

MEETING MINUTES
Town of Heath
SELECT BOARD
Jacobs Road Municipal Center
December 9, 2025

Called to Order at 5:30 P.M. with Elissa Viarengo, Will Emmet, Hilma Sumner, Town Coordinator, and Mia Francesconi, incoming Town Coordinator, in attendance. Robyn Provost was absent.

Other Attendees: See attendance sheet.

The meeting was recorded.

Review Agenda: No changes.

Welcome to Incoming Town Coordinator: The Board welcomed Mia Francesconi to her appointed position as Town Coordinator. Mia began training on Monday and will work with Hilma for the next several weeks to become oriented towards the Town, the various duties of the office, and the personnel and functioning of the town departments, boards, and committees.

Meeting with MTRSD Representative and Resident Ken Rocke: School Committee Representative Budge Litchfield and resident Ken Rocke met with the Board to discuss the current MTRSD situations and the sustainability planning.

Budge explained that for the previous ten years there has been a capital planning subcommittee which he chairs. He stated that most, if not all, of the elementary schools will continue to be in operation for the next three to five years. The subcommittee must continue to look at the health and safety issues for all the operating campuses. There are several safety concerns that will need to be addressed soon which may result in capital assessment articles that will appear on the ATM warrant. Issues include the inadequate lighting in the high school parking lot, the two hot water heaters in the building, and an older fire alarm system in Colrain Central School.

District finances for FY 2026 are being monitored carefully so that the amount put on the towns can be cushioned as much as possible. State Rural Aid was reduced from \$16 million to \$12 million after the towns had completed their annual town meetings. The district's Excess and Deficiency (E&D) account and the revolving accounts are being drawn from as needed for expenses. Budge stated that the district had asked for \$60 million last year, but the amount received was far below what was requested. If the level of state aid is unchanged, the district will once again have to draw from existing accounts but is aware that those accounts are limited in funds.

The district is aware that changes to the current operational structure need to be made and now must look at what changes make the most sense. Budge stated that merging Hawlemont into the MTRS district makes sense, so administrative work is not duplicated for each district. It also makes logistical sense to move sixth grade students for inclusion in middle school. The entire district comprises 250 square miles (the largest in the state) which means there are concerns about the distance the students in the western towns live from the high school campus. The length of time that it would take either on a

bus ride or transported by parents from towns of Plainfield, Charlemont, Heath, and western Hawley is extensive. These areas also have the highest number of low-income families. This information leads to questions about parents' willingness and ability to transport their preschool children to a centralized school. The question was raised whether it would be possible to maintain one or more local area preschools, such as using one room in JRMC now that the building was in full use.

This school year, Heath K-6th grade students are distributed between four schools. The October 1st enrollment was:

Rowe Elementary School- 16 students.
Hawlemont Regional School- 10 students.
Buckland Shelburne School- 10 students.
Colrain Central School- 6 students.

Ken Rocke began his remarks by asking if the Select Board and Finance Committee had formed official positions in response to the 2D8T recommendations for sustainability, and, has that been communicated with the district administration and the other towns. The Board's response was negative, and Ken urged the Board not to wait until regional agreement changes were proposed and the towns were asked to vote on those changes but rather to communicate their position early. It is expected that towns will be asked to call special town meetings in autumn 2026 to vote on potential changes.

Ken stated that his position was that the nine towns should regionalize for grades pre-K through 12 so administrative resources were made more efficient. Regionalization should happen first and then the decision made as to what schools should close. Perhaps it would make sense to allow Hawlemont and Rowe schools to remain open for closer proximity to western district families while the three towns pay an additional assessment for continuing to maintain those two elementary schools.

He asserted that, no matter what the changes are determined to be, there are three provisions that need to be maintained.

- The current methodology to assess the out-going school choice students.
- The apportionment of capital costs assessed by the number of students attending a particular school.
- That all regional agreement changes are made only through approval of all towns in the district.

When it comes to regionalization, Heath's voice is limited because there is only one representative on the School Committee. The Town needs a second representative to the School Committee and a member of the 2D8T Steering Committee.

A last point was made by Ken mentioning the data error that was made, and acknowledged, for the Fy 2026 student numbers. If that incorrect number was used for this one year, it needs to be used for the previous four years as well. There needs to be an acknowledgement of the error and conversation between towns' Select Boards and Finance Committees.

Budge encouraged town people to express their thoughts and ask questions early so that the School Committee is aware of people's concerns.

6:30 p.m. Special Town Meeting: The Board paused their order of business for the STM.

7:12 p.m. Reconvene: Following adjournment of the STM, the Board resumed the business on their agenda.

Review of Minutes: *On a motion by Will Emmet, and a second by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of November 17, 2025, as presented.*

On a motion by Will Emmet, and a second by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of November 19, 2025, as presented.

JRMC Roof Repairs: Following the approval of a fund transfer at the STM, the Board did a final review of the two quotes that had been received for reroofing a portion of the gym roof and cafeteria roof. ***On a motion by Will Emmet, and a second by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board voted unanimously to accept the bid of October 9, 2025, from Titan Roofing, Inc.***

Mail:

- A. Hart re: letter campaign for increasing local aid— ***On a motion by Will Emmet, and a second by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board voted unanimously to sign and send the letter to Senator Mark and Representative Blais urging an increase in local aid.***
- RSP & M. Cucchiara re: PARC grant
- RSP, NG & Highway re: roadside logs on Avery Brook Rd
- N. Anzuoni re: July & August monthly reports
- P. McGahan re: unsafe play structure in town center
- A. Wozniak re: tax rate and broadband issue
- DOR re: FCTS Excess and Deficiency
- FCSWMD re: Recycling AMV & revenue
- C. Rabbitt re: Town Nurse retirement letter— ***On a motion by Will Emmet, and a second by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board voted unanimously to accept with regrets the resignation notice of Claire Rabbitt as Town Nurse.***
- H. Hallman re: letter to HCC
- V. Isaacs re: proposal to rent 2nd floor room of Sawyer Hall
- M. Cucchiara re: hiking trail, footbridge & wetlands violation
- RSP & NG re: communication on Avery Brook Rd project
- HAS & R. Ide re: community assistance meeting with NG
- FCSWMD re: MRF processing recycling expense

Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 16th.

7:32 pm. Adjournment: *On a motion by Will Emmet and a second by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board voted unanimously to adjourn.*

Respectfully submitted,

Hilma A. Sumner
Town Coordinator