Members Present: Cicely Richardson, Vanessa Desimone (Orford); Sandra Smith-Ordway (Chair), Bruce Lyndes, Mark Avery (Fairlee); Jennifer Shatney, Dawn Stever (W. Fairlee); Jennifer Ricker, Kathy Hooke (Vershire), Kathy Blanchard (at-large)

Members Absent: Marc DeBois (Orford)

Administration and Staff Present: Gail Keiling (Head of Elementary Schools/SME Principal), Keri Gelenian (Head of Schools/RA Principal), Brenda Needham (Superintendent), Janet Cole (Director of Special Education), Michael Galli (Dean of Students), Dick Paulson (CFO), Andy Boyce (Rivendell Trails Coordinator)

Others Present: Katie Ruff (Student Government), Gay-C Gahagan (JO Reporter), Chris Crowley, William McKee, Harry Pease, Gerald Pease, Stephen Spottswood, Marion Spottswood, Richard Clancy, Bob Bacon, Ludlow Flower, Caroline Flower, Terry Harwood, Ann Green, John Karol, Gary Fillian, Tom Thomson, Kathy Eastburn, Dennis Kilmer

I. Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 6:32 p.m.

II. General Public Comments: None.

III. Agenda Revision/Time Allocation: None.

IV. Presentation/Guests
   A. Cross Rivendell Trails & Rivendell Trails Association (A. Boyce)
      Boyce gave a brief overview of the work that the Rivendell Trails Association (RTA) does and how they interact with the schools thru class presentations, hikes on the trails and programs, as well as hiring students to work on the Rivendell Trails. The RTA works on developing curriculum around the trails work.

   B. Concerned Citizens of Orford (C. Crowley) - Crowley passed out a handout with data and graphs. They are concerned about the lower student enrollment and how it is affecting the tax rate in Orford. They feel the percentage that Orford pays increases each year and that Orford is paying more than it should towards the Rivendell budget. Harwood asked what the fixed costs are as compared to the variable costs to run Rivendell. Hooke responded that the calculations for Rivendell are complicated and each state has its own formula that drives the tax rate. Karol commented on a recent Valley News article stating that the tax rate in Orford would be higher by 33% over Fairlee, 11% over West Fairlee and 9% over Vershire. The group feels that Orford is subsidizing the other towns. Stephen Spottswood states he would like the Board to look at changing the by-laws to amend the funding method. The goal should be to reduce the cost to run Rivendell – taxpayers can’t keep absorbing these increases year after year. Richardson said that keeping the tax rate the same year after year is difficult based on how the two states fund education – the Board would need the state legislature change their funding calculations. Green wants to know if the Board has spoken with the interstate district south of us to see if they have any ideas on how to make this work better. R. Pease wanted to know why Vermont aid can’t be applied to all costs. She’s also concerned that the high tax rate in Orford is stopping businesses from coming to town. Keri stated that many residents have their land in Current Use which affects what others have to pay in taxes. He also wants to work on attracting students in the District that are attending other schools. C. Flower feels that $15,000 should be the cost per student and the budget should be built using that as the benchmark. Eastburn feels the budget will fail
at the annual meeting if the Board doesn’t look to lower the spending and the tax rates. Needham states that we are the only K-12 Interstate district in the country. Dresden is only 7-12. Concord sets the tax structure for NH and school districts have to work with that. Regarding changing the Articles of Agreement – that would have to be approved by all four towns and VT and NH legislations. When Rivendell was formed it took several years of work with attorneys and Board members. Changing the By-laws could create a worse tax situation for all towns. L. Flower stated that the Board needs to make deep cuts immediately. M. Spottswood stated that while we have lost students, the Board didn’t reduce the professional or administration staff accordingly. Why do the costs keep increasing – can’t we look at larger class sizes or combining classes? Hooke stated that the Board always looks at these possibilities and in the past has done that. However, class sizes are often small in one class and large in another, and to combine would be far too many in one class. She stated that to make deep cuts would affect programs which could mean lower scores and then we’d lose more students. C. Flower asked if there are too many perks offered at the school. Smith-Ordway stated that for some students being involved in sports and other extra-curriculum activities are what motivate them. Times are different than 25 years ago. Having too many kids in a classroom takes away from the education being delivered to all students. Harwood asked if there is a benefit to closing one of the elementary schools and combining all kids into one building. Thomson asked about upcoming negotiations. He wants the Board to look at the salary and benefits being offered to the staff. The staff needs to know that the taxpayers can’t pay their taxes and other bills. He feels the staff needs to pay more towards their benefits. The staff pays 15% towards a family plan while many taxpayers pay between 30-40%, if they have health insurance at all. S. Spottswood asked what the top salary was at Rivendell. Needham replied that it’s around $60,000 and stated that our teachers work more days (due to the two states requirements) and that the salary scale is one of the lowest in the area. 15% for health insurance, compared to other districts, is quite good. Eastburn asked if professional days could be reduced. Green asked about substitute teachers – what is the cost per year budgeted at ($25,000 for elementary and $35,000 for the Academy). L. Flower wants the Board to reduce the budget by 10% over a 3 year period. Also, the Board should look at splitting the budget equally between the 4 towns.

V. Consent Agenda

A. Minutes (December 6, 2011) – Changes noted.
B. Superintendent Report – No additions.
C. Head of Schools Report – No additions
D. Principal Reports – No additions
   1. Student Representatives - No additions

ACTION: Motion made to approve consent agenda with changes to minutes. APPROVED.

VI. Ongoing Business

A. 2012-2013 Budget – Needham stated that the budget is up by less than 1%, but it does not include negotiated salaries. The administration has worked hard to keep the budget tight. Hooke stated that last year the budget was approved without the negotiated salaried included and the administration was able to keep the budget as it was and absorb these increased salaries. Paulson has worked on the history of spending so the Board has a tool to use to look at trends. Smith-Ordway asked the Board for comments on the budget – all felt that the budget as presented was acceptable, with a few commenting that maybe we should have a level funded budget.
B. Committee Updates – Smith-Ordway stated that the committees have been assigned and the chairs need to set their goals and charges for the upcoming school year.

C. NEASC – No discussion at this time

VII. New Business
   A. Correspondence - None
   B. Announce Tuition for 2012-2013 – Needham stated the tuition is set at $13,500. The rate is based on a formula using the 2012-13 budget.
      ACTION: Motion made to approve tuition rate at $13,500. APPROVED.
   C. Students trip to Spain – The Spanish teacher (D. Riordan) will be taking a group of students to Spain
      ACTION: Motion made to approve the trip to Spain. APPROVED.

VIII. Future Agenda Items
      Professional Development In-service; Long Range Plans to Address Flux in Population, Community Outreach, Grants, Global Language for 6th grade, Policies to be Revised, Student Presentations, Department Reports, Strategic Planning, Board Goals

IX. Anticipated Executive Session - None

X. Adjournment: Action - Motion made to adjourn. Approved. Meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Recorded by:

Esther Dobbins-Marsh