in having two groups do the same thing.

Rick Alpers then asked why are you always working on the past.

Mr. Rescigno said the past repeats itself.

Ms. Larochelle stated we need to move on.. We are rehashing something that cannot be rehased anymore. We have signed legislation that formed this committee and have tasked us to review the possibility of separation and will bring forth at the town meeting for the three town to vote.

Tony Desmarais asked Will this be on the town ballot or as a warrant article.

Mr. Murphy stated that he has been told it will need to be a warrant article.

Tony Desmarais asked if it could be on the ballot as a separate vote. Can we have the RSA that states warrant article. We need more information so that we have a sufficient amount to vote and it needs to be a ballot vote.

Ms. Larochelle expressed thank you for your concern. We will reinvestigate and consult with our attorney and let you know.

Deborah Rangel introduced herself and her husband Paul Rangel. She stated concerns that the date chosen for the meeting conflicts with the open house at BHVS. Due to that, family members had to choose to go to open house or come to this meeting. Why couldn't the date be changed.

Ms. Larochelle stated that this committee meets every Wednesday evening and will for a while. We only change the venue between the towns so that everyone can come to some of the meetings.

Ms. Parker added that the meetings are posted in advance and it was too late to change the date when we found out on Monday night.

Mr. Rescigno added that each of the selectman also have their selectman meeting dates.

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A discussion ensued around the meeting date and time and Ms. Larochelle had to request order in the room.

Ms. Riddle also added that they will have additional meetings with teachers and parents.

Britta Matthews asked is there could be a group email.

Mr. Rescigno stated that it was attempted to collect emails in Groton, but only a handful of individuals signed up. It has worked better in the other two towns and they do communicate with the individuals that have signed up.

This prompted a request regarding social media. The committee does not choose to use social media as that tends to be an avenue of opinions and rumors.

Ariel Maloney asked is it true that you are hoping to separate for tax purposes and then everything else would remain the same. If SAU #4 doesn't pan out, what other districts have you talked with . . . like Plymouth/Mascoma/Franklin.

Ms. Larochelle stated that the committee isn't comfortable going to others prior to an answer from SAU #4.

Discussions ensued around which other school districts the committee could possibly reach out to. The committee ensured the public that one of their main concerns is to minimize disruption and provide school choice for the students and parents.

Janice Barnard expressed her concern about the staff at the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School.

Ms. Larochelle ensured her and the public that the committee is in direct communication with the teachers and staff at BHVS. The committee is currently answer questions and concerns and will have meetings in the future and had meetings throughout the course of HB349. We are excited to work with all the teachers and staff.

Another discussion ensued regarding what should be public and what should be executive session. The committee stated that while we are discussing financial numbers and negotiations, these items will remain in executive session until we have answers for the public. Once items are finalized, or when we require input, we will discuss during the public session. At this point Ms. Larochelle thanked everyone for their questions and comments. She stated that the committee feels they owe it to SAU #4 to see if they are open to negotiations in any formal way and until we hear from SAU #4 we are merely discussing options.

Ms. Larochelle requested that we stop accepting questions. This is a standing weekly meeting and we will accept questions/comments at every meeting. She moved to enter executive session at 7:30pm.

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Mr. Murphy moved and Mr. Moriarty seconded and all committee members present approved. (Ms. Riddle left the meeting).

Ms. Parker voted to exit executive session at 8:08. Ms. Larochelle seconded and all committee members present approved.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday September 27, 2023 at 6pm. At the Groton town hall.

Ms. Larochelle requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Moriarty moved to adjourn and Mr. Murphy seconded. All committee members present approved. Meeting adjourned at 8:10pm.