

*RSU #14 Withdrawal
Committee
401 Webbs Mills Rd
Raymond ME 04071*

**January 10, 2019
6:30pm
Broadcast Studio
423 Webbs Mills Rd
Agenda**

Members:

- Rolf Olsen, Select Board Rep, Chair
- Teresa Sadak, Proponent Rep
- Katie Leveille, RSU #14 Board of Directors Rep
- Joe Bruno, Citizen Rep

Consultants:

- Dr. Mark Eastman, Retired Superintendent and Educational Consultant
- Dan Stockford, Attorney

1) **Called to order** at 6:30pm by Chair Olsen

2) **Minutes of previous meetings – will be taken up at the next meeting**

- a) November 14, 2018
- b) December 3, 2018

3) **Open Workshop – Citizen Input**

Chair Olsen – The purpose of tonight is to get your input. You are not going to get a lot of information from us because at this point, we do not have a lot of the answers. We are looking for what are your questions, concerns, and thoughts so we can put together a coherent plan that will address those items as well as the budget and a number of different things. We are here tonight listening to you, not you listening to us. Speakers must go to the podium and state their name and address and then your thoughts.

Susan Brackett – 4th grade teacher at RES. Since we have been with Windham, we have been able to increase budgets and have extra coaches. We have better curriculum. If we withdraw, we will lose that funding and the students will suffer. We have struggling students and I worry that they won't get the help they need.

Bob Gosselin – The first time it became obvious that it would cost more for us to take this on.

Chair Olsen – Part of our task is to present a budget as a part of the final proposal. We did not finish the budget last time because we were able to renegotiate the cost sharing. It is premature to say we will not be able to afford this or that.

Mrs Sadak – We have a consultant and an attorney who have done this before.

Mrs Leveille – The consultant and attorney are there to help the Town and the students.

Marshall Bullock – I am a little bit involved in this and I do not think it will come down to a money decision. I can not see the State allowing Windham to replace their middle school without closing Jordan Small Middle School.

Mrs Leveille – We do not know that at this point.

Sue Accardi – The last negotiation of the cost sharing said that any new construction will be absorbed by the town who is constructing. Raymond will not have to pay for the new middle school.

Chair Olsen – Look at the bus garage. If Windham were to close Jordan Small, then our students would be going to the new middle school and we would need to then pay for our share of the new middle school.

Mrs Leveille – There have been no talks on the RSU #14 Board to close JSMS.

Walter Lund – Thank all of you for stepping up to go through this process. I support withdrawal. Raymond is frugal in how it runs our government, but I appreciate that we will not be saving taxes dollars if we withdrawal. This union has never felt like a single district. There was a proposal to send some of the students in Northern Windham to JSMS and there was opposition. I have heard nothing but wonderful things of the Raymond Schools. The towns are fundamentally different. I was a teacher for 30 years and went through a withdrawal process. Don't leave the teachers out of the loop. Meet with the teachers separately from a public hearing to answer their questions. Smaller can be better. Let's do school as we think is best for our students. Intimate conversations with our teachers.

Heather Martin – We picked this town because of the Windham-Raymond relationship. I like the smaller schools in Raymond, but like the opportunities the Windham has for high school. I am very disappointed to see this process being laid out. The vote for this was on a Tuesday in the summer when a lot of people didn't know about it verses doing it in a General Election. This was a hidden agenda item.

Mrs Sadak – We have school choice and the students could still go to Windham.

Ms Martin – *(Continued to speak from her chair and it was not caught on the video)* Windham may not take our students.

Mr Bruno – We can't predict what Windham's reaction is going to be. We have to have a contract school. You need to let the process play out to see what happens. We appreciate your input and concerns.

Mrs Sadak – 3 options were put on the table including closing JSMS. It is not a definite, but none of the school board members will say that it is not going to happen. It is about the kids and we need to go with the programs that help the kids.

Jessica Madsen – I wonder what the long-term plan would be if we were to move. This seems to be a thrown together process. Will there be a 5 to 10-year plan? We were attracted to Raymond because of the small town. Would you build a high school here? You need to surround yourselves with experts. Will you have a central office? You cannot be successful without this. I just found out about this and feel like where is this coming from. I don't feel like I understand why we are doing this. I don't want to see this be a cycle where someone gets upset with something that is done and we threaten to pull out again. If we are going to do it right there will not be any tax savings.

