Regional Agrement Working Group

Jan 7, 2015 7PM

Professional Development Center

Amherst Regional Middle School, Amherst MA

Attendance:

Kip Fonsh, Jeff Eiseman, Mark Santos, Trevor Baptiste, Elaine Puleo, Michael DeChiara, Becky Torres,

Julie Shively, Ann Delano, Alisa Brewer, Andy Steinberg

Also present: David Singer (facilitator), Maria Geryk (superintendent), members of the public

Agenda

**1. Review of Agenda**

**2. Public Comment -**

Mary Lou Thielman – The forum in Amherst is scheduled to be only 2 hrs long and isn’t enough. Working Group states this is only a draft of timeline and will be modified and will allow as much time as necessary

Janet McGowen – Amherst Resident stated that there was a promise of forums to be held throughout the process and that didn’t happen and she’s upset that no input was sought.

**3. Review of draft of report to Regional School Committee** – Andy presented that there are 4 issues that need to be discussed. They are as follows:

A. Minutes from Sept 30 were not voted on thus we do not have agreement on the following

|  |
| --- |
| It was agreed that the Regional School Committee will be required to have a 2/3 vote of its members to initiate process to amend the regional agreement.   It was agreed that the Regional School Committee will be required to have 8 votes to close a school and to hire, fire or renew a contract for a superintendent.   No other actions of the RSC, except those noted in … |

We’re not sure if this was agreed on being 2/3 or 8 for hiring, firing or renewing of the superintendent.

**Michael** made a **motion** to have 2/3 of the RSC to vote in favor in hiring of the superintendent. **Elaine seconded**.

Discussion:

Jeff supported this. Alisa wants to know if 8 or 9 is a supermajority which is what we had agreed on.

Dan Hayes, Shutesbury School Committee suggested we go with a number not a term.

Trevor would like a number vs. 2/3 but we discussed how the RSC would possibly change in numbers based on which towns are in the region at the full preK-12 level.

Andy – Amherst has trouble with the term “supermajority”.

Jeff: This is less about whether it’s Amherst plus 1 rather that the superintendent has the support necessary to work

Kip called the question Julie seconded. Unanimous :Question called

**9 voted in favor, 2 abstain**

Michael wants to know if we want to revisit the question of having 8 votes required to close a school also. Kip discourages changes to what we have already decided on.

**B. Two votes**: Discussion need regarding timing of vote 2.

Do we want to vote “not to participate” or “To participate” then also a question of timing:

We could wait for a second fall special town meeting to have the second vote.

Michael: votes should both be taken at the same time. Kip: both votes the same day

**Julie made a motion** that both votes be taken at the same time at the same meeting.

**Kip – seconded**.

Kip – provides good time frame for RSC, gives supt. more time to prepare and plan for the new region if passed, it’s incumbent upon the 3 town members of this committee to engage the public in forums to disseminate information. Also gives Lev & Sh time to get out of Union 28

Becky supports being more concise time-wise to give Union 28 issue as much time as possible. We haven’t spent any time on this discussion

**10 voted in favor 1 opposed no abstentions**

Kip made a motion that the second vote be expressed as an affirmative vote to join the preK-12 region

Jeff seconded

**11 voted in favor**

**C. Can 3 small towns opt out?** We all agreed that only 2 towns could opt out. But what happens to Union 26 if Amherst opts into the new region and Pelham doesn’t. We’re just going to leave it as is.

**Michael made a motion** that at least 2 towns have to participate, one being Amherst for the regional agreement to be amended.

**Kip seconded**

Andy; Then Amherst doesn’t have to take 2 votes if the amendment package passes.

**11 voted in favor**

Public members were leaving so Trevor took this opportunity to make an announcement to say that

we can have information disseminated to and from the Supt. on her Twitter account.

**D. Change in School use function**; This was all geared towards the Supt. making the decision not the RSC. Gini Tate says there is no law to distinguish between change in school use and school use closing. This brings up the question about whose decision was this. The language proposed in the report and in the Table appendix chart – see attached. This language has NOT been adopted by our committee and therefore needs to be discussed.

Julie is proposing that the following language be adopted and be in the regional agreement –

The RAWG recommends that the Regional Agreement include a specific process similar to that suggested for school closings. The process would begin with a study of the proposed action. The study would be conducted at least one year in advance of announcing that the option to change use is being considered. The announcement would be triggered by either a vote of the RSC or the superintendent’s notifying the RSC. Under extraordinary circumstances this timeline could be amended. The study should include:

• A fiscal analysis to determine the effect on the regional school budget and assessments to member towns

• A study of the educational options and the impact on the school in question and the region as a whole

• An analysis of population trends in light of a change in use

• At least 2 public hearings to be held in the town whose school is subject to such a change in use; one hearing before the study and one before a decision is made If the decision to change the use of the school will be made by the School Committee, the RAWG recommends that the process include additional requirements to make it similar to a decision to close a school.

Full discussion pursued centering around whether just the superintendent had the power to make the decision or if the RSC could also do this. A clear process could be put in the regional agreement.

Michael made the point that we shouldn’t call this change in school use because that term is specific to change in use of the school building by MSBA.

**Kip made a motion** that RAWG recommend the language (as above in yellow) be adopted in the regional agreement.

**Michael seconded**

Note that the only sentence that changes is the 4th sentence. The ultimate decision is the school committees but this helps untie the hands of the supt to start the process.

