

Town of Groton
Select Board Work Session Minutes
Informational Session on HB349 and exiting SAU4
March 14, 2024

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

John called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

John wanted to point out a few things that have happened since the last meeting,

- John said that Mr. Darlington pointed out last time that there wasn't a date set on the articles of agreement for when we were going to set the number of students. We do have a date set for that. Also, the three towns agreed to get together to make amendments to the articles of agreement if the article passes so that has been addressed as well.
- John mentioned that Groton sent the articles of agreement and pro forma budget to our Town attorney. She felt that everything in there was fair and she did not find anything concerning.
- John reminded everyone that what we are voting on Saturday cannot be amended and has to pass as written. The three towns did agree that we can amend that after.
- Bridgewater voted on this on Tuesday March 12, 2024 and this passed in Bridgewater 291 to 28.

John opened the meeting up for questions.

Michele Lacroix said that on the budget it states there are 184 students from Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton, compared to Thornton which has 189 and Ashland has 166. However, if you look at the entire budget of 4.7 million, that is 1.1 million less than the Thornton budget with only 5 less students. She wanted to know how the numbers on the budget were derived. Virginia stated that Thornton has a few unique driving factors in their budget that increased their costs. Right now, off the top of her head she cannot remember what it was but she could ask Erick for this since he has had more in-depth conversations with Thornton. They had some costs that were not the average per person costs. It is not as simple as looking at the bottom line but they also looked at how far are you away from school, are you replacing technology and other factors in Thornton. She knows there was something else in Thornton that drove up their short-term costs.

Virginia said as far as how they put the budget together, it was a lot of long hours working on this, they did not just throw this together. They did this by looking at SAU4 and the information they were able to get. They were not able to get it all because there was a date breach so the information is not available right now. They actual couldn't provide any information from the current year. Virginia stated that she is also on the budget committee for SAU4 and this information doesn't not exist due to the data breach, it is not that they didn't want to share it, that data is not available to them. They had to work with limited information. Currently, they did a great job giving them what they could, it just wasn't all there. They actually had to use information from previous years adding in 5% or 10% for increases where needed. They know pretty well how the current operation runs so they had to turn that into a K-8 model. However, year one will only add in 6th grade so it will not be that different from what it is now. They can only give their best estimates. The short answer is that they used a lot of information and compared a lot of things so that they were not just putting numbers in that they hope works. What they put together is what they believe is the worst-case scenario, they did not just make numbers up. They are being intentional and saying this is not the exact tuition dollar amount that they are putting forward because they are going to be negotiating with SAU4 and it makes sense not to benchmark giving that number right now. There are ranges for them to build in. There was a lot of people consulted to come up with this information. Michele feels that more of an explanation should have been put in there to explain all of that. She thinks it could have been explained better as to where the differences are

coming from. Virginia said something to keep in mind, something unique that we have in our favor is the facilities. The Bridgewater Hebron Village District is the owner of that building and in this new district they will continue to pay for the maintenance costs for that building. This is something that usually a school would pay for and would be in a budget like this that we do not have because it is covered by the Town. Groton will not pay for the maintenance. John said we are paying for the operation, not the maintenance. They own the building so there are not these costs as well. Michele asked if there is nothing down the road that they can do to make Groton pay for it. John said it is not written that way.

Michele said in the beginning it was said there would be no tax increase. John said that was never said, he has always said that this will stabilize the taxes and there may be a slight increase at first, which may decrease over time or it may maintain where it is at. This is three towns that are very similar to each other that will be working on the budget. Where SAU4 added that \$800,000 to do the roof and then that got incorporated into the budget, that is not something we would do because it would not be in the best interest of the three towns.

