

HEBRON BOARD OF EDUCATION/BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Thursday, March 14, 2019

SPECIAL MEETING

GHS Music Room

6:30 p.m.

MINUTES

- I. Call to Order and Roll Call: Chairperson Erica Bromley called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.
- Board of Education Present: Erica Bromley, Heather Petit, Christopher Aker, Geoffrey Davis, Maryanne Leichter
- Board of Education Absent: Kathy Williams, Kevin Williams
- Board of Selectmen Present: Dan Larson, Gail Richmond, Clara O'Brien, John Collins, Andy Tierney, Town Manager
- Board of Selectmen Absent: Brian O'Connell
- Also in Attendance: Dan Greenwood, Resident State Trooper, Stephanie Levin, Financial Assistant
- II. Public Comment
No public comment at this time.
- III. Discussion Regarding Topics Related to a School Resource Officer Program for Hebron Public Schools
- Mr. Larson began the conversation asking a question regarding the actual costs of the SRO proposal saying the numbers showed that social security and unemployment compensation was not included and also asked if the plan was inclusive with the schools' safety plan.
- Mr. Van Tassel thanked everyone for attending and stated part time positions would not have access to benefits of the pension plan. The plan for the SRO would be part time employees covering both schools full day. There would be a rotation schedule, two days one week, three days another week for 182 days per year. Unemployment benefits were not factored in. Mr. Larson asked if working two days a week or three days a week would be over 20 hours and be eligible for benefits. Mrs. Levin stated the hours would be under 40 hours for a bi-weekly pay so no benefits would be available. Ms. Levin also stated that part time employees are required by our district to join a 457 Mid-America Plan which is a substitute for social security. Mr. Van Tassel said there are always ways to improve security and this is just an added measure for safety and security. The program would factor very heavily in planning for safety and security measures. Mr. Collins asked about the evolution of the idea. Mr. Aker said it's the world we live in and a last line of defense is an armed police officer. The context is the history of events in the world. This program is an augmentation of already very good security measures in place. Mrs. Leichter said the odds are low but the position would also be in the school community as an aid to help the kids, interact with the students, teach a curriculum, and be a friendly face in the community to assist students in school. Mrs. Bromley stated the primary role for this position is safety and said there are very specific roles the positions would play. There would be different programming looking at the elementary level instead of the upper grades. Mr. Van Tassel said there is a level of reassurance with an officer in the buildings. Research shows the perceptions by parents and community members was that they felt safer having police officers in the schools. Ms. O'Brien asked if there was a job description. Mrs. Bromley said that

