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Minutes for the Monday, July 18, 2016
South Hero Act 46 PreK-8 Exploratory Sub-Committee
Meeting at Folsom Education & Community Center

Called to Order

- Meeting called to order at 6:05pm by Melanie Henderson, Sub-Committee Board Chair

In attendance

Melanie Henderson, Jen Lyon, Barbara O'Reilly, Bentley Vaughan, Board members; Fred Heslop, Julie Moeykens Seigfreid, Janine Bellinghiri, Julie Pidgeon, Melissa Hood, Tim Maxham, Kari Banas

Adjustment of Agenda

- Sub-Committee members suggested delaying the Public Comments section until after the Sub-Committee Rules and Major Goals had been introduced

Meet and Greet!

- Bentley Vaughan is on the Folsom School Board, Islands Act 46 Study Committee, and PreK-8 Exploratory Sub-Committee. He has two children, Naya (7, Folsom student) and Nora (3), and has been a South Hero resident for 10 years.
- Jen Lyon has four children, Amelia (7), Maybel (7), Juliet (6) (all Folsom students) and Vivian (2). She has been a South Hero resident for 12 years.
- Barbara O'Reilly has many years of experience working in higher education. She has grandchildren in the Grand Isle school, and has been a South Hero resident (both part-time and full-time) for 30 years.
- Melanie Henderson has two children, Sam (9) and Vivien (6) (both Folsom students). She has been a South Hero resident for 5 years.

Sub-Committee Organization:

- The Sub-Committee voted unanimously to use the Consensus model of decision-making
- The Sub-Committee elected Melanie Henderson as Sub-Committee Chair and Secretary (for now)
- Jen Lyon asked if there was a budget for the Sub-Committee. Melanie Henderson confirmed that there is a \$5000 budget available to sub-committees, but that the disbursement of those funds must be approved by the School Board
- Jen Lyon asked if more people could join the Sub-Committee if they were interested. Bentley Vaughan believes the School Board set a limit of five Sub-Committee members. Melanie Henderson suggested that anyone who is interested can contact Kris Bowser and allow the School Board to vote.

Sub-Committee Discussion:

Rules Governing Sub-Committees

- Melanie Henderson presented general rules governing sub-committees. She also presented the practical applications of those rules. Sub-Committee members can gather information anonymously, or as a private citizen. Sub-Committee members cannot present ourselves as Representatives of South Hero, or contact school board members from other towns. We are an Information-Gathering Body. Sub-Committee terms last for 1 year (or until the formation of a merged district), and can report out to the Folsom School Board during their meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month.
- Melanie Henderson clarified that our mandate is to research PreK-8 merger options, not a "Stand Alone" approach. Bentley Vaughan confirmed that financials surrounding the "Stand Alone" option were covered in the presentation given at the Folsom School Board Informational Meeting on July 14th.

Discuss the Major Goals of the PreK-8 Sub-Committee

- Melanie Henderson presented an overview of the two major goals. The first goal is to understand the cost of meeting the Educational Quality Standards for 7th & 8th grade. The second goal is to identify possible PreK-8 partner school districts.
- For the first goal, Melanie Henderson presented three slides on excerpts from the Vermont Education Quality Standard, State Board Rule 2000. The slides pertained to Personalized Learning Plans, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and the requirement of students to demonstrate "proficiency" in subject matter. Since the standards are vague, it is unclear what changes may be required to meet them, or if we are already meeting them.
- Julie Pidgeon offered some insight into the Education Quality Standards. Folsom is already providing all 7th & 8th graders with a Personalized Learning Plan. Folsom already offers multi-tiered systems of support (MTTS). The Assessments are still very new, so none of the schools are meeting the proficiency standards yet. However, Ellen Thompson, the curriculum coordinator in Essex, may be able to help us understand the proficiency model, which may eventually replace the letter grade model. She expressed concern that the GISU is currently lacking formal curriculum standards, and that we must develop curriculum standards before we can measure proficiency against them.
- Julie Pidgeon also stated that other schools in the Islands do not offer a World Language, and that Folsom does not currently offer enough minutes of World Language instruction. She also believes that the Education Quality Standards require additional focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) but thought it may be possible to integrate that learning into other core subjects.
- For the second goal, Melanie Henderson presented the following spreadsheet of PreK-8 school districts in Vermont. It includes county, number of pupils, Homestead equalized tax rate, and distance from South Hero (in miles and minutes). Data is taken from the Vermont Agency of Education's .pdf titled "Classifying School Districts by Size and Type of Education Offered: FY2015", as well as Google Maps. © Many schools are already involved in an Act 46 study committee, but only two have already merged.