Michele said she wants to know about a 5-to-10-year projected budget here because it said it could be a slight increase and then could level off but there were no numbers in the packet that talks about the projection. John said that you are always going to see it gradually going up, especially at first. The one thing this will protect us from is another warrant article to change the formula. They tried this a few years ago and can do this again every 5 years. This would paralyze Groton since it was going to increase Groton taxes by at least \$200,000 easily. It was also going to increase the taxes in Hebron and Bridgewater but the other towns taxes would dramatically decrease so they were just wanting to redistribute their taxes. All they have to do now is pull that article out again, dust it off, change the date and submit it again. It is simple to understand that if your taxes are going to go down you are going to vote in favor of it so the other four towns would vote for this if it was submitted again. We got very lucky that we were able to create the study committee over the summer so they could explore warrant article 5 and see if there was a way that they could change it that would work for everyone. Groton, Hebron and Bridgewater would significantly increase with every change that was presented. No matter how we looked at it, Groton's taxes would have increased. We are doing this to stabilize our taxes. They may go up with this and may go up every year due to inflation but they will not go up to that extent. When voting this week there was a few articles for the school that increased their budget for SAU4, which is something we wouldn't do. That added about \$675,000 extra to the school budgets which adds that to our tax bill. Sharon asked if that article didn't pass before what makes them so certain that it would pass next time. John said if he said to you that he could lower your taxes by 25%, wouldn't you vote on that. She said that is what they are doing now. John said we are not saying it will lower your taxes, we are not doing this to stabilize them and to offer the students that best educations and options. She said the threat is that if you don't vote for it our taxes are going to go up, they are going to triple so what makes you so certain this will happen. John said if they pass that warrant article it will happen. Virginia says she is trying to ask how we know this will happen. Virginia said that everyone that she talks to is confident this will happen and it is currently being talked about in other communities. Tony said it only takes 10 voters to put that warrant article through. Any 10 voters in any town can put that warrant article forward again. Tony said if you go to the town and say their taxes will decrease by 25-50% they will vote yes. A resident asked why it didn't pass last time. It was explained that it did pass, it was just changed at the deliberative session to become a study committee.

Virginia said that she doesn't think anyone in this room will sway anyone and she is not here to sway anyone, you have your right to your opinion and she will not say your opinion is wrong. What she will offer is the reality of a bond coming forward in SAU4 within the next five years. That is a reality. She has served on the budget committee for the last four years and every year they have pushed off maintenance time and time again to meet the tax cap requirements. There are fundamental issues with most of the elementary schools in our district. With the tax cap limitation that SAU4 has, things have been kicked down the road. There is a

building committee for SAU4 so you can look at those minutes. They are talking about making a large campus, revamping, needing a new elementary school. There are a lot of plans out there and there is a price point that comes with all of this and it is not for schools that anyone in Groton, Hebron and Bridgewater would benefit from. That is a reality that is coming down the pipeline.

Virginia said to answer the 5-year budget question. She said the accuracy to plan a budget for 3-5 years down the road would not be accurate. There are so many variables that it is near impossible to give those numbers. She could talk for hours about these variables. They didn't want to give out inaccurate information and they could give out 100 different options but it is not feasible to do. Michele said that works for the college and she did this so it is possible. She gets it will be a best guess but she thinks there should be a best guess scenario to go along with this. Virginia said this is not something they were able to have available within the short timeframe they were given. To give a little background, this bill was introduced with 4-year lead time and there were some folks at SAU4 that advocated very strongly to push that time back so they have only had a few months to put this all together. John asked Michele what she looked at when she did her budgets. She said cost of living, increases, payroll, healthcare, what you planned to do for staff, projected health care costs as they increased. It is a best guess scenario. John asked her if she would say in those scenarios if it was a 15% increase. She said it would depend on all of the numbers like supplies could be 3%, salaries and your fringe benefits could 15% but it would all depend. John said overall when you look at your budget today and 5 years for now would you say 10% roughly. She said yes roughly you could do that. John said that they could say the same thing then that in five years it could be a 10% increase and with the way inflation is going it could be 13% increase. Sharon said they are only going through 6th grade for the first year and then adding two more on. Virginia said they are actually projected to save money with more grades in the school. John said instead of paying SAU4 for the child to go there we are paying ourselves.

Britta said we also don't know the tuition costs will be. Virginia said that they do hope it is more towards the Hill metric. They are paying \$14,000 and the average cost is \$20,000. Britta said that they also provide all of the transportation, superintendent services, and other items. Virginia said she has talked to the transportation company and they can do all these schools in 4 buses. That is not a concern at all. As far as the costs go, SAU4 School Board already said on video, they unanimously voted in good faith to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to start negotiations once this passed. Beyond those negotiations, the reality is even if SAU4 decided that they are not interested in doing that, it is a no brainer because the state will not allow a school with open seats to not allow students to go to that school. There is a formula in lieu of negotiations which is preset. John said the state determines that. Virginia said is our worst-case scenario is the preset formula then we go with that.

