

**Town of Durham
Board of Selectmen
Public Hearing – Withdrawal RSU#5
Durham Community School Cafeteria
March 15th 2016**

Call to Order – Open Public Meeting: Selectman Chairman Wakeman called the meeting to Order and opened the public meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Selectmen Present: Chairman Jeffrey Wakeman, Vice Chairman Sarah Hall, Selectman Mark Blake, Selectman Joshua Libby. Selectman Michael Stewart excused.

Also Present: AA/TA Ruth Glaeser, Meetings Secretary Jill Toher, PIT Shannon Brown.

Pledge of Allegiance: Completed.

Residents Present: 78 residents.

Handout Distributed: “Withdrawal Makes No Cents” supplied by the Durham Friends of RSU#5; durhamfriendsofrsu5@gmail.com.

DCS Principal Present: Will Pidden.

Chairman Wakeman gave a power point presentation depicting the twenty-two steps necessary to be completed before a Withdrawal request can be approved by the Commissioner of Department of Education. He stated that Durham has completed the first three steps as of the completion of this Hearing. Step four will proceed only if the Townspeople, by vote via secret ballot with the majority approving, prevails. The Warrant Article authorizing the initial expenditure of up to \$50,000.00 would need to prevail at the April 2nd 2015 Annual Town Meeting or the money would be borrowed.

Kevin Nadeau provided a power point presentation of his proposed proforma budget and answered questions from the audience as they arose. He stated he looked at his 2012 proforma budget and updated the presentation with current numbers. He added that Durham pays 30.3% of the RSU#5 budget and has 30% enrollment. He did not take into consideration costs for special education students, approximately \$5,969.00 per student, not including tuition or transportation. Mr. Nadeau stated Durham currently has four special education students.

Alice McPeake reviewed history of prior withdrawal attempts. She also cautioned the proforma budget doesn't have a proposed RSU#5 budget for comparison purposes. Other concerns she raised include that Durham and Pownal can't out vote Freeport and that residents are having increasing difficulties paying property taxes.

A sophomore student stated she enjoys going to Freeport High School and enjoys the enhanced sports opportunities.

Mr. Nadeau stated there are other costs not included such as the Laugh and Learn Program, one time start up costs, financial software in addition to paying tuition for high school students as well as the cost for a Superintendent. He also stated that Durham would still have to pay for the FHS renovation bond, \$260,217.00 for twenty years whether Durham stays with the RSU#5 or not. In addition, if Durham withdraws, the Town would lose voting rights for grades nine through twelve.

A very lengthy discussion followed regarding Durham's recent property tax increases. Mr. Nadeau explained that the State determines what we pay to the State for education which represents approximately 85% of each resident's tax bill, and in recent years, the State has trimmed their budget by shifting a number of educational costs to the Towns.

Selectman Blake pointed out that Mr. Nadeau's proforma presented tonight was based on 2014/2015 and should have been calculated on 2015/2016. The difference, \$241,788.00, was the estimated additional cost.

Terry Kirk asked for pros and cons, not just a one-sided conversation. He also wanted five to ten year projection of costs for staying with the RSU#5 versus withdrawing. He added that there has to be a guarantee in place for ten years for accepting high school students.

Alice McPeake stated before the RSU#5, the Town had high school choice and if Durham withdraws, the Town would have high school choice paid on a tuition basis again.

Alan Purinton urged residents to get involved and attend RSU#5 meetings noting that on average only up to thirty residents attend. Michelle Ritcheson also urged residents to get involved, show up and vote.

Bob Small opined that Special Education student enrollment is a "wild card" cost, as there is no control over those families that may move in and have additional special educational needs students. He also urged residents to get involved and attend all Town meetings.

John Simoneau reminded all that the State of Maine hired a consultant that created a log of high school capacity which contained errors. He added that the Durham Community School is aging and someday will need major repairs as well. He continued that, in the short term, Durham will have to pay for Freeport, but in the long term, the RSU#5 will be paying for repairs to the Durham Community School as it ages.

The audience wanted Will Pidden, principal of DCS to speak. Chairman Wakeman polled the audience and it was the general consensus to allow him the floor. Mr. Pidden stated he is in his thirteenth year as principal and is sensitive to expenses and residents' concerns. He stated that all areas of academics are flourishing including the scope of athletics and the increased opportunities in the arts that are now being offered.

Other residents speaking in favor of staying with the RSU#5 included Rod Stimpson, Jake Webb, Ginny Costigan, Susan Karns, Devin Koenig, Mary Fallon and Candice Descipkes.

Selectman Mark Blake recused himself as part of the Board of Selectmen and spoke as a resident. Mr. Blake stated that, in his opinion, Durham has always had great teachers. He asked all to think of future school rebuilds and commented on the very poor participation of Durham residents at all meetings. He pointed that special interest groups leave as soon as their interests are voted upon.

Selectman Chairman Wakeman asked if anyone else wanted to be heard. Seeing no one, he concluded the Public Hearing at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill S. Toher
Meetings Secretary