

TOWN OF GROTON
PUBLIC HEARING – WITHDRAWAL FROM SAU4
February 13, 2024

In Attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Administrative Assistant)

Audience Members Present

John called the Public Hearing on the withdrawal from SAU4 to order at 6:00pm.

John mentioned that this warrant article is to withdraw from SAU4 and redistricting of the school district. He wanted to discuss some high points and then he will open it up for questions.

John said this is a win-win for the three towns and the students. House Bill 349 is a once in a lifetime chance to stabilize our school taxes. The warrant article cannot be altered in anyway or it will be invalid. All three Towns must vote in favor for this to pass. The three similar towns, which is Groton, Hebron and Bridgewater, will be working together to will stabilize the school taxes. This is not necessarily going to lower the taxes; it will stabilize them. Never again will we have to live in the fear that another Town will submit a warrant article to change the tax formula like they did two years ago. This would have significantly increased the taxes in our town. This is about school choice so your child could be tuitioned in to either Plymouth or Newfound Highschool. The tailing out agreement will also allow your child to remain in the middle school if they so choose to do so. This will not disturb your child's education in any way, shape or form. The tuition that is set by Plymouth and Newfound is regulated by the State so they cannot randomly pick a number to charge. At this time, John opened the meeting up to questions.

Bill Jolly mentioned he is running for school board for SAU4. He really believes that he is running there is taxes and curriculum. There are serious concerns about the curriculum there and the literary content. He would agree that doing this would allow better control because it would be a smaller government. He also doesn't disagree that when they submitted the formula change it was a bad idea that opened a can of worms and now, we have a situation where we would be looking at a petition warrant article to change the formula again and if so, there is nothing we could do about it. Bill asked if this was correct. John said that he is correct that if this doesn't go through, the formula change could be submitted again and if the Towns vote for it, which most likely they will because there are more towns that will benefit from it and they have higher numbers when voting and there is nothing we can do that that point. The other Towns taxes will decrease and our three towns would significantly increase. Bill said he saw the information that if this doesn't go through and if the petitioned warrant article does what that would do to our taxes. However, the concern he sees is that he doesn't see a model on the tax information if this does go through or even a budget with projected numbers so that we can make a vote on that. He asked if there is anything on that. Virginia Parker is a member of the Steering Committee and a resident of Groton. She said that they are working on something and they are hoping to have these numbers by February 25th so that the residents have a few weeks before Town meeting to review it, ask questions, etc. Bill asked that once we get this information if we could set up a time and date to have a public hearing to discuss this. Virginia and John both agreed that depending on when it comes out there should be time to follow up on this and have a meeting. John said that we would absolutely make sure that the information is on the website and emailed to all that are on the email list. Virginia said that it was delayed because there was a date breach at SAU4 so they no longer have financial data for the school year. Virginia is the Chair for the budget committee for SAU4. To date they have requested that information from SAU4 and this information is not available so they are working on reconstructing it through the invoices and their bank statement. The committees original plan was to have this by now but with the lack of information from SAU4 due to the breach, they had to get creative. They have

looked at Ashland which has 160 students and we are about 180 students for our new school district. We have looked at their budget and their framework and compared to data from SAU4 from previous years. They have also looked at Thornton and other school districts so these numbers are not coming out of thin air. It will be broad stroke and a framework which they will then have a year to implement and get this together. There is a draft but they don't want to present that.

Gary Easson said we are going to have to house this somewhere and wanted to know if anyone has looked into what kind of building or what improvements we are going to have to make. Virginia said that this is one of the most incredible advantages that we have here. Most school districts own all of their buildings. This is a very unique situation where there is a special district, the Bridgewater Hebron Village School (BHVS) District owns the building and has been maintaining it themselves. SAU4 has been leasing it from BHVS district for \$1 a year. This is a building that will be available for our new school district. This is also a building that currently houses students from Alexandria, Bristol, and Danbury. Gary asked if this means we will be taking over that building. Virginia said you could say taking over but really it is going to be continued. Gary said we will be sharing it with the kids that are currently there. Virginia said the goal is to disrupt as little as possible so they will let the kids that go there remain and same with the kids that go to the other schools. They have made this very clear to SAU4 from the beginning. The school board has voted on this so they want to continue this as well. The kids can stay where they are or can change if they want to. Gary stated that if there is any building or work that needs to be done, he would be very interested in doing the electrical work. John said they are referring to the BHVS which already exists. The building is there and the students already go there. Virginia said there is also special education classes, specialty services that are provided in that school. They feel that there is ample room.

