

District Elementary Enrollment Committee
Wednesday, July 20, 2005
Humiston Building, Meredith
4:00 p.m.

Members present: Richard Hanson, Peter Miller, John Hansen, Phil McCormack, Steve Kelley, Jeanne Chute, Juli Hird.

Others present: Trish Temperino, Susan Mitchel, Carroll Bewley

Meeting called to order at 4:20 p.m.

Public input: None

Dr. McCormack noted that Mr. Miller raised a concern about the enrollment projections handed out at the last meeting. There was a wide-ranging discussion about enrollment projections and census data that the towns did and did not collect.

Ms. Hird noted that we need to know more about the financial impact of a special village district, what formulas are involved, what the process would be to pursue it, and more information on the advantages of a special district to the ILSD and the Town of Sandwich.

Dr. McCormack handed out Inter-Lakes School District *School Enrollment Projections (Prepared 6/8/05)*. There is no sure way to project enrollments, but the trend certainly shows a gradual decline in enrollment since 1999, and thus the projections reflect that trend.

Mr. Miller said the Meredith Planning Board commissioned a study to look at the impact on the schools caused by a new development. The projection for Waukevan condominiums was that it would add 3/10ths of one school age child per unit. If sixty units are built, there might be an increase of 18 students. The demonstration model is now open and it is thought that the builder will move quickly to build all the units.

Dr. McCormack stated that although the enrollment projections go out ten years, one shouldn't trust the projections much beyond five years, as we just don't know what development will happen.

Attorney Barbara Loughman joined the meeting at 4:30 p.m. She handed out some copies of the legislation regarding the Bridgewater-Hebron Special Village District.

Mr. Miller stated that there are some critical values that are in collision. This committee is trying to find some sort of golden mean among the things that are in collision. We have a school, Sandwich Central School, that is the cornerstone and an extremely significant part of that community. Staffing has bounced around over the years; there has not been much consistency or predictability. We are trying to find some consistency and

predictability over time. Lastly, there are financial implications for both Sandwich and the entire school district.

Mr. Miller continued with a question to Attorney Loughman asking whether there is a mechanism that exists for Sandwich to pay for a staffing pattern above and beyond what the school district perceives to be equitable within the ILSD.

Attorney Loughman said one way to do this is to establish a Sandwich Special Village District. You could establish a class size threshold above which the Special Village District would pick up additional financial obligation. What are the triggering events and how do you enforce the collection of the additional funds are two important questions.

Dr. McCormack asked whether someone could challenge the current ILSD cooperative agreement in regards to funding formulas. Attorney Loughman said the other possibility is to look at the cooperative funding formula to see if there is something that you could do it that would address this special issue. Mr. Hansen asked Attorney Loughman if she was familiar with the Fall Mountain Regional District in which the cooperative formula assigns the cost of each town's elementary school to that town, but shares the costs of the high school at the same 50-50 percentages the ILSD uses now. Attorney Loughman noted that many existing cooperatives have articles of agreement that require an elementary school be maintained in each town. You could amend your articles of agreement to provide for this, and also tie strings to it. You may need special legislation no matter what you do, but that (special legislation) is not that difficult.

Dr. McCormack noted that once the door is open to discuss the funding formula, or cost of operating a school, might other situations develop that we have not considered? Attorney Loughman said this could certainly happen, but any change requires a majority of the Cooperative voters to agree.

Mr. Hanson was glad that Attorney Loughman pointed out the differences in changing the apportionment schedule. At least with the village district, it will only be a vote of the Sandwich voters.

Attorney Loughman pointed out one hypothetical problem: what happens if you get to annual meeting of the Special Village District and the village voters vote not to appropriate the funds needed to maintain the school or small class sizes.

Mr. Miller noted that there is a need to identify a trigger. The school board would need a policy regarding minimum class size. Let's say that the staff of SCS and the voters has agreed that the staffing should be above and beyond what the school board formula has established. If it were the case, in any given year, that the voters would not be willing to pick up the cost, then the school would have to get by with the staffing formula dictated by the school board.

Attorney Loughman noted that if the ILSD went in the direction of a Special Village District, the legislation should mandate that Sandwich's special district meeting occur by

January 31st. This is necessary for the school board to know how much has been allocated towards its budget. January 31 is also necessary in case the Inter-Lakes School District ever goes to Senate Bill 2 status.