Ted asked if you would want your first grader going to school with 8th graders. Hilary said yes, she has no problem with that. Virginia said there are separate wings and the older students could be in their own area. Sara said they are already on the bus with 8th graders. She feels in the school they would be more supervision, there are teachers and aids to help in the classroom. On the bus there is only one bus driver and they cannot see everything. John said that some students are currently on the bus for an hour and half one way so that is three hours on the bus so they will get some time back.

Hilary wanted to say that there are times she cannot take her oldest child to cheer at the high school because her coach says there is no bussing and they are told two days before. She cannot take time off from work to do this and her partner cannot either. They cannot afford to do that so just by virtue of living 40 minutes away from the high school, my children do not get the same opportunities that kids from closer towns get. She understands that this is a tax issue for a lot of people but for parents it is bigger than that. I do not want my kids on the bus for an hour one way. She doesn't want them to have to miss out on opportunities. Plymouth is so much closer. Plymouth is where they go to for the pharmacy, doctor, therapist, dental, pet stores and grocery shopping. Everything we do is in Plymouth because it is closer. It is really hard as a parent

to get a kid from Bristol to go to Plymouth then back to Groton for an appointment. That puts a strain on the household expenses and they are at their limit financially. She said to be transparent, they have a mortgage that is \$1,700.00. They do not have anything left over for gas. She understands that some people have the sentimental hold on Newfound, and she gets that. She has ties to Newfound that goes back generations but sentimentality won't pay her bills. Sentimentality isn't a great excuse for my child when she wants to know why I can't take her to cheer. She would really urge everyone to think about this. Taxes are just a small part of this. Taxes will go up regardless so ask yourself what are you getting for the increase in costs.

Britta wanted to get clarification. She is confused because Virginia said they were working on negotiations with SAU4 but now Hilary is saying Plymouth. If we negotiate a tuition agreement with SAU4, but a parent chooses Plymouth, would they have to tuition to Plymouth or pay the different? Virginia said they intend to offer both options. They originally reached out to SAU numerous times that they are happy to exclusively work with them, to put all of their eggs in that basket, to make it as easy as possible, to offer as many services as they had before but unfortunately that was met with silence for about 4 months. At that point, they very openly and publicly let them know that in addition to committing to the tailing out agreement, that they would be exploring other opportunities and they found an opportunity in Plymouth. Britta asked how do we budget for that since they have two different tuition costs. Say we are going to spend \$23,000 with Plymouth and Newfound is \$19,000. Virginia said she feels Britta is projecting a larger gap between the two schools. The reality is state wide, NH doesn't have the population it used to. It is a steady decline at every school across the state right now. When you reduce the number of kids you cannot reduce bills so costs rise. Virginia said we are begging Plymouth to take our kids; they are willing to and have said how many students and how quickly. John added they want our kids and want to work with us. Virginia said she is in her 30s and will be paying taxes for decades and she thinks long time, going from a district with so many crumbling buildings and so much overhead built in, to an agile town owned single building with multiple tuition agreements at a time is competitive and puts us in a good position for negotiations.

Britta asked what type of process or work has been put into retaining the staff there? Part of what makes BHVS great is the staff that is there. Some staff are very senior in the SAU4 and have been at BHVS for many years. What is being done and what will be done to keep them there? You are going to have to renegotiate health insurance and a union because their contract is going to end as we potentially exit. There is a realistic thing that they could leave due to these concerns. John said they have stressed from day one that they want to keep everything the same and as equal as it is today as it will be tomorrow. Britta said her understanding is the health rates are based on the higher number such as 200 employees at the school district and if we drop down to potentially 30 employees, she does not know this number realistically, but that would be a much different insurance negotiation, correct? Virginia said she is not the foremost expert on HealthTrust on the Steering committee, there are others that are, but there are people that are very in tune with that and there are group plans. Long short of it is that they will not be renegotiating contracts, they will not be renegotiating insurance. They have said from day one that this is a copy/paste situation. The contract itself will be renewed as of July 1st and will be voting on months prior. So not only it is the intent to continue as is but she believes it is also mandate from the state that they have to. As far as what they have thought about, it is not just what they have thought about for the teachers. They have actually had actions and held meetings and informational sessions for the staff. They don't want teachers to go home and worry about this stuff and they have tried to coordinate with SAU4 but they have limited the interactions the Steering Committee can have with them. There have been question and answer sessions with the teachers as they are a very important part of this. John said they have always tried to work with SAU4 to keep this as seamless as possible so that a transition wouldn't be noticed. The plan has always been for the teachers, administrators, and for the students to be seamless.