Slim said that one of the big advantages of doing this, less travel time alone from the bus company. He complains about the long bus time. There will be less travel time. River Road will still be the furthest. Virginia said that she has talked to the current contractor that covers the SAU4 and they believe they can do all three towns in just four buses. John said this will also get back about an hour and a half a day of not sitting on the bus. David Darlington asked if it would be other buses for highschoolers. It was explained that it will not necessarily be a separate bus, it would be the same bus. Virginia said that there is also the opportunity that the kids could be bussed to after school activities. Slim said that our kids wait on River Road at 6am waiting for buses.

Slim said that Tracey from Hebron said we have some time to wait, they couldn't change to coincide with us. We have to wait until May to get all of the votes. Jennifer Larochelle said that when we first put the bill together there was a four-year time frame to put this all together but SAU4 and their attorney thought that was too long and they amended it to two years as they thought it wasn't fair to the school to take that long. We inadvertently missed that Hebron Town meeting is in May so Groton and Bridgewater will be voting in March and Hebron will be voting in May. They have been to the Secretary of State, the moderator in Hebron went to the County Commission to see if they could change it. However, because it is a statute and a law that was passed by the legislature, it is the way it is so they cannot vote until May. Bridgewater and Groton will vote in March at our town meeting. It is not a ballot vote so you do have to be present at the Town meeting to vote on this. Virginia explained that it is not a cumulative vote, it is per town. Bill Luti from Hebron explained he was involved in writing bill. The statute says the three towns will vote at their next town meeting, so since Hebron is in May they have to vote then. He said that the school district forms officially on July 1, 2025 so we will still have over a year after Hebron votes. Slim said we can hope that Groton and Bridgewater pass it so even if Hebron doesn't vote for it, they will be outvoted. Jennifer explained that all three towns have to vote in favor, so if one town votes against it then it doesn't go through. John explained the warrant article cannot be changed, all three towns have to vote on it as written and all three towns have to vote in favor. It is a simple majority vote.

Bill Jolly said assuming it goes through, there is a year to plan it but can we anticipate how many students we will have so we can anticipate how many teachers we will need. He asked if this will be union shop or non-union? Also, will the budget committee be elected or appointed? John explained that not much will be changing. The same students that go to the school will stay there and the teachers that are there will stay there. When it goes up to 8th grade, we will have to hire teachers to cover those grades. It will follow suite just like other schools so it will have teachers' union. Terry said that the law says they have a union shop right now with a collective bargaining agreement so we are obligated under the new district to accept that which could be renegotiated if they request it. As far as the Village District, the Towns of Bridgewater and Hebron will continue to own the school district and continue to spend the money to maintain it. The money that has been spent to do these studies, has been done through this district.

Terry said the biggest concern he has is that everybody thinks that staying the same is a safe bet. It is not a safe bet. The school district just raised taxes over a million dollars which is about \$0.60 on the dollar for Groton for this coming year. After this goes through, it will not be a separate group. There not be meeting here and meeting there, you will be meeting as a group. It will still have a school board but whether it will have a budget committee or not he doesn't know but he would hope not. Bill Jolly said he would hope not too and that by statute states we have a choice.

Terry said that you have a line-item budget that is about 10,000 lines long. That is a lot of detail to get into. Right now, it is around 4.6 million to run a K-8. The thing that is really hard to come by is how much revenue you get and we have low balled the estimate from about 3-4 million. They just had a meeting with 9 heads of the Department of Education (DOE) and we are pulling together the things that we cannot get from SAU4. This is slowing us down to get the numbers. The problem in SAU4 now is that you have seven different towns pulling in seven different directions. You can't get a consensus. The way the budget goes up every year it is hard to really get in the weeds to understand it.

