

**Minutes**  
**THOMASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Special Meeting**

Thomaston Town Hall – Lena Morton Gallery  
Date: Monday, March 25, 2013  
7:00 p.m.



**Members:** Lucy Santopietro, Chair; Roxy Fainer, Vice Chair; Kathleen Freimuth, Secretary; Holly Herbert, Treasurer; Rebecca Guay, Member; Alexander Lee, Member; Anne Petrucci, Member; Joanne Gilland, Member; Debra Schriver, Member

## Minutes

**Present:** Lucy Santopietro, Kathleen Freimuth, Holly Herbert, Joanne Gilland, Debra Schriver, Anne Petrucci, Alexander Lee, Rebecca Guay, and \*Roxy Fainer (\*arrived 8:11 p.m.)

**Absent:** Superintendent, Lynda Mitchell; Center School Principal; Anne Uberti

**Also Present:** High School Administrators; John Perrucci and Jonathan Kozlak; Black Rock School Administrator, Alisha DiCorpo; Business Manager, Nancy O'Dea-Wyrick; and Board Clerk, Patricia George

### **I. Establishment of a quorum and call to order:**

Board Chair Lucy Santopietro established a quorum and called to order the Special Meeting of the Board of Education at 7:06 p.m.

### **II. Approval of Agenda:**

On a motion made by Kathleen Freimuth and seconded by Anne Petrucci to accept/approve the agenda as presented; no further discussion; motion carried unanimously.

### **III. Consolidation Discussions:**

Board Chair Lucy Santopietro opened the consolidation discussions by stating that the Board is not considering regionalizing or tuitioning out students; the other districts were not ready for either scenario at this point in time. The Board's primary focus is in-district consolidation between the elementary schools, Black Rock and Center. Ms. Santopietro said at this juncture, there are too many students to consolidate into one building without incurring major construction costs to

make the schools adaptable. She also said that there are a host of decisions that need to be made and many matters that need to be taken into consideration.

Ms. Santopietro cited the roof project as one of them. If the schools remain as educational institutions for a period of ten years, the town would be responsible for 65% of the financial cost with the state picking up the remaining balance. However, if a school is closed, the monies would need to be paid back to the state. The reimbursable amount would depend on the number of remaining years.

Ms. Santopietro said the purpose of tonight's meeting was to hear what the public had to say.

#### **IV. Public Participation:**

##### **Tony Durso**

Mr. Durso reiterated a comment from a previous meeting made by Ms. Santopietro which was there are too many students to close a school at this point in time. He asked if that would cancel out consolidation.

Ms. Santopietro indicated that it is based on the number of students, in order to consolidate within the next two to three years, the construction costs may be higher in order to accommodate the higher number of students moving to one building.

He also asked how low enrollment will have to go before a school can be closed.

Ms. Santopietro deferred to Business Manager, Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick who indicated that the projected enrollment for 2016/2017 was 887 students, if the projections are correct. This number appears to be the best scenario for consolidation with minimal construction costs.

##### **Patricia Brody**

Ms. Brody expressed concern that the consolidation wouldn't occur until 2017, and asked why the schools couldn't be consolidated sooner.

Ms. Santopietro explained that you can consolidate sooner, but they would need to consider the construction costs to do so.

Ms. Brody asked what would occur with the Pre-K students.

Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick indicated that the Pre-K program would be relocated in its entirety to the high school. She further stated that there may other communities with the same structure and that it has worked out very nicely.

**Tony Durso**

Mr. Durso asked if closing a school depended on how much money could be saved. He asked, "If you find out that closing it next year is going to save the town money, can't you close it next year?"

Ms. Santopietro said that she didn't believe that they could accommodate all the students in one building for next year.

Board member Kathleen Freimuth said that there was nothing that would prohibit Board discussions regarding one grade level moving to another school in the interim, for example, grade 6 students to the high school.

**Chris Davis**

Ms. Davis asked if there were any discussions with regards to the playgrounds.

Ms. Santopietro said that the playgrounds were one of their considerations.

**Doreen French**

Ms. French made an inquiry regarding the possibility of moving a grade to the high school commencing with the 2013/2014 school year and when is the latest that there would be a decision made.

Ms. Santopietro said research would have to be done prior to committing.

Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick provided a hand-out to the Board members and audience depicting the savings realized by the Board if they were to consolidate into Black Rock School and the same information if they were to consolidate into Center School. A preliminary consolidation estimate was provided for each scenario. She reiterated that it is an estimate, that there might be educational decisions made that would increase some of the costs.

In the Black Rock School scenario, the BoE would save approx \$550,000 but it would cost the town \$100,000 because it would pick up the operation of the Center School building, heat, water, electric, etc.

The same information was presented for the Center School. The Center School was built for high school students. Per fire regulations, Kindergarteners would have to be housed on the ground floor level. One issue in this scenario is the lack of bathrooms. Also mentioned was the lack of parking at the Center School facility. Suggestions were heard expanding parking to where the tennis courts are currently housed and/or out to the corner facing Adam's market.

Finally, the high school would have to be retrofitted to accommodate the Pre-k program. Unknown costs were highlighted in gray and included such things as parking lot expansion, building a playground, locks on classroom doors, and retrofitting bathrooms on the ground level to name a few.

### **Tony Durso**

Based on the handout, Mr. Durso asked if by 2017, if the building modifications would need to be made or would less need to be made.

Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick said all of them noted would need to be done in order to consolidate.

Board member Joanne Gilland asked Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick what percentage is \$500,000 to 600,000 (the savings) to the entire budget, to which she replied, "very small".

### **Christel Russman**

Ms. Russman expressed her happiness that the students will remain in town.

She then went on to make an inquiry regarding the loss of students from one year to the next and how that determination was made.

### **Alex Osowski**

He expected to see a much larger savings than \$500,000. What is the payback on the savings if renovations are to be done?

### **Patricia Brody**

Ms. Brody also questioned the savings. She asked whether or not the special education department would be consolidated, would dollars be saved from snow removal, a smaller required lunch room staff; she felt there were items missing which would increase the savings.

Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick explained that the number noted represents the consolidation of schools. There may be other educational savings realized.

### **Sue Palomba**

Referring to the handout, Ms. Palomba said that the unknown costs highlighted in gray are going to fluctuate quite a bit and will take away from the savings, not increase it.

### **Gail Lascko**

When looking at the whole picture, she asked that the Board remember not only the educational value but the real estate value, as well. If the buildings are shut down, they will not be able to be reopened because they are grandfathered in and it will cost the town millions of dollars to make them a school again. She cited the Grove Street school scenario, which was

closed because they couldn't put an elevator in it. She said someone went on to purchase the building, put an elevator in; it could have remained a school rather than senior housing.

She said, "Millions of dollars have been spent on the properties, the new auditorium at Center School, and the BoE is considering closing them?"

She suggested looking at expansion of programs such as trade programs at the high school.

Board member Kathleen Freimuth indicated that the issues were being discussed with the Board of Finance, too.

### **Doreen French**

Ms. French said she was more confused, she was not sure whether she was there to discuss whether or not the BoE will consolidate, or that consolidation will happen and what building will be closed as a result.

Board Chair Lucy Santopietro indicated that they are in the process of gathering information. She said that the Business Manager would be working further on numbers to see if closing a school would be worth it, she reassured the audience that no decision has been made. "What is the best time do to this? What is the most cost effective way?"

### **Undetermined speaker (Jennifer)**

The individual asked if the Board has looked at any other schools that are comparable in size to Thomaston and what grade levels are put together, should sixth graders be moved to the high school.

The speaker was concerned that the teachers are already overwhelmed with the class sizes, before consolidation. She said the Board needs to look at what is best for the students and the teachers.

### **Ed Mone**

Mr. Mone stated, "That the key to any planning is research – no one expects a decision would be made this evening." His inquiry, "Do you have any concept or plan in mind that will bring about the necessary research to assist in making the decision, perhaps hiring a consultant"?

Board Chair, Lucy Santopietro explained that the Business Manager worked on consolidation in one of her prior districts so she has first hand knowledge. Ms. O'Dea-Wyrick explained that her consultants were sitting in the audience with her, referring to the administrators of the buildings.

Board member Becky Guay showed concerns with hiring a consultant, that there was an issue with hiring a consultant to find a Superintendent, and hiring a consolidation consultant would be an added cost.

Board Member, Kathleen Freimuth explained that it may not be a Board cost; that the town may offer to help. She made a recommendation that the Board begins researching securing a consultant.

**Linda White**

Ms. White asked, "If we are going to employ a consultant to look at options, is the only option open to us consolidation and closing a school"?

