

Rochester-Stockbridge Unified School District
Annual Meeting Warning
May 28, 2019 @ 7:00 PM
Stockbridge Central School
Draft Minutes

The legal voters of the Rochester-Stockbridge Unified District ("District"), consisting of the Towns of Rochester and Stockbridge, are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Stockbridge Central School on May 28, 2019 at 7:00 pm to consider and act upon the following articles:

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

The Annual Meeting Warning was read by Kent Butterfield.

Article 1: To elect a moderator who shall assume office immediately and serve a one-year term or until the election and qualification of a successor.

Kent Butterfield was nominated to be moderator; nomination was seconded. One ballot was casted for Kent Butterfield, and Kent was elected as moderator.

Article 2: To elect a clerk who shall assume office immediately and serve a one-year term or until the election and qualification of a successor.

Last year Joanne McDonnell was the Clerk. Joanne is not present at this meeting. Jenny Austin was nominated to be moderator; nomination was seconded. One ballot was casted for Jenny Austin, and Jenny was elected as clerk.

Article 3: To elect a Treasurer who shall assume office immediately and serve a one-year term or until the election and qualification of a successor.

Cathy Brown is the current treasurer. Cathy Brown was nominated, and the nomination was seconded, to be treasurer for the upcoming year. Cathy initially declined the nomination due to her upcoming retirement. There was public comment asking that it was confirmed that if you work for the school district that you cannot be the treasurer, and this was confirmed. Cathy Brown noted that she will temporarily fulfill the position as treasurer, but only until August at the latest as she is retiring from the Town Clerk position. One ballot was casted for Cathy Brown, and Cathy will serve as the treasurer until the School Board finds a replacement.

Article 4: To hear and act upon the reports of the School District directors and officers.

Carl Groppe gave a presentation on behalf of the School District, including the following:

A. Special Projects

i. Black River Design (BRD) Facilities Assessment Study

- a. A final report is anticipated June 4. BRD is working on a space utilization analysis. For Stockbridge they estimate a space deficit of approximately 2,100 square feet (sf) for music/art, guidance/health, and additional storage. For Rochester elementary school building they estimate a deficit of approximately 4,200 sf for music/art, office space, and

additional storage, in addition to a reconfiguration of the entryway (this assumes no elementary use in the high school building). BRD estimates that if the Rochester high school building is used as an elementary school building (with no use of the Rochester elementary school building for grade school activities) that there is sufficient space. However, there would need to be some reconfigurations in the building (e.g. convert shop room area to multi-purpose space, change art room to kitchen, relocate art/makerspace, reconfigure office areas) and there is approximately 1,000 sf of extra room. BRD is also looking at the various systems within the schools, such as heating, mechanical, etc. Carl noted that if the Rochester campus is reduced to one building, the first step would be to ask the Town if they wanted the building. Any improvements made in the last 5 years would need to be paid back to the School District from the Town. Carl noted that what he has heard from other school districts is that it isn't recommended for school districts to be "landlords", however there could be some sort of educational space, such as supervisory union. Carl noted that no decisions have been made from the information provided, and the study by BRD has not been finalized. There will be more discussions coming in regards to the Rochester and Stockbridge facilities.

- b. Public comment – What would the extra 1,000 sf of extra space in the high school building be used for? Carl noted that the building is 1,000 sf larger than what is needed, based on BRD evaluations. There have not been discussions of what that 1,000 sf would be used for.
- c. Public comment – Is solar power being considered? Carl noted that there will be a general discussion about energy efficiency, but nothing in detail.
- ii. Stockbridge generator – The school has put out a bid for the generator.
 - a. Public comment – why wasn't a generator put in after Tropical Storm Irene? Carl noted that after Irene the plan was initially to purchase a generator with monies to come from ARA funding, but the supervisory union at the time did not move this forward.
- iii. Neither of the above projects are in the school budget. Funding to come from reserve funds/grants. Combined these projects are approximately \$90K.

B. Budget goals

- i. Align educational and operational systems
- ii. Understand infrastructure needs
- iii. Develop Rochester transition blueprint
- iv. Determine Stockbridge space configuration
- v. Create educational "strategic plan"
 - a. Public comment – Is RSUD strategic plan in line with SU plan? Yes.
 - b. Public comment – How does our SD line up with SU goals? Lindy noted a couple initiatives within RSUD that correlate with SU goals include: (1) literacy has been a big focus, and (2) wellness initiatives, this year including winter wellness together for 6 weeks, fitness goals being set on state standards, and outdoor education. Carl noted that the SU has a new database management system and Rochester and Stockbridge will be stepping up our data analysis for students, including kids through grades 7-12. There was a middle school fair for both schools.
 - c. Public comment – When does personalized learning start? Lindy noted it can start at any time, and that the Schools are working on setting the foundation for this.

