

Joint Withdrawal Committee
Somersworth and Rollinsford

June 18, 2019
5:30 PM

Rm. 113, Somersworth CTC

1. **Introduction:** Gadomski stated that we would start with introductions again to refresh everyone's memory. Present were: Denis Messier, Matt Hanlon, Dana Rivers, Dave Witham, Mark Richardson and Todd Marsh, all from the Somersworth Committee; Judy Nelson, Erin Cavanaugh, Caitlyn Houde, Jen Lentz, Joe Desch and Sheri Levy, all from Rollinsford. He stated that he would distribute the opinion from the attorney that he had been asked to explore at the last meeting. He asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes? Richardson made a motion seconded by Hanlon to accept the minutes. VOTE: motion passed, unanimously. Gadomski stated that at the end of the last meeting the task that I was asked to do was to find out the representation and makeup of the SAU Board and there were two things that would dictate it. He stated that if you were to leave everything the same, there was a question as to whether you could adjust the number of seats on that Board and by RSA the answer to that is no. He stated that it is the total membership from both Boards that make up the SAU Board. He stated that either Rollinsford or Somersworth, through a vote from the public, assuming that Somersworth would be by City Council, could either add or delete members from their Board. Witham stated that Somersworth would be through City Charter. Gadomski stated the second part of this was that if Rollinsford was to withdraw could there be some kind of discussion, by contract, as to whether there would be no seats or a liaison for representation on the SAU Board. He stated that the attorney's feedback was that if Rollinsford was to contract service with Somersworth, there would be no representation on the Board. He stated he had asked the attorney for further clarification today and she felt that there could be some discussion as to a liaison who would be there as a non-voting member and be allowed to provide some feedback. He stated that this would be a part of the contract. Witham stated that, after the last meeting, most of us were on the page of the attorney that the representation, if we remained as is, you could not tweak as the State Law is rather ridged. He stated that the surprise is that if they are contracting services, they cannot have formal representation. Marsh stated that if contracted services is something that is chosen it was nice to hear that a liaison may be an option for feedback and input. Rivers asked Gadomski if he knows of any instances that a Board has a liaison? He stated that Oyster River comes to mind. Gadomski stated that this is a bit different. He stated they are similar with the students going to Marshwood now, which is a contracted service and not SAU. He believes that Middleton pulled out recently and are contracting their services with Governor Wentworth but I do not believe that they have any seats or say and they are just contracting the service. Nelson stated that Oyster River is comprised of Durham, Madbury and Lee and they are all in the SAU. She stated that they do contract out to other communities. Gadomski stated that they are more of a regional school district. Nelson stated it is the Oyster River School Board, not the Durham School Board. She stated that a regional school district is a different setup. He stated that Governor Wentworth has 6-7 communities and because it is a "regional" district, each community has one seat on the Board. Cavanaugh stated

that the last time we were also wondering what the feeling was of the Somersworth City Council about what we had discussed. Witham stated that he had been informally talking with members and the idea of contracted services was appealing to them. He stated the new information we got tonight about the representation he does not believe would change that. Messier asked where do we go from here? Gadomski stated that is up to these two committees. He stated you may want to make a decision to move forward to go back to your separate committees to have a chance to discuss it, or we can have a discussion tonight, or is there another direction that you want to explore? He stated that everything has been laid on the table as to the options so it is up to these committees on how you want to proceed. Lentz stated that we had discussed Rollinsford potentially lowering their numbers. She stated that this letter from the attorney says that Somersworth can potentially change their numbers up. She stated that Somersworth could potentially change and go to nine members. Cavanaugh stated that they have nine members. Richardson stated that it would be by City Charter not by City Council. Witham stated that at this point they have come to a fork in the road. He stated that one option is that we do nothing. He stated that Option Two is that Somersworth withdraws from SAU 56, forms their own SAU and leaves Rollinsford to be SAU 56. He stated that Option Three is that Rollinsford withdraws from SAU 56, Somersworth maintains SAU 56 and Rollinsford contracts with us or another district. He stated there are three choices. Levy stated that if Rollinsford reduces their number of members on the SAU board and everything remains status quo is also an option. Gadomski stated that you would have to do that locally through a community vote at the annual meeting and that would not be set in stone. He stated that you could lower it to three members and then at a later time someone can decide they want nine members. Richardson stated that all of your members are part of the SAU Board. Marsh stated that if he was a resident of Rollinsford, he thinks the residents would have a hard time reducing the numbers of representation they have on the SAU Board. Desch asked that couldn't we put anything that we wanted in a contract? Houde stated no, that they might only be able to have a liaison as a non-voting member. She asked would the formula for cost be similar if it is for contracted services? Gadomski stated that this is something that is going to have to be agreed on by both sides. He stated that you could say that the formula stays the same or you could have some kind of a creation of a hybrid formula. Hanlon stated that this is probably the most negotiable part. Gadomski stated that the length of it would also be in the contract. Levy asked if with a contract, does the State decide the cost? Gadomski stated that the contract would decide the cost. He stated that if you decide to stay with the same formula that you have now, that is State driven and would be what you have been use to forever, in his mind it would be the cleanest way to do it. Richardson stated that at the last meeting he had expressed that he would not be comfortable with anything but the current formula. Desch stated that he is surprised by what the lawyer had said. He stated that going through the list of other SAUs and other Towns, he asked why is this not a problem everywhere? He stated that every town could have 3,5, or 9 Board Members and they would all be part of the SAU Board. He asked does this not happen in other places? Gadomski stated that it is the same everywhere. He stated that when he was up in North Conway there were 29 members on the Joint Board, because they had seven different school districts in SAU 9. He stated that the top one is Exeter with 43 members on their SAU Board. He stated that in

