

TOWN OF HEBRON
SELECT BOARD INFORMATIONAL HB 349 MEETING
OCTOBER 19, 2023

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Scott Hayes, Barbara Kelly, Roger and Carol Lafontaine, Tracey Steenbergen, Matthew and Bridget Barnard, David and Mavis Brittelli, Bill and Donna Luti, Arthur Burdette, Lindsey Santamaria, Vanessa Robert, Alison York, Jenniver Larochelle, Kathleen Tawa, Fred and Barbara Kohout, Roger Larochelle, Derry Riddle, Debra James, Bob and Janet Wisniewski, James and Gillian Van Schaick, Everett and Kathy Begor, Mark Coulson, Edward and Maryann Weber, Debra Hart, Jack and Suzanne Sheehan,

6:00 P.M. **OPEN MEETING:** Chair Hazelton commenced the meeting. Chair Hazelton informed the attendees that this meeting was to present information that the Board has, at this time, with regards to HB 349, there will be no ~~negative comments allowed~~ debate on HB 349, the meeting is anticipated to last about an hour, and there will be time allowed for questions to be answered.

Vice-Chair Moriarty informed the audience that he is a member of the Steering Committee that is formed of representatives from the towns of Bridgewater, Hebron, and Groton as well as the Commissioners from the Bridgewater – Hebron Village District. Vice-Chair Moriarty commented that property taxes are not the most ~~adequate equitable~~ way to fund education. Vice-Chair Moriarty reviewed the history of the Newfound Area School District, the funding formula of the district, and what led to the construction and formation of the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School District.

Vice-Chair Moriarty reviewed with the attendees the main discussion of the Article #5 Committee for changing the current formula for funding the Newfound Area School District. One of the formula changes proposed was to shift most of the funding to the “richer towns” Bridgewater and Hebron based on property valuation that would have resulted in paying \$57,000 per pupil and the Town of Alexandria would pay ~~\$~~15,000 per pupil. The Town of Hebron has the highest level of poverty out of the seven towns in the district. Also, Hebron has the oldest population. As Article #5 Committee met it became clear to the Towns of Bridgewater, Hebron, and Groton that the funding of the Newfound Area School District could change and significantly impact the current town budgets. Since the populations in each of the three towns is much lower than the other four towns in the district if every voter in Bridgewater, Hebron, and Groton voted at the polls the other four towns could easily outvote the three towns. Forming a smaller school district would allow the voters to have a say in the funding aspects of education. All three towns on the steering committee are in favor of negotiating tuition ~~in~~-contracts with the Plymouth School District and the Newfound Area School District. The Steering Committee is looking to work with the Newfound Area School District to keep students from other towns at the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School.

Jennifer Larochelle, Steering Committee member and former teacher in the Newfound Area School District, presented to the audience the educational aspect of a smaller K-8

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school district. Mrs. Larochelle reported to the audience that the Bridgewater-Village School could take on the three additional grades (6-8) without necessarily constructing an addition to the school. And if an addition is needed to support the increase in students the connections to the existing ~~utilities electric, heating, and plumbing~~ are already in place. Mrs. Larochelle reported on the advantages to the students of a K-8 school model and how the teachers and staff at the Bridgewater Hebron School have made it like a home to the students.

Bill Luti ~~spoke to~~covered the ~~audience as a member of~~ position in which the Article 5 Committee ~~stance was heading~~. Mr. Luti expressed concerns with the direction the committee was heading, and the emotional comments made by other town representatives that drove the direction of the funding towards the “rich towns” paying their “fair share” as opposed to a fair proportional payment for all the towns. Creating a smaller school district would give the parents, taxpayers, and residents more of a say in the education provided to the children as well as controlling the tax rate in each of the towns. All information regarding the Article 5 Committee, HB 349, and the Steering Committee are available on the Hebron town website as well as information being emailed to 570 residents and taxpayers. Mr. Luti relayed to the audience the potential cost to taxpayers if the formula is based on evaluation. HB 349 is specific to Bridgewater, Hebron & Groton where the taxpayers could have a say over the education of the children.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC:

- David Brittelli – Is partnering with Plymouth High School, Plymouth, NH an option? - Yes
- Barbara Kouhout – difference in tuition costs – Plymouth High School vs. Newfound Memorial High School? Bill Luti responded PHS is estimated at \$20,000 per student.
- Roger Lafontaine – The towns of Bridgewater and Groton will be voting on the article to withdraw from the Newfound Area School District in March, Hebron will be voting on the issue in May. What effect will this have on the vote? Chair Hazelton replied that Hebron will know how to vote based on the other towns votes. Vice-Chair Moriarty added that all three towns would need to vote in favor of the withdrawal for the withdrawal to happen – simple majority vote.
- David O’Leary – What happens if all three towns vote against forming their own school district? Bill Luti replied that the towns would stay in the Newfound Area School District. The funding formula change could still happen in the future through a vote of the ~~Newfound Area School District School Board~~SAU4 Deliberative Session.
- Tracey Steenbergen – Could the residents petition Grafton County Superior Court to change Hebron’s Town Meeting from May to March? Vice-Chair Moriarty replied that he would check with Town Counsel as the Attorney General would not approve the change for voting.
- Jillian VanSchaick – What is the impact on the tax rate? Bill Luti replied that the tax rate would increase slightly as there would be start-up costs ; however, much less than if the formula changes.-
- Jennifer Larochelle informed the audience that the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School has three classrooms that could be used if the pre-k was not in the school.

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Mrs. Larochelle informed the audience that the Steering Committee has met with the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School parents and teachers to address their concerns.

- Vice-Chair Moriarty informed the audience that the Steering Committee tried to work with the Newfound Area School District (SAU#4) and received some push-back as change is hard to accept. Vice-Chair Moriarty would like to see multi-lateral agreements with the Newfound Area School District.
- Bill Luti noted that the original bill proposed allowed for four years to withdraw from the district, but an amendment was made in the legislature to reduce the timeframe to two years.
- Derry Riddle informed the audience that the Newfound Area School District is considering a \$30 million bond for a new school that would be located near the Newfound Memorial High School. The students would be bussed that much further for elementary school.
- Bill Luti pointed out that a new school district would mean a smaller school district with votes that count.
- Selectman James commented that the three towns would have more control over a smaller school district.
- Carol LaFontaine – encourages the town boards to hold more meetings to get the word out to more of the Hebron residents.
- Debra Hart – The Steering Committee holds weekly meetings that are noticed on all three towns' websites and open to the public. Ms. Hart encouraged the attendees to take the time to attend the meetings to become informed.
- Deborah James – suggested sending out an informational pamphlet on this important topic to reach more of the voters.
- Bill Luti – noted that the Town of Hebron has 47 students in the Newfound Area School District and the average age in Hebron is 65.
- Selectman James asked the attendees to spread the word to neighbors and others ~~that the~~ usually do not attend the public meetings.

6:55 P.M. **MEETING ADJOURNED:** Chair Hazleton moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:55 p.m., seconded by Vice-Chair Moriarty. The vote was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Sanborn
Town Administrator

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