

**MEETING MINUTES**  
Town of Heath  
**SELECT BOARD**  
Mohawk Trail Regional High School  
Wednesday, April 24, 2024

**Called to Order at 4:30 p.m.** With Robyn Provost-Carlson, Susan Lively, and Elissa Viarengo.

**Others in Attendance:** See attendance sheet.

The meeting was recorded.

This was a joint meeting with Heath Finance Committee, Mohawk Budget Subcommittee and Business Manager for the purpose of discussing the proposed language change to the district agreement. Mohawk has proposed changing the language to use foundation enrollment rather than residential enrollment for assessment calculations.

Robyn opened the meeting with a statement from Heath describing this as an attempt to foster communication with the district and then stating the Board's goals for the meeting. See attached document.

The Mohawk financial team spoke to their concerns regarding fairness. They felt there was an inequity in how some students are counted thus leaving other towns to cover expenses for choice students. They also noted that there is no savings to the district when a student chooses to go out of district. In sharing information with the towns, they explained that they did not calculate future projections because there are too many variables to give accurate results. Instead, they looked back over the last five years using real numbers from that time period. The majority of school committee members voted to present articles with language changes at the upcoming 2024 annual town meetings. In response to Heath's concerns regarding communication, they encouraged the Board to send any questions to the Budget Subcommittee as well as to the Business Manager.

Discussion followed between individuals in attendance. Heath officials expressed the following concerns. One, it is Heath's responsibility to consider the future, long-term impact this change might have. Information is needed to share with townspeople if they are to make a sound decision. Something to gauge what this future might look like is also needed. Two, statements put out by Mohawk imply that this is what DESE wants which is not accurate. This is the method DESE uses for their calculations, but they approve of both options, leaving the towns to decide what is best for them. Three, there is a need to consider choice, out of school placement, charter school issues and capital costs separately as the associated costs for each are quite different. Four, the statement that choice students from Heath are not counted, and therefore all the other towns have to pay for them, is incorrect. They are counted for Chapter 70 funds and for minimum contributions. They are not counted for the above minimum contribution. Therefore, the District is receiving sufficient funds from the sending towns to cover the expenses of a school choice child. Five, all of Heath's money no longer follows its students.

The Business Manager, Bill Lataille, and Heath resident, Ken Rocke, shared general information regarding their methodology in generating the numbers they produced. Ken expressed particular interest in having his work reviewed, acknowledging that he does not have access to some of the

internal figures for Mohawk. It was agreed that the two would exchange documents to review and then set a meeting to share their observations.

All parties agreed that school choice forces competition between schools and towns rather than cooperation.

It was noted that Heath has five different zip codes. Because of this, the question was raised regarding the accuracy of student counts and EQV information. School officials stated that the student count should be accurate as each year the student list is shared with town officials to confirm residence. EQV is determined by the State; therefore, the district cannot confirm its accuracy.

There was much discussion about the issue of fairness and how each party saw it applied to this current situation. No consensus was reached.

Suggested actions included: a meeting between Bill and Ken, review of the document wording on materials sent out to the public to make sure wording is not misleading, a look at separate changes to address out of town placements, charter school issues and capital costs, and to produce comparison documents for FY 24 and FY 25 using both methods of calculation.

**6:25 p.m. *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.***

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lively  
Select Board Secretary

**Opening Remarks of the Heath Select Board  
Given by Robyn Provost Carlson**

On behalf of the Town of Heath, I would like to thank everyone for coming today. I would also like to offer an apology for the fact that we did not receive the latest communication sent to Heath by the District until almost a week after receipt, which created confusion regarding our attendance at today's meeting. So, again, thank you all for your willingness to meet.

This meeting today is important to all of us because it fosters communication. It shows a willingness by each of us to enter into discussions regarding the proposed Regional Agreement Amendments. It is also important that we recognize that we are coming together not only as representatives of individual towns, but that we are coming together as members of a District with a common goal of educational success for all of the District children.

For Heath, being a District member means that we are part of a team that works together to problem solve, achieve educational goals, and provide support to one another as we move through District challenges. As Town leaders, it is important that we remember the charge that we received when accepted our position in our Town's government structure. What can be a challenge for each of us is the balance that is often required to be a successful leader of our town as well as a productive member of the District team.

As the leadership of Heath, we come here today in hopes of achieving a couple of objectives. We believe that our goals are both beneficial to our Heath residents as well as the residents of our other District towns.

First, when we leave today, we hope that there will be a willingness to "change the focus" of continued discussions regarding the very real financial concerns of the District. We hope that there could be redirection of energy in of how we are dealing with the issues being faced by each of the Towns within our District as well as those Districts around us.

While we agree with the fact that there is value in continued review of our District Agreement, we disagree with the timing of the proposed Amendments. We are appreciative of the work that is in progress on the current Sustainability Study and are hopeful that the information gained will be valuable in continued discussions by District members regarding the operating and organizational structures of the two Regional School Districts along with the current Mohawk Trail Regional Agreement.

Our second goal for today is a specific request. It is known that leadership in Heath has had the benefit of having a Heath resident, Ken Rocke, work with us to help us understand and analyze the proposed Amendments and the financial impacts of those Amendments to the residents of Heath. As the financial custodians of Heath, both the Selectboard and the Finance Committee see it as our responsibility to fully educate ourselves on all warrant articles so that we can not only explain the purpose of the article but to also provide as much financial data to town voters as possible.

We currently have before us proposed assessment calculations submitted to all of the Towns by the District financial team. We also have proposed assessment calculations presented by Ken. There is a difference in proposed calculations and a difference in the method used to achieve these numbers. We continue to see the need to explain to Heath voters the possible financial

implications of the proposed Regional Agreement Amendments at our upcoming Annual Town Meeting. To do this we are requesting an in person meeting to review the two sets of numbers and the methodology used to achieve the numbers prior to our ATM. We are asking that Bill Lataille, as the individual that calculated the District numbers, Ken Rocke, a member of the Heath leadership team, and another District representative agree to meet as soon as possible with a purpose of reviewing the numbers and the methods used to calculate those numbers, and with the hope of achieving a set of numbers agreeable to all.

Heath's leadership has been investing time to understand both the rationale for the proposed assessment amendments as well as the fiscal implications to the Heath residents for over a year now. It is important to us to clearly state that we appreciate the work that has been done year after year by the Mohawk Trail District leadership. We are hoping that our coming here today can be seen as Heath continuing to ask questions and voice our concerns, with the goal of continued education for ourselves and our residents. We are not trying to be difficult or challenging. We are trying to manage our leadership roles and responsibilities to our small Town of Heath with our supporting positions on the larger team of the Mohawk Trail Regional District.

The SB and FC met last night to work on ATM preparation and the Agreement Amendments. I have tried to sum up our discussions as best as I could. Please feel free to add or correct as needed.