

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE  
March 2, 2016  
MINUTES**

The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law requires minutes for all school committee and subcommittee meetings. The recorded minutes are open to the public for inspection within 10 days of the meeting. Minutes recorded provide a brief overview that reflects the subject matter discussed and any decisions made. If any motions are made clearly state the motion and indicate who made the motion and who seconded the motion. Record who was in favor, opposed, or abstained. The names of any person(s) appearing before the committee are to be indicated.

**Date:** Wednesday, March 2, 2016      **Time:** 6:00 p.m.      **Place:** Superintendent's Conference Room, Mohawk

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Kate Barrows [Colrain], Karen Blom [Buckland], Willow Cohen [MTRSD School Committee], Susan Mitchell [MDEA], David Newell [Ashfield], Edwin Reynolds [Hawlemont School Committee]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont], Martha Thurber [MTRSD School Committee], and Lark Thwing [MTRSD School Committee]

**Committee Members Not in Attendance:** Mick Comstock [Heath], Kim Orzechowski [Hawley], John Payne [Shelburne],

**School Committee Members in Attendance:** Glenn Cardinal [Buckland]

**School Administration:** Michael Buoniconti [MTRSD Superintendent], Karen Totman [MTRSD Secretary]

**Others in Attendance:** Paul Cohen [Shelburne]; Ken Campbell [Buckland]

**Documents:**

March 2, 2016, Agenda  
February 24, 2016 Strategic Planning Steering Committee Draft Minutes  
February 24, 2016 Email from Andrew Baker  
8 Recommendations for the Mohawk District Strategic Planning Group – Andrew Baker  
Sustainable Schools: Recommendations for the Mohawk Trail Regional School District  
Solutions in Sustainability: How to Insure the Long-Term Sustainability for Public Education Within the Mohawk Trail Regional School District  
Rural School Consolidation Report  
Revised Draft Statement of Purpose  
Blueprint for Action  
FY 17 Single-Family Tax Bills: Memo to the Ashfield Finance Committee

**Call to Order:** Martha Thurber called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

**Review and Accept the Minutes of the February 24, 2016 Meeting:**

On a motion by Susan Mitchell, seconded by Willow Cohen, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee voted to approve minutes from its February 24, 2016, meeting. Michael Buoniconti, Edwin Reynolds and Lark Thwing abstained.

**Citizen Comments:** Citizen comments were recognized throughout the meeting.

**Introductions**

Because several additional members had joined the group, Committee members again introduced themselves and provided a bit of background.

### **Re-naming the Strategic Planning Effort:**

The Committee discussed the need to have a more dynamic name and several ideas were presented. With no idea gaining broad support, it was agreed that potential names would be solicited from community members, teachers and Mohawk students as well as additional suggestions from Committee members. Martha Thurber emphasized the importance of doing this quickly so that the name could be used consistently in media and community relations.

### **Finalize Subgroups – Focus, Chairs and Next Steps:**

Discussion then turned to how best to divide the multiple tasks facing the Committee. Lark Thwing noted the importance of the work being done locally in several towns (Heath and Colrain). The Heath Educational Task Force has regularly published its activities on its website. Mr. Thwing asked for an update on the activities of the Colrain group. Kate Barrows reported that the Colrain task force has discussed not only educational options but also the inter-related factors of economic development, the “marketing” of local communities as great places to live and the value of local schools to their communities. She will keep the Committee updated on Colrain’s efforts.

Martha Thurber noted the importance of the Committee’s showing some progress in its efforts to District towns by early May (town meeting season). While having a final plan by then is not possible, the Committee needs to show solid progress toward short-term goals and a reasonable timetable for completing its recommendations. Referring to a “blueprint” of goals/tasks she prepared based for discussion at the last meeting, she suggested the Committees tasks could be divided into two broad areas: increasing/retaining revenues by attracting and retaining District students who currently choose to go to school outside the District; and by maximizing operational efficiencies.

The Committee then discussed creation of various subcommittees to pursue specific tasks. Glenn Cardinal suggested that the Committee seek to work with existing School Committee subcommittees wherever possible. After considerable discussion, the Committee agreed to form several subgroups, each to work with School Committee subcommittees where appropriate. Superintendent Buoniconti noted that he could best serve not as a member of specific subcommittees, but rather as a coordinator of District resources to all subcommittees. The subcommittees, areas of focus and composition agreed upon are as follows:

Education – To work closely with the Administrative Leadership Team to review the existing curriculum (focus and offerings) and adjust these as appropriate to align as well as possible with college and career opportunities as well as to attract and retain students: Kate Barrows and Martha Thurber

Communication/Community Outreach – To develop and implement a communications plan to engage local communities in the planning effort and to keep all constituencies informed of our activities and progress: Willow Cohen, Karen Blom, Sue Mitchell, Kim Orzechowski and Will Comstock. Community member Paul Cohen will also participate in the group’s efforts. This group will work closely with the School Committee’s Communications Subcommittee.

Revenue Enhancement/Fundraising – To work with the Administration and local community organizations to identify opportunities for grants, pilot project funding, and community fundraising to support Mohawk’s educational mission: Sue Mitchell, Sarah Reynolds

Facilities and Finance – To use demographic data, financial analysis and community impact assessments to determine the most efficient way to deliver educational opportunities to our students and the best ways to achieve that efficiency: Martha Thurber, John Payne, Lark Thwing. This group will work closely with the School Committee’s Budget and Buildings Subcommittees.

Transportation – To work with the Two-District Transportation Committee to assess both existing and potential alternative transportation options to minimize transportation expenses: David Newall and Erwin Reynolds.

It was agreed that in order to leverage resources and time, subcommittees would try to meet prior to the regular Committee meetings on Wednesday evenings from 6-7pm, then report to the full Committee at meetings starting at 7pm. Subcommittee meetings are open to the public.

The committee then discussed the need for the District to develop a plan to consistently and regularly survey families of students, beginning in grades 4, 5 and 6, to determine parents' future plans for educating their children (Mohawk, choice, charter, etc.); and to survey families of students that have left the District to understand why that choice was made. While some data is currently being gathered, it is not being collected and analyzed systematically. The Communications subcommittee will pursue this effort.

#### **Ideas for Community Outreach:**

The Communications subgroup will take the lead in this area. Among the ideas discussed:

- Holding Steering Committee meetings at each of the schools in the District. Principals will be specifically asked to attend meetings at their schools and to give Committee members a brief tour of the facilities.
- Holding open town forums in each town to get community feedback.
- Issuing press releases to local media relative to Committee meetings, forums, activities and actions.

Karen Blom and David Newall noted that it was important for the communities to know what the School Committee has done with respect to the recommendations of the Long-Range Planning Committee, made a year ago. Martha Thurber said she had prepared and sent to Committee members an assessment of progress made with respect to those recommendations, noting that much of what was recommended has been accomplished. This assessment will be posted on the Steering Committee website.

Martha Thurber informed the Committee that Ken Campbell has created a Google-based web page for the Committee and has already posted a variety of informational materials on the site (<https://sites.google.com/site/mohawkspsc/>). The Committee thanked Ken for his ongoing work on this important site.

#### **Target Schedule for Deliverables to the Communities:**

Martha Thurber again emphasized the need for the Committee to move as quickly as possible, with a goal of having solid progress to report to communities by the time of town meetings, particularly in areas, such as curriculum enhancement, fund-raising and family surveys, where work is already underway. She said it should be the Committee's goal to have one more final recommendation(s) before the start of the next budget season (November 2016). She also said that if the Committee had recommendations on issues that would require amending the Regional Agreement, she believed towns should be encouraged to hold Special Town Meetings focused solely on these matters rather than wait until the spring on 2017.

#### **Other:**

David Newall distributed an analysis he prepared for the Ashfield Finance Committee showing, among other things, the average value and average property tax bill for single-family properties in Franklin County, western Hampshire County and all towns within 12 miles of Ashfield. The average tax bill across all 36 towns is \$3,350 and across all eight current Mohawk District towns is \$3,461.

**Adjournment:** On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Willow Cohen, the Subcommittee voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

Submitted By: Martha Thurber

Next Meeting: March 16, 2016 at Buckland Shelburne Elementary in Shelburne Falls.