

Approved Minutes
TOWN OF STRATTON SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Tuesday, November 1, 2022 at 6:15 p.m.

Attending

Board

Allison Young (Chair)
Melissa Walker
Kellie D'Elia-Laskin
Devon Crowther

Administration

Bill Anton (Superintendent)
Laurie Garland (Business Manager)
Alyson Peterson (Treasurer)

Members of the Public:

Dr. Colleen Palmer (Mountain School)
Peter Barus (Recorder)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Modifications to the agenda

Recognize Ms. Sibiliala earlier.

Discussion with Laura Sibiliala regarding matters relating to the Stratton School Board

Representative Sibiliala, now representing Dover, Wardsboro, Jamaica, Stratton, and Somerset after changes in the legislative districts, noted residency in Dover since 2000 and service on schoolboards all that time, with children in the system; presently Vice-Chair of House Energy and Technology, Co-Chair of Rural Caucus; founder and Co-Chair, Veterans Affairs Caucus.

Ms. Sibiliala discussed work to correct the education finance mechanism weighting factors since Act 60, and the significant increase in taxes, the lack of resources for the poorest and smallest districts, contrary to the point of Act 60, a result of the weighting error across the state; that Stratton was second and Dover fourth largest sending towns; that last year a correction for the pupil weights had passed into law which may not be helpful to Stratton; and that, currently representing another non-operating district (Searsburg), Ms. Sibiliala was anxious to hear about specific issues.

Ms. Sibiliala expressed commitment to independence, faith in voters, making sure voters were well informed about focus and engagement, keeping the dialog open, making sure Stratton's voice was heard; and noted work to put out a weekly newsletter (website www.laurasibiliala.com) about sponsored legislation when in session, emerging issues, public hearing opportunities; etc.; for almost two decades, in addition to the weighting issue, work on broadband, infrastructure; passing comprehensive climate legislation (imperative that rural communities not left behind regarding adaptations); that with stronger storms coming, rural communities must have capacity to adapt, be comfortable and safe.

Ms. Sibiliala noted serving four terms, running for a fifth.

Ms. Young noted reading the newsletter, the most Stratton had received from local state representatives; that the town had been impacted by the weighting issue and was expecting a significant tax rise; that tuition formed the one-line; that there were huge fluctuations when three students move in, and the long and complicated formula involved.

Ms. Sibiliala noted a two-year average student cap, and asked if it would be better at five or six years. There was discussion. Ms. Young noted a big influx of about 18 students about five years ago, when taxes rose 46%; that this impacted homestead taxpayers; and noted that Dr. Palmer's school had helped with tuition levels.

Ms. Sibiliala noted frequent consultations with Ms. Garland (WCSU Business Manager); and asked whether the town had considered designating (as a sending district). Ms. Young noted that the district could only designate for high school, and only if the school agreed; that the previous board had discussed this but had never done so; that BBA, L&G, BUHS were the most likely designees because of bus logistics; that the students were divided between SMS and BBA; and discussed various configurations.

Ms. Sibiliala explained that in the legislative district every town but Whitingham had school choice; and would defend Stratton's choice, although believing it was unconstitutional; would never support universal choice because of scale in Vermont, not enough students, too much geographical isolation.

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Ms. Young noted no high schools near Stratton, and available choices not easy to access. Ms. Sibilgia explained that up to three could be designated; that the four academies were critical to the state infrastructure until a constitutional challenge; that currently two challenges, federal and state, needed to find an equitable way for all students; that none of the towns represented had a high school; and that should not add private schools to choice.

Ms. Young suggested that Stratton was the perfect town for people to move to and send their children out of the state, or country, but would rather see the funds stay in the state.

Ms. Sibilgia noted the opportunity to be heard, and had sent an outline of federal and state issues; that Vermont and Maine uniquely allowed access public funds to send students to private schools; and had prohibited those parents from choosing to send to a religious school, but the US Supreme Court had decided that school choice excluding religious institutions was religious discrimination.

Dr. Palmer

Dr. Palmer discussed the complexities of education funding; that the Mountain School at Winhall was the only school in the area that did not charge parents beyond the tuition from sending towns (allocated by state at around \$17,000); and noted possible opportunities to look at Stratton's special circumstances, caught in the middle, with costs higher than tuition; that all children were accepted from Stratton; that per pupil expenditures were less than other schools; and the desire to work out a way that would not impact Stratton; that the new funding formula was a concern for many communities; and hopes for long term partnership to continue; that the MS board was planning for next year, and a letter would be coming explaining all this.

Ms. Young noted previous discussions and willingness to consider all proposals.

Dr. Palmer expressed love for the children and being honored to serve them, and would inform the board and trustees.

Ms. Young suggested considering a retroactive increase, which would require a special town meeting, but should not be difficult; that Stratton would do what they could to help the Mountain School.

Approve School Board Minutes for October 11, 2022

Ms. Crowther moved to approve the Minutes for October 11, 2022. Second by Ms. Walker. All in favor.

Review Correspondences

(none)

Approve Warned Policies

Policies had been read over the summer; wording about retroactive pre-k tuition changed to reflect that the district shall comply with statute, to extend pre-k education payment to resident students enrolled in an approved pre-k program, beyond the ten hours if offered to a total of 35 hours per week.

Policy F16

Ms. D'Elia-Laskin moved to approve Policy F16. Second by Ms. Walker. All in favor.

Policy F09

Ms. Walker moved to approve Policy F9 as posted. Second by Ms. D'Elia-Laskin. All in favor.

No substantive changes were noted to Policy F-13 (Verification of Student Residency).

Policy F16

Ms. Crowther moved to approve Transportation Policy F16. Second by Ms. Walker. All in favor.

Review/Approve Order

Ms. Young discussed a bill for a student with no residency affidavit (application delivered), noting that this could not yet be paid, asking the Treasurer to hold check #1149.

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The board approved the Order dated 10/26/22, in the amount of \$43,349.38 holding check #1149 to SMS in the amount of \$8,639.00 pending confirmation of student residency, by unanimous consent.a)

Other Business

Ms. Young discussed revisiting the five-member board configuration for the March meeting, to put the question before the town whether to go back to three seats, noting that two were up for reelection, and could opt out; and possibly a third position would be up anyway, with three elections every year.

There was consensus in favor.

Adjourn

Ms. D'Elia-Laskin moved to Adjourn. Second by Ms. Walker. All in favor.

The meeting was Adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Peter Barus, Recorder, November 11, 2022