Michele said that since we will have to have our own SAU, she has a question on the SAU section. The business manager salary and benefits are \$160,000. That is not the superintendent whose salary and benefits is much

more. The budget only says \$169,000 for superintendent services. What does that mean? Virginia said that there is there is a document that goes over the superintendents' services. Some are easy check boxes. When you are looking at 162-180 students, the number of services and the complexity of those services is smaller. They looked at comparative districts that have that K-8 model, and there is a lot less to it. They are not overseeing elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. There is less to it at that level. Michele said payroll is payroll regardless if it is one person or 200. She said someone to lead as a superintendent is expensive regardless of check boxes. They make \$150,000-\$200,000. That is regardless of the number of buildings. Virginia said they are working with Virginia Barry, she was the commissioner of education, and she will be assisting with the introductory period of this project. Britta asked if that would be a conflict of interest with Terry Murphy being on the Steering Committee and with him being on the board. Terry Murphy's wife being the Superintendent could be a conflict of interest with him being on the board. John said if it was it could always be changed. He is on the Village District Board and Steering Committee.

Hilary said that this has been confusing for people online as well. The Steering committee cannot act as a school board so they cannot enter legally binding agreements. They are just getting information and then after the vote we can move forward with these conversations and contracts. At that point we will get a greater say. John said that is correct. Once it is voted on and passed by all three towns is when it will all go together. Tony said that we have to wait until Hebron votes in May. Then we can move forward and have until July 2025 to get this set. Then we will have 15 months to get this all ironed out. This is a one-time opportunity and if it doesn't happen now, it won't happen again. Tony said his daughter went to BHVS and he would have liked her to stay longer it would have benefited her more from this. He wishes she could have had a K-8. His daughter gets along with everyone but when you move to the middle school and combine all of the schools you lose friends and things change. He wishes this was an option then. He believes it would have benefited her and other kids. John said there have been studies that show that a K-8 model is better for the students.

A concerned resident stated that the situation he is in right now with a 5th grader is that she will be a 6th grader, so when this goes through in 2025, she will be in the middle school. Will she have to go back to BHVS? John said that is the beauty of this. The way they worked it out is that she can choose to go where she wants to. She could stay at the middle school in Bristol or she could go back to BHVS. The student and the parents can decide. You are getting the opportunity to choose your child's path. Virginia said some kids are ready for the larger school and others are not. Who are we to say that they shouldn't have that opportunity.

Joe said so in this scenario if they go to middle school could they still decide to go to Plymouth or Newfound? John said yes, they can. He said it is a win-win situation. This will stabilize the taxes and you can choose where your kids go. Tony said this is a very unique situation for us. He is glad that Bridgewater and Hebron brought us on board. When they build that high school, they could have bought the land across from BHVS but they chose to build it where they did. His Father told them that they couldn't have built it any further from Groton. Tony said he believes Groton even tried to get out but they wouldn't let them leave; it failed.

Katie wanted to clarify that all services that are currently offered like speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy etc. will still be offered since they are shared with the SAU. John said yes, they will have services. These positions are usually 40 hours and divided between all of the schools so they will still come to BHVS. Virginia said they have spoken about this. If for some reason SAU4 won't do it, then they are confident there will be room to make those services happen in the new district. She said it is federally mandated that special education and a lot of those services are mandated at the federal level. Virginia said that she thinks there will be a time when SAU realizes they have lost the students and don't want to lose these extra costs. John said they have never wanted to hurt SAU4 financially during this process.