Ms. Freimuth said the study has to encompass both educational and financial pieces.

**Roger Perrault**

A question Mr. Perrault thought should be presented to the consultant would be what building would be most marketable if it were to be closed. "If there is no need for it, put it on the market and sell it to offset the cost of consolidation", he said.

**Gail Lascko**

Ms. Lascko noted that there are many groups that use the Center school gymnasium and auditorium and if it were closed, there would only one gym and auditorium in the town.

**Sarah Jackson**

Ms. Jackson asked if there was a timeframe for the consultant and how long would the study take.

**Undetermined speaker**

The speaker asked if the Board was taking into consideration whether the parents of 6<sup>th</sup> graders wanted their children at the high school.

**Joyce Knowlton**

Ms. Knowlton raised a question, "Does the whole town vote on this? Once the Board makes their decision, does it go to the town?"

Board Member Alexander Lee said that any regionalization or unities with other districts must go to a town referendum, internally closing schools is a Board of Education vote.

Board Chair Lucy Santopietro said the Board would take into consideration what they hear and what the majority says.

**Tony Durso**

Mr. Durso said that Ms. Petrucci indicated that there was pressure on the Board to consolidate. He asked if the Board voted on the matter and/or if it is divided.

Ms. Santopietro said there is not enough information. "If it doesn't affect the students' education and saves the town money, why would the Board be against it? The Board wants to make the right decision at the right time".

**Lisa Acker**

Ms. Acker said she was very happy that the district is not regionalizing or tuitioning students out. She asked if they don't consolidate, what are the other options.

Ms. Santopietro and Kathleen Freimuth said they would need to look at class sizes in that scenario.

**Joyce Knowlton**

Expressed concern with regards to "shoving all the kids" into one building. She said the rooms are full.

**Barbara Grenier**

Ms. Grenier asked if the consolidation may not happen at all, "Could there possibly be four - 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes with 15 students in a class, it's not a bad ratio."

Ms. Freimuth said, "That can't continue to happen, it's unrealistic."

**Alisha DiCorpo**

Ms. DiCorpo said the Board is concentrating on K-6 consolidation in an effort to save money. But as the district looks ahead, the numbers of students that are projected will end at the high school in very small class sizes, she explained. In terms of programming, if the district does not add to or change the academic programs, they won't meet the requirements of NEASC. "What can you offer with such small classes, if you can't bring in students," she asked.

**John Goscinski**

Mr. Goscinski asked, "If the district consolidates, what would happen if the enrollment increases?" "What are the numbers of students that the district loses moving from each school?" "Is there any type of questionnaire that asks why they are leaving?"

Ms. Santopietro explained that departing grade 8 students have a choice. They can go on to attend either a technical school, or a private, or magnet school; it depends on their individual desires.

Principal Perrucci indicated that he does meet with the students and said they leave for varying reasons. He also said it is unrealistic to offer everything.

Mr. Goscinski said perhaps the district could consider offering some of the courses, not necessarily all of them.

Principal Perrucci explained that the magnet schools are drawing students away, more choices are being made available out of district. He feels the only way the district can save any money is by regionalization.

Board member Debra Schriver suggested sending out a survey to the parents, as well.

**Barbara Grenier**

Ms. Grenier stated that she is looking to find other solutions not in Thomaston because of the changes and class sizes. She said the classes are too big and not beneficial to the students.

**Trish Brody**

Ms. Brody made several inquiries on behalf of SEND (Sharing Educational News and Data). "How have we gotten to this point", she asked.

Another concern she inquired about encompassed safety. That Center School is safer from a security standpoint.

Board Member Roxy Fainer said that it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to make Center school accessible to younger children. She felt there is nothing wrong with Black Rock School.

Ms. Brody just wanted to confirm that the security issue was being looked at with regards to a consideration of consolidation.

In conclusion, Ms. Santopietro stated the purpose of the meeting was to bring to the public that the district was not planning to regionalize and would not tuition out the students, that their goal is to work toward a decision on consolidating or not, and when that would occur.

**V. Consolidation/Time-line:**

(Anticipated vote to accept/approve)

No decision/No motion

**VI. Adjournment:**

A motion was made by Anne Petrucci and seconded by Kathleen Freimuth to adjourn the Special Meeting of the Board of Education at 8:30 p.m.; no further discussion; motion carried unanimously.