Terry said this will not be easy. The first part is to vote for it and the second part is to do it which will require a lot of committed people to get involved. He believes it will exceed everyone's expectations. The legislature and the Department of Education think this is a great idea. Bill Luti said it passed the senate unanimously 5-0, which is 3 republicans and 2 democrats. Then it passed the House Education Committee 18-2 which is a rarity. It passed unanimously in the house and in the senate which should show the residents this is a really good idea because the legislature was about 99% behind us.

Bill Luti said he was on the famous school funding formula committee. He said when he showed up with John, Terry and Erick Piper representing their towns, the assault that took place by the other towns on our towns to make us pay more money was unbelievable and shocking the assault that they experienced. He couldn't believe that one person from another town said they were tired of carrying the weight of taxes and our towns should pay more. Even when our towns showed data of what we are paying per student was more, we were paying \$21,000 per student and Alexandria was only paying \$13,000, it didn't matter they wanted us to pay more so our three towns band together to stop this. This was when they wanted to change it to the 50/50 formula which was 50% by ADM (per kid) and 50% by towns valuation. It is currently 100% ADM. If the formula for the articles of agreement is based on that so our three towns will pay per kid. On this committee, the representative from Bristol had a proposal to go to 100% equalized value. Bill said that formula would have doubled the tax rate if that went through so instead of Groton paying \$10.00 per thousand it would have been \$20. That is when we knew we have to do something so a formula like this won't pass. He stated that Hebron has a poverty rate of 16%, which means that 16% of their 650 citizens live below the poverty line. The average age in Hebron is 62.

There are a lot of people on fixed incomes. They are not a rich town but the other towns think they are rich because they have lake front property.

Bill said this is a once in a lifetime opportunity that won't happen again. John said but what will happen is that the formula change will go through again and that will paralyze that Town.

John said he wanted to go back to Bills question about if the school board or budget will be elected or appointed. He said it will be elected not appointed. Bill Jolly said he wishes more people were at the deliberative session. We had poor representation. If you were there you would have seen how they are jacking up our tax rate and there was nothing we could do about it. We were overwhelmed. John said that this is the first year he wasn't there because he was away but it is like that every year. Bill Jolly said that his point is that if you have a committee that is appointed by the board, we will have a better likelihood of having control. John said that is something they can certainly consider.

Miles asked why Bill Luti said this will never happen again. Bill explained that we will never get a bill like this to pass through the legislature again. John said this is a very unique situation. Virginia said if this doesn't pass the only way to leave the school district, outside of this legislation that was a really coordinated effort, is to put it to a vote. This is not a vote at just one Town, all seven towns by majority have to vote to allow us to leave the school district. Bill Luti said there is a statute that governs cooperative school districts and they intentionally make it difficult for towns to leave. The concept is that all seven towns will contribute equally and it will lower costs. These articles were put in place in the 1960s and there has been a lot of changes since then. Only one town in 60 years has been able to leave a cooperative school district. A lot of Towns have tried but only one has been able to. Carroll is in the White Mountain Regional School District. They pay \$52,000 per student in Carrol. The other towns pay anywhere from \$7000-\$9000 per student. This is due to the Bretton Woods Ski Area and the Mount Washington Hotel. They have tried for ten years and have pleaded with the other towns. They write out a check every month for over \$250,000 to that school district. They tried to get out. They formed a committee and the committee does a report. Then all six towns in that school district vote on that report and that little town gets beat every year at the polls so they are stuck with this. Bill said we have a unique situation with the BHVS is not a town run school. There was a law passed in 1997 that created the Bridgewater Hebron Village School District, which helped this bill pass. On the Bridgewater and Hebron's tax bill they have another tax for the education tax that Groton won't have to pay. They raise about \$175,000-\$200,000 per year between the two towns for the repairs. We rent the school district for \$1 a year and let them use the school for special ed. Sherry asked if they ever say thank you. It was commented that they do not, they want to raise our taxes.

