**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**MOHAWK’S BEST FACILITIES AND FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE**

**July 20, 2016**

**DRAFT 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, July 20, 2016 **Time:** 6:00p.m. **Place:** Superintendent’s Conference Room at Mohawk

**Committee Members in Attendance:** John Payne, Martha Thurber and Lark Thwing

**Committee Members Not in Attendance:**  None

**School Committee Members in Attendance:**  Glenn Cardinal, Joe Kurland, Nina Martin-Anzuoni

**School Administration:** Superintendent Michael Buoniconti, Business Administrator Mike Kociela; Principal Amy Looman [Colrain], Principal Joanne Giguere [BSE], Curriculum Coordinator K-6 Rachel Porter

**Others in Attendance:** Sue Mitchell [BEST – MDEA]; Kendra Canaday [Colrain]; Rob Riggin [Buckland BOS]; Kevin Fox [Buckland BOS]; Kate Barrows [BEST – Colrain]; Suzanne Taylor [Ashfield]; Jan Jones [Colrain]; Rachel Glick [Colrain]; Joe Judd [Shelburne BOS]; Cameron Graves [West County Independent]; Diane Broucaccio [Greenfield Recorder]; Lynn Kelsey [Buckland]; Jason Cusimano [Shelburne]; Carolyn Giard [Colrain].

**Documents:**

July 20, 2016, Agenda

July 12, 2016 Draft Mohawk’s BEST Facilities & Finance Subcommittee Minutes

**Call to Order:** Lark Thwing called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Citizen Comment:**

Citizen comments were welcome throughout the meeting.

**Review 4 Colrain Central School Scenarios:**

1. **Status Quo**
2. **Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 2**
3. **Pre-Kindergarten Only**
4. **Move Colrain Central School to a ‘School within a School’ at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary**

**Review Building Consolidation Scenarios Proposed to Date and Current Status:**

1. **Buckland-Shelburne Elementary Pre-K – Grade 5; Sanderson Academy, Colrain Central School Heath Elementary School Pre-K – Grade 2; Mohawk Middle/High School Grades 6-12**
2. **Buckland-Shelburne Elementary and Sanderson Academy Pre-K – Grade 5; Colrain Central School and Heath Elementary School Pre-K Only; Mohawk Middle/High School Grades 6-12**
3. **Buckland-Shelburne Elementary and Sanderson Academy Pre-K – Grade 5; Colrain Central School Pre-K Only; Mohawk Trail Middle/High School – Grades 6-12; Heath Elementary School joins Hawlemont at Pre-K – Grade 6 with 7-12 Grades at Mohawk Middle/High School**
4. **Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School Pre-K – Grade 5; Sanderson Academy and Colrain Central School Pre-2; Mohawk Middle/High School Grades 6-12; Heath Elementary School joins Hawlemont at Pre-K – Grade 6 with 7-12 Grades at Mohawk Middle/High School**
5. **New Central Pre-K – Grade 5 School at Mohawk; Mohawk Middle/High School Grades 6-12**
6. **Colrain Central School, Heath Elementary School and Sanderson Academy Pre-K – Grade 5; Buckland-Shelburne School Pre-K – Grade 6 and District-wide Grade 6-8 Middle School; Mohawk Trail Middle/High School Grades 9-12**
7. **Discuss new Building Consolidation Scenarios and Scenarios to drop:**

Lark Thwing opened the meeting with a presentation that briefly outlined the goals of BEST and the current issues situation facing the District. The presentation then reviewed each of six scenarios that have been or remain under review by the BEST Finance & Facilities Subcommittee, the pros and cons of each scenario, and the projected savings each represented over the District’s current FY17 budget. Subcommittee members and other attendees then discussed issues and opportunities presented by each scenario. Main topics and key points included:

***Moving 6th Grade to Mohawk –***

John Payne asked the Principals present for their thoughts on moving 6th grade to Mohawk. Joanne Giguere (BSE) said that she believes many of her students would be ready to be part of a middle school, but noted that her school has larger classes and more students than smaller schools in the District. Amy Looman (Colrain Central) said it really depended on the child, but most of her students, she believed, were ready by mid-year of the 6th grade. Both noted the educational advantages of having 6th graders exposed to more specialized instruction earlier. Joanne Giguere said her school is moving toward the Mohawk Middle School model (more hands-on learning, more integration of SPED students, etc.). Martha Thurber noted that another factor in favor of moving 6th grade to Mohawk was to engage 6th graders in all Mohawk has to offer, hopefully making it less likely that they and their families will choose a charter or choice alternative in Grade 7, a time when many families make such a decision.

