

Town of Warwick

Selectboard

February 4, 2019

Minutes

Members present: Lawrence Pruyne, James Erviti, Todd Dexter

Others present: Town Coordinator David Young, Town Secretary Rosa Fratangelo, HEART Committee member Tom Wyatt, Finance Committee members Diana Noble and Laurette Crane, Adam Holloway, Max Marcus (*Greenfield Recorder*)

I. Call to Order

Chair Pruyne called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. in the Town Hall right after the adjournment of the Joint Selectboard/Broadband Committee Meeting.

II. Minutes

Erviti MOVED to accept the minutes of January 22, 2019 as printed. Dexter SECONDED. Motion CARRIED 3-0-0.

III. Presentations and Discussions

1. Highway Department—Dexter gave an update on the Highway Advisory Committee (HAC). He said that due to the lack of a quorum, the committee had not met since the last Selectboard meeting but will meet on Wednesday, February 6th. He said that comp. time is still an issue and said that Highway Superintendent Larry Delaney told the committee that he did not have a copy of the current Personnel Policy and was functioning off of a previous policy. Dexter said that he has since E-mailed Delaney a copy of the Personnel Policy and that now Delaney is operating under the current Town policy. Dexter noted that comp. time must be used within one year. Erviti pointed out that Delaney was at the Selectboard meetings when personnel policy revisions were discussed; Young concurred. Dexter said that HAC was developing a form to document that a person has received a copy of the Town's Personnel Policy and understands it. He said once the form is finalized, he will bring it to the Selectboard. Erviti said that a broad policy needs to be made that goes beyond just the Highway Department. Dexter said that Highway crew member Brian Hubbard claimed to be unaware of two personal days allowed to him last year and that he wants them re-instated. Young noted that Hubbard was also present for personnel policy

discussions regarding vacation time, and said that because Hubbard is a good employee, he recommended giving him the two days.

2. Review of Selectboard Letter to DESE Commissioner Jeff Riley—Erviti referred to the paragraph that begins with “For example, the District recently advertised” and characterized the argument set forth in that paragraph as pointless. He explained that it is always the case when there is a high cost per student in a District with low population and that cannot be compared to a higher population district. Erviti recommended eliminating the comparison and simply stating we have a low student population and the cost per student is very high. Adam Holloway said that DESE is already aware of this, and that what DESE wants is to hear how things can be fixed. He said don’t just complain but come up with fixes and solutions and advised to think about short-term and long-term goals.

Dexter said that he thought the Green Communities Grant be mentioned as a source of funds for the District, PVRS, Northfield and Warwick. He said that should WCS close the grant could be in jeopardy. Dexter pointed out that the energy cost savings and the grant funding of the work to make those savings possible reduces some expenses for the District. He also said that closing WCS would save the District about \$214,000.00 but then it could be losing \$250,000.00 grant and subsequent energy savings for the three schools. Young explained that Warwick’s money from the grant goes to PVRS and WCS while Northfield’s share goes to Northfield. He said that his understanding is that if WCS closes the PVRS Green Communities Grant funds are gone and the District would have to cover the costs of the necessary upgrades. Young also mentioned the net meter credits and the 20-year contract we have for 25% discount on electricity which includes the WCS building.

Crane stressed that we emphasize asking for more time, and since the deficit is less than first thought, we should not be rushed. Noble said that budget cuts need to be made even if it will be painful District-wide. Young cautioned that a level service budget does not mean level funded. Noble said that the Finance Committee has met twice and drafted a memo on recommendations regarding possible closure of WCS as the first step in negotiations. She said that the Green Communities grant limits the ways in which the WCS building can be used. Noble stated that the District should pay maintenance and operating costs and the annual estimated total per year comes to \$66,000.00. Erviti said that something needs to be included about the intangible costs associated with the loss of our school to make everyone aware that the cost of operations is far from the only cost to our Town.

Dexter said that he spoke with Representative Susannah Whipps, and that she and Representative Paul Mark, who represents Northfield, Bernardston and Leyden, will sit with the DESE Commissioner to discuss our concerns. He said that they are looking for letters to present to the Commissioner and to act on our behalf in asking for time to research the matter further and request that the Commissioner not exercise his power to close WCS right away. Dexter said that the letters, including the one from the Selectboard, will go to Boston on February 8th. Young said that we need more time, and that all the School Committee can agree on so far is not to cut

anything. He said the school closures are at best a band-aid.

Tom Wyatt pointed out that the Town has spent more than \$1,000,000.00 on the school which puts into perspective how heavily we have invested in our school. Erviti said that we must amplify just how good WCS is, especially in comparison to other PVRSD schools. Dexter said the letter from Jennifer Core Flagollet highlights that WCS is a Level One school with a newer and energy efficient building. Holloway said it should be noted that parents from Orange care enough about the quality of their children's education to school choice them to Warwick and not merely bus them in but actually bring them to school every day. Young said that people from out of town choosing to provide transportation shows how much they value the education provided by WCS. Crane said that from a business perspective it makes no sense to close one of the best assets just to cut some costs. She also said that it seems Bernardston and Northfield are ready to support school closures.

Holloway pointed out that our geography and topography are different and to put kindergartners on a long bus to Northfield is a bad idea. He said that smaller schools work better in our region and the bussing issue is just one reason for that. Noble said that the community changes when students are educated farther away from home, as they make friends and more of their life transitions further away as a result. Crane asked if anyone had considered taking this to a Federal level by writing to Senator Elizabeth Warren. Young

brought up the possibility of Warwick becoming a private school. Dexter stressed again that we need to get DESE to allow us the time to explore and investigate our various options and to make those options clear to DESE.

Pruyne said he will build more emphasis into the letter regarding what was discussed

Pruyne said that we received formal notification from the District announcing their intent to cancel our WCS lease effective September 1, 2019. He said that per Town Counsel, even though the lease has expired, it is still in effect. Young said that the basis for this is precedent, and that our behaving as though it is still in effect since 2011 solidifies the precedent.

3. Update on January 28, 2019 Joint Selectboard/Finance Committee Meeting of PVRSD

Towns —Wyatt asked about the Gill/Montague Planning Committee and what Warwick's position was on participating on the six-town committee. Young suggested publicizing this on the "L" and in the newsletter to find people interested in being on the committee. Wyatt reminded everyone that one of the three members must be a School Committee member.

Erviti MOVED that Warwick agree to be a part of the Regional School District Planning Committee and seek three members from Warwick. Dexter SECONDED. Motion CARRIED 3-0-0.

Pruyne said that in negotiations we need to suggest what will be acceptable to us. Erviti said that he felt the District Agreement was being written by those whose only interest is for the District and not its member towns. Young said that the School Committee is all about the District and only the District, and that the HEART Committee serves as a bridge between the District and its

member towns. Erviti said that if the town is to pay an increased assessment, there must be *quid pro quo* where the District must also give and put forth a reduction in expenses as an example. Noble said that the PVRSD Finance Director is very precise and that corners of the budget are being chipped away while they look at many different ways to save money.

4. Discussion of School Closures, District Finances, Building Lease and Related Topics—

Young said that over the past ten years all certified free cash, which averages \$100,000.00 per year, has been used to reduce the tax levy. He said that this year we could vote to appropriate a portion of free cash to cover our share of another payment by member towns for the PVRSD school lunch debt. Young explained that this would be supplemental appropriation separate from our minimum contribution and assessment. Young noted that he was concerned the School Committee could squander the money on something else as there is no willingness to cut anything.

5. Execute Amendment 1 to the MBI Last Mile Grant Agreement—Young explained that this was a one-year extension to the existing contract with no additional cost to the Town. He said it was more time and not more money.

Erviti MOVED to authorize the Chair to sign Amendment 1 of the MBI Last Mile Agreement. Dexter SECONDED. Motion CARRIED 3-0-0.

6. Report on Franklin County Emergency Communication System: Options for the Future

—Erviti said that he was not able to attend the meeting and noted that Police Chief Shoemaker and Fire Chief were also unable to be there. He said that Chief Gates was going to obtain the information from that meeting. Erviti pointed out that the meeting was informational, and nothing was actually decided.

7. Selectboard Reports—There were no reports given this meeting.

8. Coordinator Report—Young did not have a written report. He noted he will have hip replacement surgery on February 8th and expects to have a very limited work schedule for a while.

9. New and Other Business Unanticipated at Time of Meeting Posting — Holloway asked that the Selectboard please request that PVRSD Superintendent Scagel present what he will propose to DESE at a School Committee meeting. Wyatt said that there are meetings on February 12 and 14. Dexter said that he thought Holloway's idea was good, and that the towns should be made aware of what Scagel will say to DESE on February 20th .

Dexter MOVED to send a letter to PVRSD Superintendent Jon Scagel requesting the disclosure of his intentions for what he will propose at the February 20, 2019 DESE meeting. Erviti SECONDED. Motion CARRIED 3-0-0.

10. Public Comment—None.

Adjournment

Erviti MOVED to adjourn at 8:07 p.m. Dexter SECONDED. Motion CARRIED 3-0-0.

Documents consulted at this meeting:

*Draft Minutes of January 22, 2019 Selectboard meeting

*Memo to Warwick Selectboard from Warwick Finance Committee dated February 4, 2019 RE:
Compensation Recommendation regarding possible closure of WCS

*Draft letter to DESE Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley from Warwick Selectboard

*Letter to Warwick Selectboard from Sue O'Reilly-McRae dated January 28, 2019

RE: discontinuance of WCS lease by PVRSD

*Amendment 1 to the Last Mile Broadband Grant Agreement between Massachusetts
Technology Collaborative and Town of Warwick

*PVRSD Tentative Agreement dated January 18, 2019

*PVRSD Gill/Montague Regionalization Study dated January 28, 2019