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District Name	LEA	County	Grades Operated	Town District's Entire Equalized Pupils	FY 2015 Equalized Pupils	FY 2015 Education Spending Per Equalized Pupil	* State Rank of Education Spending Per Equalized Pupil	Act 68 Homestead Equalized Tax Rate	Size Detail	Distance from South Hero (Miles)	Driving Time from South Hero	Already Merged?	Part of an exploratory committee?
Readsboro	T164	Bennington	PK-8	Yes	97	10,291.24	255	1.0862	Small <100	197	3h 14m	Y	Y
Montgomery	T128	Franklin	PK-8	Yes	181	11,509.39	239	1.2148	100 <= medium < 500	54	1h 7m	Y	Y
Stamford	T194	Bennington	K-8	Yes	107	12,029.38	229	1.2697	100 <= medium < 500	204	3h 22m	Y	Y
St. Johnsbury	T179	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	1,084	12,062.52	228	1.2732	1000 <= very large	92	1h 46m	Y	Y
Berkshire	T018	Franklin	PK-8	Yes	271	12,319.29	223	1.3003	100 <= medium < 500	49	1h	Y	Y
Sheldon	T187	Franklin	PK-8	Yes	371	12,666.46	209	1.3369	100 <= medium < 500	35	43m	Y	Y
Georgia	T079	Franklin	PK-8	Yes	662	12,810.87	202	1.3521	500 <= large <1000	22	28m	Y	Y
Washington	T223	Orange	PK-8	Yes	134	12,817.37	201	1.3528	100 <= medium < 500	71	1h 17m	Y	Y
Walden	T218	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	161	12,896.88	200	1.3612	100 <= medium < 500	73	1h 36m	Y	Y
Rutland Town	T174	Rutland	PK-8	Yes	515	12,991.89	197	1.3716	500 <= large <1000	87	1h 52m	Y	Y
Lunenburg	T116	Essex	PK-8	Yes	180	12,996.84	196	1.3718	100 <= medium < 500	114	2h 11m	Y	Y
Bakersfield	T007	Franklin	PK-8	Yes	220	13,014.02	192	1.3768	100 <= medium < 500	40	48m	Y	Y
Coverly	T054	Orleans	PK-8	Yes	158	13,242.76	185	1.3977	100 <= medium < 500	75	1h 39m	Y	Y
South Hero	T192	Grand Isle	PK-8	Yes	209	13,356.14	180	1.4097	100 <= medium < 500	-	-	Y	Y
Orange	T146	Orange	K-8	Yes	156	13,395.10	177	1.4138	100 <= medium < 500	58	1h 15m	Y	Y
Halfax	T090	Windham	K-8	Yes	86	13,418.09	175	1.4162	Small <100	181	3h 1m	Y	Y
Sutton	T203	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	159	13,543.46	169	1.4295	100 <= medium < 500	90	2h	Y	Y
Lyndon	T117	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	729	13,551.08	168	1.4303	500 <= large <1000	100	1h 54m	Y	Y
Alburgh	T003	Grand Isle	PK-8	Yes	304	13,983.47	150	1.4759	100 <= medium < 500	29	40m	Y	Y
Tunbridge	T210	Orange	K-8	Yes	186	14,014.45	147	1.4792	100 <= medium < 500	82	1h 33m	Y	Y
Manchester	T119	Bennington	PK-8	Yes	649	14,474.81	114	1.5278	500 <= large <1000	119	2h 32m	Y	Y
Barnet	T010	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	280	14,707.65	106	1.5523	100 <= medium < 500	100	1h 52m	Y	Y
Grand Isle	T084	Grand Isle	PK-8	Yes	303	14,758.99	103	1.5578	100 <= medium < 500	9	13m	Y	Y
Dorset	T059	Bennington	PK-8	Yes	284	14,868.46	96	1.5693	100 <= medium < 500	112	2h 21m	Y	Y
Waterford	T225	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	242	14,877.73	95	1.5703	100 <= medium < 500	102	1h 56m	Y	Y
Newark	T135	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	77	14,975.27	90	1.5806	Small <100	98	2h 11m	Y	Y
Burke	T036	Caledonia	PK-8	Yes	281	15,116.20	82	1.5955	100 <= medium < 500	107	2h 4m	Y	Y
Hartland	T094	Windsor	PK-8	Yes	456	15,614.03	52	1.6512	100 <= medium < 500	116	1h 48m	Y	Y
Weathersfield	T227	Windsor	PK-8	Yes	335	15,773.02	45	1.6648	100 <= medium < 500	128	2h	Y	Y
Marlboro	T120	Windham	PK-8	Yes	128	16,215.31	29	1.7115	100 <= medium < 500	176	2h 47m	Y	Y
Fairfield	T072	Franklin	PK-8	Yes	325	16,977.52	13	1.7402	100 <= medium < 500	32	47m	Y	Y
Waitsford	T222	Chittenden	PK-8	Yes	119	17,342.06	122	1.5138	100 <= medium < 500	23	36m	Y	Y

- Additional data may be valuable, including whether a World Language is offered, SBAC and NECAP scores, whether the towns are voting on a merger proposal in November, and graduation rates.
- During discussions, Melanie Henderson explained the three approved Act 46 merger structures, which are eligible for financial assistance from the State. She also explained the difference between “necessary” and “advisable” towns in a proposed merger. The clarification was appreciated.