Northwood they had 15 members, 5 from each Town. He stated that there are a lot of different configurations in the State. Hanlon stated this is why you see a lot of splitting and moving. Rivers asked if we return to our respective committees and work on this, if we do not decide to keep everything the same, Rollinsford has to pull out or Somersworth has to pull out? Gadomski stated yes. Desch asked if we are trying to solve a problem that really is not a problem? He stated that he knows that there is history way before him. He stated that we are limited by the RSA, but do we really care? He asked who would care if it stayed the same? He stated if we were to go around the room and we all voted to stay the same, you could go to your Town or the Council and say we are going to keep it the same. He stated that he does not understand what the people's concerns are. Gadomski stated that he would not want to answer that for each of the individual members at the table. Witham stated that he cannot speak for the Somersworth City Council as a whole. He stated that going into this process there was a fair amount of momentum driving the separation. He stated that if it was between keeping it the same or Somersworth withdrawing, they would withdraw. Richardson stated he agreed with that. Hanlon stated that the feeling he got from the initial motion to create this was anonymity as being the direction we were going in. He stated that since our last meeting, he had been approached by someone who had read the minutes of the last Joint Meeting and they told me that that was the way they wanted to go, to be autonomous. Richardson stated that the City Councilors are asking questions and they are giving their opinion. He stated that long before there was a vote to form this committee, the feeling has been that when Rollinsford's last student leaves, that we need to separate and have our own autonomy. Levy asked that they do not even want to have us contract services? Richardson stated there is no problem with contracting. He stated that if there is no representation on the Board, then they are fine with that and some are fine with having a non-voting member on the Board. Lentz asked if the Councilors were members of the community? She stated that it seemed like it is not representative of the whole City. She stated that it just seems like a few loud members. Nelson stated that it is the City Council that will make the decision and not the public. She stated that the public has voted for the representatives on the Council and the Council will make the decision. She stated that it is not the same as in Rollinsford where it will go before all of their voters. Lentz stated that presumably the City is weighing the \$1.87 in additional taxes? She stated that there is no guarantee that Rollinsford will contract back with Somersworth if we withdraw. Marsh stated that he understands what Lentz is saying and when he was younger and on the School Board he learned that 2 people can represent the majority in the community. He stated that as a resident he has not heard anything on the street but when you are on the City Council or the School Board you are more likely to have the public give their opinion to you. He stated that we need to problem solve for the future. He stated that he would be interested in knowing, if the decision was to contract with a liaison what would that look like. Nelson stated that if the decision is to contract, this committee will not draw up the contract. She stated that it will be between the two School Boards. Gadomski stated that any contract would have to be approved by the Boards. He stated that part of getting your work done is that you have to have a couple of community forums for each committee. He stated that wherever the committees end up, those two forums will be a good avenue to educate the public and put forward your

plan. He stated that before we go to the public he stated that we should present the plans to the Department of Education and he would like to see as much detail in those plans as possible because it will help the process along. Witham stated that there needs to be a framework of sorts before we present the plans. He stated if Somersworth was to withdraw, SAU 56 would now be Rollinsford, so you and the staff would be employed by the Town of Rollinsford. Gadomski stated kind of. He stated that whoever has SAU 56 they will have what is there. He stated if there is any kind of separation we would have to look at the assets and divide them up. He stated that if Somersworth remains SAU 56 he envisions that the office will look very similar to what it does now. He stated that in Rollinsford, if they are SAU 56 after Somersworth pulls out, the office will look very different. He stated that it will not be in that building and it will not be staffed the same way. He stated that SAU 125, or whatever Somersworth became, would look just like it does now. He stated, the staff, with the exception of him, would be free agents. At the end of next year, when their contract runs out, the staff could go to either one. Levy asked if Somersworth pulled out, couldn't Rollinsford also disband and go out on their own? She stated we would keep the name but not necessarily the whole operation. Gadomski stated that he would have to ask the Department of Education what it would look like for Rollinsford. Lentz stated that it is not a "first to the finish line" contest to see who draws out first. She stated that we both can say we are going to leave and we can both can say we are going to stay. Gadomski stated Somersworth can become SAU 125 and Rollinsford can withdraw and become SAU 126, it makes no difference; it's just a number. Levy stated that if Rollinsford withdraws, they would probably need to contract services. Hanlon asked if they have to be an SAU? Gadomski stated no, you have to receive services. Rivers stated that when it comes to the SAU Staff he looks at it from a job description perspective. He stated that there are job descriptions for each and every person in the SAU. He stated if Somersworth pulled out, they would still need the services of the staff and their job descriptions. He stated that if Rollinsford pulled out, you may not need all of the duties in those descriptions. Gadomski stated that because of the size Somersworth will need that office as it sits. He stated that because of the size, Rollinsford would not need an office of that size. Messier stated that if we both choose to leave, Rollinsford will not get the current SAU Building. Gadomski stated that it is owned by the City of Somersworth. Cavanaugh asked if whomever becomes SAU 56, are they on the hook for the remainder of your contract? Gadomski stated that he has a contract with SAU 56. He stated the other staff has a year to year contract. Cavanaugh stated that would be tough. Houde stated that we would have him but he will be doing everything! Marsh stated that the cleanest would be for Rollinsford to withdraw, Somersworth remains SAU 56 and Rollinsford contracts with Somersworth. Witham stated that this would be the cleanest way. Nelson stated that they had heard from one Somersworth Withdrawal Member that they are pretty clear at the City Council that they do not want to stay at status quo. She stated that she wanted to make this clear to everyone. Desch stated that is what he heard but if we talk about the bullets of things that can be resolved my paper is blank. He stated that he has no idea what to solve. Nelson stated that perhaps we should take a ten-minute break and each committee could caucus. Witham stated he liked that idea. Nelson stated that both committees would meet back at 6:15.