Ann called the question, Julie seconded. Unanimous to call question

**9 voted in favor 2 opposed no abstentions**

**E. Method to assess costs in the event that one or more towns do not participate at the preK-12 level**

Both this question and the 5 year rolling average assessment formula are in question. We adopted the Mohawk Region current language

Andy made the motion to approve the language written as follows

Becky seconded

The apportionment of operating costs shall be determined in accordance with the following procedure:

First: The Committee shall determine the proportion of the annual budget representing costs associated with the provisions of services to grades seven through twelve and the proportion representing costs associated with all other services including services to grades kindergarten through six.

Second: The Committee shall determine the average enrollment share of each member town in grades seven through twelve, inclusive. For this purpose, average enrollment share shall equal, for each member town, its five-year average proportionate share of total student enrollment in the district schools for grades seven through twelve, as of October 1 in each of the five years immediately preceding the year for which such allocation is to be made.

Third: The Committee shall apportion costs of grades seven through twelve, inclusive, to the Towns that decide to only participate in the Region for grades 7 through 12 in direct proportion to each town’s five-year average share of student enrollment in grades seven through twelve, inclusive.

Fourth: The total budget, less the shares allocated to the Towns that decide to only participate in the Region for grades 7 through 12, shall be apportioned among the district’s six remaining member towns on the basis of each member town’s five-year average student enrollment share. For purposes of this calculation, average enrollment share, for each of the K-12 Member Towns shall be based on its five year average proportionate share of total student enrollment in the district schools.

**11 voted in favor**

Further discussion of the document RAWG Agreements – Table appendix for RSC report

Alisa wants to delete the word supermajority because it does not give a solid definition. Julie wants them changed to 2/3 in every case. Julie wants to also change the “8” to be 2/3. Jeff is strongly against this because we were compromising with Amherst members who wanted it to be a majority vote.

So #3 needs to be amended:

**Michael made the motion** that the vote following the study and public hearing, to decide about closing a school must be 8.

**Kip seconded**

**10 voted in favor 1 against no abstentions**

**More discussion:** Does column 2 in this document remain in when this goes to the School Committee or does it get deleted?

**Kip made the motion** to include column 2 in this document as amended tonight and add a 4th column that will reference the relevant paragraph in the current agreement

**Julie seconded**

Andy suggested that we need to make this is clear for the RSC – wherever there is clear indication as to where this is in the current agreement, it can have that provision referenced. – add a column to do this.

**11 voted in favor**

**5. Consider provisions to recommend for an amended Regional Agreement**

**Kip made the motion** that RAWG approve sending the report to the RSC as amended tonight

**Julie seconded**

**Jeff moved to table this motion, Becky seconded**

**11 voted in favor**

**Becky made the motion** to amend the 4th paragraph of the Report to the Regional School Committee to remove the words “and current members of the” in the second line.

**Jeff seconded**

**11 voted in favor**

**Becky made the motion** that on page 8 Paragraph 2 “The RAWG calculations assume that the obligation to retirees…will remain with the town ” be enhanced to specify that new regional employees retirement OPEB obligation and the portion of current employees moving into the new region retirement OPEB obligation be assumed by the region

**Ann seconded**

**11 voted in favor**

**Kip made the motion** moved that any references to supermajority be changed to reflect the amendments made in the RAWG Agreement Table appendix for RSC report

**Mark seconded**

**11 voted in favor**

**Alisa made the motion** that the accompanying document current referenced on page 2 paragraph 3 be named Appendix A and be referring to the current “RAWG Agreements that serve as basis for recommendations to the Regional School Committee”

**Becky seconded**

**11 voted in favor**

Becky suggested:

Page 2 paragraph 4 last sentence remove the work “support

Page 4 paragraph 5 6th line “School committee position could only filled’ be replaced by School committee position could only be filled”

Becky moved that we include the document “Comparisons of region structure” be included in the document as Appendix B

Ann seconded

**11 voted in favor**

**Ann moved** to take Kip’s motion off the table

**Julie seconded**

**11 voted in favor**

Vote on Kip’s motion

**11 voted in favor**

**6. Information from Trevor and Maria about the next steps**

30 minutes of the RSC meeting on Jan 13th at 6PM be devoted to the elevator pitch as this document goes to the school committee. Then information will be collected and a public forum (Feb 10, 2015) will be held with the RSC asking questions of the RAWG. Potentially David will chair this meeting. Then there will be a final meeting of the RSC to vote on the amendments. Between the last 2 meetings, each town should have separate forums. See the draft timeline presented to the committee – Maria presented this. Maria will contact the regional school committee representative in each of the 3 smaller towns to determine a good time for the forum in each town. Kip requested having it on Monday Feb 2nd. in their town school committee meeting.

Alisa thinks that Gini’s document MUST be completed at least 2 weeks before the first forum.

Maria will let everyone on the RAWG know when the forums are so they can attend.

Michael asked that the RSC officially dissolve the RAWG on Jan 13th.

**7. 3 sets of minutes need to be approved**

**Elaine moves** to approve Aug 18th minutes

**Ann seconded**

**10 voted in favor**

**Jeff moved** that we approve the Sep 30th minutes with the exception that they were amended tonight

**Ann seconded**

**7 voted in favor 3 abstained**

**Jeff moved** that we approve the Sep 30th minutes with the exception that they were amended tonight

**Ann seconded**

**8 voted in favor 2 abstained**

Agreement was that we have gotten to a momentous occasion and we should be proud.

And, we acknowledged David’s effort to hang with us even as he suffered through hard personal times.

Thank you all!!!!!!!