

New Ashford Select Board and School Committee Meeting  
New Ashford Town Hall  
January 30, 2018

Select Board Present: Jason Jayko (chair), Ken McInerney, Mark Phelps  
School Committee Present: Brenda Frye (chair), Lori Jayko, Jen Welch  
Others Present: Superintendent Peter Dillon, Chris Wooliver, Karen Benko, Alex Benko, Stephen Jayko, Brandy Jaros, Alton Nichols, Michelle Filiault, Jeff Welch, Travis Demyer, Karen Mongue, Windrose Morris, Lori Hadley

Meeting opened at 7:00

1. Tuition Discussion: Peter Dillon provided a summary of the current tuition situation. As a non-operating school district, New Ashford has tuition agreements with Lanesboro Elementary School and Mount Greylock High School. Williamstown and Lanesboro recently voted to form a region and decisions are being made by a transition committee. In late October, the New Ashford School Committee was notified that the Lanesboro School Committee had formed a policy to charge tuition students the full per-pupil rate. This would increase the tuition paid by New Ashford by almost \$9,000. A tuition increase of that magnitude in one year is unprecedented. The transition committee proposed to raise the rate for Mount Greylock by over \$3,000 a student. The school budget would go up by a very large percent, and by such the town budget would also go up a large percent. Most schools do not charge per pupil cost because the overhead cost does not change by adding a few extra students.

We have a number of options. We can accept the increase, try to negotiate for a phased in increase, have tuition agreements with other districts - at which point parents could choose where to send their kids (based on where there are tuition agreements), parents can try to school choice to another community, virtual school (which is not recommended due to its not being the best developmentally appropriate practice), or opening a one room schoolhouse. Some options for other schools are New Lebanon, Drury, Hoosac Valley, BART, Pittsfield, and Hancock. We can explore the possibility of joining the region. There may be financial advantages in the form of getting 70% reimbursement for transportation and we'd get a seat on the committee. Peter spoke with Christine Lynch who said the state likely would not intervene, but she is checking with her legal team. Mt. Greylock has not been fully accommodating of our special education students. Peter handed out and reviewed the budget with the dollar implications, representing a 38% increase in tuition costs for next year.

Mark Phelps asked for more information about the virtual school. Peter explained that there are two virtual schools in the state. One is in Greenfield. Students would enroll and the town would pay per student, probably around \$8,000 a year. Homeschoolers do not have access to that, but many use similar programs.

Michelle Filiault asked about Hancock and New Lebanon. Peter reported that Hancock is interested and will be presenting a draft tuition agreement to the school committee. They have space to accommodate the students and parents should visit. The principal is new, from Pine Cobble, and the school is small and family friendly. The benefit of a small school is a depth of relationships. The drawback is less electives/activities options. The nurse is part-time. There is floor hockey in the cafeteria, new playground equipment, and several multi-grade classrooms. Most of the students from Hancock go to Mount Greylock for high school.

Alton Nichols asked about the options for the high school students, as Hancock covers only the elementary students. Peter responded that the price difference isn't as much as the proposed elementary tuition. New Lebanon could be an option. Taconic is a vocational option, plus Drury, Hoosac, BART, and Pittsfield. Hancock is having the same tuition problem with Mount Greylock.

Jen Welch asked, if we accept the rate as proposed by the transition committee, what the tax impact to the town would be. The board answered that the tax rate went up this year from \$8.32 to \$10.71. The projected increase based on this school budget would be to \$15.38, meaning a tax increase of \$1,133.98, to a house valued at \$150,000, since FY17. The school budget makes up 75% of the town budget.

There are questions about what is included in the per-pupil cost formula. We pay for our transportation. The committee mentioned that they would like to add a surcharge for capital costs but that is illegal.

Tuition for Richmond is just over \$9,000 through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Having the extra children and tuition creates opportunity for expanded offerings. What happens to the staff and programming if Mount Greylock loses our students and our money – around \$450,000 for New Ashford and Hancock students? We have to do our due diligence and balance the school needs with the those of the residents of the town.

Mark suggested having a negotiated tuition agreement with other schools in hand, when we talk to the Transition Committee. He asked how school choice works. Peter explained that the school announces how many spots it has open in a particular grade. Parents then submit an application. Names are selected randomly to fill the spots. The only preference given is to siblings of current students. Peter will check the deadline for Lanesboro's school choice submission on the request of Michelle Filiault. Parents may be able to apply for choice on the possibility that the tuition agreement is not renewed.

Our attorney represents all the districts and cannot represent one against another. We could talk to elected officials at the state level, but the representative also represents the other communities. After the meeting on February 8 with the Transition Committee, Peter will draft a memo of the range of options.

Jen Welch mentioned that at a recent Transition Committee Meeting, Regina Dilego, from the Lanesboro School Committee, mentioned that New Ashford had been communicated to three times, however, we only received one correspondence, a letter in October. Also at the meeting, the Transition Committee requested the projected budget from New Ashford and said they had not received it. Peter said he will send it to Joe Bergeron, Transition Committee Chair, tomorrow.

Mark asked if the School Committee had considered budgeting using a flat fee or rolling average, rather than a per-pupil cost, as this will create stability of budgeting. Peter will look into this, including the legality.

Ken McInerney mentioned that if we join the region, we won't have the school union anymore. Peter said it might cost less if we are charged per-capita. The region would also take our special needs students.

Michelle Filiault asked if there would only be negotiations with Mount Greylock and not Lanesboro. Peter answered that all negotiations now go through the Transition Committee. There may be one contract for all students k-12.

Jeff Welch expressed concern over the classroom size at Hancock. Peter said there is enough room. Jeff also mentioned that if Hancock joins the region, it could affect the long-term stability of their school.

Lori Hadley asked how the budget gets passed. The School Committee will give its recommendation to the Select Board and it will go to Town Meeting, where residents will vote. Windrose Morris asked about other options. She has researched one room classrooms in the Midwest that are having success. Peter said we may not have enough children and the board pointed out that we do not have a compliant building.

Meeting adjourned at 8:54 on a motion by Ken, seconded by Mark.