

1 Mont Vernon Middle School Study Committee

2 Wednesday, November 3, 2021

3 Meeting Minutes- Approved 11 30 2021

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5 Attendees: Stephen O'Keefe- Mont Vernon School Board Member, Dagmar Vlahos- Mont  
6 Vernon, NH, Jennifer Heneberry- Mont Vernon NH, Charline Brown- MVVS Teacher, Howard  
7 Brown- Mont Vernon NH, Craig Wiley- Mont Vernon, NH, Autumn Grdina- Mont Vernon NH,  
8 Anne Dodd- Mont Vernon NH, and Peter King- Mont Vernon School District Moderator.

9 Meeting Minutes: Danae A. Marotta

10 Public: None

11 I. Overview

12 Mont Vernon School Board Member, Mr. Stephen O'Keefe, noted that the work that this  
13 committee will embark on is extremely valuable to make sure our community both understands  
14 what is in front of them and second, that the school board can decide on behalf of the community  
15 that they feel based on your help it's in their best interest of our students.

16 Tonight, every single person that is on this committee was chosen for a particular reason. The  
17 reason is the attachment or the preconceived notions that you have for the 7th and 8th grade  
18 students were not there at least in the responses that you gave us. That was important to us  
19 because they wanted to make sure that everyone came into this conversation with an open mind,  
20 more importantly to new ideas and strategies that could better their kids.

21 To create some context, the town of Mont Vernon tuitions their 7th and 8th grade students to the  
22 Town of Amherst. They have done so way back since I was in middle school when they used it  
23 tuition them to Milford Middle School. They have never educated our 7th and 8th grade students  
24 in the past 40 years, possibly more in this building, or at the McCollom Building. They have  
25 always sent those kids out because of resources, the networking, the interaction with other kids  
26 was not possible with such a small subset.

27 The tuition agreement started with Amherst in 1992, they started sending their kids to the  
28 Amherst Middle School. They were then combined to create a high school at Souhegan High  
29 School. They felt it was a great natural transition. This conversation that they will be having over  
30 the course of six months has been discussed multiple times over years. Should they bring their  
31 7th and 8th grade students back or should they continue with the tuition agreement.

32 The thing that makes it different now is that the Town of Amherst is on a sizable capital  
33 campaign to renovate their middle school and elementary school. The middle school project  
34 alone is estimated to be \$41m of which this community, they're estimating, to be responsible for  
35 20% of that capital cost. The project has been scaled back to \$31- 35m Based on their most

36 recent presentation but this community is still responsible for 20% based on their current tuition  
37 agreement. That is a whole different conversation now, the original conversation was the well-  
38 being of our kids. This upcoming budget year they're estimating spending 1.4 million to educate  
39 our 7th and 8th grade students in Amherst. Can Mont Vernon do that with lower costs in house,  
40 we probably could. The Superintendent has given us estimates in regarding to hiring faculty,  
41 getting additional teachers for the 7th and 8th grade program, potentially funding a renovation  
42 for their building, hiring a full time Music, Gym, Art, Spanish teacher but this community has  
43 made the purposeful decision not to because of the benefits a being integrated with more kids.

44 This is different now because of this obligation around the \$6 million mark on top of the 1.4  
45 million annual contribution, it is a different ball game. This community needs to be fully  
46 informed. The mandate for this committee is narrow.

47 It is to answer these three questions:

- 48 • Do we continue the Tuition agreement and absorb the additional capital costs? because  
49 we believe add the added value is so vital and important to our 7th and 8th grade  
50 students.
- 51 • Do we bring the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students back, take the capital costs that could have  
52 gone into the town of Amherst, do something on this building and educate K-8?
- 53 • Is there anything else that they are not considering?

54 Those three questions are the important task that you have in front of you over the next couple of  
55 months. Mr. Peter King was selected as the Chairperson as our School District Moderator and  
56 has engaged in this conversation before. He was chosen for his neutrality on this issue. He will  
57 speak to the expectation, and they have a lot of work to do.

