

**HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, December 1, 2015 @ 6:00 p.m.
Minnechaug Regional High School – Information Research Commons**

Members Present: Tod O'Brien and Sandra Sheehan, Co-Chairs; Sue Bunnell, Courtney Derosia, Allison DiGrande (arr 6:15 p.m.), John Flynn, Karen Grycel, Lisa Morace, and George Semanie

Members Absent: Lena Buteau, Nick Fyntrilakis, Pat Gordon, Marty McQuade, Tricia Murphy, and Eric Panasci

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 6:08 p.m. noting the full agenda.

2) Public Comment

See comments at end.

3) Report from Co-Chairs

Mr. O'Brien and Mrs. Sheehan attended the School Committee meeting and provided a copy of the brochure and timeline. They felt like they received some good feedback regarding their intentions, as well as their support for the work of the Middle School Task Force and the steps for moving forward. At a prior meeting the School Committee was asked if they supported our objectives and if we were all heading in the same direction. Mr. O'Brien then read the motion from the November 10th meeting: *That the School Committee pursue any and all action associated with the strategy of pursuing a long term unified approach to a facility as deemed appropriate by a partnership with the MSBA to meet the middle school model and support the educational, social and emotional needs of the children of Hampden and Wilbraham.* The motion was seconded and approved. This demonstrates that the School Committee is behind us and we have their full support. They asked us to continue to work on a communication plan and community outreach. Mr. O'Shea added that as Mr. O'Brien suggested, it was an important momentum-gathering moment for this initiative. He reported that he and Mrs. Regulbuto just had a working meeting with School Committee reps, Board of Selectmen reps, and town attorneys. As these conversations continue, the towns want to know that their interests are protected. Just as we are always looking out for our students' best interest, the towns have interests too. That meeting was productive, and although nothing was decided, we were able to bring them up to speed as to where the MSTF stands. Mrs. Sheehan clarified that this School Committee vote "allows" Mr. O'Shea and Mrs. Regulbuto to begin discussions with MSBA. Mr. O'Shea then explained, without any obligation, we can submit a Statement of Interest (SOI), although MSBA is not yet accepting applications yet. He also noted that nothing can happen without the participation of School Committee and the Boards of Selectmen. (Mrs. DiGrande arr @ 6:15)

Exhibit(s): None

4) Public Engagement

a) Status of Informational Brochure

Where do we stand with our information brochure? On behalf of this subcommittee, Mrs. Regulbuto reported that it is on its way to production after School Committee review and legal review to be sure it is an appropriate document and use of public funds. It is tentatively scheduled to be delivered to Post Office on December 8th to be mailed to all households in Hampden and Wilbraham. Mr. O'Shea noted the great effort by many people involved and that this should be viewed as one more part of the group's efforts to keep the public informed. In addition to mailing this, it was suggested that copies be made available in such places like town halls, libraries, and senior centers. Mrs. DiGrande suggested an Edline notice, which Mr. O'Shea will do. Mrs. Sheehan reported that there was discussion at their last meeting about other ideas for the future brochures and Mr. Dufresne said he has started a bulleted list of ideas. Mrs. DiGrande noted that they talked about single theme pieces but realize this work can be time consuming. Volunteers to help with this task were solicited. Mrs. Regulbuto recommended staying with the original group (Mrs. DiGrande, Mrs. Murphy, Mr. Dufresne, Mr. Pixley, and Mrs. Regulbuto) for consistency but would welcome other volunteers. Mrs. Derosia volunteered. Mr. Hale asked if the next brochure would address whatever comes out as a result of the survey and Mrs. DiGrande said that one of the original

purposes was to get information out to the public before the survey went out, but is wondering why couldn't we do a one-topic piece while the survey is open? She is worried we may be waiting too long to get information out to the public. Mrs. DiGrande asked if members had ideas of what the next one should be about – what keeps coming up, what would help guide this working group? Mr. Pixley suggested providing the list already developed to get others thinking.

Mr. O'Brien then asked about the survey. Mr. Semanie reported on the survey to date. It currently has 13 questions. The group (Mr. Flynn, Mrs. Grycel, Mr. Semanie, and Ms. Bunnell) did a dry run with family and friends – online and printed copies – to get some feedback on it. They are going to work on the introductory paragraph and will also compare it to the final brochure to weed out some questions and expand others. Ms. Bunnell explained that they want the MSTF members to complete the survey to see how it works. Mr. O'Shea asked about the proposed timeframe. At this point, Mr. Semanie couldn't say what the timeline is exactly. Mr. O'Shea recommends keeping it open for three weeks but that will probably depend on when it goes out, which as Mr. Semanie explained, will depend on when the first brochure gets out. Mrs. Regulbuto reported that the first brochure should be in people's hands by December 10th. Mr. Semanie figured if people got the survey by December 14th, we could close it as of January 7th. Although Mrs. DiGrande does not want to lose momentum, she thinks that due to the holidays we should give them to at least early January. She asked that if it goes out on the 14th, could a follow up notice be sent via Connect Ed from the towns and district to remind people to complete the surveys. Mr. Semanie then encourages MSTF members to complete the survey and provide their feedback to Mr. Dufresne. Ms. Bunnell said the group is meeting next week so if you provide feedback prior to then, it can be incorporated into the survey. Mr. Semanie noted that Mr. Flynn has volunteers ready to work on tabulating the hard copies. Members of this subcommittee will handle the drop off boxes to the schools, libraries, town halls, senior centers, Village Store, Village Mart, and the Y.

Exhibit(s): Letter from Jim Toomey dated November 20, 2015 re: legal opinion, Middle School Unification Brochure, MSTF Survey Test

b) Public Outreach

Mr. O'Shea said public outreach is ongoing – he has recently made presentations at the Wilbraham Senior Center, Hampden Senior Center, and Hampden Lions – and there was much rich conversation and the concerns he heard are similar to the ones you have all heard as well. He believes that people have come away from the discussions with a better understanding of the issues and our intentions and looking for more information. In addition, he, Mr. Pixley, and Mr. Dufresne had a taped conversation on Wilbraham Public Access – for a video-on-demand presentation. Mr. O'Shea plans to send the link via our mass communications and he is hoping *The Times* would be willing to share that information as well. Our outreach efforts, public engagement and survey work all have to continue and hopefully by the end of January we will have a sense if this can be put in front of voters in the spring. Ms. Morace mentioned the group of people in Hampden meeting at town hall, including Mrs. Sheehan, Mr. O'Shea and herself. She is wondering if the MSTF could host a meeting at the Hampden town hall. Mr. O'Shea agreed that another forum would be good and those Saturday morning meetings seem to be working. A December 12th date was suggested and he said he could be ready to present something that day. Mrs. DiGrande also suggested a January date with plenty of notice. Mrs. Sheehan suggested January 9th or 16th. Mr. O'Shea also suggested that in January we could host an evening public informational meeting and Ms. Bunnell suggested going back to WMS and TWB as we did before. Mrs. DiGrande noted that elementary schools need to be included because that is the cohort that will be impacted. Mr. O'Shea will work on finding suitable dates and suggests holding it in the MRHS auditorium as this is a district-wide issue. He mentioned that the Saturday morning conversations bring up the inequity issue and he believes that even if we could work on comparable course offerings, what good is that when it is so much less than what we want for our students and so much less than the robust offerings with qualified teachers that we could be offering in a combined school.

Exhibit(s): None

c) Public Access Program

See discussion above.

Exhibit(s): None

5) Review Status of Community Survey

See discussion above.

Exhibit(s): None

6) Timeline & Next Steps Discussion

Mr. O'Shea talked about all that has been done to date and all that is being worked on at this time. Ms. Bunnell is hoping that we can get possible date(s) for the public forum before the survey goes out on December 14.

Exhibit(s): None

7) Correspondence

a. Letter from Wilbraham Board of Selectmen

Letter of support from the Wilbraham Board of Selectmen was distributed but there was no need to discuss as it was mentioned at the last meeting.

Exhibit(s): Letter of Wilbraham Board of Selectmen to HWRSC Chairman Peter Salerno dated October 26, 2015

8) Public Comment

Comments included:

Consider having the public forum at the MRHS auditorium and perhaps the Key Club could offer babysitting for young kids.

Need to reach out to the parents of elementary students – people don't know enough to be interested in this topic.

Reach out to the older population as well.

Concern about the effect on property values if a school is closed.

9) Adjournment

Before ending the meeting, in checking calendars, Mr. O'Shea said it looks like the public info session could work on Thursday, January 7, 2016. Mrs. Grycel asked if we should consider delaying the forum pending results from the survey, but Mr. O'Shea thinks this will not be the last forum and if we have it in January we can see if we can bring this to the spring town meetings. Mr. Semanie said that we could keep the survey open until Sunday, January 10, 2016.

The next MSTF meeting was set for January 13, 2016, @ 6:00 p.m. Mr. Semanie then made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Flynn seconded and it was unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen W. Belsky
Recording Secretary