

1. **Members present:** Denis Messier, Don Austin, Dave Witham, Todd Patten, Dana Rivers, Todd Marsh, Mark Richardson and Robert Gadomski.
2. Messier called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM. He stated that he had met with the Superintendent and they had put together binders for each member of the committee. He stated that it includes some of the gathered data that had been asked for. Gadomski stated that we should review the binders. He stated that there was a schedule for meetings for the next four months. He stated that he put in the agendas and minutes for the meetings. He stated that there were the procedures and the possible outcomes. He stated there was a Mission Statement. He stated that the timeline for the SAU withdrawal was included. He stated that you have the approved budget for 19-20 in the binder. He stated there was also the sheet that shows the district assessment for Somersworth and Rollinsford. He stated that at the last meeting there was a question as to surrounding SAU's so he took a map of them and went out 20 miles and within that you have Dover, Rochester, Barrington, Oyster River, Northwood, Newmarket, Greenland, Milton, and Farmington. He stated that he will keep a running plan that the committee worked on and by the time we get to 5-7 meetings, the plan will complete itself. Richardson asked what the difference was between this committee and the transition committee? Gadomski stated that the transition committee will decide how SAU 56 will transition to whatever the choice is once this committee makes a decision. He stated that sometimes when a district is pulling out it is very complex. He stated that we have the schools and the buildings. Messier asked what the wish was of the committee to review the timeline or the meeting schedule? Gadomski stated that he had picked some dates moving forward for meetings once a month. Messier stated that if you are going to miss a meeting to please let the Superintendent know. Patten asked if Rollinsford left, what would be the hit to the bottom line? Witham stated that this year it would be \$183,000.00. Austin stated that it would be a onetime hit to revenue but it is a permanent reduction to the budget. Witham stated that a \$183,000.00 reduction would be a roughly \$0.26 increase on the tax rate. He stated that it would be a hit on the school budget. Messier stated that this cost would shift to the school budget. Richardson stated that it is the SAU line of the school budget. Witham stated that the tax cap is a complicated formula and the number ebbs and flows all the time. He stated that the way the tax cap works is when the economy is a bit sour our tax cap number is usually better than when the economy is strong. Richardson stated that the proposed budget for 19-20 is less than it was in 2015. Messier stated that the \$183,000.00 loss will mean further reductions in the Somersworth School budget. Witham stated that he wants to know how the school department will absorb this hit? Messier stated that this goes back to the three possible outcomes: 1. Status Quo, not to recommend to withdraw from SAU 56; 2. to withdraw and join an existing SAU; or 3. to withdraw and form a new SAU alone. Patten stated that the SAU will find that it is not feasible to try to join with another outside SAU. He stated that he is having a hard time not knowing what Rollinsford is going to do. Gadomski stated that they vote on March 12th. He stated that after a few months their committee will have been meeting and at that time both committees

would have been operating for a while and there may be an opportunity for some collaborative learning. Messier asked what happens if the townsfolk vote to not form the committee? Gadomski stated that you then proceed with your process. Austin stated that if they say no they have lost their option to withdraw. Messier stated that some people are wondering what we should do. He stated that we need to discuss how we should proceed. He stated that they have been asked by a Board to come up with a recommendation to be put forward. Richardson stated that their next meeting is March 7th and we will not know the result of the Rollinsford vote at that meeting. Marsh stated that we need to collect information because it is not just about the cost loss, but also the cost benefit. He stated we need to look at what the advantages of withdrawing are and how does that compare to the cost. He stated he would like to meet with Rollinsford. He stated that it makes sense to collaborate. He stated that if they vote to not form a committee, then our mission is to explore what road we need to go down. He stated that we need to weigh the advantages to doing this to the disadvantages, including the cost. He stated that analyzing it now makes sense. He stated that we are at a point where we need more information. Patten stated that with a \$0.26 increase in tax rate the taxpayers will want to see some tangible benefits not some theoretical benefits. He stated that this is a collaborative effort and not an antagonistic effort. He stated that he is still not clear on the back story of why this is happening. He stated that there was some tension that has led us to this. Messier stated that the amount of the loss of \$183,000 is not hypothetical. He stated that you can expect that this will result in a \$0.26 increase in the tax rate. He stated that the Somersworth School District budget is going to have to find a way to eat this loss. Witham stated that on the financial side, this is not a benefit. He stated to try to absorb a \$183,000 loss is not a benefit at all. He stated that we need to check some boxes on the benefit side and frankly he is struggling to find the benefits. Messier stated that it gives Somersworth the autonomy to work alone. Patten stated that he would like to know the vote on the repairing the SAU roof that caused some of this tension? He stated that he assumed that the 5 School Board Members from Rollinsford voted against it and a certain number of Somersworth Board Members were against it also. Austin stated that he does not remember how many of the Board Members were at that meeting. He stated that it may have been more of a consensus than a vote because we did not have full information on what it would cost. He stated that it may not have been a formal vote but the environment is that the two boards are not getting along as well as we would like and this presents an opportunity to make some decisions. Richardson stated that the bid to repair the roof was totally outrageous. Austin stated that it is not like the two boards are fighting. Patten asked that this leads us back to what led us to this point? He stated that you must have decided that you cannot deal with this anymore and we need more autonomy. He stated that the roof does not sound like it was necessarily a breaking point. Austin stated that it is not like we are in the sandbox fighting with each other. He stated that this goes back many years. Richardson stated that it really started with their withdrawal of the students from Somersworth. Austin stated that it was actually before the withdrawal. He stated that there was this attitude pervasive in Rollinsford that Somersworth was a lousy community to send their students to. He stated that they were upper class and did not want to send their students to Somersworth and be exposed to the kind of ruffraff that is supposedly there. He stated that this all came out as the

