RIVENDELL INTERSTATE SCHOOL DISTRICT
Act 46 Discussion
Lake Morey Resort – Fairlee, VT
September 24, 2015 – 6:30 p.m.

Rivendell Board Members Present: Marc DeBois, David Ricker, (Orford); Mark Avery, Bruce Lyndes (Fairlee); Kathy Hooke, Jean MacDonald (Vershire); Kathy Blanchard (at-large)

Thetford School Board Members Present: Erin Sterner, Shannon Darrah, Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey

Other School Board Members Present: Christopher Preston (Waits River Valley School Board); Cameron Cudhea (Thetford Academy Board of Directors)

Others: Brad James (VT AOE); Cicely Richardson (Journal Opinion); Sara Day, Gail Dimick, Peter Tse (Orford); Ben Williams, Marla Lanello (Thetford); Lyndon McFate, Peter Berger (Fairlee); Jon Molesworth (West Fairlee); Mary Lynn Riggs (VCDG-Permanent Fund); Kathleen Eaton Paterson (Building Bright Futures); Jessica Eaton (Thetford Bus Driver)

I. Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 6:35 p.m.

II. Introductions: DeBois welcomed everyone to the discussion and asked everyone to introduce themselves. After introductions, he stated that Brad James, Education Finance Manager from VT AOE would explain to the group his understanding of Act 46. James stated that Act 46 was designed to create larger districts in order to increase equity and opportunities for kids, with the possibility of cost savings through greater efficiency. He said that at the end of the district mergers, there will still be districts that just didn’t fit in the way the law is written. James stated that while the state has put some incentives in for merging, the Act is not about incentives, it is about more opportunity for students.

III. PowerPoint Presentation (D. Ricker): DeBois introduced Ricker and thanked him for all his work putting the presentation together (PowerPoint is attached). DeBois and Ricker both stated that this is an initial meeting to see if there any interest in continuing discussion. Ricker stated that as an interstate school district, Rivendell is exempt from the merger mandates. He spoke of how Rivendell has great schools and that his own children are very happy and so is he with how things are currently operating. Ricker stated that there are advantages to being small (like Thetford and Rivendell) but also being small puts limitations on what can be offered to the students. He stated that he felt that Board members needed to look out 10 to 20 years to see what is best for kids, as what is done now or is not done will affect them and their education opportunities. Ricker’s presentation reviewed Act 46 expectations and incentives, offered several options for collaboration with Thetford and other neighboring schools and districts (such as sharing resources and costs, merging to a single district, etc.) Ricker stated that he already had some options in the PowerPoint presentation that were not going to work or be allowed. One option that James said the law would not allow is a district cannot operate a 9-12 school and offer high school choice. He said a district may operate a high school or may tuition out its students but not both. He stated that everyone within each district must be treated the same. As Ricker went through the presentation, James gave clarification on items in the slides. With the various options slides, Ricker stated that since he put the options together he now knew that Option 2 and Option 3 would not be allowed. There was a discussion regarding including over towns and Preston wondered why Topsham hadn’t been included and he gave some figures for number of students in that area. Ricker said there was no reason Topsham couldn’t be included. However, James pointed out that redrawing of boundaries for supervisory unions were fine but incentives are aimed at Districts not Supervisory Unions. James clarified that with current configurations at Thetford and Rivendell, they could not merge, however, they could change their configurations and make merging possible. One option Ricker presented was to form one unified district with Thetford Academy as the 9-12 school for the district,
Rivendell Academy as the middle school and reducing the number of elementary schools (currently 2 in Rivendell and 1 in Thetford). Ricker added that this option could be expanded to include Strafford (VT) and Piermont and Warren (NH). He added that under this option Thetford Academy would probably need to be a public school. Another option was if Thetford Academy stated private and the entire “new” district (Thetford and Rivendell) was a choice district (students able to choose where to attend high school). Discussion ensued because presently NH law does not allow NH public money going to a private school outside of NH. DeBois stated that the Rivendell Board was contacting NH to get this clarified and if it would be allowed. A question on arose on how Vermont comes up with their average announced tuition figure and James said State collect tuition rates from all the schools in Vermont and then does an average (separated in to elementary and 7-12). Ricker finished his presentation stating that he felt Thetford and Rivendell are similar enough (i.e., shared values, great building facilities, proximity to each other) and could both keep what they like about their communities (such as retaining their small town values) while providing more education opportunities to their students. DeBois again thanked Ricker for all his work on this presentation.

