

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1084, Monday November 22, 2004  
7:00 PM

Media Center  
Wachusett Regional High School

*Committee Members Present:*

Duncan Leith, Chair	John Kane
Donald Benson, Vice-chair	Alice Livdahl
Cynthia Bazinet	Natalie Mello
Elizabeth Brennan	John Nunnari
Charles Capparelli	Norman Plourde
Clifford Connell	Cheryl Rauh
Patricia Gates (7:15 PM)	Michael Sherman
David Gibbs	Margaret Watson
Mark James	

*Committee Members Absent:*

Kelly Maxwell	René Rodriguez
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*Administration Present:*

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations  
Steven Penka, Director of Administrative Services  
Susan H. Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

*Others present, who desired to be recorded as present (see attached Attendance Sheet – attachment 1)*

Chair Duncan Leith called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

I. Public Hearing

Maureen Floryan, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 2).

Chair Duncan Leith took Agenda Items V-B, 1, and 2 out of order and introduced the Superintendent, who advised the Committee that he would be presenting information on *Operating Budgets and Revenue Comparison* –

*Member Towns and WRSD and Comparison of Possible FY06 Budget Scenarios.*

1. Operating Budgets and Revenue Comparison – Member Towns and WRSD

The Superintendent presented budget information via a PowerPoint presentation, *Operating Budgets and Revenue Comparison – Member Towns and WRSD* (attachment 3). The Superintendent also distributed copies of the back-up information obtained from the Department of Revenue regarding the Member Towns (attachment 4).

Following inquiry, the Superintendent explained that the information is only available through FY04 from the Department of Revenue and that FY04 information was incomplete for the Member Towns of Paxton, Princeton, and Sterling.

The Superintendent advised the Committee that by law, only 5% of the District's operating budget can be in the Excess & Deficiency (E&D) Fund and that he believes that Member Towns are governed similarly, although he does not know the percentage allowed. The reserves in E&D are a consideration when the District is requesting a bond rating for borrowing. The District was fortunate to have talked with the bond counsel prior to the School Committee depletion of the E&D fund to reduce assessments for Member Towns.

Following inquiry from a Member, the Superintendent advised that the School Committee has the authority to request that Member Towns hold Special Town Meetings to approve a supplemental budget, should it be necessary. It would be up to the Member Towns to schedule the Special Town Meetings. The School Committee has not made such a request during the Superintendent's tenure. The School Committee also has the petition process by town available to it.

2. Comparison of Possible FY06 Budget Scenarios

The Superintendent presented budget information via a PowerPoint presentation, *Comparison of Possible FY06 Budget Scenarios* (attachment 5).

The Superintendent explained to the Committee that the three scenarios presented are three of many possible scenarios but that a starting point is necessary. The Superintendent will present a budget in line with the School Committee's direction. The Superintendent encouraged the School Committee to make some policy budget decisions by the end of January in order that the Superintendent have time to prepare a budget.

When asked, the Superintendent informed the Committee that the student teacher ratios in FY02 were close to the ratios suggested by the School Committee in its adopted policy.

The Superintendent was asked to share this data with the area legislators. The Superintendent informed the Committee that the PowerPoint presentation on the three budget scenarios would be posted on the District's website on Tuesday, November 23, 2004, and, therefore, available to the public. The Superintendent encouraged School Committee members to share budget concerns with legislators individually and in small group settings.

The Superintendent, in seeking guidance and direction from the Committee, indicated that the Status Quo Budget Scenario would probably be the lowest and the Restoration Budget Scenario the highest.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent advised the Committee that the legislature has approved additional Chapter 70 Aid for FY06 in the amount of \$50/student, or approximately \$300,000. The Superintendent expressed hope that the increase would be greater than \$300,000 for the District.

Following requests by several School Committee members, the Superintendent advised the Committee that he would make available, in his next Superintendent's Report, a report on the actual class sizes, rather than staffing ratios.

Motion: To request that the Business/Finance Subcommittee look at the scenarios in earnest and provide budget policy issues pursuant to the Superintendent's recommendation for review by the School Committee  
(M. Sherman)  
(N. Mello)

Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello informed the School Committee that this would be added to the agenda for the November 30, 2004 Business/Finance Subcommittee meeting in addition to the annual review of the District Audit.

The Superintendent distributed an updated posting for the School Committee's information (attachment 6).

Discussion continued on the need for the School Committee to take ownership early on in the budget process. Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Management Subcommittee discussed the scheduling of a retreat.

Following inquiry regarding the budget timeline provided last year, the Superintendent reported that the Governor's Budget is released in February, followed by the Department of Education posting preliminary minimum local contributions and preliminary Chapter 70 and 71 State Aid. The Superintendent requested that the School Committee have some budget policy direction for the Superintendent by the end of January.

A friendly amendment was made and accepted by Members Michael Sherman and Natalie Mello to add "by the end of January" to the motion.

Following a request by a Member, the Superintendent advised the Committee that he would provide a report on the costs for School Choice students leaving the District and the revenue received by School Choice for students attending schools in the District.

Following discussion by some Members, the Superintendent reminded the Committee that the School

Committee decides budget issues of policy and not administration. It is the sole responsibility of the Superintendent to appoint staff.

Vote on motion, which reads: To request that the Business/Finance Subcommittee look at the scenarios in earnest and provide budget policy issues pursuant to the Superintendent's recommendation for review by the School Committee by the end of January.

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

## II. Secretary's Report

- A. Approval of 1083<sup>rd</sup> Regular Meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on November 8, 2004 – approved by consensus.
- B. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on November 8, 2004 – approved by roll call vote, not to be released until the matter is resolved, correcting Member Bazinet's first name on page 4.

Member Clifford Connell left the meeting 8:35 PM.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Charles Capparelli  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
Alice Livdahl  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

None

Abstained:

Donald Benson  
John Kane

(Motion passed 14-0-2)

III. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statements

Chairman Duncan Leith reminded the Committee that if there were questions regarding the Comptroller's report that Members should contact the Superintendent; if there were questions regarding the Treasurer's report, Members should contact Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello.

IV. Committee Reports

A. Student Advisory Committee (C. Brennan, K. Getchell, J. Leger, C. Wilde)

No members of the Student Advisory Committee were in attendance.

- B. Management Subcommittee (D. Leith, Chair, D. Benson, C. Capparelli, P. Gates, D. Gibbs, M. James, N. Mello, J. Nunnari, M. Watson)

Member Clifford Connell returned to meeting at 8:37 PM

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Management Subcommittee met on November 17, 2004 and had a full agenda; the minutes of the meeting were included in the Superintendent's Report. The next Management Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for December 16, 2004 and will focus on the goals of the subcommittee.

The Management Subcommittee agreed by consensus to schedule a retreat in January, similar to the one held last year at WPI. Member Natalie Mello will check availability of the WPI facility on Saturday, January 15<sup>th</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Management Subcommittee reviewed suggested By-Law revisions, particularly in the area of the responsibilities of the secretary for the School Committee. The Superintendent agreed to gather information regarding the cost of a stenographer or secretary and will report back to the Management Subcommittee.

At the request of the Superintendent, the Management Subcommittee also discussed the distribution of notices by students. Chair Leith reported that this is becoming a nationwide problem. Further information will be provided to the Management Subcommittee.

1. Adoption of the 2005 School Committee Calendar

Motion: To adopt the 2005 School Committee Calendar (attachment 7)

(J. Kane)  
(J. Nunnari)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan

Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

In addition to proposed changes regarding the responsibilities of the secretary, other By-Law changes were discussed. The Superintendent will provide draft changes at the next Management Subcommittee meeting.

Member Natalie Mello noted for the record that members of the School Committee and members of subcommittees should be attending the scheduled meetings.

- C. Education Subcommittee (M. Watson, Chair, C. Bazinet, E. Brennan, A. Livdahl, J. Nunnari, N. Plourde, R. Rodriguez)

Education Subcommittee Chair Margaret Watson reported that the Education Subcommittee has been meeting.

1. DP3813 **Policy Relating to Education *Audio, Video and/or Stenographic Recording of Meetings*** – second reading

Motion: To adopt DP3813 **Policy Relating to Education *Audio, Video and/or Stenographic Recording of Meetings*** for the second reading, waiving the reading

(M. Watson)

(M. James)



Following discussion of the proposed policy, the Superintendent advised the Committee that the issue of recording meetings had been brought to his attention by school staff and at the advice of the Superintendent requested advice from District Counsel for student issues, advised that a policy adopted by the School Committee was necessary. District Counsel for student issues drafted the policy for consideration by the School Committee.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

Clifford Connell  
Patricia Gates  
Alice Livdahl

(Motion 14-3)

Education Subcommittee Chair Margaret Watson requested input from School Committee Members on community service issues at the high school. Chair Watson reported that policies P6434 **Policy Relating to Pupil Services *Sexual Harassment*** and P6436 **Policy Relating to Pupil Services *Tolerance*** have been referred to the Education Subcommittee for review and will be included on the next agenda.

The next meeting of the Education Subcommittee is scheduled for Tuesday, December 7, 2004, at 6:00 PM in the Superintendent's Conference Room at the Central Office.

- D. Business/Finance Subcommittee (N. Mello, Chair, C. Connell, D. Gibbs, M. James, J. Kane, D. Leith, K. Maxwell, C. Rauh, M. Sherman)

Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello announced that the next meeting of the Business/Finance Subcommittee is November 30, 2004 at 6:00 PM at Curriculum Center, where the audit will be reviewed with the District auditors. The budget scenarios presented by the Superintendent will also be included on the agenda of the meeting.

- E. Community Outreach Subcommittee (D. Gibbs, Chair, C. Bazinet, E. Brennan, C. Connell, D. Leith, A. Livdahl, M. Sherman)

Community Outreach Subcommittee Chair David Gibbs reported that the next meeting of the Community Outreach Subcommittee is Tuesday, November 23, 2004, at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center at the Central Office.

- F. Ad-Hoc Subcommittees

1. Review the Process for Selection of a Superintendent (N. Plourde, Chair, C. Capparelli, C. Connell, M. James, D. Leith, A. Livdahl, N. Mello, J. Nunnari, M. Watson)

Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Chair Norman Plourde distributed draft RFP for consultant services, minutes of the November 15, 2004 Ad-Hoc Subcommittee meeting and a revised timeline (attachment 8). Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Chair Plourde asked that School Committee Members review the RFP and timeline and be prepared to take action at the December 13, 2004 School Committee meeting. Chair Duncan Leith reported that he had spoken with District Counsel Leo McCabe who advised him that the Superintendent is the Chief Procurement Officer and that all RFP's for the District must come out of his office. If a person, different from the Superintendent, is the Chief Procurement Officer, written notification of such must be made to the Inspector General.

Member Margaret Watson requested that the spelling of her name be corrected in the minutes of the Ad-Hoc Subcommittee.

G. Building Committees

1. High School

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the High School Building Committee would be meeting in executive session on Tuesday, November 23, 2004, in the Superintendent's Conference Room at the Central Office. The next regular High School Building Committee meeting is scheduled for December 1, 2004 at the high school.

Chair Leith reported that it came to the attention of the Building Committee that there would not be sufficient natural gas supply for the high school. Following negotiations between Nstar and the Superintendent, there will be sufficient natural gas for one burner and the roof top unit.

Chair Leith reported that the floors have been poured in the buildings in the old parking lot. The construction of the Media Center has been delayed due to the necessary removal of unsuitable fill.

2. Rutland – Naquag/Central Tree

3. Rutland – Elementary School – John Nunnari

Rutland Building Committee Representative Elizabeth Brennan reported that the next Rutland Building Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 2, 2004.

4. Sterling

The parking lot paving has been completed and the Town of Sterling may be considering installing sidewalks on the school side of Boutelle Road.

- H. School Council Reports: Central Tree Middle School (C. Rauh), Chocksett Middle School (C. Capparelli), Davis Hill Elementary School (C. Bazinet), Dawson Elementary School (M. James), Houghton Elementary School (N. Plourde), Mayo Elementary School (M. Watson), Mountview Middle School (M. Sherman), Naquag Elementary School (E. Brennan), Paxton Center School (A. Livdahl), Thomas Prince School (C. Connell), and Wachusett Regional High School (K. Maxwell).

Member Michael Sherman reported that the Mountview School Council met for the first time and were given an overview of the school council process. Discussion centered around an individual staffing issue, an absent math teacher in seventh grade. The School Council also reviewed in detail an analysis of Mountview's MCAS scores. School Council members expressed concern that the students are "test fatigued" in April. The School Council would like the District to review the sequencing of MAT-8's and MCAS. The School Council asked that Member Michael Sherman inquire as to whether the District has a District-wide attendance policy. The Superintendent reported that the high school has specific attendance requirements but that the District does not have a District-wide policy.

Member Margaret Watson reported that the Mayo School Council met on November 22, 2004 and reviewed the MCAS test results. Members of the School Council were dismayed to see that scores have fallen. Concern was also expressed regarding parent/teacher conferences. The Mayo School Council will be conducting a survey to parents and one of the topics will be the format of parent/teacher conferences.

Member Mark James reported that the Dawson School Council met November 16, 2004. The School Council discussed the Dawson Challenge Course. Training and repairs to the Challenge Course must take place before the Challenge Course can be utilized. The installation vendor has been contacted; once the vendor reviews the report of Project Adventure, the vendor will contact the District.

The School Council also discussed the impact of budget reductions on instruction, especially reading. Principal Charles Gruszka reported that there are students who need extra instruction, which could be provided by instructional aides. The

Superintendent reported that the additional aides are included in the Reinstatement Budget Scenario.

