

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE
October 6, 2016**

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: October 6, 2016 **Time:** 6:00 p.m. **Place:** Superintendent's Conference Room - Mohawk

Committee Members in Attendance: Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Karen Blum [Buckland]; Mick Comstock [Heath]; Sue Mitchell [MDEA]; John Payne [Shelburne]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont] (arrived 7:00 pm); Leslie Rule [Mohawk SC – Plainfield]; Martha Thurber [Mohawk SC – Buckland]; and Lark Thwing [Mohawk SC – Hawley].

Committee Members Not in Attendance: David Newell [Ashfield]; Kim Orzechowski [Hawley]; Erwin Reynolds [Hawlemont]

School Committee Members in Attendance: Glenn Cardinal [Buckland]; Jason Cusimano [Shelburne]

School Administration: Superintendent Michael Buoniconti; Business Manager Mike Kociela

Others in Attendance: Emily Leue [Ashfield]

Documents:

October 6, 2016 Agenda

MTRSD Mohawk's BEST Committee Draft Minutes of September 21, 2016 and September 28, 2016 Meetings

Current Status of Restructuring Options—9/29/16

Call to Order: Martha Thurber called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Review and Accept the Minutes of the September 21, 2016 Meeting:

On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Sue Mitchell, the Committee voted to approve the minutes from the September 21, 2016 meeting. Karen Blum and Leslie Rule abstained.

Review and Accept the Minutes of the September 28, 2016 Meeting:

On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Sue Mitchell, the Committee voted to approve the minutes from the September 28, 2016 meeting. Karen Blum abstained.

Discussion of Scenarios:

There being no objection, the Committee re-ordered the agenda to consider Scenario #9 first, followed by Scenario #8 and Scenario #5.

Scenario #9 (Grades PK-2 as an Early Learning Center and Grades 3-5 at BSE)

Martha Thurber noted while staff had not been supportive of a stand-alone Grade PK-2 concept, there was support for an Early Learning Center idea under which there would specific curriculum and resources focused on the needs of younger students. She then noted that BSE was likely the only building with the capacity needed for all PK-2 (an estimated 339 based on today's enrollment). Sanderson, or potentially Colrain Central, have sufficient capacity for Grades 3-8 (estimated at 208), but no room for growth, if needed. John Payne asked about current capacity at the Mohawk complex, noting that he had heard that Mohawk had 1,500 students at its peak. Superintendent Buoniconti (and several former Mohawk students) disputed that number. The Superintendent said that a walk-through of the buildings had resulted in an estimated capacity of 1,000, based on a maximum of 25 students per classroom. He also noted that it was unrealistic to assume that every classroom could be utilized

to maximum capacity, given variability in class (grade) sizes and the number of students taking any particular course at the high school level. Further, there would be a need for substantial renovations to accommodate younger students and keep them physically separate from older students at all times.

This led to a discussion of whether it might be possible to house Grades 4-12 at Mohawk (approximately 600 students). Doing so would necessarily be a multi-step process of integration (and potential renovations). What would be parent reaction?

Discussion then returned specifically to Scenario #9. Martha Thurber noted that analysis by Robin Pease (Mohawk Facilities Manager who also oversees transportation) indicated that transportation costs likely would be higher (than at present) under this scenario, because of the need to transport some elementary students further. Time on bus may also become a concern, depending upon where Heath students are enrolled. Mick Comstock noted that the Heath Task Force was meeting concurrently with this meeting, at which time that group would discuss some representatives' recent meeting with DESE about short-term "bridge" possibilities for transitioning Heath students to other facilities.

Scenario #8 (All grades PK-5 at BSE, including building addition)

The group then turned to a discussion of Scenario #8, which would require space at BSE for approximately 547 students, versus a current capacity of 350. Key advantages of this scenario include much better operating and staffing efficiencies, as well as better opportunities for sharing of necessary resources. One of the key cost issues would be transportation. Robin Pease's preliminary analysis indicated that basic transportation costs would be higher as elementary students would be transported further and there could be time on bus issues if Heath students were to go to BSE. Adjusting opening/closing schedules at BSE and Mohawk such that all students could be picked up in a single run could result in some savings, if all students could be accommodated on the existing number of contracted buses. However, the largest savings would be in fuel rather than personnel, since the current bus contracts provides for a 2-hour minimum for all drivers, regardless of actual time spent. Martha Thurber noted that safety/security for younger students on buses would need to be addressed through bus monitors or reliable parents (paid a stipend), potentially reducing overall savings.

Jason Cusimano said he had asked a friend who is an architect and well familiar with BSE about the idea of adding on to the existing school; the response was that, given BSE's age and existing issues, it would be far better to build a new school on adjacent land, then remove the existing buildings. The group then discussed whether Sanderson might be a more appropriate facility for potential enlargement. Lark Thwing noted the wetlands issues involved in the vacant land around Sanderson, as well as time on bus issues for transporting students from Heath and parts of Colrain to Ashfield. He also noted the issue of needing to repay all MSBA funding on existing facilities as a prerequisite for getting additional MSBA funding for new construction. Attorney Russell Dupere had told the Committee that when the Gateway District recently closed three schools and received MSBA funding to construct a new, consolidated school, that District was required not only to pay off existing mortgages, but also to return a significant portion of the original MSBA grant funding for the closed facilities. According to information provided by Business Manager Mike Kociela, outstanding MSBA financing on BSE and Colrain could thus require repayment of \$660,519. Martha Thurber asked whether this amount could be refinanced as part of the overall financing package for renovations. Mr. Kociela will ask the District's financial advisers to provide their thoughts.

Scenario #5 (All grades on Mohawk campus)

The Committee then re-opened the discussion of Scenario #5, which would put all (currently) 1,014 students on the Mohawk campus, including construction of a new elementary school. This scenario allows for maximum operating and staffing efficiencies and resources sharing. In addition, all towns share in the "pain" of losing local schools and there is an opportunity to create a true Early Learning Center within the new building that potentially could attract students from outside the District. The transportation issues would be essentially the same as those for Scenario #8, as would the MSBA financing issues. Mike Kociela will do additional work on potential project costs and will arrange for the District's financial advisers to provide input on financing options and costs to towns.

Transportation Implications:

Transportation implications were discussed within the context of each Scenario.

Other:

None

Citizen Comment:

Citizen comments were encouraged throughout the meeting.

Adjournment: On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Sue Mitchell, the Committee voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Submitted By: Martha Thurber

Next Meetings: Thursday, October 13 at 6:00pm at Mohawk and Wednesday, October 19 at 6:30 pm at Mohawk.