

South Hero School Board
North Hero School Board
Joint Meeting
Folsom School
Meeting Minutes: Monday July 13, 2009

Meeting called to order 6:35 p.m.

In attendance South Hero School Board: Bill Chiari, Matt Altadonna, Lisa Pendolino, Diane Kline

Administration and Staff: Michael Freed-Thall – Principal South Hero, George Nelson – GISU, Joey Bennink – Principal/Teacher North Hero

North Hero School Board: Shelly St. Hillaire, Jennifer Garrity

In Attendance from North Hero town: Mr. & Mrs. Andy Julow, Danielle Kinney, Jennifer Kinney

Bill Chiari began the discussion by reviewing the three options of combining the two schools of North Hero and South Hero.

1. Designation – North Hero closes their school and tuitions their children in to South Hero
2. Joint Contract – two towns combine equally
3. Union – both schools close and form a union school, needs voter approval from both towns, 15+ month process

Shelly St. Hillaire questioned the possibility of funding from the state if schools consolidate. Chris Leopold, an educational law attorney who periodically is consulted by the GISU could be hired to do an analysis of the two towns and make suggestions. The study costs \$30-50K. George Nelson mentioned that there have been no unions in the state of VT in the past 10 years. The North Hero board members wanted more information about the schools that have designated or formed a joint contract. Matt Altadonna asked if the same study is required for a joint contract as a union and the answer is no. George Nelson will find out if a town vote is required for joint contracts as it would be for a union school district.

Jennifer Garrity requested an analysis of cost on each of the three options.

Michael Freed-Thall noted that by combining the schools, it would allow for additional educational opportunities. It would allow South Hero to maintain and restore certain programs that would be threatened by budget constraints.

Some of the North Hero parents present mentioned that they would like to see a parent presentation that addresses finances, programs, and transportation. As a taxpayer, how much will this save? North Hero School Board would like to acquire more information

from both the parents and the taxpayers of their town to get a better idea of voter sentiment. Is there a split between what the parents want versus the taxpayers?

Jennifer Garrity stressed the need for more information on the three options. She does not want to close North Hero School and designate South Hero without some sort of a long term consolidation plan. Jennifer was also concerned about absorbing the cost of the North Hero School building once the school is closed. Shelly St. Hillaire said they are looking into options of renting the space.

George Nelson handed out a report on the steps required to form a union school district. George was asked by the NHSB to give more detailed numbers on 4 scenarios of consolidation configuring the North Hero and South Hero schools in different ways and showing the effect each would have on the school budgets and town taxes. The North Hero Board wants to gather as much information as possible and consider many scenarios before presenting a final option to their town.

Bill Chiari suggested that both towns look at their preliminary school budgets for next year since we already know there are state mandated increases that need to be considered. It may aid in making a decision to consolidate or not with economies of scale in mind.

The North Hero and South Hero school boards will review the numbers prepared by George Nelson at their next respective meetings and then will schedule a joint meeting to discuss their findings and opinions.

Motion to adjourn, Matt Altadonna 8:29 pm, second Bill Chiari, unanimous.

Prepared by Diane Kline
July 14, 2009