

## Ad Hoc Committee for Inter-district Education Cost Sharing

June 10, 2021

5:00PM

**Call to Order:** Scotland First Selectman Gary Greenberg called the Meeting to order at 5:05PM.

**Roll Call:** Gary Greenberg, Hampton First Selectman Al Cahill, Hampton Board of Education Chairman Rose Bisson, Hampton Board of Finance Chairman Kathy Donahue, Scotland Board of Education member Cassidy Martin.

Not present: Scotland Elementary School Superintendent Frank Baron, Hampton Elementary School Superintendent Frank Olah, Scotland Board of Education Chairman Brynn Lipstreu.

### **Approval of Minutes**

**Motion:** Kathy Donahue, seconded by Rose Bisson, to approve the April 22, 2021 Minutes. Motion carried, 4-0, Cassidy Martin abstaining.

**Additions to the Agenda:** none.

### **Discussion of Cooperative Agreements with Lon Seidman, Region 4/Essex Board of Education**

Lon Seidman, Chairman of the Essex Board of Education and the Region 4 Supervision District Committee, was invited to speak to officials and residents on cooperative agreements. Region 4 is similar to our district in that the three towns educate K through grade 6 students in three separate elementary schools and students in grades 7-12 in combined middle and high schools, all with declining enrollments. After four failed attempts to fully regionalize the district, a supervisory district committee was formed to develop a cooperative agreement and combine services where practical. Initially, a superintendent was shared, the services expanding over the years to include shared central office staff, IT support, special education services, specials staff (art, music, physical education), and transportation. Pre-School is also housed in one school. Benefits include considerable cost-savings, flexibility, local control, and the fact that, unlike regionalization, cooperative agreements allow for schools to leave the arrangement if dissatisfied.

Mr. Seidman explained that the Supervision District Committee, which is comprised of members from all four school boards, meets in December to evaluate services and expenses. This provides an annual opportunity to assess efficiencies and the efficacy of the shared services and allows for the flexibility to make changes if necessary. A budget is developed, presented at a Public Hearing, and approved by the committee and all four boards of education.

Mr. Seidman acknowledged that the State does not yet recognize the supervision district committee as an official agency which causes some procedural challenges. Five audits are conducted for the budgets, one for each school as well as the supervisory budget, and though identical, five contracts need to be negotiated with each entity's approval.

Enrollment in each of the elementary schools is 200 – 225 students, with class sizes ranging from 18 students in grades 1 & 2 and increasing to 22-23 in grade 6. In addition to savings realized through shared services, level or decreased budgets have been approved as the student population has declined and staff has consequently been reduced.

Mr. Seidman stated that cooperative agreements begin with the governance in place, and stressed the importance of transparency and autonomy, noting that, though cost savings provide incentive to remain in the cooperative agreement, the fact that schools can withdraw from cooperative agreements provides incentive to reach consensus in every step of decision making.

### **Audience for Citizens**

Wendy Sears asked why Region 4's student population decreased so precipitously. Mr. Seidman attributed the decline to a lowered birth rate, the financial collapse, and long-term residents remaining in their homes. He stated that projections predict that the elementary school population will increase by 30% in ten years. She also asked if the State currently encourages cooperative agreements. Mr. Seidman replied that while elected leadership, irrespective of political parties, is very supportive, the State Department is not, preferring regionalization for school districts. He stated that when more communities look into legal alternatives to regionalization, the State will be pressed to deal with alternative designations for local education agencies. He also encouraged tri-town officials to research the history of State supervisory districts in our region. Ellen Peters recalled that the State provided a superintendent to serve the district in the late 60's and/or early 70's.

To Gary Greenberg's question on documents that guide the governance of cooperative agreements, Mr. Seidman stated that the current statutes apply only to regions, and that guidelines must be developed, first and foremost, for specific cooperative agreements.

To Maryellen Donnelly's question on what form of legislation Mr. Seidman would like to see, he stated that he supports expansion of the definition of "school districts", currently towns and regionalized districts, and recognition of other agreements. Ms. Donnelly also stated her belief that the ease with which cooperative agreements can dissolve is problematic; Mr. Seidman countered that cost-savings is what binds the towns. Mr. Greenberg added that terms can be set as part of the agreement.

Anne Gruenberg thanked Mr. Seidman, stating that the conversation was appreciated, a sentiment echoed by officials.

**Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the Committee, the Meeting adjourned at 6:22PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dayna McDermott Arriola  
Recording Secretary