58 Mr. O'Keefe concluded his statement by stating that he is very appreciative to this group to help  
59 the community move forward. He will not be attending the meetings but will review the minutes.  
60 Additionally, there were 17 people that had volunteered to serve on this committee. As the work  
61 gets filtered out among the committee, bring those people into the conversation.

62 He will be happy to answer any questions.

63 Ms. Charline Brown, MVVS Math Interventionist, commented that she is a non-voting member.  
64 She questioned if her job was to serve as an educational resource to the committee.

65 Mr. King replied that you can be as active in the discussions and offer feedback as much as you  
66 want. They see their role as to deliver a report with recommendations or possibly a vote.

67 He thanked everyone for their attendance and participation. He introduced himself adding that he  
68 has three children and participated in a number of committees, served on the MV School Board,  
69 and currently serves as MVSD Moderator.

70 He would first like to talk about the Right to Know Law. They have to post these meetings 24  
71 hours in advance, also the SAU #39 website and the second they have to have minutes and

72 anything that they hand out will be funneled to the SAU for the website. The third thing, and  
73 probably most important, is that because they are a public meeting body, they cannot meet  
74 outside this room as a body. It does not mean that they cannot talk to one another it just means  
75 they cannot bring a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5 person into that conversation. It then becomes a non-public meeting  
76 and void everything that they do and possibly close the committee. Additionally, please refrain  
77 from group texts or emails. If you cannot attend a meeting that is fine, please email him as the  
78 Chair.

79 They are part of SAU 39, which is the Mont Vernon School District, they are responsible for the  
80 K-8, with K-6 in this building. They do not have their own school for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, and they do it  
81 through a tuition agreement. High school is different, they have a cooperative agreement, it is  
82 legal agreement between Amherst and Mont Vernon. anything that happens at Souhegan is done  
83 according to a formula. They own that building and pay for the students, there is no tuition. The  
84 catch is the middle school, they do not have their own and it is the responsibility of the Mont  
85 Vernon School Board.

86 Mr. King asked Mr. O'Keefe to go through the tuition agreement.

87 Mr. O'Keefe responded that they did sign the tuition agreement contract today. He reviewed the  
88 tuition agreement.

89 Ms. Dodd noted that this new middle school removes the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and our costs are going to  
90 increase significantly because there are only three grades and not four.

91 Mr. O'Keefe added that they pay a user fee. That is what they are doing, they are renting desks in  
92 Amherst getting their educational experience. Our districts, 3 years ago, engaged in a very in-  
93 depth process to review about the consolidation to funnel into a Souhegan district.  
94 Overwhelmingly, no one was in support. The number one obstacle was labor unions.

95 Souhegan High School does not have a union but a PPC. It would take an act of Congress to  
96 move into a consolidated district because one has a pension system, and one does not. Our  
97 agreement at that point was to act as one, act as one district and funnel everything through the  
98 SAU School Board and funnel individual decisions to the school boards.

99 Mr. Wiley inquired if there was any investigation for the middle school to be in the Souhegan  
100 school district.

101 Mr. O'Keefe replied that is where they were at. The Town of MontVernon felt that local control  
102 of the elementary school was important. They were going to do away with the Middle School  
103 under the Amherst School Board, have Amherst and Mont Vernon each K-5 and then 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and  
104 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to Souhegan School District. That is where they ran into the problems with  
105 legal. The Amherst union wanted to continue union coverage and Souhegan HS does not have a  
106 union. To integrate that would have been extremely challenging. A second obstacle was in  
107 regards to retirement. It would require an Act of Congress to allow them to leave and enter the  
108 Social Security system. It just was insurmountable.

109 Mr. Brown added that this was not new. When he was on the MontVernon School Board, they  
110 had a study group to look to buy property for a middle school.

111 Ms. Dodd noted that at the time they did not have a union.

112 Mr. O’Keefe asked for questions.

113 Mr. King noted that the most important thing is to solve the problem. He noted that Ms. Dagmar  
114 Vlahos specializes in this process and has great ideas.

115 He asked for nominations for Vice Chair.

116 **Ms. Dodd nominated Ms. Vlahos as Vice Chair. Ms. Grdina seconded the motion. The vote**  
117 **was unanimous, motion passed.**

118 **Ms. Dodd nominated Ms. Grdina as Secretary. The motion was seconded by Ms. Vlahos.**  
119 **The vote was unanimous, motion passed.**

120 Mr. King added that he wanted to speak to some ground rules and Ms. Vlahos has some of her  
121 own.

122 Ms. Vlahos commented that there are Rules of Engagement.

123 Mr. King requested that the committee come to the meeting giving everything a 15% chance.  
124 They cannot come to the meeting with all the solutions because they have not defined what they  
125 are trying to solve. They will be a much better group if they consider everything like that instead  
126 of trying shout out their own idea. They are all equal here, and everybody has to participate and  
127 has to talk. If you don't agree with someone it's fine, it is not the person it is the idea.  
128 Additionally, please do not post our conversations on Facebook.

129 The committee members introduced themselves and spoke about their personal backgrounds.

130 Mr. King reviewed the meeting schedule, these meetings are scheduled for every other  
131 Wednesday.

132 Discussion ensued over the meetings.

133 Mr. King noted that the minutes will have detailed discussion.

134 Ms. Vlahos added that her format will be used to capture the beginning information. When they  
135 get into the current landscape, she will capture what a lot of people are saying. They may see a  
136 little redundancy.

137 Mr. O’Keefe gave his support.

138 Mr. Vlahos asked Mr. O’Keefe if she needed to provide her information that she had captured.

139 Mr. O’Keefe reviewed 91A discusses that everything that they do should be in the open and  
140 transparent. If an Amherst resident was curious, they would be able to properly disclose that.

141 This committee is empowered to enter into Non-Public Session RSA 91:A II. To shield that  
142 conversation if it falls under matters which, if discussed in public would likely affect adversely  
143 the reputation of any person, other than a member of this committee. There are also a number of  
144 other reasons. That would be Ms. Grdina's responsibility as Secretary to take those notes.

145 Mr. King inquired if they went into Non-Public Session if it had to be for a specific reason.

146 Mr. O'Keefe replied correct.

147 Mr. King added that they can also have Public Input but would prefer that it be at the end.

148 Ms. Vlahos remarked that there may be times where they break out into groups, especially when  
149 they discuss recommendations. Instead of her capturing everything, members would be provided  
150 with sticky notes and be submitted to her, and she can organize them in a way to discuss pros and  
151 cons. She is forward thinking about approach and things that they can do and keep everyone  
152 engaged to make progress.

153 Regarding current objectives, a lot that she filled in were items from the beginning. There is not  
154 much that is missing. She wants to capture the customer and the stakeholders. Customers are the  
155 those that receive the output of what they are trying to do. Stakeholders are people who care  
156 about what they are doing but are not impacted by the end product.

157 She believes that the customers are the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, and the Mont Vernon  
158 community are stakeholders.

159 Mr. King replied that the taxpayers are stakeholders.

160 Ms. Vlahos added that customers are always stakeholders, but stakeholders are never customers.  
161 Anyone that you tell her is a customer she will add to the stakeholder list. She also thinks about  
162 things in scope and out of scope. She inquired about the homeschool students.

163 Mont Vernon Village School Math Interventionist, Ms. Charline Brown, added that homeschool  
164 students also come to the Village School to access Specials.

165 Ms. Grdina suggested they use Mont Vernon school aged residents.

166 Ms. Vlahos asked if she could add homeschool/MV school children.

167 Mr. King replied that he was thinking of all students, including special education students.

168 Ms. Heneberry replied that it is all the students.

169 Mr. Stokinger noted that their choices will affect the MV parents. however, it is really the  
170 children that are being affected.

