

Pelham Education Visioning Committee
Meeting Minutes: October 6, 2010

Attendance: Kathy Weilerstein (School Committee), Ed Martin (Selectboard), Fred Vanderbeck (Finance Committee), Warren Hall (Planning Board), Tom Fanning (past School Committee), Claire Kurtz (past School Committee), Michael Hussin (past School Committee), Sarah Hayes, Lisa Desjarlais (Pelham Principal), Darius Modestow, Janet Scott, Kristin DeBoer

Kathy Weilerstein called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

1. Introductions – four members were not present at the first meeting (9/23/10)
2. Discussion about Open Mtg Law: reviewed basic rules and regulations including posting meeting agendas, minutes and email communication (no deliberation – ‘housekeeping’ only)
3. Minutes from the 9/23/10 meeting were approved.
4. Summary of September 28th joint Pelham & Amherst School Committee meeting. Primary issues addressed were the cost allocation methodology for Central Office expenses and the balance of representation on the Union (equal for Amherst and Pelham) – some Amherst School Committee members expressed discontent with both. Steve Rivkin stated that he plans on making a motion at the Amherst SC meeting to “explore the possibility of Amherst leaving Union 26”. Other members (Amherst and Pelham) expressed concern that doing this could bring the state in – meaning we could lose local control of the decision making process. It was noted that Amherst feels a pressure for decisions to be made quickly. Pelham stated that we are addressing the cost allocation now and requested time for our Educational Visioning Committee to complete a study regarding possible changes (consideration of various scenarios for the future of Pelham School) between now and May.
5. Began discussion of possible scenarios – realized there are lots of questions we need to address before moving forward on studying specific scenarios. We generated the following questions:
 - a. Big question – how do we sustain the school? (Finance Comm is almost done with a 5 Year Plan)
 - b. What we will do if Amherst pulls out of the Union? What becomes of their/our relationship with the Superintendent and Central Office?
 - c. Overall desire to better understand how Chapter 70 works: How are the Chapter 70 funds determined? How does having School Choice students effect that? (Kathy)
 - d. What are our per pupil expenses? How does having School Choice students effect that? (Kathy)
 - e. What are ALL our funding sources? (Why is Chapter 70 not listed on page 7 of the Pelham Budget Booklet?) (Kathy)
 - f. What are our current enrollment numbers (Pelham residents and School Choice). What is the 5-Year projected enrollment? (Lisa)
 - g. How can we find out how many of our students are in Charter Schools? (seems that we don’t have bills for all the students we expected to) (Kathy)
 - h. How much would it cost to close the Pelham School? (building expenses, cost to send Pelham resident students elsewhere, emotional/social cost to the town)

- i. How can we attend to the fact that the elementary school is the primary reason that people move to Pelham – how would not having a school impact the town? Are there ways to bring more people into town?
6. More discussion: Concern was noted about potential burden on the Central Office (in looking for answers to many of our questions) – already taxed by numerous requests for information from other school committees. Acknowledged that we could approach Rena Moore to get some of the information. Fred noted that the Amherst and Pelham Finance Committees are both worried that the Regional costs are going so high that it will be difficult for both towns to support the elementary budgets. (There are upcoming capital costs that are creating this concern).
7. Began to develop list of possible scenarios to explore:
 - a. K-6 with continued School Choice
 - b. K-6 without school choice (smaller staff/combined classes)
 - c. K-6 Region with Amherst
 - d. K-6 Union OR region with Shutesbury & Leverett

This is NOT a comprehensive list, it is just the BEGINNING of brainstorming of possibilities. We will continue to generate ideas. Also, we have yet to discuss how to choose which scenarios we will focus on for further study.

8. Meeting adjourned 8:45PM
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Next meeting: Wednesday, October 27 @ 6:30PM Community Room in the Pelham Library

Agenda next meeting:

1. Open Meeting Law review and signatures
2. Presentation of Pelham Finance Committee 5-Year Plan (Fred)
3. Continued discussion on possible scenarios – review of the list of ideas from Shutesbury document.
4. Review of the historical documents; Report of the Special Committee on the Pelham School to the Pelham School Committee dated February 1984, K-12 Regional Agreement dated February 1994 and Final Report and Recommendations Amherst-Leverett-Pelham-Shutesbury Four-Town Regionalization Study Committee dated June 2010.