***Pre-K Configurations***

There was significant discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of having only a pre-K program in local schools. Amy Looman noted the many benefits of having higher-grade children interact with pre-K students through “buddy” programs and reading periods. Lark Thwing asked what parents value more: having pre-K close to home or having a more robust program farther away. For a number of parents the issue is location of the pre-K, either close to home or close to work or work-related routes. Several people suggested that BEST eliminate scenarios that envision keeping only pre-K in a school.

***Timing of Scenario Implementation***

A discussion of adding a timeline to the presentation materials led to a discussion of the pros and cons of an “all at once” versus a “transition” to the implementation of whatever scenario BEST ultimately proposes. Martha Thurber noted that all options would require changes to the existing Regional Agreement and, thus, approval by voters in all District towns. One suggestion that appeared to have solid support was to move gradually, beginning with the migration of 6th grade to Mohawk (a factor common to all scenarios currently under review), and perhaps then moving one grade per year from smaller schools larger schools. Joanne Giguere suggested the concept of having a “school within a school” as a transition step, noting this had worked very well a few years ago when Charlemont children had to be moved into BSE for an extended period. Children from a town could be kept together by grade level in the same classroom, but share all other activities with all students.

***Finances and Citizen/Town Input***

Rachel Glick asked how much saving was ”enough” to bring the District to sustainability? Superintendent Buoniconti said the goal is to operate as efficiently as possible, keeping costs down but not so much as to affect the quality of education. Principal Giguere asked if Heath chose to leave the District, would that be enough to retain other schools as they are currently. Mr. Thwing said that scenario had not been modeled. Superintendent asked for town officials in the room to talk about what they believe their towns want – to cut as much as possible as fast as possible, or to move more slowly and assess the impacts. Joe Judd (Shelburne Select Board) he felt the work BEST was doing was what was needed. He did not favor doing everything all at once, but moving progressively. With respect to budgeting, he suggested starting with a 0% increase, seeing what that looks like and adding from there. He noted discussion of a “level services” budget last year helped clarify what were fixed cost increases and what costs were added above that. Several people suggested doing some type of survey of townspeople to see whether they were willing to pay more in taxes to finance education. Lynn Kelsey asked why the “climate survey” recently completed by the District had not included citizen input. Superintendent Buoniconti said the cost would have been double and that including townspeople would have taken several additional months. The District decided to go ahead with surveying staff, students and parents, then assess whether using this survey for citizen feedback would be useful. Nina Martin-Anzuoni said people only get involved when they are worried or upset. Word of mouth communication from people who attend BEST meeting to friends and family is the best way to involve more people in BEST’s strategic planning process. Joe Kurland noted that the scenario information to date did not include analysis of the impact on town assessments. While costs would be lower if Heath left the District, would assessments be lower, given that Heath would no longer be contributing.

***Colrain Central School***

A number of Colrain parents and Principal Amy Looman spoke against keeping CCS as a pre-K only school. Nina Martin-Anzuoni spoke of trying to use a portion of the CCS building for some sort of use involving seniors as a way to re-use available space. Colrain parent Kendra Canaday argued that if Colrain lost CCS, it would lose the heart of the community. Joe Kurland noted that renovation of the school for another use could backfire if population increased in the future and more school space were needed.

**New Building Consolidation Scenarios and Scenarios to Drop/Next Steps**

Based on feedback from this meeting, the Subcommittee agreed to discuss this input with the full BEST Committee and to:

1. Put pre-K only scenarios (Scenarios #2 and #3) on hold for now.

2. Analyze more deeply all other scenarios (#1, #3-A and #4), adding such elements as transportation, building operations and town assessments.

3. Analyze a new scenario (#7) that assumes Heath leaves the District and pre-K-5 is retained in the remaining elementary schools.

4. Consider in greater depth the notion of transitioning to the desired option(s) rather than proposing all changes be made all at once.

* Begin with adding 6th grade to Mohawk, potentially for FY18, then transitioning one or more elementary grades per year.
* Consider/model the “school within a school” concept for transitioning elementary students.
* Add a potential timeline to presentation materials.

5. Add optimal student counts for lower elementary, upper elementary, Middle School and High School to presentation materials.

**Other:** None

**Set next meeting Date and Agenda:**

**Adjournment:** On a motion by John Payne, seconded by Martha Thurber, the Subcommittee voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Submitted By: Martha Thurber

Next Meeting: