

**WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE**

**HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING**

Minutes

Special Meeting #226 Tuesday, October 23, 2001

7:00 PM

Media Center  
Wachusett Regional High School

*Committee Members Present:*

John Rokicki, Chairman	Alice Livdahl
Sherry Horeanopoulos, Vice-chairman	David Lowenthal
Mary Copeland (7:27 PM)	Peter MacDonald
Carol Esperti	Kelly Maxwell
Kimberly Ferguson	John Nunnari
Michael Gennert	Elizabeth Pape (7:40 PM)
Jane James	Julie Scott
Sarah Jordan	Kathleen Singh
Duncan Leith	Jeffrey Wentzell

*Committee Members Absent:*

Kenneth Fensin	Jeffrey Gibbs
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*Administration Present:*

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Philip Campbell, Director of Student/Information Services  
Susan H. Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

*Others present:*

Linda Lehans, *The Landmark*  
Mary Anne Magiera, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*  
Christine Nelson, *Sterling Meetinghouse News*  
Timothy Ethier, Chair Holden Selectboard  
James Leger, Chair Rutland Selectboard  
Joseph Sullivan, Holden Selectboard  
James Scola, Holden Selectboard  
David White, Holden Selectboard  
Scott Runstrom, Paxton Selectboard  
Douglas Briggs, Rutland Selectboard

Louis Cornacchioli, Rutland Selectboard  
Remo Rossi, Sterling Selectboard  
Edmond Benoit, Chair Holden Finance Committee  
Stanley Moss, Chair Princeton Advisory Committee  
Paul Challenger, Holden Finance Committee  
Marilynn Foley, Holden Finance Committee  
Joseph Giotta, Holden Finance Committee  
Christian deMarcken, Paxton Finance Committee  
Evelyn Lawler, Paxton Finance Committee  
Edith Morgan, Princeton Advisory Committee  
Brian Bullock, Holden Town Manager  
Maureen Floryan, Holden  
Larry Floryan, Holden  
Melinda Johnson, Paxton  
Bob Sauer, Princeton  
William Theurkauf, Sterling  
Hillary Anderson

I. Call to Order

Chairman John Rokicki called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM.

Chairman Rokicki outlined the procedures for the evening:

Presentation on the Final Report

Open to comments and questions from public officials

Open to comments and questions from the public

Open to any action from School Committee

II. Regional Assessment Issues

Ad-Hoc Subcommittee – Town Funding Inequities Chair and Sterling Selectman Remo Rossi briefly described the final report.

Motion: That the School Committee and Superintendent enthusiastically support and work towards the immediate implementation of the attached proposed language “Section 4 Method of Apportioning Costs of the Regional School District” (attachment 1)

(K. Maxwell)

(S. Horeanopoulos)

The Superintendent urged the Committee to amend their motion to its intent that the Superintendent forward to Town Selectboards, following

review of counsel, for action at December 4, 2001 Town Meetings. The maker and seconder of the motion accepted it as a friendly amendment.

In response to an inquiry by Member Duncan Leith, the Superintendent informed the committee that he did not negotiate control of his emotions to the will of the School Committee.

Member Michael Gennert distributed a memo "What does a typical homeowner in each town in the Wachusett District pay in school taxes?" (attachment 2). He had asked for inclusion of taxpayer rate as part of final report and was disappointed that the information was not included in the final report.

Public Comment:

Timothy Ethier, Chair Holden Selectboard, urged the School Committee to support this vote and place the item on the Town Meeting Warrant.

Louis Cornacchioli, Rutland Selectboard, stated that the state should step in to solve the problem it created. After the endorsement of the "Bunker Proposal", a Task Force was to be established by the Regional Selectboard meeting a month ago. He indicated his concern for fairness. He acknowledged that the current assessments are not fair to Holden; that one of the proposals presented was not fair to Paxton and Sterling; and another is not fair to Rutland. He informed the Committee that he will not support this proposal until all other avenues have been exhausted. He reminded the Committee not to forget that the Wachusett Regional School District is the best in Worcester County and threats are not helping the situation.

Bill Theurkauf, Sterling, agreed that the tax rate should be a contributing factor to the solution. He requested that the Committee not oversimplify the solution.

Edith Morgan, Princeton Advisory Committee, informed the Committee that Princeton does not have industry and that the school budget has a large impact on the Princeton budget.

Edmond Benoit, Chair Holden Finance Committee, referred to the history for the formula for the District and supported reverting back to pre-Ed Reform.

Remo Rossi, Sterling Selectboard, indicated that the state solution can be followed in parallel with the proposal in front of the Committee. He pointed out that a report distributed included a school tax rate that well exceeded the real school tax for Rutland single family houses.

James Leger, Chair Rutland Selectboard, pointed out that there have been many issues or boulders put in the public view to defeat the high school proposal and did not think that this proposal would pass and is another impediment to solving the high school facility problem.

A member requested an explanation of footnote #2 on page 16 of the report which reads: "District Participation could be accomplished through a reduction and reallocation of their recapture of excess Debt credit."

Brian Bullock, Holden Town Manager, explained that excess debt recovery is the only vehicle available to the District to absorb the District share of the Bridging Plan. Manager Bullock represented that Holden Town Counsel indicated that it is not necessary to vote every year and there is no case history to affirm that you do.

The Superintendent informed the Committee that the Department of Revenue and the Department of Education, the authors of Chapter 71, Section 16B, paragraph 4, concurred that member towns have to unanimously support a change in the formula annually.

The Superintendent raised the question of whether or not the School Committee could request funds above Net School Spending in the scenario presented. He expressed concern for this in the future. He also expressed concern regarding the lack of protection for the budget assessment process should four towns support the per capita option and one town does not.

A member asked the Superintendent to explain the budget process in relationship to this new proposal.

The Superintendent confirmed to the Committee that assessment letters would be sent to the Town Selectboards in March, following the adoption of the annual appropriation budget by the School Committee prior to action taken annually on the process for assessment. The Superintendent wanted to make sure that the Committee understood that

there would be consequences to their action adopting the motion as presented.

The Superintendent further informed the Committee that as written and with at least four town votes, the Regional Agreement would be changed requiring that, following the adoption of the annual appropriation budget by the School Committee, the Treasurer would issue assessment letters that would result in lower assessments for some towns and greater assessments for others as compared to the previous year. If all five towns did not approve of the appropriation budget, the School Committee had no recourse but to revert to the previous assessment process other than for any town that had a higher assessment. Those communities that had received the lower assessment could not be increased by the School Committee. Therefore, the School Committee would be creating the potential for substantial reduction in revenue.

Brian Bullock, Holden Town Manager, stated that if the Committee had concerns that the easier route would be to revert to strictly a per capita assessment. The proposal before the School Committee is a buffered proposal to help the Town of Rutland.

Motion: To add “and the Superintendent to provide language to protect the budget assessment process”.

(D. Leith)  
(M. Gennert)

Bob Sauer, Princeton, explained the process that would be required for implementation of this proposal. He explained that the change to the Regional Agreement would require four out of five towns’ approval. The implementation of the change would have to be voted on each year.

Motion: To call the question.

(M. Copeland)  
(J. Wentzell)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Mary Copeland  
Carol Esperti  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Michael Gennert

Jane James  
Duncan Leith  
Alice Livdahl  
David Lowenthal  
Peter MacDonald  
Kelly Maxwell  
John Nunnari  
Elizabeth Pape  
Julie Scott  
Kathleen Singh  
Jeffrey Wentzell

Opposed:

Sherry Horeanopoulos  
Sarah Jordan

Abstained:

John Rokicki

(Motion passed 15-2-1)

Roll call vote on amendment:

In favor:

John Rokicki  
Sherry Horeanopoulos  
Mary Copeland  
Carol Esperti  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Michael Gennert  
Jane James  
Sarah Jordan  
Duncan Leith  
Alice Livdahl  
David Lowenthal  
Peter MacDonald  
Kelly Maxwell  
John Nunnari  
Elizabeth Pape  
Julie Scott  
Kathleen Singh  
Jeffrey Wentzell

Opposed:  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Roll call vote on the main motion, which reads “That the School Committee and Superintendent enthusiastically support and work towards the immediate implementation of the attached proposed language ‘Section 4 Method of Apportioning Costs of the Regional School District’ and the Superintendent forward to Town Selectboards, following review of counsel, for action at December 4, 2001 Town Meetings and the Superintendent to provide language to protect the budget assessment process.”

In favor:

Sherry Horeanopoulos  
Mary Copeland  
Carol Esperti  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Jane James  
Sarah Jordan  
Duncan Leith  
Alice Livdahl  
David Lowenthal  
Peter MacDonald  
Kelly Maxwell  
Elizabeth Pape  
Julie Scott  
Kathleen Singh  
Jeffrey Wentzell

Opposed:

John Rokicki  
Michael Gennert  
John Nunnari

(Motion passed 15-3)

Motion: That the Wachusett Regional School District Committee support the efforts of State Representative David Bunker related to the funding inequalities for regional school districts, and to direct the

Superintendent and Chairman to solicit the support of local and statewide organizations towards that end (attachment 3).

(J. Nunnari)

(D. Leith)

Member Carol Esperti left the meeting at 9:30 PM.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki  
Sherry Horeanopoulos  
Mary Copeland  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Michael Gennert  
Jane James  
Sarah Jordan  
Duncan Leith  
Alice Livdahl  
David Lowenthal  
Peter MacDonald  
Kelly Maxwell  
John Nunnari  
Elizabeth Pape  
Julie Scott  
Kathleen Singh  
Jeffrey Wentzell

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Motion: To respectfully ask the Selectboards place the inequities warrant article first at Town Meeting.

(K. Maxwell)

(S. Jordan)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Sherry Horeanopoulos  
Mary Copeland  
Kimberly Ferguson



Jane James  
Sarah Jordan  
David Lowenthal  
Peter MacDonald  
Kelly Maxwell  
Elizabeth Pape  
Julie Scott  
Kathleen Singh

Opposed:

John Rokicki  
Michael Gennert  
Duncan Leith  
Alice Livdahl  
John Nunnari  
Jeffrey Wentzell

(Motion passed 11-6)

### III. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

(A. Livdahl)  
(P. MacDonald)

Vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki  
Sherry Horeanopoulos  
Mary Copeland  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Michael Gennert  
Jane James  
Sarah Jordan  
Duncan Leith  
Alice Livdahl  
David Lowenthal  
Peter MacDonald  
Kelly Maxwell  
John Nunnari  
Elizabeth Pape

Julie Scott  
Kathleen Singh  
Jeffrey Wentzell

Opposed:  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:57PM

Respectfully submitted,

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

ADT:ss  
School Committee/Minutes