

PETERSHAM CENTER SCHOOL AGENDA

NOVEMBER 20, 2013

LIBRARY

6:00 p.m.

AGENDA

I. CALL TO ORDER: Russell Fontaine, Vice Chair called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

Members Present: Chuck Berube, Lynn Peredina, and Russell Fontaine.

Members Absent: None

Others: Superintendent Tari Thomas, Principal Chris Dodge, Dr. Patricia Martin, Stacey Mousseau, and Alyssa Roberts

II. HEARING FOR VISITORS-

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES & WARRANTS: 10/23 School Committee Minutes; 10/03; 10/17; 10/31; & 11/14 Bill Warrants

a. Russell Fontaine moved approval of the October 23, 2013 School Committee Minutes. Lynn Peredina seconded. VOTED: Unanimous.

IV. OLD BUSINESS:

- a. Financial Report-** Tari Thomas reported that the FY13 End of Year Report is complete and has been submitted. Tari stated that the Franklin County Group Bus bid for FY15 through FY19 with Kuzmeskus as the only bidder came in at \$127,350 for Petersham Center School. The only individual bid for Petersham was also from Kuzmeskus and that came in at \$113,400. The current FY14 contract amount is \$103,777. Tari stated that they are still in negotiations with the bus companies because they just received the bids yesterday morning. Chuck Berube stated that he thinks this is the most modest bid that he has seen over the years. Dana Kennan stated that it might be but he does not know because of old contracts in the past. Chuck asked about the operation standards that might have been changed such as chains being added to the cost? Tari stated that is the way that all of the bids come in and any other details such as chains, GPS, and cameras are included in this. Dana Kennan recommended that they look into their current contract to see what is down in writing. Tari stated that in other financial news the Petersham Advisory Finance committee was sent a letter on November 1st to request specificity relative to the questions they would like the School Committee to address at their next joint meeting to be held on December 10th. Tari stated that the School Choice balance for FY13 was \$36,594.34 and \$10,000 was added to the reserve bringing the reserve total to \$30,012 for FY14. \$26,594 remains in surplus and the DOR estimated \$399,169 in anticipated school choice for FY 14. \$371,000 has been earmarked towards the FY14 budget.
- b. Transportation Bids-**discussed in financial report.
- c. NESDEC Enrollment Projection-** Tari is working on this and should have an update for the December meeting.
- d. Well Dome-** Chuck Berube stated that at the last meeting they had asked for the administrations opinion. Tari Thomas stated that last year Rebecca Phillips did not

think that this was necessary due to the cap being welded on. Chris Dodge stated that due to the position of the well and the cap being welded. Chris stated that he talked to the DEP and they really do not have a position on the well domes and there are things to consider. If the well was in a spot where it could be contaminated this would be different. Chris does not think that the benefits outweigh the concerns at this time. Chuck stated that clearly no one is going to be hitting the well and they think tamper proof bolts would give it that extra protection as Russell suggested. Chuck stated that they do not have much to gain by putting something unsightly in. ***Lynn Peredina moved approval to not go with the well dome although much appreciated. Russell Fontaine seconded. VOTED: Unanimous.***

- e. **Response to AFC-** discussed in financial report.
- f. **MSBA impact of building use change-** Tari stated that she talked with Diane Sullivan at the MSBA and she is researching the project funding agreement and restriction on sale, lease or removal from service guidelines for the Petersham Center School. This wasn't present in the artifacts received from the school and town offices and section 14 basically indicates that the district can rent or lease the facility for a temporary or periodic community use. Tari also stated that if the district wishes to sell, rent, lease, license, mortgage, donate, transfer control of, declare as surplus or otherwise dispose of an assisted facility, notice of intent must be filed, include the appraised value and the authority shall receive no less than its share in proportion to its investment in the total project cost of the fair market value of assisted facility. Tari is looking to keep the committee updated when she gets more specificity for the MSBA. Chuck Berube wanted the public to understand the reason for discussing this item is because they have had some recent requests that they use some of this building for us other than education.

V. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Envision Math-** Chris Dodge gave the committee a brief overview of the Envisions Math program. This program works towards addressing the new standards and he wanted to present some of the things that he finds fantastic about the new approach to math. Chris stated that there has been a change in practice where there used to be set steps involving math and now they are linking it to more word problems and seeing the whole picture.
The first philosophy is learning and that math ideas should be explored in ways that stimulate curiosity, create enjoyment of mathematics and develop depth of understanding. The other philosophy is teaching and an effective mathematics program is based on a carefully designed set of content standards that are clear and specific, focused and articulated over time as a coherent sequence. The next philosophy is technology because technology is an essential tool that should be used strategically in mathematics education.
The next philosophy is equity and all students should have a high quality mathematics program that prepares them for college and a career. Literacy across the content areas because an effective mathematics program builds upon and develops students literacy skills and knowledge. Math used to be shown one way now they are shown lots of ways and you might look at a math problem a different way than the student next to you but you can get to the answer different ways.
The last piece is assessment and the assessment of student learning in mathematics should take many forms to inform instruction and learning. Chris opened up the presentation for any questions from the committee or visitors. Ann Townsend asked if it is more challenging for certain students that are better with just numbers to make this switch to more verbal math. Chris stated that it is something that we are finding