Terry said since 1997 when it passed to become a village district, it has worked very well for the school district and the towns. The building was built to be expandable thinking this day may come. This is not a negative against the towns. When people get desperate, they do silly things and one of these things was this formula change. There is a huge disconnect between your value of your home and your family. You could have a house that you bought that was \$30,000 and now it is worth \$300,000 and the tax rate kills you even though the tax rate may be low. What scares him is the attitude. On videotape, one Selectmen said in a public meeting that Bridgewater and Hebron are gated communities without a gate. He said he guarantees us that if this fails, they will come back with a vengeance because they want our money. He doesn't want to dismiss the idea that it is solely money. That school district does a great job so it is an equal opportunity for both sides. He believes that in the long run they will see the light to change the way they deliver services of a K-8 system. It works everywhere else.

Bill Luti said that Plymouth has 8 towns that are all K-8 and then they send them to Plymouth High School. They have their own school boards. Bill said Jennifer will tell you that this is great education

model that is becoming more prevalent around the state and middle schools are going away. BHVS is in the top 20 elementary schools in the state. Why not expand the model that is K-5 to K-8 and give the students a better education. We will have a better control over the taxes and better education. The school was built to handle a K-8 so we may not have to put an addition on the building.

The school didn't want to sign a 10-year lease, they wanted a 5-year lease and the contract is up as of June 30, 2024. They have already sent a letter saying they will not be renewed. They have not figured out what the next option is but it will not be \$1. He agrees that if this doesn't go thru the cost for them to leaves it will go up, this is not black mail this is mostly because they take up a lot of room at the school for preschool and they would like to keep the preschool so SAU4 will also be part of the payment process for expansion of the building if needed. This will put the decision making back to the people in those towns. The schools have done well, not just because of the teachers, but the parents are more involved for some reason. This is not to get back at them but it is a collaborative effort. They are irritated right now but they will come around.

Bill Luti wanted to make sure that everyone understands that parents will have two choices for high school, which will be Newfound or Plymouth.

Bill Jolly said to speak to that. There was a meeting last night at the SAU4 meeting. He said it is reactionary and maybe they will come around. Today there is a sentiment on the board that there is no obligation to this new district if it passes. He knows there are memorandums of understanding but he wants to know what commitments as of today have been established or what has the board committed to us. Bill J said that this is not binding according to them. Terry said that it was voted and passed 6-0 for tuition agreement, opt out agreement, tailing out agreement and so on. If they change this and said no, we would appeal that to the DOE State Board of Education. John said if there are not at full capacity, they have to bring the kids in. John said that the interesting thing is that the school board constantly speaks about not wanting to disturb the children but they are denying the children of maintaining what they are currently doing. Bill Jolly said that are also influencing people to have fear above what is reasonable. John said once the towns do vote in favor of this, they are going to realize that they need some of that money back to keep their school district going.

Hilary said she wants to repeat something again that John said so everyone can hear it. There have been comments by people from other towns and the members of the school boards that this is going to disrupt the kids lives and the only people that are in control of a disruption is SAU4, not us, we do not want to do that.

Bill L said that the statement that was made about them having to take students if they are not at capacity is true. There is a statute that says if there is an opening in your school you have to accept kids. The chairman asked the superintendent how many seats he had at the Newfound Area High School. He said 500. The next question was how many are currently enrolled and the answer was 300. This is clear that there is room. He said he took Terry over to see the superintend at Plymouth to work out a tuition agreement a couple of months ago and her response was "we will take your money. How many kids do you have?" They also had the Principal of the Highschool, the assistant Superintendent, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chairman of the school and a school board member from Thornton and it took them 15 minutes as opposed to the five months it has taken to get an agreement with Newfound. She is very proud of their district and wanted to take all of the high school kids. Terry sad the principal wants to come to the BHVS to make sure that the standards are being met at this school that they would expect in Plymouth so that the transition would be easier. They are trying to do it the best way but

They are trying to do it the best way and at this point it is up to the people.