C. Budget highlights

- i. \$236,516 surplus returned to taxpayers

- ii. Expenditures increased 3.7%
- iii. Local revenue increase of 1.7%, despite tuition/subsidy drop of \$86,712
- iv. “True” tax rate of increase of 2.4% (not looking at CLA, etc.). Income based Homestead rate is 2.81% on first \$400,000/\$225,000. Bill Edgerton handed out a spreadsheet of tax rates comparing those which pay by the calculated tax rate versus income-based tax rate. Approximately 2/3 of the State qualify for the income-based tax rate.
- v. Public comment – There was a question as to why the pre-K grant funding is eliminated. Bruce noted that it was a State grant to encourage pre-K programs, but the State grant is no longer available. One member of the public asked if this is something that we should be talking to our legislatures about.
- vi. Merger incentive drops 25% from last year
- vii. ADM declines 2.3%
- viii. Grade 7-12 tuition costs increase 4.3%
- ix. Professional development increased \$8,500 for literacy training to bring our teachers up to speed.
- x. Audit moved to SU budget
- xi. Central office / special education assessment flat (down \$952)

D. Opportunities Ahead

- i. Building a new elementary education model that is visionary and sustainable
- ii. STEM/STEAM/Maker collaborative learning
- iii. Intensive arts cross-campus residency
- iv. Farm to school and outdoor education experiences
- v. Increased “big adventures” capacity
- vi. Leveraging both our facilities and our location to exploit the opportunities they bring us
- vii. Becoming the school that attracts families – both neighboring and new

E. Question & answer (public comment)

- i. The budget shows \$9K from the Trustee of Public Funds and this was not in the budget last year. Public comment regarding these funds. Carl noted that we hadn’t had advice from our attorneys yet during last years budget preparations in regards to whether the funds could be used for students at both schools. The Board wanted to make sure that using these monies would be legitimate for joint operations. This year we were told that this is acceptable. It was noted that during the budget development for this year the Board learned that in Rochester the Trustees of Public Funds expect the school board to ask for money. In Stockbridge the trustees automatically give us money without a request. The board did not request the money from the Stockbridge trustees.
- ii. What happens to the endowments in Rochester? Amy noted that the Trustees of Public Funds in Rochester had managed the school funds in the past separately. Public noted they are not published in the Town report nor the School report. Amy noted that there is still some work needed to figure out where these funds stand and who is responsible for them.
- iii. Tuition projections – How many Students are in each school, and what Towns do they come from. During the course of the meeting Lindy Stetson calculated that the Rochester campus has 94 students: 20 Hancock, 8 Granville, and 66 Rochester. Stockbridge has 54 students: 2 Granville, 5 Pittsfield, and 47 Stockbridge. It was noted there is one elementary aged student from Rochester going to school in Middlebury. Public question whether this was a parental request. It was noted by the Board and SU that this was a

special placement and not a parental request. Public comment that it would be good to see in the annual report where the kids in our schools are coming from. The Board acknowledged this request.

- iv. Public question asking who is the principal author of the budget, is it the SU or the principals? Also, question regarding whether the budget is reviewed line by line? Carl noted that it is the SU in conjunction with the principals. Public comment that the budget is not shown clearly in the report. It was noted that the organization of the budget is different than it has been, and Carl noted that due to different software than last year at the SU that the formatting has changed. Amy commented that we have been going through the budget in the previous meetings and encourages people to attend meetings as the Board does go through the budget drafts line by line. Janie noted that we have gone through line by line the budgets. Another member of the public commented that they (public) can't always make it to public meetings due to job schedules, other meetings, etc. Ethan commented that we do listen to comments from the public, and we are always listening to comments throughout the process.
- v. Question whether we can treat the SU as a "vendor"? Carl noted that we can't do that and explained that over the years more items have been transferred to the SU budget line items, such as transportation, special education, and auditing to name a few. There was discussion regarding what the School District gets from the SU. For example, the recent curriculum programs were paid for by the SU, there is going to be a new SU staff that will serve as a literacy coach, the SU provides support with allowing access to grants, etc. Carl noted that there are also some items that are the responsibility of the SU. For example, a school board cannot fire a principal, but the SU can. Bruce noted that over the years more and more items have come out of the school budget and into the SU budget that they are responsible for, instead of the school districts.
- vi. What is the Tuition to VT LEA (561) line item in the budget? The State requirements for line items for tuitioned students in grades 7-12 has changed from last year, and that number is part of that section.
- vii. Public noted that the mailed copy of the annual budget report was missing pages, and it can be difficult to follow if there is missing information. Amy noted there was a mistake in the printing of the booklet, and the Board apologizes for this error.
- viii. Question regarding the WRVSU expenditure budget FY20, Section 2212, line item 610 (curriculum instruction, supplies general) of \$24,750 for the FY20 proposed budget versus the \$1,250 FY19 budget, and why these are so different. Bruce noted that with the new software there are numbers that do not line up with last year due to changes in formatting and overall changes in the software. Tara noted that she started after the SU budget was established and she would have to look in the file to see where this came from. Carl noted that the State does change requirements, software, etc. and that some of the changes in formatting is beyond our control. The Board noted that it is not the RSUD school board that develops the SU budget. More focus is placed on development of the RSUD budget that the SU, in coordination with the principals, develop.
- ix. Question regarding SU-level grants. Bruce commented Medicaid funds have been used for moving forward with a literacy initiative. There are several grants that the SU has been able to use with the initiative to get kids reading at grade level. Carl noted that on p. 18 there is additional information regarding Medicaid and federal title fund grants that come to the SU.
- x. Public comment asking whether the new SU-wide literacy coach is Wilson certified? Bruce doesn't know whether she is. Deb Matthews noted that the literacy initiative is primarily