withdrawal process started. Messier stated that it was not everyone within the community that felt this way. Austin stated that this was correct but it was a large majority that felt that way and were vocal about it. He stated that the withdrawal process cost Somersworth about \$1.6 million dollars and we are still catching up with that. Patten stated that this money will not be recovered. Austin stated that the only thing that they have in common right now is the operation of this facility. He stated that the SAU Board only has jurisdiction over the SAU but because they had students here they wanted to have discussions as to what was happening in the schools. He stated that they allowed it for a long time because they had kids here. He stated that they wanted to have a voice in what was happening here. He stated that they have no voice now in what goes on in Marshwood. He stated that this committee needs to think about if you join with another SAU that you will give up your rights for any voice in how the SAU manages the schools. He stated that every time we have a joint meeting of the SAU Board it is stressful and anxiety filled. He stated that it is never a board that comes together for a common purpose. He stated that each side has their best interest at heart rather than a joint interest. He stated that it is time to separate the SAU and operate it the best way that it can be. Patten stated that he thinks perhaps the Rollinsford Board feels like they are not being represented fairly at the SAU Board Meetings. He stated that the benefit that they get is the facility but it is beyond that. He stated that it is just not the facility. Gadomski stated that you will be gaining time, every person on the SAU staff will be gaining time because they will not be dealing with Rollinsford issues. He stated that they are paying 16% of our time and 16% of our budget and they are getting a full time SAU which takes some of our time to do that. Witham stated that the portion that they are paying is deducted from the SAU budget which is \$183,000.00. He stated that this would definitely mean staff reductions. Gadomski stated that it would definitely mean staff reductions as there is nothing else. Witham stated that this is an option although not a palatable one. Marsh stated that one of the benefits that he sees is the focused efforts of the SAU staff on Somersworth. He stated that he does not know if this outweighs the cost and we need to discuss this. Gadomski stated that at any time a staff member from the SAU could be working for Rollinsford or Somersworth. He stated that the focused efforts would be a positive. Patten asked if you could think of where the focused efforts for Somersworth would be a benefit? Gadomski stated that any time that you have deadlines in submitting budgets and preparing them there are deadlines and these deadlines are different for Towns and Cities. He stated that the gain in the focused effort is the increase in quality that you are getting and the timeliness in getting things done and improving on them and doing more of a cost analysis. He stated that every task that the SAU staff does for Rollinsford is taking away time from the Somersworth tasks. He stated that the same holds true for Rollinsford that there are times we are doing a task for Somersworth and they are put on the back burner. Austin stated that the Special Education kids that go to Marshwood are still our kids and Pam MacDonald has stated that there is an extra layer of having to work with SAD 35 and manage that process with the different State laws. Messier asked how we can drill down to what is being provided for Rollinsford that will go away if we withdraw and benefit Somersworth. Gadomski stated that he may be able to draw up a benefit pros and cons list. He stated that we can add the Special Education, the budgeting and the jobs on task. Messier stated that they are looking for a general