Dr. McCormack asked for clarification on how a Special Village District would be created. It was his understanding that the voters of Sandwich would have to decide to go the Special Village District route. The initial decision should be Sandwich's. If the people of Sandwich are not willing to do this, then it is a moot point.

Attorney Loughman agreed, saying that the voters of Sandwich should vote on it first with the caveat that legislative approval would be necessary.

Mr. Bewley asked what the legal requirements are to hold a meeting to create a village district. Attorney Loughman said the selectman warn an organizational meeting for a special district. Attorney Loughman said it might be a good idea for the committee or the school district to lay the groundwork for this process, though it depends what the selectmen, school board, and our local legislators want to do.

Attorney Loughman offered one idea on wording: The purpose of the Special Village District is to raise and appropriate money to supplement the ILSD budget to provide for staffing that would not otherwise be provided.

Mr. Miller asked what if the school was to operate with a multi-age philosophy. Can that fit with what we're talking about? Attorney Loughman said she thought it could. But how are we going to resolve the fact that it is ultimately the responsibility of the Inter-Lakes School Board to staff the school, she pondered?

Dr. Kelley asked where does that end, with crafting language? What about foreign language, gifted and talented programs, etc.? Dr. McCormack pondered how someone could manipulate the special district in a way not anticipated by the intent of the ILSD.

Mr. Hanson commented that how the Special Village District is tailored will limit the abuses that could happen. A mild concern he expressed also, would be what would happen if the special district allocated money based on enrollment projections, but then the enrollment changed up or down?

Attorney Loughman asked whether we wanted different towns adding different programs at the schools. The purpose of the special district isn't to add additional programs, but to maintain the current program.

Committee members raised a number of hypothetical considerations, and Attorney Loughman offered hypothetical solutions and answers.

One approach would be to treat the appropriation from the Special Village District as a special warrant article – if not spent for the specific purpose it is allocated for, then it can't be spent and would go back to the village.

Mr. Bewley noted that both sides would have to approach this idea with a reasonable stance on how to craft the agreement.

Mr. Miller felt that the trigger for cutting staff in the single grade model is somewhat clear, based on board policy in effect or amended. He worries about what the trigger would be with multi-age philosophy. What is an acceptable class size for a multi-age class?

Dr. McCormack agreed that there have to be some very well defined criteria for triggers.

Mr. Miller said that the Board would be challenged if the school follows a multi-age philosophy, to establish a maximum class size.

Attorney Loughman spoke of the possibly having a special village meeting later instead of earlier. If the village meeting were held after the School District meeting, then legislation would be needed to allow the ILSD to receive money and expend it after the operating budget had been adopted.

Dr. McCormack asked what the timeline is to establish a Special Village District. Attorney Loughman responded that it's not something that would happen before next fall. It's going to depend first on whether in the opinion of the legislator you have sponsor legislation if he/she wants to see voter approval first or after the legislature. The selectmen then call an organizational meeting with 30 days notice and at that meeting, a Special Village District can be approved or not. A petition from ten voters (see RSA chapter 52). The voters then choose officers that hold office until the first annual meeting. (Note: Legislation for the 2006 General Court can be filed between September 6 and September 23, 2005).

It was discussed and agreed that the DEEC is not the group to approach a legislator about a Special Village District. Mr. Bewley noted that he would like to see the committee's recommendation to the school board before expending a huge amount of effort on a Special Village District.

Dr. McCormack asked what the committee wants for an agenda for next meeting. Mr. Hansen asked that the committee look more closely at the multi-age solutions and what limits we would propose for class sizes. Dr. McCormack noted that someone had asked that financial information be considered. Mr. Miller said he was the one that had brought up the financial questions, but feels that they can wait at this point in time. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, August 17, 2005 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Humiston Building in Meredith.

Plus/delta: Mr. Hansen feels that what we heard this afternoon addresses many of the major concerns, even if some solutions are not within our purview. I see some possible solutions and feel good. Mr. Miller agreed with Mr. Hansen. Mr. Hansen had trouble following the flow of the discussion, as many ideas overlapped. Dr. McCormack wants

more detail. Dr. Kelley thought that there was good information, and thinks its important to get back to the educational issues with any solution. Ms. Chute feels that the meeting leant clarity to the issues. Ms. Hird agrees very much with Mr. Hanson and Mr. Miller. She is also looking forward to the discussion next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 6:20 p.m.

Submitted by:
John Hansen