NOTES – FY2016

Information Meeting Concerning Possibility of Rowe Rejoining Mohawk School District for Grades 7-12 Thursday, February 24, 2016 – 6:30pm – Rowe School

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Present: Rowe School Committee: Susie Zavotka (SZ) and Lisa Miller (LM)

Also Present: Mohawk Superintendent Michael Buoniconti (MB), Lark Thwing, Mohawk SchCom Chair; Glen Cardinal, Buckland SchCom; Mike Kociela, Mohawk SD Business Manager; Jon Lev, NBSU Superintendent; Carrie Garivaltis, NBSU Business Manager; Bill Knittle, Rowe School Principal; twelve townspeople; Diane Broncaccio of The Recorder

Purpose of Session: MB stated that the purpose of the information session was to discuss what it would look like if Rowe rejoined the Mohawk School District for Grades 7-12. Rowe had been a Grade 7-12 member since the district's formation in 1967, but was asked to leave in 1982 because Rowe's high EQV (equalized valuation), which was much higher than the other eight towns' EQVs, was dragging down Mohawk's c.70 aid. At some point after 1982 there was a change and c.70 aid is no longer calculated at the district level, but is now calculated at the town level. The impact of Rowe belonging to the district has been eliminated.

Result of Request to Leave District: Rowe did withdraw in 1982, and since that time Rowe 7-12 students have been attending Mohawk via a pay-as-you-go arrangement...# of students x tuition rate. This arrangement means that Rowe's payments go through peaks and valleys as enrollments change each year. If you're a member town these costs are smoothed out (see Item 1 below). Calculation of the tuition rate is set by the formula in the MTRSD Agreement that was part of the 1982 amendment allowing Rowe's withdrawal. As an incentive to leave the district, the agreement gives Rowe a 10% discount on the calculated tuition rate. [Note: The few out-of-state students that are at Mohawk use the same calculated tuition rate, sans the discount.] Rowe's tuition agreement cannot be changed without approval of the Rowe townspeople.

Rowe's Generosity: MB pointed out that Rowe has been very generous since withdrawing by donating funds to the district for items such as technology, textbooks, a Spanish teacher and late bus—and during the past 10 years or so has donated nearly $500M for such items. Going back to 1982 this number would be much higher. So, even if the tuition rate may not have always covered actual costs, the town more than made up for that in other ways.

Rumblings for change: MB stated that actual expenses to educate students were beginning to be substantially higher than the tuition rate, and because of this, rumblings began on the Mohawk side of the fence that the tuition calculation needed to be revisited. But due to the change in the way c.70 funds were now being calculated (at town level vs. district level), the reason for Rowe not being a member was gone, and it seemed more advantageous for Mohawk to discuss inviting Rowe to rejoin the district and thereby avoid the tuition controversy altogether. MB stated that the MSC is overwhelmingly in favor of having Rowe rejoin. Lark added that the sense of the MSC members –and some Mohawk community members—is that Rowe is part of the family and has always been part of the family and district—and not to have Rowe in the district is a travesty. MB stated that draft revisions of the regional agreement were begun last year. This is a lengthy process and all changes must be reviewed and approved by DESE.

Proposal for Rowe to rejoin the district would mean...

1) Rowe would change from paying a tuition charge per pupil (semi-annually), to an assessment paid to the district (6 payments per year). The assessment, based on the apportionment of expenses (both operating and capital costs) among the member towns, is spelled out in the MTRSD Regional Agreement. Each year each town's share is based on their State Determined Minimum Contribution, and the State Determined Above Minimum Contribution, which is based on the town's 5-year average enrollment.

2) Rowe would not pay for any existing or prior capital costs/debt, since calculating Rowe's payments for special items throughout the years revealed that they in fact voluntarily paid more than they would have paid for past capital items. Rowe would only be responsible for future capital projects. However, since Mohawk just passed a large capital project last year that will not start until FY2018, Rowe would also be responsible for these capital costs. The cost to Rowe for this project would be about $3,300 per year for 5 years. [Note: Capital costs are only Mohawk capital costs, and all 9 towns must approve. For elementary capital costs, only the towns involved in the specific school vote and pay for those capital costs.]

3) Rowe would have two (2) elected members on the Mohawk School Committee (MSC), bringing that full committee membership to 18.

4) Rowe's total town vote percentage on the MSC would be 3.8%. Rowe would only vote on 7-12 matters. Voting is based on town population using the federal decennial census. Current census data for Rowe is 349. The next federal census is 2020, and each weighted vote will be adjusted by the MSC according to that data for the 10-year period beginning 2021, and every ten (10) years thereafter. With Rowe on the MSC the weighted votes would be:

Town	# of Members	Vote % by Member	Vote % by Town
Ashfield	2	8.2%	16.4%
Buckland	2	9.0%	18.0%
Charlemont	2	6.0%	12.0%
Colrain	2	7.9%	15.8%
Hawley	2	1.6%	3.2%
Heath	2	3.3%	6.6%
Plainfield	2	3.1%	6.2%
Rowe	2	1.9%	3.8%
Shelburne	2	9.0%	18.0%
		50.0%	100.0%

Proposed Regional Agreement Changes: Three changes to the regional agreement are being proposed:

1) **Clean-up wording:** eliminate obsolete wording and change the district from "K-12" to "PreK-12"
2) **Add Rowe:** Invitation to Rowe to join as a member
3) **Voting:** Change voting requirements for making changes to regional agreement from unanimous to 2/3rds

Process for Rowe to Join: Regional Agreement change that must be passed by all nine (9) towns via town meeting warrant articles. If all towns approve, the change will take effect in FY2018 (effective July 1, 2017). MB stated it does make sense for Rowe to wait until the other 8 towns have voted, and then take the Rowe vote. The last town meeting vote will probably be Charlemont's on Wed, May 25th.

Continue Tuition Arrangement vs. Joining as a 7-12 Member: Projected FY2017 assessments if Rowe were a member at 7-12 level show that it would provide **additional FY2017 revenue of $39,830 to Mohawk, and FY2017 savings to Rowe of $11,731** ($15,031 less $3,300 capital costs**).** The Mohawk increase is mainly due to increased c.71 transportation reimbursements of $38,658 that Mohawk would receive on behalf of Rowe—which only regional schools receive; and the Rowe increase is mainly due to the elimination of $58,908 in Charter School Sending costs for Rowe which would now be picked up by Mohawk at a lower per student rate totaling $35,718. **However...**

The Projected Tipping Point: MB stated that a good enrollment number for Rowe is 20 students at Mohawk. A *Power Point®* presentation he provided; however, shows that by FY2025 Rowe's enrollment may only be 13—far lower than what would be advantageous to be a member. In fact, Susie Zavotka reported that town information shows that this year and next Rowe only has one new student each year. MB will make his PP presentation available on the Rowe school and Town of Rowe websites; along with a copy of the draft MTRSD regional agreement.

Strategic Plans: Paul McLatchy III asked about assessment increases at Mohawk that many member towns are unhappy with. MB responded that when he first came to Mohawk there were double digit assessment increases and a 23-page Management Letter from the auditor. Things were turned around beginning about ten years ago by paring down staff (consolidating several PT positions with expensive benefits to 1.0 FTs), switching to GIC insurance, etc. Mohawk realized about $3M in E&D and $900K in school choice, but those savings are now dwindling and we need to look hard at other areas. A new Strategic Planning Committee has been formed and they are developing a new plan to cut costs and assessments. This new committee is having their kick-off meeting this evening with representatives from all communities, and Lark chose to come to Rowe instead as the Rowe matter is very important to him. MB: Elementary schools will be one of those areas looked at. Heath has already formed a task force to deal with their enrollment changes, and Colrain is studying their costs also. Lark re-stated his dream of one school location with all students bused or carpooled to this location. MB added...perhaps we should own our own buses—large and small, and perhaps pay some individuals to carpool students to school or gathering points along Route 2. Lark: we also need to up educational offerings to eliminate losing students to other districts via choice, charter, etc.

MB was thanked for his presentation.

The session adjourned at 7:28pm.

Ellen B. Miller

Notes taken by Ellen Miller

Attachments:

- Informational Meeting notice from S Zavotka, R Wilson and M Wilson
- Information Sheet: *Exploring the Town of Rowe Becoming a Member of MTRSD for Grades 7-12*
- Projected FY2017 Assessments if Rowe were a member of Mohawk at Secondary Level
- *Power Point®* presentation - M Buoniconti
- Draft MTRSD Regional Agreement