wasn't done yet but there were state level job descriptions that would be looked at and Hebron would develop a description off of that information. Mr. Aker said the officers would be active participants in the school. Mr. Van Tassel reviewed programs that SRO officers have been involved with while employed in other districts. Mr. Collins said the Board of Selectmen didn't know where the program came from. There are other methods to bring down the risk of assault. Mr. Collins said there are very few assaults in rural elementary schools. The problem he is concerned about is police presence in the area. Response time is the key to protecting schools. He would like to see a more comprehensive plan so that there is more presence in the town and asked about the school's security plan. Mrs. Leichter stated a safety plan is confidential because it keeps our children safe. Mr. Van Tassel stated our safety plan is approved by Homeland Security and updated yearly. Trooper Greenwood said the schools have been comprehensively working on safety plans and are well above average compared with other schools. Mr. Larson asked if the SRO proposal is included in that plan. Mr. Van Tassel said this will be added to our plan as an update next year to give us added expertise. Mr. Davis said this is one more layer to the current plans that are in place. He works in a school with an SRO to add their leadership and guidance and if needed to step up. The program eases the comfort of staff and students if there is an incident. Mrs. O'Brien said there has been an increase of thefts and break-ins in Hebron and inquired about the possibility of police officers visiting the schools during the day if the town were to hire additional officers. Mrs. Bromley stated that was not the proposal approved by the board – this is about safety of students. Mr. Collins would like kids not to grow up with guns around. Mrs. O'Brien said the SRO information is not going to the whole community. Mr. Van Tassel said as a school community we can communicate very well with our school families but we also make every attempt to communicate with the whole town. Articles were in the Rivereast, and the Journal Inquirer. There were also surveys sent out. Information was also posted on the Town Facebook page and the district websites. A request to utilize the Everbridge system was made, but Everbridge cannot be used for this purpose. Mr. Van Tassel noted that he was happy to hear that the town is now looking into ways of communicating better. The schools have done everything in their power to communicate with family and community members who do not have children in the school district. Mrs. Bromley noted that this is an issue that is on the town. Mrs. O'Brien stated she spoke with her children about it and they thought that it was unnecessary. Mr. Davis said student and school staff safety is paramount. You cannot put a price tag on our kids. Loss of property can be made whole. You cannot say that about safety in school. Mr. Collins asked if there was another proposal with a combination of town and school coverage. We want to do the right thing by the children and the town. Mrs. Bromley said the proposal of part-time SROs working all day in the schools is the proposal the board had approved of and wants to move forward with. Mr. Larson said he is hearing all sides of the issues and whether we support it or not, let the voters decide. Mr. Tierney said the problem that we have is we cannot separate the police department and asked if there is any way we can compromise. Mrs. Leichter said she understood the issue with the crime in the town and the SRO proposal and asked how can we get to a compromise. Mr. Collins suggested forming a committee with two selectmen and two board of education members talking about solutions. Mr. Van Tassel doesn't see that as a possibility because of the special meeting with no action. Mr. Larson expressed that he believes this is up to the board and would not want to take a position against the proposal as he is concerned about something happening and being the reason why. Members of the board thanked him for his position on the matter. Mrs. Richmond stated that you cannot put a price tag on the safety of children. She has received calls on both sides of this issue, but recognizes that it is in the budget and was researched. Mrs. Richmond said she is seeing an increase in SROs in elementary schools and that it should now be in the hands of the voters. Mrs. Petit thanked Mrs. Richmond for her position on the matter. Mrs. Petit said the board tries to reach

out in the community and hopes the Board of Selectmen will leave it to the voters saying the Board of Education wants to be proactive, not reactive. Mrs. Bromley thanked the Board of Selectmen.

IV. Public Comment

Mal Leichter, 62 Wellswood Road, stated that unemployment is required and asked if School Messenger Notification System is available for the town also. He said that when he was using those systems, they could be used for both. He also asked if the police officer has long guns in their cars. Trooper Greenwood said that is confidential. Mr. Leichter also asked about funding for insurance. Mr. Tierney said there was no additional cost for insurance because it comes under their purview.

Paul Knutsen, 33 Chesterfield Road can't say he agrees with SROs in school systems. Having someone on sight offers a false sense of security. Night crime is not the only problem. His house was robbed at 1:00 p.m. during the day. This town needs more police presence and he feels it's potentially dangerous to have guns in school. A much wiser choice is to look at counselors to work with kids at risk as a much more healthy investment.

Kathy Shea, 32 Old Daniels Lane said she wants more police presence on the street and feels the SRO program is not a wise use of tax dollars. We are all one community and paying one tax bill.

Clara O'Brien, 56 Ames Road needed a police officer at her home. Trooper Greenwood responded but was called away. The need was still present but no trooper was available. The town needs more police presence and we have to come together and work as a community.

John Collins, 23 Coates Farm Drive, asked if it was possible to get together to talk and find a solution.

Maryanne Leichter said both boards should come together to come to a compromise.

Clara O'Brien said we want to have a budget that passes. Let's make a compromise that meets the needs of everyone.

Paul Knutsen said an SRO is not going to protect kids walking from the school bus to home.

Mal Leichter asked if the town can use the emergency road sign to connect with townspeople.

Andy Tierney said there were zoning regulations.

Diane Del Rosso, thanked the Board of Education for all their work on this process. Other parts of the community are vulnerable also. She would like to see everyone come together to have something for the entire town.

V. Adjournment

Motion by Heather Petit to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m. Seconded by Geoffrey Davis.

Vote: All in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Conderino
Board Clerk