Chair Olsen – It is not the case that we are doing this to save money. Raymond ran a

school department here for years before consolidation. We have brought on consultants who have a wealth of experience with this process. We want to bring back local control. Right now, we have 3 representatives on a 9-member board. We will not be able to put forth a long-term plan, that will be up to the new School Board. We only have 128 students in high school and that is not enough to have an effective high school with all of the offerings of a larger high school.

Mrs Sadak – If this does go through there would be a newly elected School Board.

Ms Madsen – When it goes to vote again will citizens get more information including long term plans?

Chair Olsen – We will have a number of meetings to go over all of that once we have that information. We are currently developing those things. That is why we brought on Mark Eastman as a consultant to help with this 22-step process.

Mrs Sadak – We try everything we can to get the word out. The school will not send out anything that is not school related. If you have any suggestions of other ways to get word out, we would love to hear them. We put it on our sign, the website, Facebook, newspapers, etc.

Ms Madsen – I don't know where this is coming from and what motivated it.

Mrs Sadak – I did both petitions. The first time there were talks of closing JSMS and building a new middle school in Windham. I got booed at a School Board meeting and told to go back to Raymond where I belong when I suggested that Windham middle school students be sent to JSMS. It was very contentious. I took out petition papers and then we came up with a great agreement which says that any new footprint will be born by the town it is in and it lowered our share of the cost sharing agreement since we have a lower percentage of the students at WHS. We were paying 45% of the budget and now we are paying 30%. The new vehicle maintenance garage and 2 modular classrooms are all new footprints in Windham, and we have space in Raymond. The Select Board pulled in our attorney and we sent numerous letters to the RSU and the School Board requesting a meeting and the request was denied. The School Board said they had nothing to say to us. This is why I started this process again.

Mrs Leveille – I wasn't here for the 1st time. The Withdrawal Committee members are set up by statute and I am the representative from the RSU #14 Board of Directors, this does not mean I am for the withdrawal. Chris did a good job presenting the shared maintenance facility and the process the Board went through. I would encourage anyone to view that presentation.

Wendy Thoren – I agree this was a forced marriage. We would not have joined Windham in the first place if there had been a choice. To go back to our own school where our school was fantastic.

Sarah Davis – I am disappointed that this was in a June vote and not a November election. You are all from the Select Board, so it feels inside. It feels rushed, there was not a lot of publication. We can not make decisions without more information. The Town page is not great.

Chair Olsen – Meetings other than negotiations are public meetings. I understand the frustration that there is not a lot of information. We are driven by State guidelines and that dictated when the vote would take place. All that vote did was determine whether or not we would begin this process. There will be a final vote, after all information is

available, to decide whether or not to actually do this.

Mrs Sadak – We are not rushing anything. We will not go to vote until all information is available. The Town has the ultimate say, not this board. We have to have everything in place by July 1st to have a November vote.

Ms Davis – The impact on other towns who have withdrawn, school ratings, tax impacts, etc.

Mrs Leveille – We have asked for that already. Also, we need a certain turnout for the final vote (*at least 50% of the votes cast at the last Gubernatorial – at the 11-2018 Gubernatorial Election there were 2,563 votes cast meaning that there will need to be at least 1,282 people turn out for the final RSU #14 Withdrawal vote*).

There was more conversation from the floor that was not captured on the video.

Ms Accardi – What will you be negotiating in executive sessions?

Chair Olsen – We will be establishing in executive session what our negotiating positions are on certain elements. The current School Board is doing the same.

Ms Accardi – Will you be getting public input to this process?

Mrs Sadak – That is part of the purpose tonight.

Mrs Leveille – I have the pleasure of wearing 2 hats in this process. I am a member of the RSU #14 Board of Directors and on the RSU #14 Withdrawal Committee. I will not be involved in any negotiations on the RSU #14 Board of Directors side. I will only be representing the Withdrawal Committee.

Kaitlyn LaCasse – There is a Town list serve that people can sign up for to get information. I was a part of this process last time. I am impressed with the process even though I was not in favor of withdrawing. I have serious concerns with withdrawal. We moved here due to the schools and we like school choice for high school. This was one of the deciding factors for us moving here.