171 Ms. Grdina asked for clarification on the customer.

172 Ms. Vlahos replied that the customer is the recipient of the end product.

- 173 Mr. Wiley questioned what is the product.
- 174 Ms. Vlahos replied that the product will be the recommendations that they make for the students  
175 going forward.
- 176 Ms. Grdina mentioned that the parents are not reaping the direct benefit.
- 177 Mr. King remarked that he prefers to see the parent on the stakeholder side, and then focus on the  
178 children's needs.
- 179 Ms. Vlahos inquired about the relevant school districts.
- 180 Mr. Brown replied that there is the Amherst School Board, Mont Vernon School Board  
181 Souhegan Cooperative School Board, and SAU #39 School Board.
- 182 Ms. Dodd commented that they need to add teachers.
- 183 Mr. Stokinger mentioned that their decision affects the school aged children of Amherst because  
184 they will not have 20% of the funds that they would have had.
- 185 Mr. King responded that would be the Amherst School Board.
- 186 Mr. Stokinger inquired if the aMontwould be greater than 20% that they would be contributing.
- 187 Ms. Dodd noted that it depends on how many students are attending.
- 188 Mr. King asked about the number of students.
- 189 Mr. O'Keefe replied that they sent about 25 students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 25 kids in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 190 Ms. Dodd mentioned that they have 76 students listed on the last town report.
- 191 Ms. Vlahos noted that the teachers are included in both MV and Amherst.
- 192 Mr. O'Keefe added that they also send special education tuition students.
- 193 Ms. Vlahos asked if it impacts the Amherst taxpayers, the Amherst school aged residents with  
194 homeschool students.
- 195 Ms. Grdina replied that she believes it should be similar to the MV.
- 196 Ms. Vlahos asked if it would impact the bus drivers.
- 197 Mr. King mentioned the administrators in the SAU #39. They are running four separate books.
- 198 Ms. Vlahos commented that this is a good starting point to launch the discussion.
- 199 Mr. King remarked that there is not one answer and there are pros and cons.
- 200 Ms. Dodd also noted that it is a good start.

- 201 Ms. Vlahos proposed that she would populate the notes from tonight's discussion and then  
202 review them at the next meeting. They can then look at the current landscape.
- 203 Ms. Dodd noted that there are resources and documents they need to have. She asked about the  
204 state requirements for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade education and the site plan and any information on the  
205 infrastructure for this building.
- 206 Mr. King inquired about the student projections that the SAU has.
- 207 Mr. King mentioned that if there was anything that members would like to see, he will request  
208 the information to the SAU.
- 209 Ms. Dodd asked if they would be able to post documents to their committee site.
- 210 Mr. King replied, yes.
- 211 Ms. Vlahos added that they can link those in here.
- 212 Mr. Stokinger asked about utilities usage.
- 213 Ms. Dodd asked they need to know how much they can add to the load of utilities.
- 214 Mr. King asked if they did space needs on this building recently and the addition of sprinklers.
- 215 Mr. O'Keefe replied yes, the most recent version in 2013, is the one that he already uploaded. It  
216 talks about the core capacity of the infrastructure, which is 280 students before something is to  
217 be added on. It also implies 2013's use of the building, 2021's use of the building is completely  
218 different. Now, they have 3 teachers in one room, a nurse occupying the old teacher lounge, the  
219 teacher lounge has moved to the reading room, it is stretched. The best way they can absorb  
220 more students is if they are equally distributed among the grades. There are constraints today  
221 based on the way they are physically using the space. They look at the document and it should be  
222 listed. There would be some cost to get experts to come in for reevaluation.
- 223 Ms. Grdina inquired about the installation of sprinklers.
- 224 Mr. O'Keefe replied that it would have to be a significant renovation.
- 225 Ms. Dodd added that they did expand to the limitation of that plan.
- 226 Mr. King noted that it would not be just sprinklers, would require a water storage system.  
227 He asked if there were other questions.
- 228 Mr. O'Keefe noted that everything is on the table.
- 229 Mr. King added that it is up to them to do their due diligence and not to take the word of the  
230 previous committee.
- 231 II. Meeting Adjourned

232 **Ms. Grdina motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:25PM. Ms. Dodd seconded the motion.**  
233 **The vote was unanimous, motion passed.**

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