

**TOWN OF HAMPTON CONNECTICUT
Special Town Meeting – January 24, 2008**

MINUTES

Members Present: Maurice Y. Bisson, 1st Selectman, Melanie Johnston, Selectman, Allan Cahill, Selectman, Duncan Forsythe, Attorney, Richard Roberts, Attorney, Townspeople.

First Selectman Bisson called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.

1. A motion was made by John Burnham to elect Dick Brown as Moderator. No other nominations were made.

Motion passed by voice vote with none in opposition.

2. Moderator Brown read the item on the call concerning open voting:

The Town of Hampton adopts the provisions of Section 9-199a of the Connecticut General Statutes and provides that each political party shall have the right to nominate as many persons as there are vacancies on the Board of Assessment Appeals and those names shall be placed on the ballot. Voters may vote for the same number of candidates as there are members to be elected. The persons receiving the greatest number of votes shall be elected, subject to statutory provisions for minority representation.

Robert Burgoyne gave a brief explanation of the item. Statute restricts the number of positions available for voting to enforce minority party representation. For some offices, the statute allows towns to adopt open voting and determine minority representation after the vote. In the past Hampton has adopted open voting for the offices of Selectman and BOE. At this time, Board of Assessment Appeals is the only other office available for an open voting adoption by the town.

Motion was made by Ed Burchfield to move the Open Voting item.

Motion passed by voice vote with none in opposition.

3. Moderator Brown read the items on the call concerning the Historic Document Preservation Grant:

a. The Town of Hampton resolves that Maurice Y. Bisson, First Selectman, is empowered to execute and deliver in the name and on behalf of this municipality a contract with the Connecticut State Library for an Historic Documents Preservation Grant.

b. The Town of Hampton resolves that it hereby adopts as its policy to support the nondiscrimination agreements and warranties required under Connecticut General Statutes 4a-60(a)(1) and 4a-60a(a)(1), as amended in the State of Connecticut Public Act 07-245 and sections 9(a)(1) and 10(a)(1) of Public Act 07-142.

Motion was made by Robert Burgoyne move the Historic Document Preservation Grant items.

First Selectman Bisson gave a brief summary and history of this grant. The resolution regarding non discrimination is now required for the grant and is required to be voted on at Town Meeting.

Motion passed by voice vote with none in opposition.

4. Moderator Brown read the items on the call concerning the Water Filtration System at the Elementary School.

- a. *That the Town of Hampton authorizes the Hampton Elementary School Board of Education to fund a **Water Filtration System** at the Hampton Elementary School and;*
- b. *that the Town of Hampton authorizes the Hampton Elementary School Board of Education to apply to the Commissioner of Education and to accept or reject a grant for a **Water Filtration System** at the Hampton Elementary School and;*
- c. *that Marsha Wilhoit is hereby established as the building committee with regard to the **Water Filtration System Project** at the Hampton Elementary School and;*
- d. *that the Town of Hampton hereby authorizes the preparation of schematic drawings and outline specifications for the **Water Filtration Project** at the Hampton Elementary School.*

Superintendent Marsha Wilhoit gave a brief explanation of the issue. The school is currently using bottled water because the well water is over the allowed limit for arsenic. A filtration system is required to correct the situation. The cost of the project is 68.93% reimbursable if the procedure as outlined above is approved at Town Meeting. The project is estimated at \$22,000.

Motion was made by Dan Savino to move the Water Filtration items.

Ed Burchfield expressed concern that because there was no dollar amount mentioned in the resolution, the Town was a risk for the costs to be much higher than the estimated amount. He also expressed concern whether the superintendent was qualified to be the project manager.

John Bemis inquired if there were any proposals with more detail and whether there would be ongoing maintenance costs associated with the system.

Superintendent Wilhoit responded stating that several estimates had been obtained; the best one was from Aqua Pump. Cost of that estimate was about \$22,000. The specifications have been approved by the Department of Health. She will work with the BOE building committee to direct the project. The BOE has some money remaining from the parking lot project. They will use this money as part of the finding. There will not be any ongoing cost above the water monitoring that is done now.