Mr Bruno – School choice is a separate vote. The Town voted to have school choice and the Town would need to vote again to remove it. I am not a Selectman. I have been the chair of the consolidation process, the chair of the previous withdrawal process, I have been a School Board chair before we consolidated. Why is it so hard to explore the possibility? Currently we pay \$9.5 million to the RSU with roughly a 3-4% increase each year. Can Raymond run the schools for \$10 million per year? In 1986 Raymond was a nationally recognized school of excellence without Windham's involvement. Why can't Raymond do it again? We can if we set our mind to it. Withdrawing from the RSU does not end school choice. Please keep an open mind. We are not going to withdraw without knowing the cost and the programs/administration that we need.

Ms Madsen – I am not coming in with a preset mind. I am trying to figure out what the motivation is. It is good to hear that the long-term plan is going to be a part of the conversation.

Mrs Sadak – Getting input from the teachers is going to be huge.

Chair Olsen – There are time elements that the State has built into the process. We will be coming up with a plan and then the new School Board will need to implement.

Mrs Sadak – We are now talking about debt service. Contracts have to be honored. Everything stays the same for a year after we withdraw so students are not disrupted.

We do not want the students disrupted. We need to figure out what we want for our kids. Parents need to feel that they are heard.

Chair Olsen – There seems to be concern about the separation agreement. When we consolidated all of the Raymond assets were changed to the RSU. The separation agreement is pertaining to this, not what the school is going to be like. We are dealing with the tangible assets. The other side of the coin is what should the school look like. This give us the opportunity to be more creative and to possibly be able to do things.

Mrs Leveille – I have a child in the school and am happy with how things are. We have a very good system and a good school. What I want is what we have. If this is for the kids, why are we changing it?

Mrs Sadak – I am also looking at it from the point of view of what are we being asked to pay for. I understand what you are saying.

Mrs Susan Brackett – Schools don't like to accept children who cost money. If we have a child who needs more support, other schools will not want to take them. People are saying it is not about the money. A lot of people that want us to separate it is because of the money. They you say it is all about the kids. You have not given us the numbers...

Mr Bruno – In the 1990s we had 2 children that cost \$200,000 each and we funded them. We also have shipped kids to other schools where they could be better served.

Chair Olsen – We are trying to hear where the concerns are. We said at the onset that we would not be giving answers because we are so early in the process. History proves that we have supported Special Ed.

Mrs Sadak – When we had our own school, Special Ed was so big, and my concern was that we were cutting the regular budget to fund Special Ed.

Mrs Brackett – I am speaking from being part of Raymond. I feel right now our students are getting what they need. My concerns are that moving forward the services will be decreased.

Mrs Sadak – We could look into having some agreements to allow some form of school choice at the lower grades to give students that need extra help more options.

Beth Peavey – I know this is a lengthy process. It does impact the morale of the communities, students, teachers – before, during, and after. My children went through this system before the RSU and the schools were wonderful. We still have things that other districts do not have. My fear is for the children who still go to Windham because we will be back to, "Oh no, those are the Raymond kids." I am hearing that it is about the kids, but the reason we are at this point is the cost. People can not afford for our budget to increase. Special Ed students can move in to town at any time and have an impact on the budget. I also heard that when Special Ed goes up, we will take from regular education. We used to have 3-4 teachers per grade level, JSMS was full. What do you take away when you only have 2-3 teachers per grade level? We have some Windham kids in our building now. Will they want to come to our school if we separate? Our Title 1 percentage is the lowest in the district 29.9% which is below the level for Federal funding. Will we lose those funds?

Mr Bruno – If this was about the money, we would not have school choice.

Ms Davis – We need to allow kids to continue where they are now if they choose. With the declining population in Raymond we may not have enough to man sports teams.

Other teams use only 7th & 8th grade kids and Raymond has to also pull from the 6th grade. We don't like having our kids forced to go the Windham, I don't want to force Windham kids to come here. Talk to Windham about a bigger voice on the School Board. My kids play on the travel teams in Windham and will they be able to if we separate?

Mrs Sadak – I have no issues with the teachers, only the administration and School Board. They have not done a good job at consolidating the schools together. Our kids would do better in high school if the kids knew each other and were on teams together prior to high school. We have only had 2 meetings thus far and wanted to begin including the public at this early stage.

Mr Bruno – Kate says she likes what she has. We are looking at the governance of the school. If you have everything you currently have, what difference is it to you if it is just the governance?

Mrs Leveille – To me it is not just the governance. It is the fact that we can pull from other resources in the district. We have a Curriculum Coordinator, a wonderful administration, a great Director of Student Services, a Math Coach, a Ski Team, Wrestling, etc. that we have access to because of the way things are right now. We have no idea who could move into to Town tomorrow, who could be SO high need. Where are cuts going to happen? Music, art, gym, that is where my brain goes if we are on our own. We want to keep the enrichment programs for our students.

Kaela Gonzalez – The Town offers a newsletter and you can subscribe to that for information. The meeting is also posted on the website and on Facebook. I was on the previous withdrawal effort. I was neutral then and am now. I don't think we have gone far enough down the road to make a decision and we can explore this possibility. I think we can do better with sharing our resources as a Town with the School. I am happy with my kids' education and would not vote for anything that would compromise that.

Mrs Leveille – The School Board meets twice a month, once in Windham and once in Raymond and I encourage people to come out. You will be heard by all of the members of the School Board.

Ms Accardi – Our per pupil costs and Special Ed costs were the highest in the State when we were on our own. With Windham there is a Life Skills program, a Day Treatment program, etc. We could not do that for 1 or 2 kids. There is cost effectiveness in numbers. Our enrollment is going down. I think we should work out our differences with Windham and remain as a team.

Mrs Leveille – Special Ed numbers are going up.

Mrs Gonzalez – I forgot the most important thing – Nutrition Services. The food is excellent. We partner with community farms. We need to keep that.

Ms Madsen – What I am gathering is it would be helpful if we took a snap shot of what we currently have at JSMS and see what the cost would be for those if we separate. Teachers are leaving the profession and do not want to have part time positions. What we have now is best for kids and you need to show me that we could do it with our budget. We should not compromise anything, including staffing levels.

Sean Carr – When we consolidated the Town of Raymond gave up a lot to Windham. Raymond had great Art and Computer classes. Windham came and wiped everything out.

Mrs Peavey – Those are rumors. We have a great Art teacher and 3rd & 4th grade has computer classes. No longer are they just learning keyboarding on nice new computers. Technology is another ongoing large piece of the budget. We try to meet every child's needs, but it does not work for all. We provide a solid education. I am concerned about the longevity and you cannot answer that yet. Could you outline what the 22 steps are?

(There was more conversation from the floor that could not be heard.)

Mrs Sadak – They are on the website. We are on step 8.

Mrs Peavey – I thought I was going to get information at this meeting.

Mr Bruno – I have been keeping notes on what you are all saying. Sue is taking minutes. We are at least a year and a half out.

Mrs Sadak – The last time the only vote the Withdrawal Committee had was to vote to recommend we stop the withdrawal process after getting a new cost sharing agreement and the agreement regarding new footprints.

Chair Olsen – Even that required a vote of the Town to not go forward. This Board will give a recommendation and the Town will vote. The key is to keep the lines of communication open.

Mrs Peavey – So at future meetings you will be making public the figures we have discussed.

Chair Olsen – We are working with the consultants and once we have figures they will be submitted to the State who will then let us know what the State share will be.

Mr Bruno – You can go online and see what the State share is for Raymond and for Windham. We are a minimum receiving town, a 5% minimum of State funds. This is because Raymond's per capita income is 4th or 5th in the State.

Mrs Sadak – This is not a meeting on the timeline. We wanted to begin collecting information from the public.

Chair Olsen – Upcoming meetings are publicized on the website, the electronic sign, and on Facebook. We would like to have the school send it out, but they will not. We will send it to the PTO. We do not want it to be perceived as being done behind closed doors. We need input and want knowledgeable voters. Our goal is to get information out so people can make informed decisions.

Mrs Peavey – What we have found is that people are not going to look for information, they are waiting for the information to come to them. We want what is best for the students. Think beyond the 1st year. What is that going to look like? Dig deeper to find the long-term effects. We do not want to be in a position of cutting services to save tax dollars.

