

HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE  
MEETING MINUTES  
Thursday, October 15, 2015 @ 6:00 p.m.  
Minnechaug Regional High School

**Members Present:** Tod O'Brien and Sandra Sheehan, Co-Chairs; Sue Bunnell, Lena Buteau, Courtney Derosia, Allison DiGrande, John Flynn, Pat Gordon, Karen Grycel, Marty McQuade (6:30 p.m.), Lisa Morace (6:30 p.m.), Tricia Murphy, Eric Panasci, and George Semanie (6:15 p.m.)

**Members Absent:** Nick Fyntrilakis

**Ex Officio Members Present:** Peter Dufresne, Steve Hale, Marty O'Shea, Noel Pixley, and Beth Regulbuto

**Ex Officio Members Absent:** Ed Cenedella

### 1) Call to Order

Co-Chair O'Brien called the meeting of the Middle School Task Force to order at 6:05 p.m.

### 2) Public Comment

There were no public comments.

### 3) Review Draft of Community Survey

Members of the survey subcommittee include Ms. Bunnell, Mr. Flynn, Mrs. Grycel, and Mr. Semanie. The rough draft of the MSTF survey was distributed and reviewed. Ms. Bunnell and Mr. Flynn explained the process behind the survey and the reasoning behind the introductory paragraph, noting that it is impartial and not directed to either Hampden or Wilbraham residents or to people with or without children; and that we are seeking to gather information to help assess what people know, what they don't know and what they want to know. The plan is that this general "high altitude" survey could help determine the target for future surveys and information. The plan is to have both electronic and paper versions of the survey.

General discussion about the survey draft ensued:

- Mrs. Murphy said she would like to see more about the history and work done to date, as well as links to information online and that she is concerned about the amount of misinformation out there.
- Ms. Bunnell agreed that there needs to be a balance between too much and too little information. The thought was if the first survey is quick and easy, this might help to get more participants the first time around.
- Mrs. DiGrande likes the idea of the intro paragraph but wondered about the idea of a one page document with some relevant background before getting into the survey questions.
- Mr. Hale suggested the initial survey could be used to determine what people want to know more about. Ms. Bunnell agreed and that it could be things that we think people are concerned about are not concerns at all.
- Mrs. DiGrande thinks time is of the essence and that we need to get information out to the people sooner versus later.
- Mrs. Grycel suggested have a link to the FAQs for people who want to read more.
- Ms. Bunnell thinks we may eventually need to handle parents and residents as two different populations.
- Mrs. Murphy is worried about not getting too many survey opportunities so she believes this survey needs to be impactful and as strategic as possible.
- Mr. O'Brien thinks it's important that we identify ourselves, who we are, the work we have done and that we are seeking the best educational and financial solution.
- Mrs. Gordon suggested adding a response option stating, "No knowledge of."
- Mr. O'Shea also mentioned the response scale, noting there is a big difference between "neutral" and "don't know."
- Mrs. Sheehan questioned the sequence of the questions.
- Mr. Pixley suggested changing or rewording the first question to be more positive and that each issue should be ranked.

*Exhibit(s): Draft of Middle School Task Force Survey*

### 4) Next Steps

Ms. Bunnell then brought up the timing of the required vote and noted that she does not see it coming before the voters for May 2016. Mr. Flynn discussed the prospect of a special town meeting in the fall of 2016 if everything was well defined and clearly laid out. Mr. O'Shea questioned why it could not be done in time for May 2016, and Ms. Bunnell touched upon all the legal issues to get it to town meeting, plus the legal issues that have to be discussed, such as who is the landlord and who is the tenant. Mr. O'Shea discussed following simultaneous and parallel paths and believes if the momentum is there we could get it done. Mrs. Sheehan said we are currently doing a disservice to the children and feels we have to act

expeditiously. Mrs. Murphy suggested establishing timelines and goals and working backwards to figure out what has to be done and when. Mr. O'Shea expressed his desire to do whatever it takes to have this in place for fall 2016.

(Mr. O'Shea, Mr. Hale, Mrs. Derosia and others had to depart to attend a 7:00 p.m. presentation at the high school.)

Mrs. DiGrande feels the MSTF has the facts and we need to educate the public on this, but she questioned where the School Committee stands on this issue. Mr. O'Brien reported that he and Mrs. Sheehan attended the recent School Committee meeting and shared the MSTF's recommendations but no vote was taken so they both felt frustrated. Mrs. Gordon said she believes the majority of the School Committee is on board as they want equal opportunities for students in both Hampden and Wilbraham. As representatives from the Board of Selectmen, Ms. Bunnell asked Mr. Flynn about working directly with the School Committee and to move this along more expeditiously. Mr. Flynn is concerned that there are still so many unanswered questions. Mrs. Murphy feels we need to be educating people and getting the required legal work done. Mr. Pixley suggested that the communication plan seems more important than the survey at this point. Mr. Flynn talked about talking to people in small groups and printing informational brochures and that we need good information that will help people understand. Mr. Pixley agreed and mentioned going to the towns' senior centers and hosting forums with dates known well in advance. He also mentioned the urgency of this as the Hampden students are not getting the same education as the Wilbraham students and spending money on it will not solve the problem and would not be fiscally responsible. Mr. Flynn agreed that more money will not solve this issue. Mr. Panasci believes this issue needs to be top priority on all fronts. Mrs. Sheehan is concerned about the School Committee's priority and Ms. Morace responded that the School Committee does think it is a priority and that there is legal work already being done, but we can't jump the gun in this process. Mrs. Regulbuto suggested devising a strategy with the end goal of a May 2016 vote and then we can back up what needs to be done accordingly. There was then a discussion about the MSBA Statement of Interest (SOI) process. Mrs. Regulbuto explained that typically the MSBA SOI applications are due in April.

It was decided that there will be two new subcommittees formed in addition to the Survey Subcommittee. The first will be the Brochure Subcommittee to compose a one-page informational sheet with a summary of who we are and what the issues are with Mrs. DiGrande, Mr. Dufresne, Mr. Pixley, Mrs. Regulbuto and other members who want to volunteer. Mr. Flynn made a motion to accept this new subcommittee, Mrs. DiGrande seconded, there was no discussion and it was unanimously approved. The second group will be a Communications and Timeline Subcommittee with Mr. Flynn, Mrs. Sheehan, Mrs. Regulbuto and other members who want to volunteer. Mrs. DiGrande made a motion to accept this second subcommittee, Mrs. Grycel seconded, there was no discussion and it was unanimously approved. There was also discussion about a Statement of Interest (SOI) subcommittee but that will be discussed at a future meeting.

There was then a brief discussion about what kind of information should be disseminated to the general public. Comments were made regarding the amount of misinformation getting out there and people are anxious to know where the MSTF is heading. It was suggested that people want to know what the options are, where the MSTF's work is heading, provide more facts in small, easy to understand and digest pieces, including how the MSBA process works – perhaps a series of informational pieces. It was noted that there have been informal meetings of concerned parents on Saturday mornings in Hampden to try and dispel rumors and provide facts.

*Exhibit(s): None*

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 3, 2015, at 6:00 p.m. in order to have information ready to bring to the School Committee at their meeting on Tuesday, November 10, 2015.

## **5) Adjournment**

Mrs. Gordon made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mrs. DiGrande seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen W. Belsky  
Recording Secretary