A concerned resident asked about athletics. Right now, he knows a lot of kids from Bristol, Hebron, and Bridgewater play together. If there are not enough kids to play, would it be fair to say there wouldn't be a basketball team or baseball team at the school. Virginia said that TTCC currently does a lot of their activities at BHVS. Hilary said that one of her kids was homeschooled and could still do athletics even though they are not in the SAU. A resident said that is because when they are homeschooled, they are still a part of the SAU. Hilary said that if we tuition our students to Plymouth or Newfound wouldn't they also be able to do sports there. John said yes, they would. Britta said but now your middle schoolers are all together but if this happens, they wouldn't be. So, if there is a game where they leave at 1pm, is there going to be a bus that goes from BHVS to the middle school to get the bus or to Plymouth if that was the case. Virginia said she isn't going to pretend to know what the schedule will look like or things of that nature but she does know that they considered transportation costs for sports. She said that sometimes you have to get creative like sometimes Rumney has to combine with Wentworth to make it happen. As far as bussing, the bus will already be going in that direction so it would be a possibility to use the same bus. She said yes, sports will be offered and she thinks optimistically when this passes the residents will be able to get involved and say what matters to them to keep for sports. In the next year, help that school board decide by telling them what is important to you. We have the opportunity to set this.

A concerned resident asked would BHVS have their own team like Bristol has their own teams. Virginia said that if the school doesn't have enough kids, they will join others like Rumney and Wentworth. Britta said that it sounds like a pick-up game to her if we are trying to find schools to pick up these kids, like who this year has room for these kids. She said that there have been years that even with all the seven schools they are having a hard time finding enough girls to play field hockey but then softball you have to make cuts because there are so many. She said maybe it is too early to have all of these details but for some parents that is a very important piece too. John said we have looked at that but if you look at the bigger picture and the declining enrollment that could happen anywhere.

The concerned resident said Sara is nodding and he wanted to hear what she has to say. Sara said that she grew up playing sports and she knew a lot of kids that only kept their grades up and passed classed because you had to in order to play sports and the sports kept them going. She stated that she was fortunate to play three sports and she did good in school but sports kept a lot of kids out of trouble or forced them to keep their grades up. She feels sports is almost as important as education. Obviously, education is more important and will bring you further in life because we do not get a lot of professional athletes out of our area but sports do motivate kids to keep them in school, in class and out of trouble. This is an important thing to look into. John agreed that this is a good point. He said when you look at the warrant article that just passed now for technology, if you have looked at the Newfound budget line by line and there are a lot of lines that are budgeted every year and is not spent that we don't have as much control over. If sports are that important, which they are, the parents can get together in our three towns to say what is important. You will have more say and more control with the smaller district with three towns than we do with seven towns. The concerned resident said that you have 4th graders being pushed up to play at a 5th and 6th grade level or you have 5th graders being pushed up to play with the 8th graders already so when you have your own school, they could say this is your own deal and you are own team and you have four girls for a basketball team or four boys for a baseball team will be a problem. The travelling back and forth to other schools will be difficult. Already at these ages you have rivals. You can't have Heaths boy play for Plymouth who is their rival and not expect him to have black eyes in the locker room or will be dishing them out. He is not trying to be insulting but having been there you don't just fall onto another team. The point I am trying to gather right now is it sounds like the plan is to have them play on other teams, is that accurate? Virginia said that is just one of a number of potential options. She said will there be sports? Yes, absolutely!! The specifics are still being worked on. The first time that will come into play will be Fall of 2026 so there will be time. This is the first time this will become applicable. We are talking about going live, not this year, but July of 2025 at which point we are talking about a K-6 for that next year. K-7 would be the following year. It is not that we don't have answers

but we have time to figure this out. Britta says that only 6th graders would be impacted that first year because right now they are part of the middle school team.