IV. Open Act 46 Discussion: DeBois then opened up the meeting to more discussion and/or questions. James clarified question regarding school choice, merging, and equal opportunities for all students). Buttrey clarified a question from Hooke regarding whether Thetford Academy was Thetford designated high school or if they had choice. He stated that it was the designated school, however, Thetford allowed waivers to attend other schools. Discussion was also held on when schools offer reduced tuition if another school will send the majority of their students there. Preston asked James to explain more his statement regarding that at the end of all the mergers there will still be some SUs standing the same. James said that it will really be up to State Board but he thinks that will happen because of the geographic makeup of the State and some districts do not fit into how the law is written and he gave a few examples. Preston expressed concern that Act 46 is very hard to explain to constituents. Ricker added that as Board members whether they think this is fair or not, he felt as Board member, they owed it to voters to put something together for them to act on. He reiterated about sitting back and doing nothing and in 10-20 years the voters/communities/students sitting in judgement of what they didn’t do. James said demographics in VT do not look any better in regards to student population and said that a huge number of Vermont’s younger students are now state placed and are a more challenging group and thus resources are needing to be spent on them. Buttrey stated that, as Rivendell knew, Thetford is talking to other surrounding towns about mergers and asked if Rivendell had other “suitors" in mind. DeBois said no but this was just Rivendell’s first initial discussion and felt that Thetford seemed like the best fit, but Rivendell would, of course, welcome others. DeBois asked if Thetford was interested in continuing this merger discussion and Darrah said that they would be talking at their own district board meetings about this and Buttrey added that Thetford had a public forum coming up soon for their constituents. DeBois thanked everyone for attending.

V. Adjourn
Action: Motion made to adjourn. Approved. Meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.
Thetford-Rivendell
Safe Harbor Statement

This document is a good faith effort to frame our discussions and help us explore how we might come together to better serve the children of Thetford and Rivendell. All student counts are approximate (from GreatSchools.org). We do not guarantee the complete accuracy of the metrics that went into this analysis nor the conclusions drawn from them. In short, there could be fallacies in one or more of these proposals that we have not considered.
Rivendell Elementary Schools

Orange County / Fairlee, Vermont / Rivendell Interstate School District

Samuel Morey Elementary School (SME)

B+
Overall Niche Grade
PK, K-6 159 Public 12th in VT

Westshire Elementary School (WES)

Orange County / West Fairlee Town, Vermont 05083 / Rivendell Interstate School District

PK, K-6 98 Public

Rivendell Academy

State and Regional Ranking

1. Hanover High School (1)
2. Rivendell Academy (11)
3. Plymouth Regional High School (13)
4. Lebanon High School (14)
5. Woodsville High School (42)
6. Kearsarge Regional High School (43)
7. Mascoma Valley Regional High School (71)

Act 46 Review

Education District (the preferred structure):

- The preferred educational governance structure is a single school district that:
  - is responsible for education of all resident PreK-12 students
  - is its own supervisory district (SD)
  - has a minimum average daily membership (ADM) of 900
  - assumes one of 4 most common structures:
    1. operates PK/K–12
    2. operates PK/K–8; tuitions 9–12
    3. operates PK/K–6; tuitions 7–12
    4. tuitions PK/K–12

Superviory Union (alternative structure):

- The preferred structure is not necessarily possible or the best means of achieving VT’s education goals in all regions of the State – so…
- an SU composed of multiple member districts, each with its own board, can also meet the stated goals
- particularly if:
  1. the member districts consider themselves collectively responsible for the education of all resident PK–12 students in the SU
  2. the SU maximizes efficiencies, economies of scale, flexibility, etc.
  3. the SU has the smallest number of member school districts practicable
  4. the combined ADM of all member districts is at least 1,100

Source: http://www.vtvsba.org/SectionbySectionSummary.pdf
Act 46 Review

Sec. 6. Accelerated Activity; Supervisory Union Becoming a Supervisory District; Enhanced Tax Incentives; Small School Support; Data and Report
[Senate language with amendments]

(a) Accelerated Activity. A newly merged district will receive enhanced tax incentives if:
- an existing SU becomes an SD by merging into a unified union school district (and, in addition, could also merge with a neighboring supervisory district)
- there is a positive electorate vote after June 30, 2015 and before July 1, 2016
- the new district:
  - is responsible for the education of all resident PK–12 students
  - is its own SD
  - has a minimum ADM of 900
  - operates under one of three common governance structures listed in Sec. 5
  - demonstrates its ability to meet the goals established in Sec. 2
  - is operational on or before July 1, 2017
  - provides data at Secretary’s request and otherwise assists the Secretary to evaluate the merger

- Homestead tax rate reduction: A newly merged districts will receive a homestead tax rate reduction of $0.10 / 0.08 / 0.06 / 0.04 / 0.02 in the first five years of operation. [This is more favorable than the incentive available to regional education districts (four years beginning at $0.08)]

Source: http://www.vtysba.org/SectionbySectionSummary.pdf
Tough Target for Vermont’s Schools: ‘Spending Growth Limit’ Will Be Challenge to Hit

By Matt Hongoltz-Hetling
Valley News Staff Writer

Sunday, June 7, 2015
(Published in print: Sunday, June 7, 2015)

Hartford — When Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin penned a major education reform bill into law on Tuesday, he emphasized the bill’s goals of “right-sizing” education infrastructure, improving opportunities for the state’s students and providing property tax relief.

But adapting to H 361 will be difficult for dozens of school districts throughout the state, including many in the Upper Valley, which are now charged with limiting their spending growth to less than 2 percent per pupil , under threat of stiff penalties, in the 2016-17 school year.

Source: http://www.vnews.com/home/17146865-95/tough-target-for-vermonts-schools
The Rivendell Interstate School District because of its unique interstate construction and governance is exempt from the mandates of Act 46.

Although Rivendell is an interstate system, it operates as a Vermont school district.

Rebecca Holcombe was one of the architects of Rivendell.
What do we want for our kids?

**Improve**
1. Better subscribed extracurriculars
   - 1. Music/Chorus
   - 2. Baseball
   - 3. Track/Cross-Country
   - 4. Robotics
   - 5. Foreign language (more and earlier)
2. More Advanced Course Offerings (and APs)
   - 1. More than Dartmouth, CCV, etc.?
3. Summer and after school programs
4. Larger more diverse social pool?

**Preserve**
1. Sense of Identity/Community
   - 1. Events like Raptor Run
   - 2. Sports
2. Small Classes
3. Theatre
4. Place-based learning
5. Cross-Rivendell Trail
6. Small(ish) but great

**Collaboration Opportunities**
1. Special Ed
2. Technical Education
3. ESL
4. Food Service
5. Transportation
6. Fuel
7. Facilities
8. At-Risk Kids
9. Foreign Language

What is the number?

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Thetford-Rivendell Catch-Basin

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1. Rivendell stays as is and continues to cultivate tuition students from area towns.
2. More actively advocate for economic development in our core towns.
3. Seek areas of collaboration/cost sharing with proximate districts.
4. Sustainable?

Towns sending students to Rivendell either currently or in the past.
1. What might collaboration look like?
2. More informal
   1. Regular joint-board meetings
   2. A joint committee on Thetford-Rivendell affairs.
3. Formalize with a joint-resource of some kind (consultant or hire)
Option 2

1. TES leaves OESU and joins Rivendell. Essentially taking refuge in our Act 46 exemption status.
   3. What is in it for Rivendell? Future reconfiguration options and cost savings over time.

This option benefits:
1. Time for a more measured and considered process of integrating the two entities
2. Both can parties to take advantage of short-term tax savings? No, still too small.*
3. Might be the easiest option from a logistical standpoint.

**Cannot do, open to challenges of equal access and constitutionality. The only way this could work is if TES stayed K-6 and all their kids went to RA or all Rivendell kids went to TA. Could not have some kids going to one and some to the other.**
1. Thetford and Rivendell form a new **Supervisory Union (Act 46 Alternative Structure)**
   1. We have a structure in place that is looking at both districts. Over time we evolve the SU in a measured intentional fashion. *Thetford keeps TA as designated high school.*
   2. Would need to bring Strafford, Warren, and Piermont into the mix to get even close to 1100 for tax incentives.
Option 4a

   1. TA becomes high school for entire district.
   2. RA becomes the middle school
   3. Perhaps get down to two elementary schools from three.

What is in it for Thetford? A larger district dedicated to TA, long term viability, more expansive programs, cost savings over time.

What is in it for Rivendell? Long term viability of RA infrastructure in Orford, more expansive programs, better subscribed extracurriculars, cost savings over time.

Benefit for both – strong, cohesive, and potentially larger educational community. Simplified governance. **Both reap tax benefits.**
Thetford Academy’s Big Choice.

• **What TA will get:** 4 (or more) additional towns dedicated to TA.

• **What TA will have to give:** *Concessions on governance.* The town of Thetford is willing to make concessions because the school is located in the town and the town greatly benefits from this fact. The other four towns’ voters would be less inclined to make similar concessions and will want assurances of some say in both program and cost.
Option 4b

   1. Entire district goes choice. TA takes its chances in the open market.
   2. RA becomes the middle school.
   3. Perhaps down to two elementary schools from three.
   4. Real-Estate Market warms (more security for TA).

What is in it for Thetford? Choice, configuration options at elementary level, cost savings over time. TA could get more reach into NH if other towns join new choice district.

What is in it for Rivendell? Long term viability of RA infrastructure in Orford, choice and cost savings over time, configuration options at elementary levels.

Major Drawback – both communities lose strong sense of community identity. We become Lyme.
Option 4a Revisited

If the new district got even bigger by 1 or more towns, TA could think about an expansion that would repurpose TE infrastructure.
What is best for our kids long term?

Some Final Thoughts

- I am somewhat saddened for both our communities – I believe in small schools, and tight communities.
- Unfortunately, the State of Vermont has other ideas, and they might be right.
- On a larger level, this is about the continued vitality of rural life in New England. We need to do this thoughtfully.
- Would our kids be better off being able to jet off to other communities for their schooling? Maybe....
- But our communities will be diminished, and therefore what these kids learn by living in a community (with all the good, and the bad) will be diminished as well. And this is important. It is a Rivendell core value.
- How do we construct this new entity such that we don’t sacrifice our small-place values while enabling our children to experience more expansive educational opportunities?
- I think we have a shot at doing this with a Thetford-Rivendell partnership.
Thetford-Rivendell

Strengths – similar communities, shared values, great facilities, proximity, I-91
The Rivendell Board
(where are we from?)

Kathy Hooke - Vershire
Jean MacDonald – Vershire

Sarah Rinehimer – West Fairlee
Kevin Dexter – West Fairlee

Mark Avery (Vice-Chair) - Fairlee
Bruce Lyndes - Fairlee

Marc DeBois (Chair) - Orford
Kathy Blanchard – At-Large (Orford)
David Ricker - Orford
Michael Smyth - Orford
The Rivendell Board
(who are we?)

Marc DeBois (chair) – works for Irving Oil Corporation. Has been on the board for eight years, the last two as Chair. Marc has three children in the district.

Mark Avery (vice-chair) – is owner and general manager of the Lake Morey Resort. Mark has been on the board for six years and is currently vice-chair. He has one child in the district.

Kathy Blanchard - has served Rivendell as the member at large since 2011. She is a retired educator who worked for more than 35 years in (sequentially) Guam; Canaan, NH; Makati, Philippines; Bangkok, Thailand; OESU; Lebanon; Piermont; & OESU again. Her greatest interests these days are family, a huge vegetable garden, and travel. Her four granddaughters all live locally, two in Lyme and two in West Fairlee. Her Rivendell girls are in 4th grade at Westshire and 5th grade at Samuel Morey.

Kathy Hooke – has taught at the Mountain School in Vershire for the past 20 years and has served on the Rivendell Board since 2010. She has taught high school science and math at both public and private schools. She loves spending time outdoors. When Rivendell was just getting started, she was involved in the initial planning for the Cross Rivendell Trail, a project that her husband David led for several years. Her son is a 5th grader at Samuel Morey Elementary School.

Michael Smyth – is serving his first year on the Rivendell School Board, representing the town of Orford. Having moved to the district five years ago with two now elementary school-aged children, he has a strong interest in the health and sustainability of the school system, and believes strongly in well-rounded education and diverse life experience. He holds bachelor degrees in psychology and information technology, and has experience working in technology and systems integration, communications, and the performing arts. Other personal interests include running and triathlon, musical theater, and travel whenever possible.
The Rivendell Board  
(who are we?)

Bruce Lyndes – is the Media Relations Director at Plymouth State University. He is the father of two daughters. The eldest is a Rivendell graduate and UNH student and the youngest is a senior at Rivendell Academy. Bruce has been a Fairlee representative on the Rivendell Board for eight years.

Jean MacDonald – from Vershire is a retired business owner, a Justice of the Peace, and has served on a variety of boards. She has also been a volunteer tutor and mentor since the 1970s, and currently volunteers for Revels North. This is her third year on the Rivendell Board. She has no children in the district. And yes, she is related to Vermont State Senator Mark MacDonald.

Kevin Dexter - works for a local construction company for the past 23 years and is currently a Project Foreman. When not at work or at a school board meeting he enjoys spending time with family, watching his kids play sports and other school activities, taking his two girls hunting and ice fishing, and spending time with his wife. Kevin has represented West Fairlee as a member of the Rivendell Board for the past six months.

David Ricker – is an IT Director at Dartmouth College and sits on a number of boards including an advisory board for Western Governors University (WGU) and a pair in Indian software companies whose products relate to education. In 2009, he helped develop the curriculum for the "From the Other Side of the Stethoscope (FOSS)" program of the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, a requirement for all 3rd year medical students at the completion of their 6-week pediatric clerkship. He still serves this program as a facilitator and a member of its Family Faculty. An Orford resident, he has been on the board for almost four years and has four children in the district.

Sarah Rinehimer - is a West Fairlee representative, parent and educator. She has been on the board for two years. Sarah is an Early Childhood Teacher and has spent the past few years working in alternative educational settings. Sarah has two sons in our elementary schools.
Reference Slides
Supervisory Unions and District Boundaries