already and there are students that are struggling with this because it is a change for the students, teachers, and parents and there are some growing pains going on. Based on research? Chris stated that if you go on the website by Pearson the research on the program is shared. Tari recommended the What Works Clearinghouse is a great website for a neutral analysis on mathematics programs. Crowd question asked does the state of MA outline what programs they recommend. Tari Thomas stated no unlike other states the state of MA does not do this for us.

- b. Building walk around-** Chuck Berube stated that the school committee along with the director of ground Jay Burke did a full walk around of the building and grounds today. They reviewed maintenance issues and all the systems that go along with this building. Chuck stated that it gave us a lot of insight and it was great that they got to do this. Chuck stated that they did look at some items that are of concern and there are some less than complete maintenance items on this building. Chuck now has a very strong appreciation of the work that the Direct of grounds has to do and that the building is in very good hands. Russell Fontaine stated that it was great to see what he has on the schedule and what needs to be done as annual maintenance.
- c. Town Meeting 5 yr. plan-** Chuck Berube stated that at the town meeting they had a request about the 5 year plan for education, programs, class size, finances in regards to how the committee is going to try and deal with having more control with the finance of this community. Tari asked if they are looking for more of a strategic plan. Chuck stated yes that is what his understanding seemed to be. Chuck asked Ellen Anderson regarding if this was her opinion as well. Ellen Anderson stated that the her assumption was that it seems to be that every year the school budget goes up and we have a disconnect that most of the world is getting less every year and they were asking is it possible for the School Committee to make a plan which recognizes that we can't keep giving more to the Petersham Center School budget. Ellen stated that there needs to be a way that the school department levels out and does not stretch the pockets of the taxpayers. Ellen thinks that the town is looking for a plan that will provide good education for the children of Petersham and not involve raising the budget every year. Maryanne Reynolds stated that her assumption from the meeting was there was a concern with the student population of kids born in this town and part of it was putting some research into that. Tari stated that one of the plans that she has for the Advisory Finance Committee is to attend regular budget meetings so that they can see the development of the budget and that would be in the short term plan. Tari stated that we can have a report at the next meeting regarding this.
- d. Class Size-** Chuck Berube stated that this issue has been brought up in the past and he thinks it should be discussed again. Chuck asked the administration to talk about this issue. Tari Thomas stated that last year Mr. Baldassarre requested the committee take a look at increasing class size by two to three students in order to increase school choice revenue and the committee was reluctant to doing this. Tari stated that the staff was interviewed and did not have an interest in increasing class size at that point. Chuck stated that clearly we do not need to be making any decision right now. Tari stated that we can talk about this at the December meeting. Maryanne Reynolds asked has emerging grades been talked about with school committee? Paul Koulouris asked what current class sizes are. Tari stated that the total numbers of students are 110 and there are 16 in kindergarten, 17 in grade one, 14 in grade two, 19 in grade three, 14 in grade four, 15 in grade five, and 15 in grade six. Ellen Anderson asked if those classes have aides. Chuck stated that if they are requested by an IEP then yes certain classrooms have aides.

- e. **School Choice Presentation (Ken Roche)**- Tari Thomas introduced Ken Roche to the public stating that he is a former Superintendent and coached us through the regionalization program and is here with us today to explain the School Choice Program. Ken Roche stated that his goal tonight is to share information with the public and begin a dialogue and he wanted to let them know that these school choice situations are very complex and it's a result of specific state policies that have been in place for a while and have a very strong impact on communities and schools and they need to figure out the best path for themselves with the fiscal and educational landscape. Ken stated that one of the unintended consequences is whatever you decide can have a very large effect on communities around you. Ken stated that in his quick look at Petersham there are risks and benefits and costs to whatever is decided. Ken asked the public to share a little but with him before he gets started so he can focus more effectively on where the crowd wants this dialogue to go. Ellen Anderson stated that it appears in Petersham that more than half of the student population is choice students and there are concerns with that. Ann Townsend stated that along with that there is belief that it is costing taxpayers in Petersham some amount to education the school choice students that school choice funds don't totally cover. Ann also stated that many of them come from Athol and Athol has just undertaken a substantial building project. Ken Roche summed up the crowd's concern by stating that the three topics of interest are that enrollment is now about 50/50 with Petersham and School Choice students, subsidizing students from other towns, and what is the long term effect of the Athol building project. Ken wanted to cover first how school choice works. Ken stated that school choice has to be voted by a school committee to allow students to choose in. The Chapter 70 dollars (state aid dollars) that follow students to schools is set at \$5,000 and there is no inflation indexing of it and this is not based on real cost. Ken stated that state aid follows that student from one district to another and there are no dollars coming out of the local finances for the \$5,000. The exception to this is Special Education for example a student from Petersham chooses into Orange and that student has an IEP which calls for 3 hours of speech and language therapy per week those services are billed back and the fees are set according to the kind of service delivered. Ken stated that districts are being appropriately compensated for special education services delivered to students of other districts. Ken stated that if you were going to vote to get rid of school choice for the students already choice students would be grandfathered until they were out of Petersham Center School. Dr. Pat Martin asked if this is first come first serve process. Ken Roche stated that there is some flexibility when it comes to this process but you cannot pick and choose. Ann Degan asked if you can accept siblings together. Ken stated that the sibling policy is not state wide or a local policy. Ann asked if this would have to be a school committee policy. Dana Kennan stated that this should be a school committee policy. Ken would like to just sketch out a couple of the big ideas with school choice. First is that this is a policy that was enacted to fill empty seats in classrooms but that is why the financial arrangement is set up the way it is. Towns with severely declining enrollment in order to defray some of the cost of educating their own students this opens up a lot of slots to help burden the costs. The second big idea is to allow parental choice and being able to use another option other than charter schools. Third idea of school choice is to improve educational competition among schools. The effects are not always aligned as they should be. Ken stated that school choice is a zero sum game for example if you get \$5,000 for a school choice student another district is losing \$5,000. When a student goes out of a district that is a complete loss and when a student comes in that is a complete gain. This is a mechanism with

winner and loser and enables some towns to stay educationally viable. Ellen Anderson asked if he could define educationally viable. Ken stated we tend to think the smaller the class size the more attention the students get where in fact classes can get too small and they get a lack of diversity and different viewpoints. Small towns are really wonderful and nurturing places to raise kids but at some point it is better to expose the students and to not have classes that are too small. Ken stated that if you are trying to stay fiscally efficient and the class sizes are getting to small you need to start looking at multi grade classrooms. Ken stated that teachers are already faced with incredible different ranges of students in one grade and challenging that even more by adding 2 grades that this would take an excellent teacher to make that model work. Ken stated that this is a great school with great teachers and is this challenge really something that you want to impose on those teachers. Ken also wanted to mention that if a district is losing a significant amount of school choice students it is not only the loss of money but the loss of size because a building operates best when it is full. Ken went on to say that it is important to recognize that parents will always seek the best education that they can possibly find for their kids. With that being said they have not yet recognized at higher levels is that school choice is a step backward in regionalization goals. Some local communities are making rational decisions to not regionalize in regards to receiving school choice money. The receiving districts can sometimes become dependent on Chapter 70 money.

Ken handed out a packet to the crowd and committee to look at. This illustrates how things have changed over the years with enrollment in regards to school choice. In FY13 there are 60 students choosing in out of 100 total students and you are receiving about \$400,000 which is about a quarter of the total budget. Ken stated that if you look at the trend from FY03 to now you can see that we are increasing every year. Chuck stated that the school was redone in November, 2003 so that explains the change in school choice from around that time. Chuck also stated that if you go to the DESE website these are the numbers reported through Petersham K-6. Ann Townsend asked for the total number enrolled at these years. Ken stated that foundation enrollment found on the past page will give you some sense of the picture of Elementary students in Petersham. Ken stated that you can see a dramatic decrease in your enrollment and then you opted to accept school choice which has benefited you and he would have made the same vote if this was happening in his town. Paul Koulouris asked what required local contribution is. Ken Rocke stated to give an adequate explanation of that is probably about a 2 hour conversation. Ken stated that the state has a formula by which they calculate a town's ability to pay which is based 50% on property and 50% on income and they run this through a series of calculations and that is where the local required contribution comes in and all of this is based on a calculation that the state has made. Ken stated that it has a floor and a ceiling but is somewhat independent of residential children in the town. Ken stated that this is a way of collecting money state wide and is somewhat progressive.

Ken went on to say that Chapter 70 trends give you huge amounts of information but does show some of the declining enrollment numbers and what Ken thinks is that this town cares about its students and funding them. Ken wanted to point out that the school budget is about 1.57 million and there are 110 students, if your student enrollment went down to 55 instead of 100 there is no way that you could run the school for half of that total budget. Ken stated that there is just no way to cut certain costs for example a part time principal is a good idea in theory but it doesn't work very well. Ken pointed out that if you want to save on teachers' salaries you could

end up with multi grade classrooms which do not always have great success especially relative to MCAS scores. Ken stated that you still need to maintain the building just the same and pay for heat and plowing. Ken stated that it is actually discouraging at how little you would actually save by cutting the school choice. Chuck asked is the amount of money that we get in Chapter 70 affected by the number of children that are in free and reduced lunch program. Ken stated this this foundation enrollment is looking at the kids in the resident town not at the students that choice in. Ellen Anderson asked about total enrollment among all districts and would this be enough to fill a school? Ken stated that he thinks all of these things are worth looking into but that this is a big process and you have about 6-12 really committed people that would devote themselves to mastering these really dry materials and being able to effectively run a K-12 school. Ann Townsend asked what the actual freight per student is. Ken stated that if you have a school with 110 students and you are receiving \$5,000 for each student and the cost to educate a student is \$16,500. Ken stated that let's say you choose to eliminate school choice and 5 years from now you have a school with 66 students and having eliminated \$400,000 would you be able to save money with this model? Ken stated that he has not spent enough time to work on this and this would take a long time to come up with these answers. Ann Townsend stated that in order to persuade the community there needs to be a really good sense of the benefits that we get in order to be willing to pay a premium. Ken Roche understands where they are coming from and that this is complex and people need to study this and this is a real challenge that many districts face. The question that Ken Roche states that if you as a community decide that it is reasonable to have 1 grade level those students are getting seats that are otherwise unoccupied to maintain 1 grade level. The question he would ask is that if you lose those students would the students that remain be getting the same educational value. Ellen Anderson asked that suppose that you said we could go up to 20 per class instead of 14 per class in turn that would lower the pupil per cost. Ken Roche stated that there is a sweet spot when it comes to class size and it seems to be a lower number for lower grade levels and then you see that number rising as the grades go up. Ken stated that when he was at Gill Montague there were 2 pressures when accepting and 1 is every student you accept is more money and 2 is parents that really want to get into your system and that is a powerful idea. Ken stated that you can't avoid this moral or ethical conversation. Maryanne Reynolds asked if we had the conversation in terms of education versus dollar signs how that analysis would look. Ken stated that you could disaggregate student achievement on MCAS by sending town to look at the analysis and he is not sure that is answering that question directly. Ken stated that if you are asking if you are attracting students that are taking more of the teacher's attention that is something that is a hard question to answer. Maryanne asked how many of the students choose to come to Petersham that are special education students because it seemed like it was a relatively high number. Ken Roche stated that is also complex because some districts are very aggressive in defining IEP's. Maryanne stating is what she is asking are these special education students pulling away time from other students and how many of the school choice in students are special education students. Tari stated that there are only 14 students overall on IEPs in Petersham Center School and does not have the information about school choice. Ann Townsend asked to get back to the new school in Athol, she asked with Athol being the majority of the school choice students doesn't it make sense that they are going to work very hard to have a really great elementary school in hopes of getting those students back. Chuck stated that it is very clear that we are going to have some

negative impact if Athol does go through with this building project and we still have choice students from Athol. Ellen Anderson stated that we should begin to think about how we can knock off some of this school and still keep it open for educational purposes. Chuck stated that this is why they are exploring the SBA impact and what the impact is if we turn over part of this building to the police department for example. Karen Regan wanted to say that some people in Athol live closer to Petersham and choice for that reason so we cannot account for the new school. Karen thinks as an educator that works at Mahar and a Petersham resident go to Mahar and Quabbin and see what the students are like, they are worth every penny. Chuck stated that this conversation has been so much broader than what was expected and he thought this was going to be more about financial and is very grateful for Ken Rocke coming out to discuss this complicated situation. Michael Leblanc wanted to say that he finds it interesting that 20 years ago when we didn't have any school choice children at all and everybody was leaving town that now we have come to the point of why we are having school choice students here. Mike stated that we have turned this school around and it's always about the money and what we can afford and how much can we spend on education. Mike stated that the school is the biggest budget and school choice is able to offset this and there would be a lot more problems if you were to illuminate this. Mike would not act quickly on getting rid of school choice and he was one of the first to vote for school choice and would do it again. Ann Degnan asked if the ultimate decision is the School Committees. Ken Rocke stated yes the ultimate decision is made by the School Committee. Chuck wanted to thank everyone with their interest in the school and community.

VI. REPORTS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT-Tari Thomas reported above.

VII. REPORT OF THE PRINCIPAL- Chris Dodge reported above.

VIII. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING- NESDEC enrollment, transportation bids, and class size.

IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION

X. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS- December 18. Ann Townsend asked about the meeting on December 10th. Tari stated that this will be a meeting with the Advisory Finance Committee and the only item should be the conversation with them. Tari wanted to make sure that they are well prepared for that conversation which is why a letter has been sent to Dr. Davis requesting additional information.

XI. ADJOURNMENT- *Russell Fontaine motioned to adjourn at 8:13pm. Lynn Peredina seconded. VOTED: Unanimous.*

The listing of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.