John said that nothing changes so why are we thinking that 4th grader will have to play on the 6th grade team if we are not doing it today. Sara said that it is happening today. John said that if it is happening today then it will be the same thing with the transition. Sara said that the concern is that it is already happening today with 7 towns so it will be worse. When she was in school, they had enough kids for Varsity, JV and sub-JV teams and it is not like that anymore. Today they are lucky if they have enough for the varsity team which means no JV teams or other teams. Now we are taking from 7 towns to 3 towns so how are you going to field a team with only three towns. Virginia said it is a valid concern and a lot of towns are dealing with this because of declining enrollment and she is not going to pretend she has the golden solution. The concerned resident and Sara said they just want to know it is something that will be considered and discussed. She said that she hopes the community will continue to be involved if this passes to let them know what they want. John said it is a concern that needs to be addressed. The concerned resident said that to answer his question is that we don't really know. John said that if it is currently happening today, it will happen tomorrow so we need to come up with a solution to fix it.

Ted asked why the middle school is good enough for the kids in Bristol but not for us. Hilary said that we are not saying it isn't good enough for us. When they were in the process of moving to Groton we had to keep the kids in the school district. As she said before she has deep ties to Newfound. She was happy sending her kids to Newfound Middle School and High School if none of this had come in to play. Now that this is an option, it is hard with her to disagree with giving the parents a choice so they can choose what is best for their kids and their situation. Saying Plymouth is a better option for my kids is not saying that Newfound is bad. We are all unique individuals and that is the beauty of this solution. Just because she said that Plymouth is a better option for her doesn't mean Newfound is bad, she thinks they are both good options. Britta said that she heard that same message when this started. There was a lot of statements made that there was a huge decline in students' performance when they hit middle school. There has since then been data sent out that this is not really the case but maybe it was. John said that it was based on previous test scores but he believes they have improved today. When those statements were made, they weren't attacking the school they were stating the facts at that time. Hilary said that she watched one of her kids, who is very smart go from being an incredible student in elementary school to failing classes in middle school. That doesn't indicate that there is something wrong with her in that situation. It indicates there is something else going on whether it is at school or home and has stressors. She found an unwillingness from the teachers to communicate and work with her on it. She said the middle school is lacking and they need to work on it. In elementary school the teachers communicate everything with the parents but in middle school the students are expected to and no one helped them with this transition so it went from all communication to no communication.

Ted what are we going to do for special education. John explained that they talked about this already and that will be taken care of. Virginia said they will have what is offered at BHVS currently.

Katie asked if the kids that know that they want to go Plymouth High School, would they would be able to go to Plymouth Middle School. Virginia said they do not have a middle school; they are a K-8 as well. Katie asked if they would be able to go to the Plymouth K-8 sooner. Virginia said this is not something that they have addressed yet but they can in the future. Sara said that is a good point because you make friends and rivals in school and in sports. It is hard to fit in for school and on a team when you move over later. The sooner they could do that would be better but she doesn't know if that is an option since BHVS offers K-8. John said that his understanding is the way the law is set up, regardless of what school it is, if your seats aren't filled, they have to take the kid that wants to go there. Virginia said it could be an option but they haven't looked into it. Plymouth is willing to take the kids in high school but she doesn't know about middle school. Even Interlakes, who is far away, has reached out about our kids going there. Sara said they would have to pay

tuition. The concerned resident agreed and said they would not be able to walk in there for free. John said that is correct so whatever that tuition is set at. Sara said but it sounds like for high school the towns will be willing to pay towards the high school of choice's tuition so would that be the same for elementary or middle school? John said that the way this is set up, they could look into this to expand it to this. Virginia said it makes sense and is a good question but it just has not been asked before so it wasn't looked into.

Michele said if this goes through and in 2029 you have K-8 at BHVS but you have a family in Groton that says I don't want my child there for 7th and 8th because I want to go to Plymouth for Highschool so I want them to go to Plymouth for 7th and 8th, would BHVS pay that tuition. John said that is what we haven't looked into. Right now, the way it is, for high school let's say it cost \$18,000 to go to BHVS that is the money that would be paid to the other school and if it costs more the family would pay the difference. This has not been discussed for elementary or middle school. John said this has not been ironed out yet and is not set in stone. Virginia said that they cannot answer that right now. Sara said this is the same question that Katie just asked and they haven't discussed this yet. John said for Highschool this is the way it is looking like it will happen but it will not be definite until this is all worked out after it passes. Sara asked if this would be the same option if they wanted to go to a school that we do not have a tuition agreement with, such as New Hampton Prep School. Would they still give the \$18,000 towards the tuition and the family is responsible for the rest? That is also something to be discussed.