Witham stated that the Somersworth Caucus are reasonably convinced that the Somersworth City Council would in no way vote to keep things the way that they are. He stated the options left are that one of the two communities withdraw and become SAU 56. He stated that they thought it in the best interest of both communities and financial perspective if Rollinsford withdrew and then contracted services. He stated that ideally they would welcome some representation but the law does not allow this. He stated that they are open to the liaison position to still have a voice. He stated that they were open to a different cost point for the services. He stated that we can talk about this, but something different than the State formula. Lentz thanked all for the extra time to discuss. She stated that the past couple meetings have been productive and agree with you that it does make sense for Rollinsford to pursue withdrawal from SAU 56. She stated that they do not necessarily believe that a given is that we will contract back with Somersworth because it is in the best interest of our Town to explore the options and see who can provide the best services for our Town. She stated that they would propose to go back to their individual committees and work to provide the best for our Town and our children. She stated that they definitely appreciate the time and conversation with the Somersworth Committee. She stated that they will need to link back up at some point. Nelson stated that this makes it clearer for each community. She stated that they clearly got the message that Somersworth is not interested in status quo. Gadomski stated that both committees are still required to have Community Forums so we need to think about setting them up. He stated that each committee might want to meet and set dates when you would like the forums. He stated that in the meantime Rollinsford has some other things to explore as far as contracting services out. He stated that after the Community Forums each committee can select a direction and finalize it. Lentz stated that their committee has more information to gather before they can have a thoughtful conversation with the Town. Richardson stated that we have presented what is best for Somersworth and they have presented what is best for Rollinsford. He stated that it has always been in the back of his mind, what if Rollinsford does not contract with us? He stated that part of your process would be to look where you can go for services. He stated that he would like to keep the State formula. He stated that somewhere along the line we have to come back with a number for the cost for services before Rollinsford makes a final decision. Levy asked would a contract be any different than the way it is now? She stated that they want to be autonomous perhaps they do not want us because we would be a burden. Hanlon stated that autonomy is the decision making process. He stated that unless you got another SAU to absorb you in and make you voting members it would be the same situation. He stated that if you were not voting members of the SAU Board that SAU would still have their own autonomy. Richardson stated that the formula would not change no matter where you go. Nelson stated that it would change due to the total numbers. Desch stated that he is not sure what the definition of autonomy is or what issue over the past 10-15 years would have been resolved differently if we were contracting with Somersworth. He stated that when this is all said and done he does not know what advantages there are. Lentz stated that they need to put their energy into their decision. Witham stated that as far as the legal opinion they were looking for local control and a way that would set it up to work for everyone and State Law limits that and he is disappointed in that. Lentz stated that the premise that Rollinsford has ever had a

majority in the SAU with an exception of one time is wrong. She stated that perception vs. reality and emotion vs not, does not support it and the data does not support that Rollinsford has had that power. She stated that it is the perception and that is why they are at this spot. Richardson stated that he agrees. He stated that it is Somersworth's problem if they cannot get Board Members to a meeting. Lentz stated that there was never a majority anyways with Rollinsford. Richardson stated that the numbers thing does not mean anything to him. He stated that the fact is that we do not share any kids. He stated that is the issue that he hears from the public and not just City Councilors. He stated we do not share any kids. He stated that the public wonders why. Levy stated that the SAU is an Administrative function. Richardson stated he knows that but with no kids shared they wonder why. Lentz thanked Gadomski for pulling them together as a group. She stated that it has been advantageous for all of them. Gadomski stated that both committees have done a very nice job of looking at all of the options. He stated that he will wait for the chairs to get in touch with him.

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 PM.

Melinda Sullivan
Board Secretary