

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

106 Hancock Road

Peterborough, New Hampshire

CONTOOCCOOK VALLEY SCHOOL BOARD

School Board Meeting

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

7:00 p.m.

Physical Location: SAU #1 Board Room

Livestream Link: <https://www.youtube.com/c/ConValEvents>

Minutes

BOARD

William Bryk, Tom Burgess,
Richard Dunning, Alan Edelkind,
Jim Fredrickson, Dan Harper,
Katherine Heck, Thomas Kirlin,
Greg Kriebel, Janine Lesser,
Erin Pils-Martin

ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Kimberly Saunders, Supt.
Dr. Ann Forrest, Asst. Supt.
Brian Cisneros, B.A.
Ben Moenter, Spec. Ed.
Mark Schaub, Tech.
Larry Pimental, PES
Tim Iwanowicz, TES

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Dick Dunning called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Public Comment

Jesse Marcum, Dublin, thanked the Board for Monday night's forum. He said that it was challenging yet important. He acknowledged Mr. Dunning's consideration for accepting a second report. Concerning the report, he thought that if he were a board member he would accept the report but not the recommendation. He spoke about peer reviews. In his field, peer reviewers are asked if the report fits in specific categories. If he were asked, he would place this in the final category with concerns. He thanked the board.

Camille May, Dublin, recently moved to Dublin. It was a very difficult challenge and Dublin Consolidated School has been a lifeline for their family. She is unsure the same would happen in another school.

Ms. May read several letters written from current and former DCS students.

Susanna Toumano, Hancock, urged the board to take all of the information from Prismatic and understand that now the difficult part comes. She urged the board not to place a warrant in March on this matter but rather, take the year to consider solutions. She shared her concern that they don't know what might happen beyond closing four schools. This is an opportunity to think outside the box. There may be other options for using the school buildings by having grade level schools, bring some grades back to the elementary schools. Use the schools for senior care or daycare. She hopes that there is flexibility considering population changes.

Kari Higley, Dublin, said that she feels that all we have is a proposal without an action plan. She urged the board to take another year to put a plan in place. It should lay out bus routes etc. Something more tangible to vote on is needed. The board is asking us to vote on something nebulous. In addition, Dr. Prieto shared that there would be a decline in population by 2100. We are here now. This is the community that we live in now.

Michelle, Temple, has had four children in the ConVal District. Two of her children attended PES and the other two TES. She noted that her daughter was not challenged at PES. The staffing was not there. It is important to note that challenges can be given to students in schools other than large ones.

3. Consolidation/Reconfiguration

Dick Dunning said that a motion would be brought forward to accept the proposal sent to ConVal by Prismatic so they could be paid.

Greg Kriebel moved to accept the Prismatic Report. Alan Edelkind seconded.

William Bryk asked for clarification on the point that the acceptance of the report merely authorizes the board to pay the consultant and not accept the conclusions.

Dick Dunning confirmed that this is the intent.

Dan Harper said that he did not agree with some of what was said on Monday night at the forum.

Some felt that they have not had enough time. He asked if this could be deferred until later in the year and have a special meeting. He does not want any more division than we already have. He would like to see if another option should be considered.

Katherine Heck said that it would be in the board's purview to have a special meeting. Each town would have to hold votes like regular votes in March. It would require funding.

Jim Fredrickson said that we have a motion to accept the report.

Janine said that all we are doing tonight is accepting the report so that the company can be paid.

Katherine Heck said that depending on the direction that we go, we owe it to the community to begin discussion on the report. We will need time to begin those deliberations. We have had time to read and digest it. We have heard initial reaction from the public.

In favor of accepting the Prismatic Report: Unanimous.

Kimberly Saunders requested non-public session for matters of reputation.

Katherine Heck moved to enter into Non-Public Session for matters of reputation at 7:19 p.m.

Greg Kriebel seconded.

William Bryk asked that given that there are public present, he requested delaying going into non-public until discussion on the reconfiguration before non-public.

Kimberly Saunders said that what she needs to discuss could damage the reputation of an individual or business.

Unanimous on a roll call vote.

Katherine Heck motioned to exit Non-Public session at 7:30 p.m. Greg Kriebel seconded.

Unanimous.

Alan Edelkind said that he would like to make a motion to not make a recommendation until next Tuesday and consider a phased approach in some form. It would not start next year, next year would be a development year. One phase could come in and then evaluated. The next year could be used to consider another school or another grade for implementation and not do everything at once.

William Bryk seconded.