Britta said let's say that we have four students that choose to go to Plymouth for 7th and 8th grade, that would be costs that you have to take out of your budget but your operating costs aren't going to change so how are you going to balance that out. Virginia said we have not said that this will be an option, this is an avenue that we haven't explored yet and will be if this passes. We said that we would look into this. It is theoretical.

John said that Saturday we are not voting on all of this. We are voting on leaving SAU4 and to form our town SAU. A resident said you are asking us to make a decision but we don't have answers. Hilary said that is kind of the point that you have the ability to work all of this out and have these options.

Katie said she asked about going to Plymouth when they are adding grades and transitioning. She knows what we are voting on Saturday is leaving SAU4 and forming our own but is the school choice only for high school or for all grades. Is it that at any point you want to leave BHVS you can. Virginia said that how she sees it being on the steering committee, the guidance they are trying to put forward to the future school board, is to maximize school choice opportunities for the kids in our district while keeping the budget realistic. For high school we are not offering this in house so it is no skin off their back. When we start looking at middle school, we will have to look at the balance between having the most opportunities but also maintaining some normalcy with the budget. A resident said they if they went to Plymouth for middle school grades that would take away from BHVS. Virginia said as it is now, we do not have anything set in stone on that. At any point, any parent, in any district can change schools if they are not having their needs met There are things that already exist for that but she cannot say what the process will be for this new district. We are going from 16% on a 7-town district to 3 towns with fewer infrastructure worries. The K-8 model was brought up a decade ago but was shot down by SAU4. Now it is becoming a reality. As much it is stressful and they don't have all of the answers, to her it is exciting to have this opportunity to figure out this compromise. John said that we will also have kids' tuition in to BHVS.

The concerned resident state that for record he is a huge fan of BHVS but is scared about future. He said using John's theory, if Plymouth is asking how many we can take and with the declining enrollment, being a negotiator who cares what the tuition rate is, couldn't we negotiate? Isn't something better than nothing? If they aren't interested, we can go to Newfound. John said that is part of the negotiations that will take place if this passes all three towns. Britta said they also know how bad some parents want to send their kids to Plymouth so they could say we know how bad you need something or want something so we can ask more.

A resident asked if Bridgewater voted already. Virginia said yes and it passed 291 to 28.

Hilary said she wants clarification on if there is a cap on how much a school can charge. John said the State sets the amount and the school can decide to take less but they cannot take more. Britta asked if we know what the current state cap is. Virginia said it is not a number it is based on other things.

Ron said we should mention the new school that Newfound wants to build that will cost the Town money.

Tony Tavares asked how many students Groton has. Virginia said she was just looking at a spreadsheet from the last 10 years and she believes right now is 43. Sara said that right now is 43 and our average is right around that. She said we went on the DOE's website to get the information and put together a spreadsheet looking at last 10 years to see if the minimum threshold of 24 students would be a concern for us but we were always around the 40s for average. Virginia said it did go up into the 50's at times.

A resident said when you talk about the new boards voting she asked if all three towns will get the same 33.33% or if it will go by who has more students because Bridgewater has more students. John said that all towns will get the same equal vote. Originally it was looked at doing it different but John didn't want that to happen. He said that all three towns worked together to keep this fair, streamline the process, to make sure it was the best for education for all towns and to stabilize the taxes.

