

Town of Groton, Vermont – Special Select Board Minutes of June 14, 2018 (approved)

Select Board Members in Attendance: Wade Johnson, Sr., Deborah Jurist and Aaron Smith

Attendance for the Meeting: See attached Attendance Sheet

Wade Johnson opened the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Deborah Jurist read a short speech to open the meeting. (See attachment to minutes)

Names of people who wanted to speak at the special meeting were put in a hat then drawn to see who was going to speak.

Wade had the school board members stand so people knew who they were to direct their questions too.

Julie Oliver – Julie said the when Act 46 began the School Board met with Danville and Woodsville and OESU and did a survey to get information from the community, students, staff and the state. Then they made the best decision which was to go with the Alternative Government Structure (AGS) with the hopes of standing alone. After this, the Superintendent and Business Manager both accepted positions at OESU. This opened the school up to be assigned by the State of Vermont. The State of Vermont assigned BMU one year with OESU based on the idea that the administration there knows the school. There was a meeting about this and a majority of the School Board felt this was the best decision. The State feels the best decision for BMU is to merge with OESU. The School Board was not happy with this decision so another meeting was called on Thursday, June 7, 2018. The School Board is hoping to give a plan to the State in August that they want to stay their own district under the Orange Supervisory Union. This will keep the school board and budget local. The only way the high school could get closed is that the Orange Supervisory Union make that decision.

The School Board then heard about a possibility of Groton pulling out of BMU. Julie lives in Groton and said it is not viable or an option for Groton to pull out. Julie said the that we need to work together and move forward.

Kelly Emerson – Kelly lives in Groton and a staff member at BMU. Kelly reiterated Julie's concerns. She said that BMU is made up of Groton, Ryegate and Wells River. She said that Groton going alone would be strange and its not BMU's attitude or spirit. She is concerned about the taxes if school choice is chosen.

Angeline Alley – She reiterated Julie's and Kelly's concerns about Groton pulling out of BMU. Angeline said in order for Groton to pull out of BMU, they would have to have to call a special meeting for Groton, if that vote passes then a vote would have to be taken by the Wells River and Ryegate to allow Groton to pull out from BMU. If this happens the State must find the students in the community have schools to attend. This is a huge concern. If this is in the interest of the three towns, it would not start until July of 2019. Angeline had a concern if high school students are pulled out, where would the Elementary students go. Angeline said the

School Board have different opinions but are working to try to make the right decision for the BMU students in giving them the best education possible. The School Board wants to have a Community Forum to get the community's opinion on whether or not they want school choice. Angeline invited everyone to come to this meeting.

Roberta Dana – Roberta Dana had no questions at this time.

Tracy Puffer – Tracy has a lot of concern on Groton leaving BMU. Tracy attended BMU along with her children and now teaches at BMU. Tracy said everybody should be coming together to save the school and keep it Pre-K – 12. This was the main thing that came out of the surveys or to go to school choice. If school choice is chosen, the tuition and travel expense will have to be paid. Tracy does not like that the State of VT is telling us what we can do with our school.

Santina Huskey – Santina said that if school choice is chosen that the deadline is in November which makes this a very short time for the work to be done. Santina would like to see BMU stay Pre-K – 12. Santina asked a couple of questions to the School Board members.

At this time, all the names were drawn from the hat so Wade Johnson opened it up for others to speak.

Tonya Darling – Tonya was very upset that because the superintendent and business manager left BMU that the State assigned BMU to OESU. BMU will be using their superintendent and business manager from OESU and everything else will be the same. Tonya had a question if BMU will remain whole Pre-K – 12? Tracy Puffer answered the question. Tracy said Yes. The state does not have the power to close a school. If BMU merges with Oxbow, Newbury, Bradford to become a bigger board then that board has the power to decide on whether or not to close schools. If this happens, the new Board will have control over each of the school's destiny.

Merry Puffer – Mary asked a question on what the structure of OESU Board and BMU's representation on the OESU. The response to the answer was the each school will have 3 representatives. Of the 3 representatives that BMU has, there does not have to be one from each town.

Jennifer Kidder – Jennifer has two children that attend BMU. Her oldest son has an IEP. If he has to go to a different school, it would be very difficult for him to make the transition.