William said that the choice of language about implementation asked still requires more from the public. Given the cost of holding a special election in the middle of the summer, it would be far wiser to take a year to discuss this until the School Board elections of 2025. At that point, it would be well thought over and allow time to fully explore and educate the public. He does not favor any posture by its nature that infers that we have accepted the recommendation of the report.

Dan Harper said that he threw the mid-year election out as an option. If we need a year, that would be fine.

Tom Burgess said that he would not be against doing it mid-year without knowing the costs. He asked why we wouldn't start talking about this tonight.

Alan Edelkind said that it was suggested Monday night not to discuss the recommendation until next Tuesday.

Tom Burgess asked what the motivation was behind that recommendation.

Dick Dunning said that William heard we would be accepting the recommendation. We have accepted the report and not a recommendation. William heard that he may have heard Alan's suggestion to discuss a recommendation next Tuesday.

William Bryk said that he is opposed. We have had enough difficulty informing the public about what is proposed to do. To have an election in the middle of the summer and during a federal election year, he suggested waiting until the following year.

Dick Dunning said that there is no intent to have a special election.

Tom Burgess said that there is a primary coming, he would like cost information. He does not want to rule it out.

Jim Fredrickson said that the motion is to accept the report and he asked if it precluded discussion tonight.

Dick suggested that there is a motion and a second and it could be voted down.

In favor of Alan's motion which read that the board consider a phased approach to implementation based on the Prismatic recommendation.

Janine said that there are certain things that need to be decided before we vote.

Alan Edelkind said that it is only one strategy to think about.

Dick suggested that we take a vote and continue discussion.

In favor of Alan's motion: Unanimous.

Discussion around where the board would like to go next took place.

Jim Fredrickson moved to delay the warrant article until March 2025.

William Bryk seconded the motion.

Jim said that the purpose would be to do it and not waste time.

Erin Pils-Martin asked why we discuss a warrant article if nothing has been decided.

Jim said that we have a choice to put a warrant article for March 2024 or take another year and gather more information and have a warrant in March 2025.

Tom Kirlin said that he would be in favor if we don't have to mention having a warrant article in March 2025.

Jim Fredrickson modified his vote to remove the March 2024 comment.

Jim amended his motion and William Bryk agreed to read the exclusion of March 2024.

Dan Harper said that the public is not ready, we want them to be informed.

Janine Lesser said that she would vote not in favor of this. This has been under discussion for over ten years. Delaying it for another year places huge pressure on the budget. We need to do something now. We may not elect to do exactly what the recommendation is. She said that she believes a warrant article is needed to allow the flexibility.

Alan Edelkind asked when Jim wants to delay the warrant in 2024.

Jim Fredrickson said that if the board is not prepared to place a warrant in 2024 it needs to be decided tonight. He said that a warrant should be placed in March of 2024. We could have one every year.

Greg Kriebel said that he is concerned and will support the board. He shared concern about not giving the board a deadline on a topic that has been discussed over and over again. Just saying no this year without giving anything to come up with a plan given how many years this has been discussed and sit back and not have any sort of deadline does our constituents and students no service.

Katherine Heck said that the motion on the floor, as a board, we have not discussed the report in and of itself and its conclusions as well as our feelings and direction. Prior to making a motion or decision, we owe it to the body and public to start to have a discussion. What if we don't like the recommendation? The report itself needs discussion.

Tom Kirlin said that he struggles with the report, he has only heard that the public is against consolidation.

The data might support consolidation but the community does not.

Janine Lesser said that she does not hear anyone giving us more solutions about our excess capacity and the rising budget that people cannot afford.

Dan Harper said that he is not opposed to closing schools. We need more buy in from the public. Why rush? It will divide this district. No one ever comes in to say that we are doing a great job.

Jim Fredrickson said that he recalls discussion from people in other conversations that are opposed to a topic, those in support didn't show up.

Jim Fredrickson said that the size of the classroom does not determine success, it is student and teacher driven.

Tom Burgess said that the barrier to pass is incredibly high. We still have time to answer questions between now and March if it goes on the warrant.

Jim Fredrickson said that the implementation can be phased out should it pass.

William Bryk said that one of the things that he came away with on Monday night was that people feel passionately overlooked. His support for this on the 2025 ballot is to allow the board to be educated and then educate the public.

Katherine Heck said that she would not be in favor of a blanket warrant article to take some action. It would have to be specific. People need to be comfortable and have confidence.

Tom Kirlin said that we keep talking about our decisions, it is the decisions of the people who voted the board in.