Moderator Brown suggested a “friendly amendment” to limit the approved dollars to a maximum of \$27,000. This Motion was made by Margaret Haraghey.

Motion to amend passed by voice vote with none in opposition.

A question was raised about the need for a second well and whether this filtration system would cover that well. Response was that the second well project is not a part of tonight’s issue and likely a second well would not increase the water need or flow rate. It would be a back-up well and would not require an additional filtration system of its own.

Motion to approve the Water Filtration motion as amended passed by voice vote with none in opposition.

5. Moderator Brown read the item on the call concerning RD11.

Should the Town of Hampton apply, pursuant to General Statutes section 10-63a et seq., to the Regional School District No. 11 Board of Education, to institute a procedure for withdrawal of the Town of Hampton from Regional School District No. 11.

Kathi Newcombe gave an explanation of the petition that resulted in this item being place on the call.

Similar petitions were submitted in Chaplin and Scotland. The purpose of these petitions was to spur a study of all the educational options available for the region's 7-12 grade students now that the Cooperative School was defeated by Brooklyn voters. The defeat of the Parish Hill Building Project in June of 2004 was largely due to the desire of the townspeople to hear about other options. The circulators of these petitions felt it necessary to take this step, because, despite several requests that the RD11 Board conduct a study of all the options available for educating our 7th thru 12th graders, that Board has refused to do so.

Scotland's special town meeting on January 22nd and Chaplin's referendum vote on January 23rd, both resulted in a YES vote for withdrawal by a 2-to-1 margin, turning this study, by statute, into a dissolution study.

The procedure for dissolution begins with the formation of a study committee to look at issues relating to dissolution. The committee by statute will consist of:

1. one member of the Board of Ed from each of the three towns;
2. one member representing the Board of Finance or Board of Selectmen in each town;
3. two members of the RD11 Board, no more than one from any town;
4. one member appointed by the Commissioner of Education, who cannot be a resident of any of the three towns;
5. a designee of the State Treasurer's office;
6. and a member appointed by the RD11 Board who is an expert in municipal bonding and financing, who cannot be a resident of any of the three towns.

Within one year after its appointment, the committee must prepare a written report which includes:

1. Its recommendation concerning the advisability of a dissolution, after completing the study of all the educational options available;
2. A determination of the value of district's assets;
3. A plan to apportion those assets to each town based upon its membership in the district;
4. A plan for settlement of any obligations and the transfer of any property to the towns from the District;
5. A timetable for orderly dissolution and turnover of responsibility to the local BOEs, should dissolution be recommended;
6. The question to be determined by the referendum in each town which will follow the completion of the study.

The referendum at the end of the study must pass in each town in order to be implemented.

Barbara Andersen commented that is difficult for a lay person to understand what the statute requires. She believes that the petitioners are stating that there will be a study of all options yet the statute requires only studies and actions related to withdrawal.

Kathy Donahue stated that the statute states that the committee has a wide range regarding what to include in it study and several options were included in that last study done for Scotland.

Leslie Wertam, RD 11 BOE chair, stated that she spoke with Ron Harris, attorney for the state BOE. His opinion was that the committee is only required to study what might be appropriate to complete withdrawal. The committee is not required to study all options.

Ed Burchfield asked if the Town Attorneys had an opinion.

Town Attorney Rich Roberts stated that the language is “.....such other matters as the committee deems necessary.” He stated that that means things relevant to dissolution and withdrawal. The committee is not required to explore all options; they are only required to focus on what it would take to withdraw.

Haley Sears commented that she was a Parish Hill student and she and others were not prepared for college.

Ann Gruenberg, local BOE member commented that she felt confused. She thought the process was to vote for a study yet now it seems the process/vote is specifically for withdrawal. She does not feel the community is sure enough or has all the information they need to make an informed decision for voting or that the voting will then reflect the true voice of the community.

Jim Ryan inquired whether our vote matters since Chaplin and Scotland have already voted yes. Attorney’s answer, was “no” our vote will not stop the withdrawal process study from going ahead.

Michelle Stettler provided some statistics demonstrating that 84.2% of Parish Hill students go on to higher education following high school. There is other data available demonstrating that test scores for PH students are equal to or superior to students in schools our children would likely be “tuitioned out” to.

Ed Burchfield wanted to know how many people signing the petition actually had children in our schools. He also questioned whether we should proceed with the referendum since the outcome was already decided.

First Selectman, Bisson stated that he would like the people of Hampton to be able to express their opinions. Knowing the will of the Town would be useful information to the BOS.

The Town attorney stated that we must proceed with the referendum since the process has already been set in place.

Tim Huthausen expresses concern that Towns people not present here tonight will have different and insufficient information to make an informed vote. He asked those present tonight to try to educate others.

Gay Wagner stated that we have been given a narrow interpretation of the statute and does not believe the committee would be able to make a recommendation without looking at alternatives.

Lisa Sanchez, local BOE member[, *professor and researcher*,] stated that when doing research, as the committee must do, questions are always encountered which must be answered. She signed the petition, understood the statute before signing it and does not feel she was misled. She also stated that the committee may recommend not to dissolve. It is important to note that the referendum is not a final decision. A second vote with all three towns in favor, must occur for the region to be dissolved.

Brian Murphy asked if the study will be 3 separate studies or one study. Answer is one study. He asked if the petition was valid. Answer from the attorney was yes. Mr. Murphy questioned whether Selectman Cahill’s point of view as expressed in a recent letter to the editor represented his own views or those of the BOS. Selectman Cahill stated that they were his own views. Mr. Murphy stated that our students would likely be sent to Killingly or Windham and that the recent test scores of the PH students were higher than those of students at those schools. He also stated that dissolution of the district and Parish Hill may create added expense for the Town is the elementary school needed to be enlarged to accommodate the 7th and 8th grade students.

Barbara Andersen wants people to understand what we are voting on i.e. dissolution of the district, not a comprehensive study. She questioned the facts in a flyer being circulated around town.

Dan Meade asked the attorney's to verify that a vote yes on this referendum does not automatically mean dissolution.

Attorney Roberts confirmed that a "yes" vote on this referendum does not automatically mean dissolution. The committee must address the advisability of withdrawal. In so doing, they must look at the options and it is conceivable they would advise not to dissolve. Additionally, the *State* BOE must approve the recommendation of the committee and finally, all 3 town must vote for dissolution.

Steve Dunn if there was an impact if Hampton voted "no" in next week's referendum. The Town Attorney stated that a "no" vote guaranteed at least 1 member from Hampton MUST be on the committee.

Mack Johnston challenged the town's people to come together over this issue now to try to ensure a complete study is done that provides complete and unprejudiced data so our decision is based on fact.

Kathy Donahue asked for clarification on what the towns will be required to do with the land that Parish Hill is built on, if the school is closed.

Attorney Roberts stated that he has read the deed and applied an applicable statute. It is his legal opinion that although the land needs to continue to be used for education [*or public purpose,*] the land does not have to be returned to the donating family because more than 30 years have passed and there is not a requirement for the structure to be demolished.

Tim Huchthausen inquired whether the required 3 years between studies had elapsed. Answer – yes because the last study was for Scotland in 2004.

Kathy Donahue asked if the BOS could prepare a summary of the facts that have come out tonight so that other voters could be informed. The Town Attorney did not think there was enough time to prepare such a document prior to next week's referendum.

Leslie Wertam introduced Mr. Joe Fleming PH Interim Principal and Ms. Dori Smith, Assistant Principal. They will be available following the meeting to answer any questions about the current PH improvement plan.

Sally Lehoux asked the audience to please vote next week to let the BOS know where you stand.

Maryellen Donnelly ask that we please support the kids currently at PH as it is very frightening and demoralizing for them to be at a school in danger of dissolving.

Ann Gruenberg asked if there could be some sort of summary of the information coming from tonight's meeting. She suggested someone could write it in a letter to the editor.

Moderator Brown closed the discussion and noted the item is being sent to referendum.

6. Per item #6, Moderator Brown asked if there was any other business appropriate to come before the meeting. No other business was proposed.
7. Motion to adjourn was made by Ed Burchfield. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 8:57 pm with the RD 11 item sent to Referendum January 31 noon – 8PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Melanie Johnston
Selectman