Member Cynthia Bazinet reported that the Davis Hill School Council met on November 15, 2004 and continued to discuss the format of parent/teacher conferences. The staff was surveyed and the majority of the teaching staff would like a more traditional parent/teacher conference format, with conferences held during the day.

Member Charles Capparelli reported that he is still not receiving notices regarding the Chocksett School Council Meetings. The Superintendent reported that he would make sure that the principal is notified of the change in the School Committee Liaison.

Member Alice Livdahl reported that the Paxton School Council met recently to review the MCAS test scores. Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services, Jason Newton, was in attendance at the School Council meeting to answer questions. Member Livdahl reported that the School Council may approach the Paxton PTO to support the distribution of MCAS review pamphlets. The Superintendent advised the Committee that MCAS help is available at the Department of Education website, as well as on the District's website.

Member Norman Plourde reported that the Houghton School Council is reviewing with the Sterling Historical Society the artifacts available to the school to enhance the curriculum.

## V. Superintendent's Report

### A. Discussion of Report

Following inquiry from a Member, the Superintendent restated that Nstar recently reported to the District that there was insufficient natural gas to supply the high school, as designed. The Superintendent went directly to Nstar and negotiated a guaranteed 16,000 cfh, which will supply one of the burners and the roof top unit. The high school is at the end of the supply line; it is a capacity and a pressure issue. The line Nstar will install from the street will have sufficient capacity to carry full volume in the future.

Following inquiry regarding the enrollment information contained on page 3 of the Superintendent's Report, the Superintendent reported that the individual school information will be made available in a future report.

A request was made by a Member to ask the Business/Finance Subcommittee to review the costs to eliminate the community service program at the high school.

Following inquiry regarding the disposal of the modular cafeteria, the Superintendent reported that the bid opening is the week of November 29, 2004 and that there are two parties interested. The District can refuse all bids and is not required to accept a low bid.

B. Presentations

See above.

C. Executive Session for the Purpose of Discussing Strategies for Collective Bargaining

Motion: To go into executive session at the end of the meeting, not to return to public session, for the purpose of discussing strategies for collective bargaining and legal strategies for the high school.

(D. Benson)  
(C. Capparelli)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari

Norman Plourde  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

D. Recommendations Requiring Action by the School Committee

The Superintendent explained to the Committee that he would be unavailable during his scheduled knee surgery and recovery. Following consultation with District Counsel Leo McCabe, the Superintendent is recommending that the School Committee appoint Paul K. Soojian as Deputy Superintendent. The Superintendent advised the School Committee that someone must be appointed by the School Committee in order to have the authority to act in the capacity of Superintendent. Changeorders for the high school project must be signed in a timely way, as well as payroll for the employees of the District.

1. Appointment of Paul K. Soojian as Deputy Superintendent, at \$100 per day or any portion thereof while serving in the capacity of Superintendent

Motion: To appoint Paul K. Soojian as Deputy Superintendent, at \$100 per day or any portion thereof while serving in the capacity of Superintendent  
(J. Nunnari)  
(C. Rauh)

Following inquiry regarding the Superintendent's disability insurance coverage, the Superintendent advised the Committee that the policy does not begin until the employee has been out of work for ninety days and is at the discretion of the employee.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the issue was brought to Management Subcommittee but there was limited discussion and no recommendation was made.

Motion: To table

(C. Connell)  
(C. Capparelli)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde

Opposed:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

(Motion failed 4-13)

Motion to Amend: To appoint Paul K. Soojian as Acting Superintendent, with all duties and authority, starting on December 7, 2004 until further notice at \$100 per day, while serving in the capacity of Superintendent  
(D. Benson)

Chair Duncan Leith advised the School Committee that Member Benson's motion to amend was out of order, pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws; the School Committee must approve or disapprove the Superintendent's recommendation and may not amend the recommendation.

Motion: To extend the meeting by thirty minutes

(C. Capparelli)  
(M. Sherman)



Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
Cheryl Rauh  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Roll call vote on motion, which reads: To appoint Paul K. Soojian as Deputy Superintendent, at \$100 per day or any portion thereof while serving in the capacity of Superintendent

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Elizabeth Brennan  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Natalie Mello  
John Nunnari  
Cheryl Rauh  
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli

Patricia Gates  
Mark James  
Norman Plourde  
Michael Sherman

Abstained:  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Clifford Connell  
David Gibbs

(Motion passed 8-6-3)

VI. Public Hearing

No one from the public wished to speak.

VII. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

VIII. New Business

A. Grouping Policy Proposal – See School Committee  
Correspondence #4

Member Alice Livdahl proposed a grouping policy (attachment 9). Chair Duncan Leith referred the proposed policy to the Education Subcommittee for review and possible recommendation.

IX. Adjournment

The School Committee entered executive session at 10:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools