



Ayer Shirley Regional School District

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MINUTES OF THE
AYER SHIRLEY REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
AYER SHIRLEY REGIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARY
Wednesday, February 27, 2013 - 7:00 P.M.

Board Members Present:

Joyce L. Reischutz, Chair
Patrick W. Kelly, Vice Chair
Michele L. Granger, Secretary

Daniel W. Gleason, Member - Arrived 7:20
Susan A. B. Therriault, Member

Staff Members Present:

Carl E. Mock, Superintendent
Mary Beth Hamel, Assistant Superintendent
Evan T. Katz, Finance Director - left 9:35 p.m.
Laura E. Jordan-Callahan, Recording Secretary

Guests Present:

Robert A. Pontbriand, Ayer Town Administrator
James M. Fay, Ayer Board of Selectmen, Chair
Frank S. Maxant, Ayer Board of Selectmen, Vice-Chair
Pauline Conley, Ayer Board of Selectmen, Clerk
Christopher R. Hillman, Ayer Board of Selectmen
Lisa A. Gabree, Town Accountant
Scott Houde, Ayer Finance Committee, Chair
John Kilcommins, Ayer Finance Committee, Vice-Chair
Brian D. Muldoon, Ayer Finance Committee
Michael Pattenden, Ayer Finance Committee
David Swain, Shirley Board of Selectmen, Vice-Chair
Kendra J. Dumont, Shirley Board of Selectmen, Clerk
Bobbi Jo Colburn, Town Accountant
Michael Swanton, Shirley Finance Committee, Vice Chair
Joe McNiff, Shirley Finance Committee

Call to Order

At the onset, Mrs. Reischutz opened the meeting of the Ayer Shirley Regional School Committee at 7:05 p.m., stating that the meeting is being recorded. Ayer Board of Selectmen, Ayer Finance Committee, Shirley Board of Selectmen and Shirley Finance Committee followed suit at 7:06 p.m. Due to school closings today, the ASRSD Showcase presentation was

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postponed.

FY2014 Budget Discussion - Joint Session with BOS and FinComs of Ayer and Shirley
Mrs. Reischutz encouraged those present to participate in a frank and open discussion about the proposed FY2014 school budget.

A full copy of the Proposed FY2014 Budget was handed out.

Mr. Mock recapitulated for the Boards and Committees present, that changes to the state local contribution formula has thrown a huge curve-ball into the Shirley apportionment of the FY14 contribution. In summation, the proposed ASRSD FY14 budget of \$25,654,925 resulted in a net operating increase of \$239,500, (0.97%), excluding \$195,400 in high school debt and the FY13 \$550,000 SpEd shortfall. In the aftermath, the assessment decreases Ayer's required local contribution to -\$8,651 and increases Shirley's required local contribution to \$260,699.

Mr. Mock laid open the following questions. To what degree is this a "shared" problem? Is it a concern for Shirley alone, for Shirley and the ASRSD or a concern for both towns and ASRSD? Diligent and systematic research into possible viable solutions or combinations of the following were open for discussion.

- Reduction of school budget
- Use of one-time funding sources
- Legislative relief via state-budget process
- Override
- Amendment to the Regional Agreement:
 - Change phase-in period(s)
 - Include RLC increase as part of the phase-in
 - Adjust assessment formula(s) to reflect ability to pay
 - Reallocate the sum of RLCs (M.G.L. c.71, sect.16B)

Mr. Fay opined it should be a shared problem and asked about adjusting the assessment formula to reflect Shirley's ability to pay. Mr. Mock stated that the combined effort yield, an indication of the community's ability as to what they should come up with toward the foundation budget, is determined by the state. Reallocation of the sum of required local contributions can be changed with a vote at town meeting. Current tax rates in Ayer and Shirley are dramatically different. Historically, the fact that Ayer has a 75% greater ability to raise money for each child than Shirley does, deserves consideration. This puts a real pressure on Shirley to see if they can put a plan in place to help themselves.

Mr. Pattenden voiced that Ayer is already doing a considerable chunk to help out Shirley, the school budget has to come down.

Mr. Houde stated that although he understands Shirley's quandary, he feels that Ayer has done a lot to assist in the hole process. Ayer has invested \$2.4 million in this district. Ayer is operating on a razor thin budget as it is, however, not to help Shirley will have a vast impact on the education of our children and run the risk of seeing the quality of education reduced.

Mr. Swanton explained that Shirley knew it would have to make up a portion of the school allocation that comes from taxation, that they would need to contribute more. However, because the state has responded in fits and starts with regard to how they would plan to change the formula, and then unpredictably come back with a huge increase, was unexpected. Mr. Swanton suggested that we hold constant from this year to next, reduce the amount to \$335,000. The \$550,000 assessment will break the bank and may be rejected at town meeting. The downside is that Ayer is delayed for one more year.

Ms. Conley asked for a spreadsheet showing how that would play out.

Ms. Gabree surmised that the only way to sell it to Ayer is for Shirley to have a long-term plan.

Mr. Pattenden voiced that the school could reduce its budget.

Mr. Kilcommins asked what the impact to the district would be.

Mr. Mock replied the school would have to reduce more staff, begin to strip what was put back in last year, and be unable to remedy the inequities within the system. We were short 3 positions from last year, laid off 5 people and all lunchroom aides coming into the district.

Mr. Katz asserted a need to look at a transportation increase of \$212,000 which would further impact the budget.

Mr. Pontbriand observed that the solution to the identified problem remains illusive at this time. The Regional Leadership Advisory Group (RLAG) meetings have been beneficial to the history of the regionalization process, however, there is an inherent flaw to it. We can continue to hobble along and make this work for the next five years if we want to invest in the system, even though increased enrollment will not become a full reality for 3-4 years. We can further cut the school budget, although that would be problematic for all boards present. The town of Ayer can only do this for so long. Even if Shirley had a commercial development plan, it would require years of long-term planning. We could make it work by adjusting the Regional Agreement. In order to make it sustainable, we must have some external infusion by way of state aid, grants or assistance. Not sure there would be political support for an override and presume there isn't in Shirley either. There is a slim chance that the Ayer townspeople, will again, agree to pay more. We haven't overturned state possibilities, asked for state assistance, or had state representatives attend any of our meetings.

Mr. Swain remarked that 5 years ago Shirley was 13% below the state level. Shirley has been trying to resolve the issue. They have requested all departments to be level funded, have built up a stabilization fund for the past few years, has limited the cola to 3.75% and there are some plans in place to reduce the cost of local governments which will increase the tax rate, and received grants. 9c cuts to Shirley were \$111,000.

When asked for the School Committees thoughts, Mr. Kelly responded that this is a shared problem. The school budget has gone down 2 consecutive years. We are the only department that froze salaries and laid people off. The communities have already shown us that they want and deserve a better education for their children. We can't predict how the towns will vote. I don't see myself voting on a budget that will kill this District again.

Mr. Gleason stated, as a parent, he would want to see more money go to the schools. A lot can be done to motivate the townspeople.

Ms. Granger agreed that the high school project was a huge victory that speaks to the willingness of the townspeople to support our budget. I will not vote for a reduced school budget, we owe it to the students.

Mr. Pontbriand clarified that we are all in this together. His perception on political reality is cautionary given the current economic situation in the years that lie ahead. Political capital only lasts so long. Now we need to be very careful that our substantive solution has a viable chance to pass at town meeting. There are some credibility issues, promises made to the people that have not been realized.

Mr. Kelly replied the district has delivered exactly what it said it would. And, in fact, have started to see the choice trend turnaround in less than a year out.

Mr. Houde perceived the missing link as Shirley's long-term solution. A reduction will have a significant impact to the school budget, will affect school choice and spiral out of control. We don't want to be looked at as a cash register either. Other town departments have issues and will have to make cuts also. This will have a detrimental impact on the education of our students.

Ms. Therriault voiced she has not seen a budget yet that she would want to vote for. Cutting the school budget undermines all we've accomplished so far. Shirley needs to come to a decision and make a long-term plan.

Ms. Conley asked, if Ayer was to accept the \$335,000 adjustment to Shirley, is that an amount Shirley can pay? It seems Shirley can't even pay that. Shirley may have a plan. Ayer may have to step up and do something. It's not that we don't want to help, but there has to be an end to the fiscal inequities. We knew there would be challenges along the way. We need to see a plan, not do this for you, but with you.

Mr. Swanton stated he did not have an answer, just a direction to move toward and get us through one more year.

Ms. Conley suggested all Boards construct a letter, all sign it and send it to legislators.

Ms. Granger agreed that this temporary band-aid will help us get through the next few years until we are where we need to be.

Mr. Hillman felt that if Shirley has a plan in place to bring them into line, then Ayer picking up the slack for a few more years is doable. This is beneficial to both towns.

Mr. Maxant felt the 3.7% Shirley cola will be noticed publicly.

Mr. Gleason corrected that we are not talking about the same thing in terms of cola increases and steps. The 3.7% a misconception, the cola is less than that.

Mr. Mock emphasized there is a legislative component here. The numbers are based on the Governor's budget. Revenue increase has stopped. We need to maneuver whatever levers we can to meet common interest in the school district. We have thrown Shirley a life preserver, however, are still trying to get to firm ground. No doubt we are better off than we were a few years ago. The notion of a legislative component is a good one.

Mr. Gleason opined we draft a letter and notify the state delegation, DESE, MASS and MASC, and pull together a few members of each Board to meet collectively at the March 12, 2013 budget hearing.

Mrs. Reischutz felt it was important to have a full compliment of members from each Board and be prepared to take action, if necessary.

Mr. Pontbriand proposed the letter that he and Mr. Mock will draft will include a synopsis of the problem, followed by a request for assisted support and an invitation to our budget hearing on the 12th of March.

Mr. Pattenden declared that if we don't get assistance from the state, then the school should reduce their budget.

The Boards did not take any action. Each Board felt they needed to discuss what was talked about this evening amongst their membership and to give Shirley time to look at a long-range plan.

At 9:15 p.m., the Ayer BOS, Shirley BOS and Ayer and Shirley Fin Coms adjourned. A short recess was taken by the RSC.

Mrs. Reischutz reconvened the Committee at 9:35 p.m.

Mrs. Reischutz called for comments on the budget hearing.

The Committee was pleased with the turnout of members from each Board and were in agreement that they appreciated the candor without derogation from all the members. It was a great initiative.

New Business

Consigli Construction Co., Inc. Contract
Postponed until a Contract is in hand.

Approval of Minutes

Moved by Pat Kelly and seconded by Michele Granger to approve the minutes of the regular session held on, February 5, 2013, as distributed, for release. All were in favor.

Superintendent's Report

High School Project Update

Mr. Mock communicated that the construction has been underway since last Tuesday. Walls have been removed and re-framed, and construction workers are building an elevator shaft for a lift. Cleaning and prepping rooms is ongoing and the move from one end of the building to the other will begin on March 6. Meetings with SMMA exterior design team and logistic meetings happen on a daily basis.

Other

Mr. Gleason moved to postpone the incurring of debt discussion and securing the wording for it. Mr. Mock added in time for consideration at a town meeting, with a public hearing before the town meeting. Michele Granger seconded the motion.

Mrs. Reischutz stated it doesn't have a critical factor, so we can postpone it to a time unknown. However, we do need to discuss it. All were in favor.

Mrs. Reischutz informed the Committee that MASC is holding a training for our division that will focus on superintendent evaluation and adherence to the new evaluation standards on May 2, 2013. All members should make a concerted effort to attend.

Other Topics for Discussion Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 hours in Advance of this Meeting

None

Communications

1. ASRSD Office of Teaching & Learning Newsletter, Volume II, Issue I, 2012-2013
2. Gmail, Sequestration, February 26, 2013
3. Gmail from Jim Ryan, re: Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards Show, February 26, 2013

Documents included in the, February 5, 2013, packet by item #

5a. Gmail, Excess and Deficiency Notification for Ayer-Shirley dated 2.26.13

- Some Notes Regarding ASRSD FY2014 Preliminary Budget, January 8, 2013
- ASRSD FY2014 Budget Summary (Updated - January 23, 2013)
- FY14-Assessment Detail Per Regional Agreement
- Assessment Change Analysis FY12-FY14
- Required Local Contributions FY07 to FY14 (ASRSD)
- DESE FY14 Chapter 70 Enrollment and Contributions by Member City or Town
- DESE FY 14 Determination of City and Town Total Required Contribution FY14, Preliminary for Ayer and Shirley

5b. M.G.L. Language Section X-Incurring of Debt

Moved by Pat Kelly and seconded by Dan Gleason to adjourn at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura E. J. Callahan, Recording Secretary

The Regional School Committee approved these minutes at the School Committee meeting on March 5, 2013.