idea as to how this might work. He stated that it needs to be sellable to the people who will make the call on this and how do you get public buy-in? He stated that the way to do this is with facts that back up why the decision was made. He stated that the elephant in the room is the \$183,000.00 loss. Richardson asked if the public hearing was to educate the public on this process? He stated that they needed to be educated before they could offer feedback. He asked if the public hearing is to present the decision of the committee? Gadomski stated that the first public hearing would be exactly what Richardson is talking about, letting them know where we are at and hearing their feedback as to questions that they may have. He stated that later on they would have another public hearing to lay out the plan and allow for comments. Patten stated that coming up with the accounting of how much time the SAU staff spends on Rollinsford is challenging. He stated that without knowing what that accounting is it is hard to make a decision. He stated that he does not want to assume that it is beneficial and we will save that \$183,000.00 in time. Rivers stated that after spending ten years on the Board he believes that the public has no idea what the SAU staff actually does. He stated that it sounds like Patten is looking for billable hours. He stated that he does not see how the Superintendent can come up with billable hours. Patten stated that he does this everyday with his clients to the 15 minutes. Richardson stated that Medicaid Billing is the same to the 15-minute block. Gadomski stated that there are some days and some tasks that this would be easy. He stated that if he is answering an email and then working on the Somersworth budget and then answering a phone call from the Principal at Rollinsford it would be difficult. Gadomski stated that he could develop a fact sheet on what the SAU does, what we provide and what our responsibilities are. Messier asked if there was a way to estimate time spent? Austin stated that this may be easy to do at the Superintendent's level. He stated that when you get to the staff who are doing the reporting and the Human Resources it will be hard to identify the breakout of time. He stated that you are creating another work process just to track time. Witham stated that it would be a snapshot at best. Gadomski stated that he can ask the people in the office as to the best guess of their time spent on each district. Marsh stated that this would be a snapshot in time compared to a year. Gadomski stated that at different times of the year we spend more time on Rollinsford than others. Witham stated that if we can get some ball park estimations that may be helpful. He stated that Rollinsford is 16% and that the staff here at the SAU probably does more than that. He stated that 16% is not an adequate number and that this formula is not the best in the world. He stated the formula is set forth by the State. He stated that it will be nice to know if we are exceeding that 16%. Gadomski stated that one of the benefits for Rollinsford, as it is set up now is not the 16%, but their biggest benefit is that they have a full service SAU at their disposal. He stated that they may not use it all the time but it is there at their disposal. He stated that if they are not part of the SAU the full service aspect will also not be there. Patten stated that it comes down to how much do they use. Austin asked Patten why this information was important to him? Patten stated that it is an accounting and if we are making a decision to pull out of the SAU it is a \$183,000.00 decision. He stated that whether or not they are using that amount contributes to the financial decision. He stated that it does not have to do with autonomy. He stated that he cannot make a decision going into something unless he knows the reasons that we need to get rid of it. He stated that he would like to know how many SAUs throughout the

State are single district SAUs. Witham stated that this would be a great data request and would like to see the same. Messier stated that it may be eye opening for the Town of Rollinsford to know that they are going into a vote that the people may not be aware of the situation or know all the facts. He stated that we need to gather all the facts. He stated that all of us will have people coming to us and asking about the decision and we need to have the facts. Rivers stated that Rollinsford Grade School has 155 kids. He stated that Somersworth has 1400 students. He asked if the number of students at Rollinsford vs Somersworth has any bearing on this? Gadomski stated that perhaps with Special Education it may have an effect. Witham stated that a good portion of the decision is the cost benefit analysis. He asked is there a \$183,000.00 benefit to doing this? He stated that if at the end of the day, the answer is no, I do not see myself supporting this. Messier stated that one of the issues with this SAU is that Rollinsford and Somersworth both start their budget cycles at different times. He stated that they are a Town, we are a City. Marsh stated that in looking at the Franklin NH Withdrawal Plan there are Administrative benefits and Student benefits listed. He stated that he would like to see the student benefits to our withdrawal. He stated that we know some of the Administration benefits. Patten asked if Franklin withdrew? Gadomski stated yes they withdrew from Hill. Messier stated that we need to buy ourselves time until we see what the Rollinsford vote is. Rivers asked if there was any value to soliciting other communities to take us on. Messier stated that this discussion would come later if we choose to go in that direction. He stated that we would recommend to withdraw, recommend to join an existing SAU or do nothing. Witham stated that we have a map and list of SAUs within 20 miles. He stated that if the answer from all of these is no, we have no interest in taking you on, then that is the end of that. Gadomski stated that if you join another SAU you are losing your autonomy and that is part of the reason why you want to withdraw from Rollinsford. Messier asked if we should have the Superintendent draft a letter to send out? Patten asked how we know it is cost effective? He stated that if we contact other SAUs and they say they can't do it, or say they can do it for a certain price, at least we'll have the information. Messier stated that if Dover says they can and would be interested, how do we find out how much it is going to cost us? He stated that there will be a cost to join any other SAU. He asked if we should buy time until after the vote in Rollinsford? Witham stated that he was not thinking of getting that deep into the investigation just yet but to put some feelers out to see if there would be any interest. He stated that if another SAU says they would not be interested, then that door is slammed shut. He stated that if the answer is that they would entertain a conversation about this, then we think about it. Gadomski stated, being a realist, looking at the list of SAUs within a 20-mile radius, and thinking of economy and scale there is only one that I think might be interested and that would be Milton. He stated that in Dover and Rochester you would have a huge SAU. Messier stated that it is not just as easy as going to another SAU. Gadomski stated that he could draft a letter to the Superintendents in the other districts and ask them to ask their Boards if they would be interested. He stated that if you are asking cost estimates on their part, that is a bit more involved. Witham stated that we are just trying to see if there is any interest out there. Messier asked if we should push the March meeting further into the month to give the Superintendent time for information gathering and to know the result of the Rollinsford vote. The next meeting

is scheduled for March 20, 2019 at 5:30 PM at the SAU. Witham made a motion seconded by Austin to adjourn. VOTE: motion passed, unanimously.

3. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Melinda Sullivan
Board Secretary