for Tier 1, at Tier 2 there can be some Wilson methodologies, and Tier 3 can include the Wilson method. Deb noted this year the SU is working collaboratively with Woodstock doing some training in this area. Public comment that she had been told several years ago that the school would be getting someone on board that was Wilson certified, and that the Wilson methodology is essential. Her son has seen incredible improvements through being taught with Wilson methodologies after leaving SCS.

- xi. How do our schools compare on literacy to the SU and the State? The latest standardized testing showed approximately 44% reading at grade level. Bruce noted the SU average is at approximately 60%.
- xii. Will the School Board be asking Rochester Trustees of Public Funds for money next year? Yes.
- xiii. Motion made to vote on Article 4, and motion was seconded. Article 4 was approved.

Article 5: To authorize the District Board of Directors to borrow money by the issuance of bonds or notes not in excess of anticipated revenues for the fiscal year 2019-2020 per 16 V.S.A. 562(9).

A motion was made to move the article, and motion seconded. No discussion, voted in the affirmative, Article 5 passes.

Article 6: Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend \$4,408,562 which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of \$18,427.32 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupils is 6.84% higher than spending for the current year.

A motion was made to move the article, and motion seconded. No discussion (see Article 4 for general public comment regarding the budget), voted in the affirmative, Article 6 passes.

**Article 7: To elect Directors to the Rochester-Stockbridge Unified School District as follows:
Rochester – 1 director for a three (3) year term;
Stockbridge – 1 director for a three (3) year term.**

Ethan Bowen is up for election for Rochester and Janie Feinberg for Stockbridge. Ethan Bowen was nominated, and the motion was seconded. One ballot was cast for Ethan Bowen, and Ethan was elected to a three-year term on the RSUD school board. Janie Feinberg was nominated, and the motion was seconded. One ballot was cast for Janie Feinberg, and Janie was elected to a three-year term on the RSUD school board.

Article 8: Shall the annual meeting of the Rochester-Stockbridge Unified District be moved to the first Tuesday of April for all subsequent years beginning with the 2020 meeting.

Article moved to question.

- A. Public comment - Why move earlier, and if so, will the numbers be ready in time? Carl noted that we can have the numbers finalized by that time. One of the pros of moving is that by law

we need to have a budget completed and approved by June 30. The later in the year the budget meeting is, if the budget does not pass that this gives the Board a chance to rework the budget and have time to have another budget vote. The SU has said that we will have the numbers in time. There has also been some interest in doing it on Town Meeting Day, but that gives less time to finalize the budget numbers.

- B. Public comment – A resident that moves south during the winter would like to be able to attend the annual meeting, but if changed to early April would miss out on the vote. There are potential weather considerations with moving the date earlier as well.
- C. Public comment – Suggest first Tuesday in May for the Annual Meeting.
- D. Public comment – Regardless of date, will it still be an evening meeting? Carl noted that the electorate can vote on a day, but not the time. However, it is the Board’s intent to maintain having an evening meeting.
- E. Public comment – This meeting is spending a lot of time discussing the numbers and suggest that the board and administration is given adequate time to be able to get all the information needed ahead of the annual meeting. Also commented that we haven’t discussed educational outcomes. Another member of the public commented that he did think we have been discussing educational outcomes. This is the hardest measure to determine but is a challenge State-wide.
- F. Motion made to close discussion, motion seconded, and approved.
- G. Motion made to vote on the amended Article 8 that the annual meeting of the Rochester-Stockbridge Unified District be moved to the first Tuesday of May for all subsequent years beginning with the 2020 meeting. Motion seconded and approved. Voting on Article 8 in the affirmative, Article 8 passes. The annual budget meeting is moved to the first Tuesday of May for 2020 and all subsequent years, unless otherwise changed in the future.

Article 9: To transact any other business which may legally come before this meeting.

- A. Public comment – What is our vision to move away from using fossil fuels for transportation use? Carl noted that beyond our contracting with Butler services and renewing their conversation, the closest we have discussed is the sizing of busses (best equipment usage for our “load”). Public noted that we have to speak up as a collective body of people to encourage the large bussing companies to move in this direction.
- B. Public comment – Round of applause for Janie Feinberg and Ethan Bowen for renewing their Board positions.

Meeting moved to adjourn at 8:57 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Jenny Austin