

SAU6 Study Committee Public Hearing

12/08/15

Present: Heidi Jaarsma, Nicole Saginor, Middleton McGoodwin, Justin Ranney, William Palmer, Sandra Carlson, Peter Lynch

Absent: Holly Taft

Heidi Jaarsma called the meeting to order at 7:05PM

Heidi Jaarsma welcomed the public and made an introduction to the proposal to leave SAU6 and create our own Single District SAU presenting a summary of the plan and setting the table for later discussion of budgetary items.

The committee proposal may be found at CornishNH.net

Heidi explained that the proposal was a product of what the committee has learned in the past two years and was not a decision. The decision to form a Single Unit SAU or to remain with SAU6 is up to the voting public. Either tonight or on December 10th the committee will vote, based on the public input, whether or not to present this proposal to the state for approval and then ultimately to the town for consideration at the Annual School District meeting

Heidi Jaarsma continued explaining what a School District and SAU were by definition.

Nicole Saginor presented the organizational structure of SAU6 and the proposed Single District SAU.

The public was given information regarding committee discussions with other Single District SAU's and the possible advantages we might enjoy were we to move forward with the proposal. Advantages discussed included: Local control of the budget process; negotiation of contracted services that would create cost savings, identify and eliminate overlaps in services and create an environment that could quickly adjust to the needs of our school.

Heidi Jaarsma addressed costs for the Cornish School district in SAU6 vs. a Single District SAU.

Nicole Saginor discussed the potential budgetary impact of Cornish leaving SAU6, recognizing it may increase taxes for Claremont and Unity while also pointing out

that SAU6 might make adjustments to their organizational structure to offset such increases.

Heidi Jaarsma the spoke of the Transitional year that would follow an affirmative vote on School District meeting day. Complete details may be found at CornishNH.net.

Heidi Jaarsma opened the meeting for public comment.

Heather Meeks asked if the article would be on the ballot or voted on the floor.

Heidi Jaarsma explained the vote would be a part of the meeting and would require a 3/5th majority for passage.

Merilynn Bourne complemented the committee stating the proposal was the most strategic and organized reports she had ever seen. She continued asking where the proposal goes from here.

Heidi Jaarsma explained that a vote would be taken, preferably by the entire committee either tonight or Thursday. If the committee chooses to go forward with the proposal it would be sent to the State Attorneys General and the Department of Education for approval. The proposal would then be placed on the warrant for public consideration.

Bill Wall addressed Dr. McGoodwin asking, "What if Claremont does not approve of the proposal."

Dr. McGoodwin explained that the Unity and Cornish had no authority to stop Cornish.

Bill Wall then continued citing that he had tried contacting the Business person in Plainfield to ask about a proposed 8-12% increase to their SAU budget. He wanted to know what is going to happen when we get a contract for their services and they turn around and double their costs. We are not going to have nothing to say about it and Cornish has been through such a tough year of crisis and the principal is doing a great job improving education, why would we want to stop her by taking away her support in SAU6. Your proposal is the perfect plan if you want to close the school down. He recommended the proposal be tabled for a couple of years and that the committee vote against moving forward.

Heidi Jaarsma explained that Plainfield's costs and Cornish costs would differ by virtue of school population and that forming a SAU of our own would allow the town to dictate its own terms and become a more nimble and efficient school.

Nicole Saginor said she would not talk for the principal, but instead for herself having been a principal in two different settings stating she would be very comfortable with the Single District proposal pointing out that there will be no support taken away from the principal, instead the support would come from a collaboration with Plainfield and its staff which resembles Cornish more than Claremont.

Caroline Storrs said she like the terms within the proposal that addressed the long term sustainability of the School, spoke of the school becoming more nimble and promoting local control. She went on to say she endorsed the plan indicating that it would leave us well positioned as a town.

Alicia Simino asked about contract negotiations; "What if we for example wanted to tuition our 5th through 8th grade to Plainfield. With both towns having the same Superintendent, who would negotiate for us."

Heidi Jaarsma explained that there are situations when each side has to look out for its own interests and the School Board would negotiate these terms.

Michelle Spaulding asked why Plainfield turned away from us joining SAU32, why are they in favor of this proposal?

Heidi Jaarsma explained that Plainfield enjoys the autonomy of being a single district SAU, one budget, one audit, but if they were to bring us into the SAU they would have three of everything, Plainfield, Cornish and a separate SAU. This posed too big a change in governance. Also the apportionment numbers don't add up for them. They would end up paying more while Cornish would be paying less.

Nicole Saginor added that the town of Plainfield gains nothing financially under this proposal, it is merely a contract between Cornish and the Administrators we choose to employ.

Robert Jaarsma asked if we would be able to contract with other in the event we needed or wanted to. Are there more possibilities?

Heidi Jaarsma answered yes, we have the flexibility to contract however we want. We control the money.

Susan Borchert thanked the committee for their time and effort and stated she supports the proposal. She shared that as a past School Board and SAU board member she thought the SAU forum was polite but focused on the needs of the larger town. She feels having local support is a better way to go.

Susan Chandler thanked Heidi Jaarsma for her fantastic work, putting together the proposal and presenting it in a fashion that all could understand. She indicated that she supported the proposal, and went on to address the fear of the unknown that accompanies change focusing on a .3FTE Superintendent and the concern that a void would be left for the rest of the week. She continued stating that was confident that help would always be a phone call away, but had we considered contracting services hourly.

Heidi Jaarsma shared that all of the Single School Districts we visited reported that the availability of the Superintendent was 24/7.

Linda Fuerst agreed with Susan Chandler, that fear of change takes time to resolve. "What plans do you have moving forward to educate and bring a measure of comfort to the community between now and March?"

Heidi Jaarsma stated that there will be opportunities at School Board meetings and at the District Meeting for in depth discussion.

Nicole Saginor added that her phone number was public and welcomed anyone to call, and indicated she was sure the offer was OK with anyone on the committee.

Heidi Jaarsma said that if we went forward and the plan was approved by the Board of Education, we will be meeting on February 11th and will evaluate and discuss the need for further education.

Ruth Rollins wanted to know if there was going to an approximate time during the School District meeting when the vote might take place so the elderly would not have to spend hours on end in their seats. She went on to refer to Heidi Jaarsma as a town "treasure", complementing the work she has done.

The School Board sets the order of the articles and Ms. Jaarsma hoped it might be discussed immediately following the main article.

Judith Kaufman suggested that the committee employ current technology and record the proposal presentation as a youtube feature that could be viewed on the CornishNH.net site at people's leisure. She further suggested that some of the startup costs might be defrayed by public donation.

Lois Fitts stated that her fear of the unknown was not about the SAU but instead the school, stating that it must change.

A letter from Cathy Parks was read by Heidi Jaarsma. In the letter Ms. Parks thought the proposal was ill advised and that the money saved by such a proposal was insignificant. She indicated that purchasing Technical Services from WSESU was a poor choice that would leave us at their mercy for years to come.

She went on to say, as a school board member she was pleased with the quality and support she received from SAU6 and felt uncomfortable with the prospect of interaction with a Superintendent available only 1.5 days per week. She also believes that moving forward with this proposal will close the Elementary School.

Kate Freeland stated that separating from SAU6 sends a strong and positive message that we want to be in charge of our future, she said she completely supports the plan.

Jim Borchert stated it make a tremendous amount of sense for us to control our own destiny, decisions for our children's education will be better.

Jenn Wishnefski, Amy Ely and Mellissa Drye, all are in favor of the plan.

Kelly Patterson Perry asked what would happen if down the road we found we were unhappy; what would we do?

Heidi Jaarsma explained that the contracted positions are reviewed a year before by the school board, this would be the time to find other contracted services.

Rachel Roper voiced support for the plan.

Wells Chandler pointed out that many years ago when Cornish was looking at separating from Stevens HS and going to choice, people were nervous about change. Looking back all went well and I believe this proposal will also work out.

Christine Hines asked if we were contracting with people or with Plainfield.

Heidi Jaarsma explained that the contracted services would allow the positions to become full time positions with the commensurate benefits. We will contract for a portion of that position.

Stuart Wilkie is impressed with proposal. After hearing how Kathy Parks felt, he wondered how the rest of the committee felt about the proposal.

Heidi explained that Kathy Parks was a member of the School Board not on the committee. She went on to say the committee wanted to hear from the community and would discuss their position either later this evening or on Thurs.

Fred Weld asked about the contract procedure; "Will Plainfield have the say as to what the costs are, take it or leave it"

Heidi Jaarsma explained that we would negotiate the contract, if we didn't like it we could go elsewhere.

Bill Wall asked if the committee has asked the principal how she feels about this.

Heidi Jaarsma said that in her opinion the question is unfair. It would be inappropriate to put her on the spot with that question.

Nicole Saginor added that, as a former principal, no one is asking anybody to do anything more than she would have done.

Fred Weld thought she would expect more compensation so your costs are skewed.

Heidi Jaarsma pointed out that the job description she currently works under is not different than that in the proposal.

Greg Clark asked when contracts would be due so we could draft a budget.

Heidi Jaarsma indicated that the school budget for the following year would be posted in February.

Mr. Clark asked what would happen if there were an interim raise.

Nicole Saginor pointed out that Cornish would probably be involved and that all the negotiations would have to be done before setting the proposed budget.

Heather Meeks said both she and her husband back the proposal.

Michele Spaulding asked what other Single District SAU's experienced as far as staff stability.

Heidi Jaarsma shared that the other Single Districts were stable environments, and that having a small organization allows for easier changes as needed.

Sarah Whittiker asked if the committee has met with the prospective people we may be contracting with and if we would be involved with the selection process if changes in staff were to occur.

Heidi Jaarsma shared that we have met with them many times. If new staff were involved Plainfield would select the person and we would either employ them or not.

Ms. Whittiker thanked the committee and indicated that she supports the proposal.

Lyle Perry shared that the individuals who looked at the proposal as being a doorway to closing the school were wrong, and he supports the proposal.

Heidi Jaarsma closed the public discussion and recommended tabling the vote due to the absence of one of the committee members, and suggested we take up the matter Thursday Dec. 11th.

Middleton McGoodwin shared a closing remark, stating that the community needs to make this decision and decide what is best for the community. He closed by saying that if the town chose to leave SAU6 he will work closely with the school board to make the transition as easy as possible.

Nicole Saginor shared that as Cathy Parks had pointed out in her letter that the superintendent had always been available to the the Board, as a former superintendent Dr. Saginor knows it is a 24/7 job. Moving forward we should expect the same sort of dedication whichever direction we go.

Heidi Jaarsma accepted a motion to adjourn from Justin Ranney; seconded by William Palmer. Motion Passed.

Peter Lynch, Secretary