Identify and Assign First Steps Towards the Goals

- Bentley Vaughan will research Folsom data, to allow us to promote ourselves to other school districts. Julie Pidgeon went through this exercise in the past, and may be able to provide a framework.
- Jennifer Lyon will research test score data for the list of PreK-8 schools, and find out which towns are voting in November.
- Melanie Henderson will find tuitioning data, and contact the GISU office to gather information on the academic requirements for both PreK-6 and 7th & 8th grades

Public Comments:

- Tim Maxham reminded us that the Sub-Committee is subject to the Open Meeting Laws, and that Minutes must be taken and posted. Melanie Henderson confirmed.
- Bentley Vaughan stated that merging with the right school can improve tax base, as well as our approach to teaching. All schools must offer the same basic programming.
- Jen Lyon asked if any other schools have contacted South Hero. Bentley Vaughan stated that he’d watched Georgia’s most recent school board meeting online, and

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that South Hero was mentioned in their meeting. He mentioned that Georgia may consider building its own high school, but may also pursue an alternative structure to maintain its school choice.

- Jen Lyon asked if we would lose high school choice if we were merged with Georgia, and they then built a high school. Melissa Hood commented that it would not be "them" building a high school; it would be "us", because South Hero would have a voice in that process.
- Jen Lyon asked if South Hero could have equal representation on a combined school board with Georgia. Tim Maxham reminded us that school board representation follows population, so Georgia would have more members on a combined board.
- Bentley Vaughan reviewed the major points of the interaction between South Hero and Georgia. When South Hero agreed to join the Islands Act 46 Study Committee, we didn't realize that we would be locked into that partnership, and could only become advisable to a potential Georgia merger. When South Hero decided to table discussions with Georgia, the Islands Act 46 Study Committee was considering a PreK-8 merger. Since Georgia is an excellent school, Bentley wondered whether Georgia would see the value in merging with South Hero.
- Tim Maxham explained that the Franklin West Act 46 Study Committee has broken into two sub-committees. One sub-committee will research combining all three towns (Georgia, Fairfax, and Fletcher), while the other sub-committee will research building a high school to replace BFA Fairfax high school. That option would require a merger of all three towns to be viable. Franklin West is due to report back in September. However, Georgia feels that with 850 students, they may be large enough to stand alone.
- Kari Banas mentioned that high school choice had a lot of support on the informal survey conducted online. She also stated that if the Islands towns vote down the PreK-6 merger in November, we can try to merge with the Islands in a PreK-8 configuration, with Isle la Motte and North Hero sending their 7th and 8th graders to one of the three larger towns. At a previous Island Act 46 Study Committee meeting, Kari asked if they would consider proposing a non-preferred structure (two PreK-6 towns & 3 PreK-8 towns) to the State if the August referendum is voted down. Mike Deweese said there wouldn't be time to rewrite the proposal in time for the November vote.
- Fred Heslop wondered why the merger process is so rushed. Jen Lyon responded that towns are trying to take advantage of the tax incentives, and the anticipated large turnout for the presidential election in November.
- Jen Lyon stated her opinion that we have time to consider our options. Many of our choices depend on what towns do in November, both in the Islands and beyond, and what the next Governor chooses to do. Melanie Henderson clarified that we must take action by June 2018 or the State will step in to reorganize. Tim Maxham stated that he is not aware of any plans by the State to rescind Act 46. He asked what the towns will do if the vote fails in November, and suggests combining with like-minded towns to challenge the law.
- A question was raised regarding the statement in the July 14th school board meeting that the "Act 46 Committee voted unanimously to pursue a PreK-6 model with choice from grades 7-12". Tim Maxham clarified that the Islands Act 46 Study Committee members actually voted unanimously to become either necessary or *advisable* members of the PreK-6 merger.

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- Tim Maxham stated that Alburgh is sending a questionnaire to their residents to gauge their preferences (rather than put the question to the voters in August).
- Tim Maxham also stated that if the three necessary towns (Isle la Motte, North Hero, and Grand Isle) approve the merger in November (with South Hero and Alburgh voting the merger down), those three towns will merge into a non-preferred structure.
- Fred Heslop asked whether South Hero could join the merger if the other *four* Island towns vote to merge in November. Bentley Vaughan confirmed that we could join later.
- Kari Banas stated that after the South Hero vote on Aug. 9th, the Islands' Act 46 Study Committee will vote on Aug. 10th on whether to include South Hero (as advisable or necessary) in their proposal to the State. Julie Pidgeon asked whether we should remove ourselves from the proposal if South Hero resoundingly votes No in August. She wondered why we would vote again on the same question in November. Melissa Hood suggested that voters may want the opportunity to vote the question down, so that they can express their frustration with the State.
- Julie Pidgeon asked who will be writing the ballot question in November, whether all towns have the same question, and whether the wording will be unbiased.
- Tim Maxham stated that if the majority of voters approve the referendum question in August, he will vote to have it on the ballot in November. He also stated that he was impressed with the programs at Tuttle and Colchester middle schools. He said that although Folsom parents feel strongly towards PreK-8, they represent a small percentage of the voter population in South Hero.
- Several attendees expressed concern that wording of the referendum question is biased towards PreK-6. There were concerns that the wording implies that merging represents a cost savings (which is not necessarily the case).
- Melanie Henderson wondered whether Grand Isle will support the PreK-6 structure, since some analyses suggest it will be more expensive. Tim Maxham stated that Grand Isle parents are concerned by the loss of programming at their school, and feel their students will get a better education off island. They are not necessarily basing their decisions on cost. He also stated that the State has not given us a reasonable cost analysis structure, and that the efforts by Andy Julow and Bart Wilcox to estimate cost have been welcome.
- Tim Maxham also stated that the State has put us in a very contentious situation by forcing towns to change their operating/tuitioning structure to match the other towns.
- Jen Lyon stated that we must help South Hero residents to get informed. Tim Maxham expressed some frustration at the lack of attendance at meetings. Barbara O'Reilly stated that it's very difficult to introduce oneself to Act 46, since there's so much information to wade through.
- Bentley Vaughan stated that he'd like to see an apples-to-apples comparison between the two operating/tuitioning structures. Melissa Hood agreed, saying she'd like to see a list of Folsom's programming presented for comparison when a list of programs at other schools is presented.
- Melissa Hood expressed her frustration that the rules surrounding Act 46 keep changing.
- Jen Lyon stated that a reporter asked to interview her on the effects of Act 46 on her family. Jen declined to avoid a conflict of interest. The reporter attended the

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July 14 meeting, and approached Melissa Hood instead to hear how Act 46 is affecting her family.

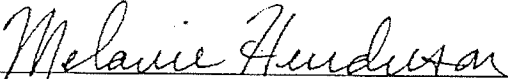
- Jen Lyon suggested that with more time, we can offer more information to the voters. Better to delay so that we have enough information to make an informed choice. Melissa Hood asked that we please reference all sources of data.
- Fred Heslop thanked the sub-committee.
- Julie Pidgeon is concerned that South Hero may make such a radical change to our school and town without any firm data or understanding of the cost. She is concerned that by tuitioning our kids off-island, we lock ourselves into a more expensive option. The majority of the budget is special education and tuition costs, which we can't control. In addition, she stated that we need more information on *quality* of education...not just *quantity* of offerings.
- Julie Pidgeon also stated that money must still be invested in the Islands to meet the educational standards for PreK-6. Tuitioning the 7th & 8th graders does not remove that requirement. She acknowledges that our school needs improvement, and that leadership problems in recent years have coincided with the Act 46 process.
- However, Julie Pidgeon also stated that our 7th & 8th graders are currently doing well at the high school level. It has been implied that our kids don't do well academically, but we see no feedback on that. We need and deserve better data from the receiving schools.

Adjournment

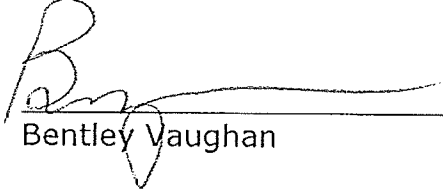
- Meeting was adjourned at 8:00pm by Melanie Henderson

Next Meeting Date:

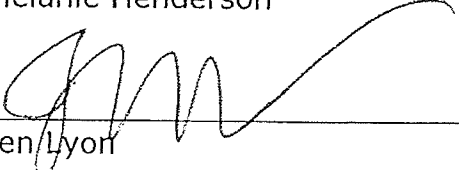
- TBD, based on progress of school board members



Melanie Henderson



Bentley Vaughan



Jen Lyon
