

Stratton School Board-

Meeting Minutes- April 10, 2018

Barre, Vermont

Present- Tom Montamaghehni; Lorraine Weeks-Newell, Stratton Board

Donna Russo-Savage, Brad James and Mary "Molly" Bachman, Vermont Department of Education

Kelly Pajala, Vermont State Rep for among other towns Stratton

Richard Werner, Windham Central Supervisory Union

Tom called the meeting to order at 1:07 PM

Donna gave an overview of why we were meeting, in that the committee was looking for a better sense of the community and why the Board was asking for their proposed makeup. Donna assured the group that although they had read the report prepared by Stratton and have had several other meetings with other districts, they were committed to not making any decisions until they had talked to all the Boards. Donna advised that they were in their final few meetings and would then start to discuss the reports, meetings and come up with a proposal for the State Board.

Tom then read the goals and talked about Stratton, that the Town is a blue-collar town that is large in size at 46 square miles however there were less than 200 people living between the two mountain ridges and this creates complications for transportation because of geographic issues. Many of the citizens in Stratton work as independent contractors, at the Stratton or Mt. Snow Ski areas or retail stores in Wilmington. This also contributes to the challenge to get students to school and for the parents then to be able to get to work. Because of this Stratton provides a lot of transportation throughout the Supervisory Union.

Stratton also will pay the full tuition requested of any independent school that is willing to accept all of the Stratton students, and that they have done this for at least the last 30 years. This has allowed gifted students to go to schools that meets their needs and challenges them, and students that face challenges can go where they have the best fit and get their needs met so that they all can succeed.

Donna questioned the remark about any school that will take the students and Tom elaborated on this for Donna.

Tom told the group that Stratton feels that they have a very successful model and did not want to change anything. One of the factors that Tom reported that supported their assumption of the successful model was the increase in the student population.

From the Board mentioned to the group that the Stratton system seems to be very attractive as indicated by student population growth. She also mentioned that the parents and that they feel comfortable coming with needs to the Board- and what they have to offer.

Tom talked about a change in the Village area- since he has been on the Zoning Board in Stratton there has been no growth for 2-3 years.

Tom also mentioned that the 52 children that Stratton is responsible to educate- they attend 13 different schools from Massachusetts to Manchester, Vermont. Donna asked if the 52-number included preschool and Tom was not sure but stated he would find out and submit that to the group in writing.

Tom then went on to discuss how they attempted to find partners for Act 46 and had four meetings with non-operating districts of Winhall, Sandgate, Ira and North Bennington as well as working with Searsburg.

Tom told that one of the meetings that they had scheduled with Searsburg that the road on the mountain was closed and the group could not get out of Searsburg to meet with them. They questioned how parents would be able to attend a school board meeting.

The Stratton group then worked with a 3X1 with Arlington, Sandgate and Arlington dropped out so that ended that discussion.

What the Stratton group took away from this was that a merger was not practical or very practical- in the study with Winhall and Sandgate Stratton would see a 11-cent increase in tax rates the first year. Stratton was also concerned about being outvoted on issues and losing control including in transportation/ school choice- their positions were not well received by other districts/

Brad asked if Tom was talking about paying above the state wide average tuition to which Tom replied yes- at Town Meeting/ School District meeting they will vote to pay the announced tuition rate to schools that agree to accept all of Strattons' students. Tom also related that for at least the last 25 years the town has worked with a transportation system that the families value and appreciate and he could not remember a time when there was even a negative voter for the tuition or transportation as presented by the Board.

Tom then talked about the success that Stratton has had with Windham Central and the Special Ed piece. Tom stated that the third Board member is very familiar with the special ed services and was very upset to think that Stratton students would lose access to the system with Stratton moving to another SU.

Tom summed up his presentation that by merging it would not make changes for the better with a larger district.

Donna questioned where Stratton was best suited to be in a supervisory union and Tom replied that they felt that Stratton with Windham Central S U was a natural fit- that although they bordered Winhall (and Winhall used to be in the Windham Central) they were more of a transient community than Stratton.

Donna asked about the Bennington Rutland merger talks and Tom replied that they did not feel very welcome with that group.

There was some discussion about geography and how Stratton is split into two sections and that the only State Highway that runs through Stratton only cuts across a small portion of Stratton in the south east corner, and that the State Highway department splits routes in this area and that has created numerous lengthy waits for the roads to be cleared so that people could move on the roadway.

Richard talked about Stratton being a active and valued member of Windham Central and that Windham Central supported Stratton in their request and that Windham Central hoped that the Education Department would respect their request.

Donna then reviewed where they were going and that by June 1 the three of them from the Education Department would present a proposal to the State Board of Education. The State Board has discussed having three meetings throughout the State- one in the north, one in the central and one in Southern Vermont, with the southern meeting most likely taking place in September- this was not so much to rehear each proposal but just for groups/ people to comment on provide testimony to the State Board prior to them making a decision.

Tom adjourned the meeting at 1:47 PM

Respectfully submitted;

Richard Werner