Jim Fredrickson said that it is the board's decision to put a warrant article to allow all of the people to decide. We have the political will to do this. March 2024 and/or March 2025, let's get it out there.

Jim's motion is to not have a warrant article in March 2024 for the ballot for closure.

Tom Burgess asked the purpose of the motion.

Jim said that he was asking about initial discussion tonight. If we say yes to the motion, no discussion is needed.

Tom Burgess said that we have the opportunity to discuss the report tonight. Do we need to vote on Jim's motion before discussing the report?

William Bryk said that we should vote on the motion to clarify what is being argued about. The board can then move forward.

A "Yes" means we are not going to have a warrant article in March 2024.

A "Yes" vote on Jim's motion means the discussion about a warrant article will not happen nor the report.

Or, do you want to continue to discuss the recommendation, pros and cons.

Janine Lesser said that we have several weeks to decide whether or not to place a warrant article this year or not.

Tom Burgess asked if the motion gets voted down, does it mandate a warrant article in 2024.

No, it means we have the opportunity.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Tom Kirlin, William Bryk

No: Greg Kriebel, Dan Harper, Erin Pils-Martin, Tom Burgess, Katherine Heck, Janine Lesser, Jim Fredrickson, Alan Edelkind

Motion defeated allowing continued discussion about the report.

How would the board like to go forward discussing the report? Continue tonight or wait until Tuesday.

Janine Lesser said that she would like to wait until next Tuesday.

Tom Kirlin said that this is the hardest thing he has to do. He runs a ski school open 9-9 every day.

Dick Dunning asked the board to entertain a motion to instruct the Superintendent to look at a one tier bus system

Dan Harper moved to request that the Superintendent look into a one tier bus system. Janine Lesser seconded.

A one tier bus system to allow adjusting school start time would mean one bus route K-12.

Unanimous.

Questions around the report should be brought to Tuesday's meeting. We have discussed what is needed to be done with schools for students and taxpayers. Dick Dunning said that he has heard from all sides and has great appreciation for the small schools. He shared his experience. The value of the school cannot be overlooked, but the greatest opportunities to learn cannot be lost. In his experience, that we have never had a foreign language program K-12 is a crime. We have to be able to make discussions that are good for all. He understands the compassion and the conflict. We have to listen, and we have. We have changed direction and need to look at the bigger picture and look at what is best for all students and all taxpayers and how we adjust getting the input from communities to address their concerns. The voice of the democracy is important. The voice from the community will be a clear sign. It is critical that this board hear from all taxpayers, not just parents. We need to be sensitive to the costs. He spoke about the potential of a default budget and the impact it would have. He said that Fran Chapman used to say that we will soon be at \$60M, and we soon will. We have to be sensitive to taxpayers. He asked the board to think about what it is that will help us to be successful and from parents about their needs. He commended parents for being civil and respectful. It speaks to ConVal.

4. Other

Jim Fredrickson asked the board to write a sample warrant article if you are thinking about one. If one is not a vision, simply share that.

5. Public Comment

John Wood, Dublin, said that the founder and CEO of Under Armor said that trust is lost in buckets and gained in drops. He has witnessed that this is the most discussion that he has seen. It is uplifting to listen to the discussion. He asked that this discussion continue in public. We want to hear differences of opinion. It is healthy to have the conversation.

Mr. Wood said that an advisory warrant article was mentioned on Monday night. When he referenced a legal conversation, it was simply to learn more about what it means. The community has given a clear path of what they want to see. This report does not satisfy what has already been passed.

Christopher Yonker, Dublin, shared his surprise about the conclusion. He heard that there was a majority to wait and that the community was not ready. The housing study should be looked at.

Kari Higley, Dublin, said that the survey questions were not satisfied with answers. She shared appreciation that time to hear from the community was noted. She would like to learn. She is not in favor of the proposal. She asked that a tangible plan be developed. She said that she is terrified.

Jesse Marcum, Dublin, said that he supports this board. During COVID he was impressed with what this district did. We were very fortunate. He said that he hears that advocates need to be heard from and he will step up to that call. He puts faith in the board.

Dick Dunning, said that as a School Board, we are proud to share that the Superintendent is New Hampshire Superintendent of the Year for 2023. It speaks to Kimberly's leadership during the lawsuit and during COVID. She represents the community well.

6. Non-Public Session: RSA 91-A: 3, II

None.

7. Adjourn

William Bryk motioned to adjourn at 8:26 p.m. Katherine Heck seconded. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Marschok