Mrs Sadak – How do you suggest we get the emails? We want to get the information out.

Mrs Peavey – Mailings work.

Town Manager Don Willard – I have seen since the RSU merger the dismantling of the "One Raymond" program to share services with the Town and School wherever possible. We have lost the working together. Will we be a vital and desirable place to be? The Raymond school system had and has a good reputation. I think we have the opportunity to restore academy level schools. Raymond needs to attract young families and the schools are a big piece of that. It is easy to get lost in a larger school. My son went

through Windham schools successfully but had a rocky start. He went from a small high care school to a large, class A school. The communications are all electronic and I do worry about the digital divide between the haves and the have nots in our community. We missed some communications in the 1st quarter for our son. When we went to see the Guidance Counselor we were told, "Don't worry. Half the folks here are in the same boat." I said that is not success for all, it is something less than that. I would like to see extraordinary schools.

Mr Carr – A lot of the concerns tonight were voiced before we consolidated, and the sky did not fall. I think we can have better schools if we keep an open mind.

Maria Pierce – I am going to be moving here in a few months and a big factor in our moving here was the school system. I have one in high school with autism and a kindergartener. I hope all involved in this have an open mind. This has been eye-opening, and I appreciate it. The kids and programs we need to keep in consideration.

Mr Bruno – I moved here in 1980 for the school system. We want it to continue this. I do not like the perception that there are 3 people against and 1 for the status quo on the committee. I was chair on the previous withdrawal and we did not withdraw. I am keeping that same open mind. We are looking at the money as well as the quality of the education of our children. We are a long way from making a decision. I appreciate all these comments. 3 years ago, no one came to the meetings. This has been very helpful to us. Please do not have the mindset that we are opposed.

Mrs Leveille – I was worried coming in to this and I do not feel that it is them against me. We do not always agree, but I do think that moving forward you are in good hands with people with open minds.

Mr Bruno – Anna Keeney was on the previous withdrawal committee and I called her when there was a seat open for RSU #14 Board of Directors and suggested that she take out papers. I hope I am open minded.

Mrs Sadak – I went into the last withdrawal effort with the attitude that we are withdrawing, and in the meetings looked at the big picture and learned that it was not in our best interests at that time to withdraw. I am going into this with an open mind. I give a lot of credit to the staff at the schools. We are taking this one step at a time and will not take it to a vote until we have all the information. We are looking at the money, local control, agreements with Windham that may be broken, etc. I have no intention to do this again if we do not withdraw. I thought long and hard before starting this process again. I did not want to be seen as simply crying wolf.

Ms Martin – Just because I am a "new-bee", why did you consolidate in the first place?

Mr Bruno – It was a mandate from the Baldacci administration to save administrative costs. The original discussions were to consolidate with Windham, Raymond and Westbrook, with later bringing Gorham in.

Mrs Sadak – At that time we also looked at Poland, but they were not big enough, and we looked at Gray which was not a good fit for us.

Mr Bruno – When Poland built their new high school, they approached Raymond to consolidate with them and due to the educational levels Raymond said no.

Ms Martin – How long do we have to spend the \$50,000?

Mrs Sadak – Over 2 years. We based that amount on how much Sebago spent to

withdraw in consultant and lawyer fees. Last time we only spent about \$2,500.

Ms Martin – I am a private early childhood educator. I have suggested to some Windham parents that their child would thrive in the smaller setting in Raymond and I like that that avenue is open without being forced. No one likes to be forced. Nobody knew why this was happening because there was not a lot of transparency.

Mrs Sadak – I have been trying to keep it out there. I like the fact that there are both Raymond and Windham teachers here for that perspective.

Chair Olsen – Thank you for coming out. Please send us any questions and comments.

Mrs Sadak – We will make a Facebook page. All meetings are taped and put on our website.

Lorraine Glowzak – Windham Eagle – Maybe we could do a monthly update.

Ms Madsen – How will we find out about serving on the subcommittees?

Mrs Sadak – We will have a list of the subcommittees at the end of January and will post them.

Town Manager Willard – Anyone can email the Town Clerk, Sue Look, if you are interested in serving on a subcommittee.

4) Adjournment

Declared adjourned at 8:46