The concerned resident said thank you to whoever has put in the effort into this stuff. It is appreciated and doesn't go unnoticed. He did say whoever runs the show should meet with the teachers because he has seen and heard teachers that are stressed out because of this so if anyone can put the fire out for these guys it is needed. John said there were people on the committee that put in more than others. As far as the teachers go, they have had meetings with them. Unfortunately, there was a lot of false information and fear factors thrown out in the beginning. There were a lot of teachers that did not come to both sides. They worked hard to comfort them and make it clear that they were not going to lock the door and not give them a key. They made it clear that they don't want anything to change. Sara said that it is normal as a parent and teacher to be concerned. She doesn't have a kid in the school anymore and she is concerned how it will all play out. Sara said that the Steering Committee has put a lot of time into this and a lot of people are focusing on all of the information that they don't have instead of what they have done to get the information that they have. Unfortunately, until contracts are in place and it is in writing, the teachers will be concerned. There is a lot of unknown and we are voting on a lot of unknowns which is an uneasy feeling. John said that some people look at them and say they don't have kids in the school. He said to his wife that what used to be easy to manage that many people are now extremely challenging. He has watched the decline of people's common sense as they got away from critical thinking and he said the scary thing is, these kids are going to be the ones that will be running us which is concerning. Education is extremely important for that reason alone. Even though I don't have kids in the school, your kids are going to be controlling me someday because they are the ones sitting back here, or running the store, health services, etc. So just because his kids are grown up now doesn't mean he isn't concerned for your kids. Britta said that realistically until they have a contract, it will be hard for them. Until these pieces are ironed out, they won't know if they should stay in BHVS, change, or what they should do. John said that in 1990 when he was running the Home Depot that did 109 million a year, he was recruited by Best Buy and he made the decision and asked do I leave that job and stock options or go to Best Buy. A concerned resident said they didn't like that comparison. John said it is the same thing and the resident said that it is not the same thing. John said that they can decide. They want to retain them; they do not want any changes. They want it to be seamless. Those are good teachers and we would be fools to lose them. You cannot replace people today. Sara said that she agrees but we are struggling to make a decision because there is so much unknown, imagine that not just being your tax dollars but your job, your life. You can stress over and over that there are not going to be any changes but it has to be in the back of those teachers minds of what could happen. Until it is in writing in front of me, I am not going to believe it or feel

confident in it. You can have conversations telling them its wont change but until it is in writing they won't feel secure. Virginia said that is not just them promising it is state statute and they have responded in writing explaining the statutes. Sara said that is the part a lot of people don't know. John said he understands the uncertainty until the ink dries.

Hilary said she has been to a number of steering committee meetings and she can count on one hand how many people have been there from the public. She understands because she doesn't always have time either but democracy is what you put into it. She is excited about this and there are less people to argue with. She loves seeing this many people here tonight and she loves that they had so many people in Bridgewater they had to bus them in. All of the people that do the leg work cannot do all of the lifting themselves. They need the people to go to the meetings and get the information and be involved. Unfortunately, a lot of what she has gotten back is that people think things are being hidden and people are being shady. No, they are not. People just don't show up to the meetings to hear what they have to say but then say they were never told. She did her own research too. John said there has been a lot involved in this and it did pass the house and the State.

Sara said that she wanted to add that a good thing about a smaller school district and school board is that she feels more people may go. She went to a deliberative session and saw how it worked and felt outnumbered so she is guilty of no longer going to those meetings because Groton is extremely outnumbered by the larger towns. It shows clearly on the ballots we voted on Tuesday. The Town of Groton did not pass all of the budget articles but it did pass because the larger towns did. There were always three towns for each thing that didn't vote for it but since four towns did, they passed. That shows how large the numbers are in the other towns. She said she knows she shouldn't think that way but she thinks a lot of people don't go because they don't feel heard and feel they will be outvoted anyway and we will not be as outnumbered in this situation and it will be a board of three similar towns that do think alike on a lot of things. Tony said that we need to remember this is step one. We need to get out and then we can make the decisions from there. Christina said she has a question on what Sara said. She knows that the equal partnership on the committee but when you go to vote on the budget, Groton is still going to be outvoted. Virginia said we have 432 registered voters and we had less than 100 show up on Tuesday so we have numbers but we need people to show up. Hilary said that Hebron does have a similar number of voters on their checklist. Bridgewater is the big one but she thinks what Sara is saying is that there is a lot more that we agree on. Sara said we may be outnumbered but she meant not as much. We are not outnumbered like if you compare Groton to Bristol. That was my point. She said she is still not saying it is a good excuse to not go because she is the first one to tell people to vote and says every vote matters but she thinks that people will feel more heard and not as outnumbered in a smaller district.

Sara reminded everyone to come out Saturday to Town Meeting.

Having no other business to conduct, Tony motioned to adjourn at 8:25pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant