

TOWN OF EGREMONT, MASSACHUSETTS  
MEETING OF THE SELECTBOARD  
MINUTES

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Date: August 22, 2023  
Time: 10:00 AM  
Place: Via Zoom Meeting & Town Hall  
Egremont

Present at the meeting in person were Selectboard Chairman George McGurn, Vice-Chair Lucinda Fenn-Vermeulen, Board member Mary Brazie, School Committee member James DiPisa, Liz Wilson, Stacey Schultz, Frank Cote, Moderator Stephen Cohen, RSDPB Consultant Jake Eberwein, Richard Allen, Finance Committee Chair Laura Allen, SBRSD Elementary Principal Charles Miller, School Committee Member Kyle Bartlett, Marion Jansen, RSDPB Chair Lucy Prashker, David Katzenstein, Town Clerk Juliette Haas.

Present via zoom were Ada Rosemarin, Eileen Vining, Mary McGurn, Charlie Ketchen, Town Clerk Juliette Haas, Joan Rogers, Doug Mishkin, Tara White, Nic, JoAnn, Susan Bachelder, Nadine Hawvery, John Cheek, Finance Committee member Dan Blitzer, Phyllis Cohen, Donea Boissevin, Ellen Rudley, Beth Dean, Neal Goff.

Only portions of the meeting were audio and video recorded because there were connectivity issues.

MINUTES:

Actions on minutes of prior meeting was deferred to the next meeting.

CITIZENS TIME:

Susan Bachelder asked that the issue of the outdoor reading garden at the Egremont Library be discussed at the next meeting.

SCHEDULED ISSUES:

Regional School District Planning Board (RSDPB) representatives Lucy Prashker and Jake Eberwein attended to answer questions about the vote of the planning board to recommend a merger of the two regional school districts and the proposed regional agreement. At the request of Selectboard member Mary Brazie it was clarified that, though the original intent was to give the planning board a half hour to present, they are now being allotted 1 hour to answer questions. (Handout given to attendees is attached.)

Chairman McGurn pointed out the following noteworthy parts of the draft agreement:

1. All buildings currently open, stay as they are, open and operating.
2. The high-school students of heritage Southern Berkshire Regional School District (SBRSD) will be vacated from Mount Everett and will attend the new high school that is built over or next to, or using part of Monument Mountain high school. (The final design to be determined working off of a Berkshire Hills Regional School District (BHRSD) existing design.)
3. The 'new district' would be named: Southern Berkshire Hills Regional School District
4. The new building estimated cost is \$100 millions of dollars and will include an academic high-school and a Career Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) wing or building attached to it with a limited number of 'seats' for students from the new district for CVTE.
5. The combined high school student body size will qualify for additional funding for construction.
6. The intent is to offer automotive, agriculture, and a couple other CVTE programs to be determined.
7. Existing programs in the heritage SBRSD will be worked in or combined or meshed into heritage

BHRSD programs forming the new district curriculum.

8. The new School Committee will have the following (elected) representatives with the distribution of ‘seats’ tied to the largest expected assessments to taxpayers:
  - a. Great Barrington: 3
  - b. Sheffield: 2
  - c. Stockbridge 1
  - d. West Stockbridge 1
  - e. Egremont 1
  - f. Alford 1
  - g. Monterey 1
  - h. New Marlborough 1
9. One Superintendent of Schools will be appointed by the School Committee. The Committee will determine that process.
10. The 8 Towns will pay for the new school with the heritage SBRSD Towns paying 10% of the total cost (an anticipated \$10 million minus \$6 million from the Commonwealth resulting in an estimated \$4 million because of the combination [depending upon the actual figures and the actual “Regional Incentive Aid” determined by the Commonwealth]).
11. The 5 heritage SBRSD Towns will have to pay off all SBRSD existing debt on their own from now until it is retired in 2032 (roof, boilers, upgrades recently done) in addition to new debt for the new high school/CVTE building.
12. Any capital spending on the Egremont School or New Marlborough Central School will be for the heritage 5 SBRSD Towns only, or those Towns alone, unless those buildings are “leased” to the new district. The heritage BHRSD Towns will not participate in any capital on those building if they are Town owned.
13. All 8 Towns will pay for all expenses for the annual budget of the new district by an assessment calculation similar to what is now used.
14. While there was an intent to ‘save money’ on education by this combination, those ‘savings’ are now considered a possible reduction in the increase of expense.
15. The School Committee in the new district will have traditional powers and responsibilities with significant powers and responsibilities assigned to the Superintendent.
16. The School Committee can vote 2/3 to close a school after a several step process and ratification by the voters of the Town where the school stands. If a leased building is later sold and the new district invested capital into that building, the new district gets some portion of any sale price.
17. Several actions, like budgets, require a 2/3 vote approval. To reach 66% as a practical matter (a 2/3 majority) it will require 8 votes (about 73%).
18. There will be a “transition period” while the new school is built when the SBRSD, BHRSD and a new Transition School Committee will all function.

Lucy Prashker pointed out that the estimate for the new high school is a projected estimate.

Actual costs are unknown until the design is completed. The South Egremont and New Marlborough Schools are not owned by the district. Currently the SBRSD agreement does not make clear who pays for capital costs, whereas the proposed merger agreement does.

The RSDPB is holding an open meeting on August 28 at 6pm, in-person and via zoom, which is primarily intended for Selectboard and Finance Committee members to ask questions, but will have a public comment time. There will be community forums held prior to the anticipated October 23 Special Town Meeting date.

Discussion ensued around concerns over the impact on students and education, cost sharing with no anticipated savings, enrollment figures, worries over enlarged classrooms, impressions that no other avenues of merging or collaborating were looked at, the impacts of the current housing crises on future education needs. It was noted that BHRSD had tried, unsuccessfully, for six years to obtain MSBA funds to build a new high school. The new school has been accepted into the program now based on a retooled

capital agreement that has payments based on each Town's Equalized Value (EQV), more explicit details regarding voc ed and the exploration of the merger with SBRSD. It was clarified that the merger would only be for the high school. Elementary and middle schools will not merge but will more closely align their curriculum.

The 8towns.org web page has been updated with new FAQ's and portrayals of the costs per town. The projected cost per home in Egremont is less than an additional \$52 per year.

Currently the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is reviewing the draft agreement. It is hopeful that the DESE review will be completed so the RSDPB can vote by late September. Once town's are notified, they have 30 days to hold a Special Town Meeting, in late October. It is hoped all towns can hold Special Town Meeting's on October 23.

#### NEW BUSINESS:

The Board voted unanimously to approve Town Clerk Juliette Haas' attendance at three Town Clerk conferences each year with the contingency that she take vacation time to cover her Board of Health hours.

The Board voted unanimously to promoted Highway Department member Tim Hughes to the position of Highway Department Foreman.

The Board continues to await a final review by the Finance Committee of the Mount Washington Services agreement FY 2024 fee.

The co-chairs of the Housing Committee have eagerly taken on the task of formulating an appropriate noise/nuisance ordinance to help with the issue of noise from Short-term rentals. It is felt that a vote at the Annual Town meeting would be more appropriate then rushing something for the October Special Town Meeting.

The Comprehensive Plan has been distributed to town officials for a two week review period.

The Open Space & Recreation Plan will be ready for the Board's review at its September 5 meeting.

#### UPDATES:

Membership changes are being requested for the 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration Committee. The new appointees names will be submitted for review at the September 5 meeting. The first meeting of the Committee is scheduled for September 13 at 3:30pm.

#### SELECTBOARD ITEMS;

The next Board meeting will be September 5 at 10:00am.

Meeting adjourned at 11:38am

Mary Brazie,  
Office Administrator

minutes.24/aug22

*The recording of the minutes is posted on the Town's web page at [www.egremont-ma.gov](http://www.egremont-ma.gov) for 90 days. Any attachments noted are on file at Town Hall.*