Dawn Lazarra – Dawn works at BMU. She asked why the community is not working together to show the state that we want to keep our school Pre-K – 12. She believes that Groton needs to work with Ryegate and Wells River to keep BMU.

Roberta Dana – If Groton was to pull out of BMU, is the intention to open a school in Groton. Deborah answered with saying that she has no answer. The question was asked if elementary would have school choice?

Wade Johnson, Sr. – Wade spoke and said he would like to keep BMU the same and not have the state involved. Wade said we need to be firm with the state and tell them we want to stay the way we are now. He's afraid if the high school is moved out then at some point the elementary school will be too.

Brent Abare, BMU School Board member – Brent said the key thing that we need to reflect upon is the actual decision that was released by the Secretary of State. The plan is 189 pages long and where it reflects BMU is on pages 125-131. Brent read a summary from those pages. BMU, Bradford, Newbury and Oxbow will be merged into a single unified district. It is going to cost approximately one-million to merge. Brent said that Oxbow is trying to fill 500 spaces for students, Bradford and Newbury are trying to stay open. There are many questions about school choice. Brent believes that school choice should be looked into. There was much discussion on school choice. Brent is willing to help do some of the research for school choice.

Deborah Jurist – Deborah said that ideas are coming from all over the place. Deborah said if we want school choice then we need to work with Ryegate and Wells River. Deborah said that we want to keep BMU the same as it is but after hearing things tonight it doesn't seem like it is going to be an option.

Tom Page – Tom gave his opinion. Tom said years ago when budgets weren't passing a study was done on school choice. The study showed it would cost approximately \$400,000 more a year for school choice for only high school and 90% of kids would still go to BMU and Oxbow. This would reduce other town's taxes but raise Groton's taxes. The advantage is that people will move into towns with school choice.

Brent Abare was asked how much it would cost when the high school from BMU go to Oxbow. Brent said it would cost \$872,000 more a year between the three towns. Angeline Alley spoke up and said Oxbow and Bradford have merged. Bradford taxes will go up Bradford taxes will increase and BMU taxes will decrease.

Brent Abare is trying to come up with a solution for Groton. This situation with BMU all started on Nov. 2017 when the School Board voted unanimously to align with CCSU. Brent said BMU was in the clear. Four nights later the School Board were brought in for a meeting to reconsider the vote. There are three ways you can reconsider and none of those processes were followed. The School Board were told that they were there to rescind the vote that was unanimously passed four days prior to this meeting. When this was done, this sealed it for BMU to go with the Act 46 decision. At a previous meeting, the School Board asked the board chair to go to CCSU and ask them what should BMU do. The board went back to the state board and asked them what should be done. This is when Brent realized he needed to do something for the community.

At this time, Deborah Jurist asked the people what would you like us to do? Tracy Puffer said we need to stay a Pre-K – 12 school.

Mike Heath – Mike is on the Peacham School Board and was on before Act 46 passed and through the Act 46 process. After Mike read what the State of Vermont said about BMU, he doesn't think there are any options that BMU can do now. Mike suggested BMU go the school choice for 9-12 and keep BMU Pre K – 8 in which all three towns would have to agree.

The final decision by the state is Nov. 1, 2018. If all three town decide to go to school choice, this process will not start until July 1, 2019.

The BMU School Board will be giving their plan to the state in August, 2018.

Mike Heath said there are 3 criterias to meet to keep a school open. They are geographic isolation (30 min travel time), performance and cost. You have to meet all three of these criterias.

The Groton Select Board wants to meet with the Wells River and Ryegate Select Board members to get their opinion on what their towns want to do.

It was suggested by Mike Heath that the BMU School Board should look into CCSU again, that they are interested in BMU.

Brent discussed why CCSU is the best option. The districts are small like BMU, can't attack each other, we preserve ourselves, keep a unified union school district.

Deborah said that the Groton Select Board will be reaching out to the other towns Select Board and she would like to see the School Board look into CCSU again.

Aaron Smith, a Groton Select Board member, thanked everyone along with the School Board Members for coming out to this meeting.

Aaron Smith made a motion at 8:30 PM to adjourn, Deborah Jurist seconded, motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,
Debra Johnson
SB Secretary

Wade Johnson, Sr., Chair

Deborah Jurist

Aaron Smith