Tony Tavares wanted to confirm that the students from Bristol, Alexandria, etc. would they be paying tuition to go to BHVS. It was confirmed that yes, they would and it is set by the state. Tony said this would be an offset. John said they want to keep it the way it is so they do not disturb the children. Terry said the 2025-2026 when the 6th grade goes in, there will be fewer kids from the district there. Then the 7th grade and so on. The if kids coming up behind them want to go to Newfound, they still can. When it gets to the 8th grade the building will be functionally full. Tony Tavares asked what the capacity is. Terry said at one time they had 185 kids and it was jam packed. They changed it so they took an average of the other schools after that. John said the enrollment continues to drop. Tony Tavares thinks we will eventually see this increase due to a population increase due to the stuff in the other parts of the country.

David Darlington said he would like to talk about the warrant article and the articles of agreement. John said that is what we are talking about now. David said we are talking about history and he wants to know what we are voting on. He agrees with the process but wants to talk about what we are specifically voting on, such as the warrant article and these articles to be signed by the clerk. Those are the articles of agreement. David says the warrant article states we are voting on the articles of agreement. He asked if this was really the language that we are voting on, the articles of agreement. Jennifer said no. You are voting on the warrant article. David asked if there would be second vote to vote on the articles of agreement. Jennifer said no. John said the initial vote is simply that we are going to leave SAU4 and create our own district. David said that it says that this will be signed by the clerk after the vote so why is this being accepted as part of that warrant article. John read the exact wording of the warrant article that we will be voting on:

ARTICLE 2: Shall the Town of Groton adopt the provisions of House Bill 349 (2023) to withdraw from the Newfound Area School District/SAU #4 on June 30, 2025, and effective July 1, 2025, form a separate cooperative school district and single district SAU, called the Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton Special Purpose School District, in accordance with the provisions of House Bill 349 (2023) and where applicable, RSA 195 and RSA 194-C, and further, shall the Town of Groton adopt the proposed Articles of Agreement for the Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton Special Purpose School District.

David said that the articles of agreement have a spot on the back that says "I, (insert name), do hereby certify in my capacity as Clerk of the Town of Groton that at the Groton 2024 Annual Meeting of the Town of Groton, the voters approved of, and adopted these Articles of Agreement for the Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton Special Purpose School District." David asked if we are going to discuss this agreement that we are actually voting for and what if we want to make changes to it. Jennifer said that we cannot make changes to anything right now. This agreement can be changed after the vote. John explained that it is a draft but is final for now until the voting takes place. David said this is ridiculous, it says this is voted on and can't be changed after the vote. Jennifer said it absolutely can be changed after the vote. Terry said that all we are voting in is a yes/no vote because that warrant article we just read was put into the law. David said he agrees with the part about withdrawing and forming a separate district, but this is also saying that we are voting on the articles of agreement. He said there is a problem with this agreement and wants to know if this will be a separate hearing or a separate vote. He said this could distract people from a yes/no vote on the entire warrant article.

Jennifer said it does say draft on it, which means it can be changed later. David said that is why he is asking if we are going to discuss this and make changes to it today or at town meeting. She said this will not be done tonight or at Town Meeting because once this is voted on and goes through then a school board with a member from each town will be elected and then this can be revised. David said that is not what it says here. Jennifer asked him where it says it cannot be revised. David says it can only be signed that it

was agreed on at the 2024 Town Meeting and it doesn't say amendments after that.

Sara explained that this warrant article is just giving the authority for the town to adopt the proposed Articles of Agreement. It does state on the articles that they can be amended. We have one town meeting so at this town meeting we need to give the Town the authority to adopt the articles of agreement. We can do this knowing they can be amended.

Terry said that once this is established, which is what the articles of agreement are, if you want to change you can do so. David said that he understands all of that but he said they said this isn't the final agreement so someone may change it sometime before we sign it. Jennifer said no they cannot. She said the warrant article says that along with voting yes that you accept that. Stacey Darlington said exactly, are we talking about this. All we have been talking about is the yes/no warrant article so we want to know if we are going to go over the articles of agreement. Virginia asked if they have questions regarding the articles of agreement. Jennifer added that if they have certain questions regarding it then they can ask them. David and Stacey said that is what they were asking but they were told we weren't discussing this. Jennifer said you can ask questions about it but she doesn't think anything can be changed on it. John added it is a draft that cannot be changed right now. It will not become final for us to sign until after the vote. Virginia said it is still a good opportunity to ask any questions that you may have.

