

## Minutes

### Board of Selectmen Joint Meeting with School Committee

#### -EMERGENCY MEETING-

Monday, August 6, 2012 at 6:00 P.M.

Rowe Town Hall

#### Present:

*Selectboard:* Chair Noel Abbott, Vice Chairman Paul McLatchy III, Selectman Marilyn Wilson

*School Committee:* Chair Lisa Miller, Lisa Danek-Burke

*Audience of Citizens:* See Attachment

**Note/History:** On August 4, 2012, a fire broke out at the Elementary School (suspected to be from a lightning strike). The entire roof was lost, and the building was likely to be considered a total loss. The two boards and additional officials met to discuss what the next steps are. Due to the emergency nature of this meeting, the 48-hour advanced posting requirement was waived.

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**Call to Order:** Chair Abbott called the meeting to order at 6:13 P.M.

**Introductory Comments:** Chair Abbott said that the school fire was a tragedy for the town, and knows that many generations have gone through the system. Though this meeting wasn't planned as a public information session, the two boards will share what is known.

The town is well insured, so there will not be a huge financial burden. This elicited a large applause from the crowd. 90 minutes before the meeting, an advance team at the site said it may be possible to rebuild. A meeting will be held tomorrow (Tuesday) at 1:00 P.M. to go through the building.

There are four items that need to be considered: Where will the students go? What will happen with the physical facility? Could this be an opportunity for something greater? What will happen with the insurance and rebuilding?

Chair Abbott expressed a desire to see the student body kept together, and kept as closely together as possible. Perhaps they will be taught at a school within a school. As a lot has been happening in a very short period of time, little discussion has occurred with the Central Office as of yet. It is clear that they will be closely involved with choosing where to send the students.

**Physical Facility:** Tom Donaldson was at the emergency joint meeting yesterday. He has since called a structural engineer. A fence will be put up around the school (hopefully) by tomorrow morning. He will be meeting with the structural engineers to assess if the building can be rebuilt (salvaged) or should be demolished. A Licensed Site Professional (LSP) will be ensuring that all environmental aspects (such as asbestos) are taken into consideration. The following items have occurred or will occur in the near future:

- Engineers will estimate a cost to replace in the next few weeks.
- Security around the facility has been maintained.
- \$75,000 will be sent to the town to purchase supplies for the teachers (as an advance on the contents insurance)
- After review, State Police Investigator, David Percy, believes that the fire was started from a lightning strike.
- Reports from engineers and HAZMAT will be forthcoming.

- The solar panels at the school may be reconnected soon. Police Chief Dandeneau said that an expert will be at the school tomorrow to determine if they are safe to reconnect.
- Principal Knittle will be meeting with staff to determine what is needed.

The School has two fireproof safes that need to be accessed, to determine if their contents were saved. Dwight Beebe, a teacher, asked if teachers will be allowed to get in. Ms. Danek Burke answered that once the School Committee is told that it is okay, teachers will be allowed in. Nevertheless, proper safety measures must be taken at all times.

Myra Carlow asked who has authority in this case. Mr. McLatchy said that there is no clear-cut answer, as there are some overlapping areas, but the School Committee will have most of the authority in this matter, as the building and grounds fall under their jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the Board of Selectmen is very likely to remain involved.

Phil Buck questioned if the playground and fields will be available. Ms. Danek-Burke said that the insurance company was discouraging it. Fire Chief McLatchy said that the baseball field and other areas may need to be used for the construction process during demolition.

There is a question about whether the town *should* rebuild. A town meeting will need to be held to determine this.

It was noted that the Rowe Historical Society and the Rowe Camp & Conference Center have offered to help in any way possible. The Heath Board of Selectmen has also offered to help in any way they can.

**Student Relocation:** Superintendent Buoniconti said that a lot has happened in a short period of time. “Luckily”, there is a fair amount of experience due to Tropical Storm Irene requiring the relocation of Hawlemont during the previous school year.

The goal of the Superintendent is to keep the kids together. The Administrative Council has met, and worked to develop recommendations and spreadsheets for the School Committee to review and consider. The hope is to have the students occupy another school for the upcoming school year as they have all necessary facilities.

Hawlemont, Heath, Colrain, and Buckland-Shelburne (BSE) all have enough space to house the Rowe students, but BSE is considered to be too far, and was not strongly considered. In terms of transportation, going to Heath would not require a great deal difference, and Hawlemont would be fairly similar. Colrain would require driving on back roads during winter, and is the farthest of these three. There was also a question of the accessibility to parents, particularly school of choice parents.

Integration is being looked at, rather than complete separation. While English/Languages Arts and Math would be separate, subjects like Music, Art, and Physical Education could potentially be merged with whichever school is chosen. After time, Science and Social Studies could also be looked at for merger.

Principal Knittle said that he has walked through the Hawlemont School, and there is definitely room for the students to attend there. It’s unknown whether grade levels between the two schools would be grouped together (putting Rowe’s 5/6 class next to the Hawlemont 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes) or if Rowe classes would be grouped together.

Elizabeth Buck asked why a wing at BSE couldn’t be used for maintaining a separate school. This could provide a level of independence. Superintendent Buoniconti said that it was ruled out because of the amount of time students would spend on the bus. Colrain was not being recommended for this reason as well. Joanne Giguere, Principal at BSE, said that Hawlemont did not inhabit a full wing, and the school has grown in size since last year.

Modular classrooms were suggested, but Chair Miller said that she had looked at them, and was not a huge fan. Ms. Danek Burke said that the insurance company said it would be difficult, as no part of the school can be used, because there are no existing facilities to use up there.

**Citizen Questions and Comments:** The following was discussed:

- Donna Flagg asked if the parents would have a say in where the students will go. Chair Miller said that parents can speak now. Ms. Danek Burke said that it's under a vote of the School Committee, but she wants to hear what people have to say.
- Leann Loomis asked for more information about how it would look. Principal Knittle said that the students would be taught by the same teachers that they have now. There is a question of whether to keep Rowe grades together, or sort them out by grades (as may be considered if the Hawlemont School is chosen). Should the students be integrated with the other school in certain subjects? Emma Svoboda, Hawlemont Principal, said that there is a lot of opportunity for social skills. In the long run, Hawlemont joining with BSE last year had a lot of benefits, and there were opportunities to learn.
- Kerri McLatchy said that there are seven math classes, and wondered how that will be accommodated. Principal Knittle said he did not know, and it will certainly be a challenge to find a solution.
- Dwight Beebe asked if the schedule will remain as is. Principal Knittle said that it would have to be decided as a full staff.
- Melanie Gokey said that if everyone is split up (even within the same school), it may lose that small-school atmosphere. Principal Knittle agreed.
- Alice Wozniak explained that she was a school-of-choice parent. She wondered if choice parents will be looked at regarding their commute. Chair Miller said that up until now, it's all one family, but yes, this issue needs to be thought of. Ms. Danek Burke said that she has received calls, and has been thinking of that. The Preschool will definitely have an impact, but she also noted that a bus can pick up a school-of-choice student if it is not out of its way.
- Ann Ledwell said that her children went through the Hawlemont/BSE merger, and it was too big. At Rowe, her children were often together. She wondered if this will be lost. Principal Knittle said that it will definitely be another challenge to face. The populations of the schools are Hawlemont-103, BSE-219, and Heath-63.
- Kirk Miller asked about a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), and whether it would be affected. Principal Knittle said it would not.
- Elizabeth Buck asked if the School Committee can try to have a structure similar to what the students had at Rowe, and to be thinking about what will happen when (and if) they return to a new school in town.
- Mary Paige asked if there would be something for kids who are nervous about the transition. Principal Knittle said that a crisis intervention program will be created for those interested. Julie McCarthy, who recently retired as the Rowe School psychologist, will be donating her time to help.
- Julie Shippee inquired whether all current staff will be moved. The plan is to bring all current staff wherever the students go. This elicited a round of applause from the audience.
- Leann Loomis asked what can be done to keep things the same. Principal Svoboda said that team building, open houses, etc... can help. If Hawlemont is tried, perhaps these things can be done there.
- Chair Miller asked if there was enough room for a joint lunch. Principal Svoboda said that there is currently a K-3 and 4-6 lunch, but with more students, perhaps that might change. It's possible there could be two Hawlemont lunches and one Rowe lunch. Ms. Danek Burke said that this is the only time some students get to see each other.
- Chair Miller asked if physical education would be combined. Principal Knittle said that this would not occur initially, but long-term, it may be considered.

- A citizen said that Greenfield has an empty school that is fully furnished. Ms. Danek Burke said that there is a policy to make sure that no elementary school students are on the bus for more than an hour.
- Phil Buck asked if there was a possibility that the school might *not* be rebuilt. Selectman Abbott said that it will be up to the voters. Mr. Buck expressed gratitude for the work everyone has been doing.
- Roberta Baker said that preschool could be housed separately.
- Superintendent Buoniconti addressed an item on the spreadsheet that said “school choice tension”. This creates a question of whether a town has to pay for a choice student to go to Rowe if Rowe chooses to go to their school (should Heath have to pay for a student if Rowe chooses to join with Heath, for example). The answer is unknown.
- Chair Miller said that finances still need to be addressed, including a shared-costs agreement. Superintendent Buoniconti said that no financials had been resolved yet.
- Melissa, an audience member, said that she works at Target, which is likely willing to donate to the school, and a letter could be sent to solicit donations. The audience applauded upon hearing this.
- Kerri McLatchy asked why Hawlemont was given a higher recommendation than Heath. Superintendent Buoniconti said that a lot of work would have to be done to the building at Heath to accommodate Rowe. Ms. McLatchy suggested modularity could be used. Ms. Danek Burke respectfully questioned the audience as to why people seem to prefer Heath. Alice Wozniak said that for her, it would be much easier to bring her child to school there than in Hawlemont. Nicole Miller said she would be worried about getting her child to and from Heath in the winter with the roads, but Ms. Miller and Sherri Moffatt said that they keep their roads clear. Ann Foshay said that the population at Heath is different than Hawlemont and would be more comparable to Rowe’s.
- A citizen asked what the timeline was looking like. Superintendent Buoniconti said that the hope is to start school on time.
- Ann Ledwell asked whether the registered sex offender in Charlemont was still near the school. Beth Bandy, chair of the Hawlemont School Committee, said that they do not know if the person was still living near the school, but the building was scheduled to be condemned.
- Alice Wozniak suggested that perhaps the joint baseball and soccer programs continue, as it would be a familiar activity for students.
- Sherri Moffatt asked if she would lose her children’s spots if she does not choose them to Rowe until after the school is rebuilt. Chair Miller said that she doesn’t know, but that nothing bad would be intentionally done. Ms. Danek Burke said that she would like to keep those seats available, but there could be no guarantees made.
- Paul McLatchy Jr. said that working with Heath has been very successful in the past.
- Myra Carlow asked if financial information would be available soon. Superintendent Buoniconti said that the School Committee needs to lean towards a certain choice before a final analysis could be conducted.
- Mary Paige asked what would happen if the town votes not to rebuild. Ms. Danek Burke said that the town has to get permission from the state *not* to have a school. She encouraged everyone to get out and support the school.
- Cliff Paige asked if busing was to be paid for. All excess costs will be covered by insurance.
- Russell Jolly said that he has been in carpentry his whole life. He said that in repairing a burned out building it would be difficult to ever get the smell out. There is potential to build an excellent new building, possibly a zero-energy building. His comment on energy received a round of applause.
- Joann Brown asked if the students were still going to have Spanish classes, and the answer is yes.
- Dot Paige wanted to express appreciation for the Fire Department and their hard work. The audience gave a round of applause in support.
- Julie Shippee asked if other schools will serve breakfast and have free lunch. Superintendent Buoniconti said that the intent is to continue current policies.

The Board informed the audience that their next meeting will be held on Wednesday. At 8:25 P.M., the two committees recessed and will reconvene inside the Town Hall.

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**Present:**

*Selectmen:* Chair Noel Abbott, Vice Chairman Paul McLatchy III, Selectman Marilyn Wilson

*School Committee:* Chair Lisa Miller, Lisa Danek Burke

*Audience of Citizens:* Approximately 25 Citizens

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**Reconvene:** Chair Abbott called the meeting back to order at 8:35 p.m. Ms. Miller did the same for the School Committee.

**Audience Comments:** The following topics were discussed:

**School of Choice:** Phil Buck said that there is a good chance of losing school-of-choice students in the relocation. Some people view Hawlemont as an inferior school. He suggested that perhaps the choice families be spoken to.

Ms. Danek Burke said that there will not be enough time before Wednesday to contact them all. The same teachers will be teaching the students, and the School Committee needs to make a decision that is best for the overall student body. If we lose kids, it's sad, but regardless, the students need to go somewhere that works.

Ms. Wilson said that it's not the building, but the teachers and students that make up the school.

Mr. Buck said that there is a connection with Heath already. Chair Miller said that the more information received, the more information there will be to look at.

Jeff Simmons said that wherever the school goes, his children will follow. But, this could be an opportunity to see what the kids are capable of.

**Rebuilding:** Alice Wozniak said that if people react with emotion, and school of choice students are lost, will it be economical to rebuild?

Chair Abbott said that Rowe will very likely become a desirable place to live in 5-7 years with high-speed internet coming soon. Chair Miller said that her hope is to have a better school built. Ms. Danek Burke said that the plan is to appoint a building committee, which will need to look at this. Selectman McLatchy said that it may not be financially wise, and that perhaps the school has *never* been financially "wise", but it would be smart to build one, as the school produces excellent results.

Paul McLatchy Jr. said that there is a fear of a change in personality, and if we lose the school, the town will suffer. Melanie Gokey said that a school is more than a school. The town will "die" without it. In the ice storm of 2008, it was a place of refuge. She supports rebuilding a school, but the concern right now needs to be about relocating the students.

**Transition:** Donna Flagg said that she is nervous about this change, but parents need to embrace what is coming. She said that the community needs to come together and set a good example for the kids to follow.

Dwight Beebe said that after a quick look, 41% of his students are school-of-choice. He's asking that people who are considering not coming to take a chance. It's a good staff, and a good community. He believes that Rowe will have a good school regardless of where it is.

Jeff Simmons said that extra driving is sad, but we need to do what is best for the children. Ms. Danek Burke said that some choice parents will benefit, and some will hurt. But she has heard from the children that their number one concern is “will we be with our friends?”

Kerri McLatchy said she has mixed feelings. The kids have connections with the Heath School, and have a similar setup. But, space is a concern. There are eight different math classes in seven different grades. Chair Miller said that adding a modular next to the Heath School might be an option, but we have to explore all options.

An audience member said that they traveled a lot to find the right school. It’s all about attitude, and it’s about the people. Paul McLatchy Jr. said that this is a community, and that everyone cares.

Donna Flagg asked if there could be some transportation help for students. Ms. Danek Burke said that the bus route cannot be changed once it is set. Superintendent Buoniconti said that the route had not been set yet, and could potentially be changed to help before it is.

Elizabeth Buck asked if there was any consideration in having a spot at the school for parents to bring their children earlier. Superintendent Buoniconti said it’s possible, but it would have to be on a volunteer basis, as the school day is set in the teachers’ contract.

Jeff Simmons asked if a decision would be made next week, and Ms. Danek Burke said hopefully the decision will be made this week.

Chair Miller said that she wants to put the Heath School with a modular back on the table, but would like to do walkthroughs of the two schools before making a decision. Superintendent Buoniconti said that site visits can be done. He said that this is a “marriage”, and that the school will have to deal with the parents and staff of the other school as well.

Dwight Beebe said that he trusts the two School Committee members, and that it’s a finite arrangement, anyway. Elizabeth Buck said that this will probably be the hardest decision the School Committee has to make, and that they need to make a decision that will be good long-term for the students.

Donna Flagg asked if parents could be involved in the school tours, and Superintendent Buoniconti said that if scheduling worked out, it would be okay. Perhaps the PTP could be a good representative for the parents.

**School Committee Membership:** Phil Buck asked if Chair Abbott, who was appointed to the School Committee last week, will be able to vote at the meeting on Wednesday. This is unknown.

**Fire Department Response:** The School Committee would like to get a final list of all the fire departments that responded to the fire.

**Jobs:** Chair Abbott said that it will be up to the School Committee how storage and other matters are handled. Certain jobs will be handled by the town, and certain jobs will be handled by the school. He believes that the rest of the jobs can be given to the Superintendent. Ms. Danek Burke would like to make sure that the two groups coordinate on these tasks.

**State Offices:** Superintendent Buoniconti said that he has spoken with the Commissioner of Education, who said that he will help in any way he can. He also spoke with Jack McCarthy, the director of the MSBA, who said that the school could potentially submit an emergency statement of interest. Ms. Wilson will talk to Business Administrator Blier to discuss financial matters.

**Security:** Ms. Danek-Burke said that she has spoken with Tom Donaldson from MIIA, and his recommendation was that structures should not be accessible. A fence company will be brought in, but there was discussion as to how close to the building it should be, and what it should encompass. Ms. Danek Burke firmly believes that all structures should be within the fence. Police Chief Dandeneau will have it set up however the School Committee wishes it. All playground equipment should be off-limits.

**Entering the School:** When engineers come in and say whether the staff can go in, safety and control needs to be ensured at all times. Fire Chief McLatchy will be developing a protocol on entering the building tomorrow.

**Gratitude:** Janice Lapointe wanted to express her gratitude for the work everyone is doing. To her, it's not the stuff that is sad, it's the possibility of losing kids, and she's glad that everyone wishes to see the kids kept together.

**Donations:** Principal Knittle said that a number of people expressed interest in helping. He encouraged them to donate personal items to the school. He will also write up a letter to try and solicit donations.

**Plants:** Paul McLatchy Jr. asked if outdoor plants by the school can be moved to another location, as they were quite beautiful. These plants have been maintained by Laurie Laffond, and also need to be checked for any contamination before they can be moved.

**Outlet:** Kerri McLatchy said that many people desire an outlet for them to share their experiences and stories. Selectman Abbott suggested a Facebook page. There is \$10,000 in the insurance plan for crisis management. Ms. Danek Burke said she's hoping to get someone in soon for families to talk to. Julie McCarthy may be hired on a per-diem rate. Selectman Abbott agreed that it needs to be done soon. Donna Flagg said that the PTP hopes to set up a website for people to contribute to.

**Adjourn:** A motion was made and seconded to adjourn. The vote was 3-0 in favor, and the meeting was closed at 10:08 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Paul McLatchy III

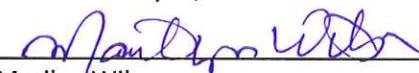
Approved:



Noel R. Abbott, Chairman



Paul McLatchy III, Vice Chairman



Marilyn Wilson

*October 9, 2012*

Date Approved

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**Attachments:**

- Agenda