David said that first of all, in the middle of the first page it says " , the district may rent or lease a facility from the Bridgewater-Hebron Village District". He thinks this should say "shall" not "may". That way it will show that we will, not that we may. Terry said that after this is voted on, there will be an opportunity to enter into a lease through the school board and public hearing just like we do with SAU4. We have legal leases with them and agreements with them. David said he agrees with that but thinks this should say shall not may. David said it also says that "The event of withdrawal shall not result in the district acquiring any real property from the three towns". Bill Jolly said that he interprets this is to say that the district has permission to utilize the facility that is existing in Bridgewater. David says but it says may. David said that the agreements should be signed by Bridgewater Hebron School District if we are going to commit to it. John said it will once it is finalized. Sara said there is a spot on it for all three town clerks to sign this. David said that he is saying it is a separate district which is not part of the Town. Virginia said that is why it would be inappropriate for them to sign our articles of agreement. They would be a landlord essentially and it is a separate entity so they wouldn't be a signing party of our articles of agreement. David said that we are stuck then if we do not like what it says. John said there would only be three towns involved now. David said we still could be stuck with nothing. Terry said we would be stuck if we stay in SAU4 because they will not be our friends. If we don't lease then what will do with the kids.

John said that there is always something that can happen but the reason we formed this committee and created this house bill is because we wanted to work together. David said he understands the history and doesn't need to hear about that anymore, he wants to talk about going forward. John said the history is important to pertain to answering the questions. David said we are voting on these agreements at town meeting so we need to discuss them. It was stated we are not voting on these exact agreements. Stacey said we are and she read it again "do hereby certify in my capacity as Clerk of the Town of Groton that at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Town of Groton, the voters approved of, and adopted these Articles of Agreement for the Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton Special Purpose School District."

Deb Johnson explained that we cannot vote on a legal document before we vote on separating and forming a new district. Then you will deal with the articles.

Stacey said that is not what he is saying. He understands the yes or no vote happens separately but this document states that at the town meeting if we vote yes then we are accepting these articles of agreement and he wants to know if we are going to talk about these articles of agreement.

Tony Tavares said if you go to the end of section three it states “The District may vote to amend these Articles to expand or change the membership on its Board in accord with the provisions and limitations of RSA 195:19-a. This is saying they are agreeing to make amendments in the future. David said that in the future you can always make amendments. John said that even if we were to sign it that day, we can always change it another day and sign a new one.

Jennifer said maybe we can fix this with a timeline. After all three towns vote in favor of this, we still have an entire year and a half of work to do. There is an educational plan to prepare for with DOE and a lot more work to do and these articles of agreement are one of them and is amendable just as it would be at amendable at any other time. We will have a full three town school meeting before 2025. David said everything is amendable after the fact but he is saying right not you are asking us to vote on this at town meeting so he wanted clarification to see if we are discussing this now or at Town Meeting. John said that are voting on what is written here which can be amended later. Terry said that the clerk is only validating that the vote took place. Stacey read the article again. John said you are also voting on where it states it is amendable. Stacey said it is amendable but you are asking us to vote on this. David said that they are asking us to vote on crap. Jennifer and John said that it is not crap.

Miles said that we are assuming that we have consulted with attorneys on all of this to get to where we are now. John confirmed that they have worked extensively with the attorneys and they are the ones that put the wording together. Miles said it would be a good idea to run this by the attorneys to clarify this issue. John said they can do that. David asked what issue. Miles said the one that you brought up.

David asked again if this would be discussed. John asked him what he would like to discuss. He has mentioned that he would like the word “may” changed to “shall” for the part about leasing the facility. David said he also wants the Bridgewater Hebron school district to sign this. Bill Luti and John said we can ask the attorney that. John said that he hopes they will lease it because this entire plan will fall apart if not and he hopes he didn’t waste the last two years on nothing. David said his other question in the last paragraph of first page it states “the district will vote to expand the grades served by the Bridgewater-Hebron Village District School up to twelfth grade.” He thought it was already assumed it was grades 1-12. Virginia said agreements like this are meant to be as less restrictive as possible so where you are looking for shall and we have may, this is more certain and more restrictive. David said he thinks it should be clear K-12 not K-8. Virginia said she is talking about in house is a K-8 but the district is responsible for the kids K-12 that is why they have worked on options for high school. He is asking when the separate vote on this is. Virginia said as we have explained there is no second vote. This is a guiding document telling us the framework for the district. John said for David to read through the document entirely and then submit to the Select Board the changes you would like to have and we can send them to the attorney. This is getting very confusing right now.

John said again what we are voting on is to stabilize our taxes. David cut him off and said he doesn’t care about the history. John said it is not the history it is the future. David said he is making the assumption that it will stabilize the taxes but he doesn’t know this for sure. John said if this doesn’t go through and an article to change the formula goes through and our taxes increase by \$250,000-\$300,000, that will be reality and will shut down our town. David said this is a separate issue from how we want to see our district run. John again suggested David read through it and send an email. David said he has read through it and has questions that he isn’t getting any answers on. John said we said we will submit his concerns to the attorney. David again said that he feels the district should be responsible and should clearly state the information about K-12. John said it states that in the agreements and uses the word shall that he wants in there. Jennifer said it is giving us the opportunity to grow and expand on site if need be. It is just there in case you want the option to have K-12 there but we are not planning on that since we have already

talked to Newfound and Plymouth. John said as Virginia stated if you make is so restrictive then it is harder to change later. David said he thinks it should be restrictive in this part. Pam said that it is the difference between tuitioning the kids out or teaching them at the current school. That is the difference it is allowing us to make the school bigger if needed. A resident stated that either way we have to educate them. Stacey commented that they are being shut down. John said that no one is shutting them down.

Celine said that this is how she understands it. The warrant article that we are going to vote on in March basically says that we agree to join the new district separating ourselves from SAU4 and. John said correct. She said the articles of agreement explain what we will be doing. John said correct those are our guidelines. She said but this will not happen until July 2025. John said this is correct. She said what this will save us from is the increase in taxes that could happen if we don't leave. John said this is correct. The other thing she understands is that the articles of agreement can be amended if needed. She asked if she was right that currently the school is K-5 and doesn't do middle school but this will be expanded to K-8 with the option if needed in the future to go to K-12 but more than likely the students will go to Newfound or Plymouth for grades 9-12. John said all of that is correct.

Stacey said they are not arguing any of that but they feel they are being shut down and that everyone here is saying they don't know what they are talking about. John said that no one is saying any of that. Stacey said they will go home and submit their questions and they are done talking here.

Terry said they are right that the warrant article is technically two things. Once is to vote on leaving SAU4 and joining the new district and the other is the framework. This is the framework that was written and is going on in SAU4 right now. Right now, they could turn around and amend the apportionment formula. In this document they put information in there on the apportionment formula to protect the small towns. They can only go so low. Again, it is a framework that is amendable and you can never get it to be exactly what you want. There are a number of sections in there and if you asked him if he totally understands it all he will say not but he trusts it because they hired one of the best attorneys in the state that drew up these agreements and have been working with us from the beginning. They have great faith in them. The biggest thing is to withdraw from SAU4. If Groton wanted to withdraw from this new district later, they could but it is quite the process. Nobody is locked in This gives you the framework for the next step. You can either vote in favor of it or not, that is up to you.

The pressure that we face is that this bill went from 4 years to 2 due to the amendment by the school. Also, there is pressure from the other towns if this doesn't pass. He has a letter from the attorney as to why this cannot be amended initially so you have to vote for it as written and the reality is that it is built so that the people can make suggestions for changes. John said it can be amended. David said everything is amendable. Terry said not necessarily, there are some things in the state that you cannot amend. Stacey said what he just said is what they were trying to say. Terry said the major vote of the warrant article is to leave SAU4 and join new district but it is coupled with the part about these articles of agreement. The reality is there is a lot of information in this document but it is built so that the people can amend it. It is wrapped around RSA195 and HB349 so you either vote it up or vote it down. If you do not have enough faith in what has been done then you can vote no but he would recommend voting yes. If we fail at this, the downside is that there is no doubt that there will be capital improvements in SAU4 such as a new school that we will be responsible to help pay for. Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton collectively will be paying between 42%-46% for the next 30-50 years of the bond. The other four towns have 6000 of them and there are only 1500 of us so we will not stand a chance when voting if we stay. Terry said that we will have no say moving forward because we are the smaller towns. Make your choice and maybe this isn't the greatest wording but it can be changed but if you don't vote on it, we are screwed and this will not be good for the towns or the kids. All of it comes down to it is a working framework which can be changed. Sara said she would rather take a chance on voting for something that can be changed or amended know

that what will not change is that if this doesn't go through and the formula changes, we will not be able to change that. At least we will have say later on to amend the articles of agreement. Terry said this is right. We will not ever be able to out vote the other towns. He asked that they give this a chance because this is in our best interest; if this doesn't go through you can guarantee they will change the formula and we will not have any chance on changing it. There is a lot more of them than us.

Stacey said they just wanted confirmation that we are voting on the articles of agreement as well. Terry said yes but it can be changed. They had a public hearing in Hebron, now in Groton, and Bridgewater will be next week. It may not be perfect but can be changed. Terry said the articles of agreement are the final but it says draft because it is a handout. David said he was told multiple times that this was a draft because it can be amended. John said it is a working document. David asked if there would be a final by town meeting. Terry said this is the final and cannot be changed until after the vote. This is what we will be using at Town meeting. We will remove the word draft if it is causing confusion. John said the draft on there was meant that it can be amended if needed. David and Stacey said at the next town meeting. Terry told him that is not correct. Once we vote to withdraw, the school board will be formed and will work on all of this. Virginia said that these were put together by an attorney but any questions should be submitted. Jennifer confirmed that we cannot make changes before town meeting. John said that the warrant article cannot be changed but if you have suggestions on the articles of agreement to submit them to the town for the attorney to review.

Amy said that if we get caught in the weeds of this then we will never get to the vote at Town Meeting. The main thing to keep in mind at Town meeting is to vote yes to leave the school district or no to stay.

Tony Tavares said we cannot change the warrant article because all three towns have to vote on the same thing and once it is voted on then changes could be made.

Slim said that he would like to go to Plymouth. He wishes he was 70 years younger they have more options.

Hilary said she wants to say something as a parent. We talk a lot about money and taxes which is awesome but there is more to it being a parent. PJ and her lived in Danbury before and they didn't know how much travel there was for those that live in Groton. Their oldest child sometimes has to miss out on activities because they occur during their work day at the high school 40 minutes away. Every part of their life, their doctors, therapists, everything is in Plymouth. It doesn't make sense to bring them all the way to Newfound for school and then to Plymouth. She asked that everyone take this into consideration. This is very stressful. Bill L said that the legislature said the exact same thing that they didn't realize how long it took Groton to get to school. Hilary said she has done a lot of work and has been waiting for someone to change her mind. She has talked to the school board, other parents from other towns, etc. and no one has given her a reason to not vote for this. We do not live in a one income economy anymore, both of us have to work to keep our house. It is not fair to my kids that they have to have a halfhearted school experience because of how far she has to drive.

Jeremy asked if there a guaranteed sports program. Virginia said if you tuition in you will be able to play with that school. We are not legally allowed to enter that phase until we have this vote so she cannot say there is a guarantee until they have this vote but there is every intention for this. Hilary said yes this would be an option because they do it for homeschoolers so if they do it for them, they will have to do it for our kids. Jennifer said most kids usually do sports through Tapply Thompson Community Center and they agreed to still allow the kids to go there so there will be sports.

There were no other questions or comments. The Select Board thanked everyone for coming out.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to close the public hearing on the withdrawal from SAU4 at 7:28pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Note: There were many times that multiple people were talking over each other and all at once so I couldn't hear in person or in the recording everything that was being said but I did my best to catch everything that I could.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant