

**Horseheads Central School District  
Special Joint Board Elmira Heights/Horseheads Board of Education Meeting  
Horseheads Central School District Multi-Media Center  
August 13, 2015**

**Present(Horseheads):** Boulas, Christiansen, Conklin, Dale, Jacobus, Johnson, Lynch, Strollo  
**(Elmira Heights):** Blish, Callas, Harris, Lepak, Sullivan, Willard, Wolowitz  
**Also Present:** Bracey, Buzzetti, Douglas, Fiore, Gray, Moyer, Sechrist  
**Absent(Horseheads):** Sadler

**Call to Order:** Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus called the Special Joint Board Meeting of the Horseheads Central School District Board of Education to order at 6:00 PM. Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish called the Special Joint Board Meeting of the Elmira Heights Board of Education to order at 6:01 PM.

**Presentation**

**Review of "Where We Are Now"**

Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus opened the meeting with Horseheads Interim Superintendent Dr. Susan Gray and Elmira Heights Superintendent Mary Beth Fiore updating the Boards with what has occurred since the last Joint Board Meeting, reviewing highlights to be presented to residents of findings of the Consultants as they ran the Study from September to May with the conclusion that a merger of the Districts makes academic and economic sense, however, the Consultants admitted in the past they recommend mergers in many cases but few are approved by the voters.

**Sharing of Elmira Heights Central School District and Horseheads Central School District Summer Retreat Discussions**

Horseheads Interim Superintendent Dr. Susan Gray stated that she and Elmira Heights Superintendent Mary Beth Fiore spent several hours reviewing and integrating comments made from both District Board Members during their Board Retreats. The following Summary of the Board Retreat Comments was reviewed: 1. Education: Benefits, Drawbacks, Issues, 2. Finance: Advantages, Drawbacks, Issues and 3. Communication Plan: Community Forum, Other Joint Information and Increasing Public Participation in the Forums.

Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus presented Education: Benefits, Drawbacks, Issues of a combined District. Jim noted that Consolidation would provide a more expansive and enriched educational program than that offered by both schools individually and stated even though students in Elmira Heights will especially benefit from academic Horseheads' offerings additional to those of their own District, there are some courses at Elmira Heights that are not offered at Horseheads that will benefit Horseheads students as well.

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish stated that a drawback could be that some courses may not survive due to low enrollment, differences in curricula, schedules and High School programs and that the bulk of aid is to offset taxes and deficit spending, not in restoration of programs and program enhancement.

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Board Member Pam Strollo stated she is concerned that currently in Horseheads we offer AP and ACE classes, however, Elmira Heights offers some classes that Horseheads does not, therefore, as a combined District there could be low enrollment as Harry stated and we may not be able to offer a class. Pam stated it seems as though the statement is overstated in some ways when it infers the New District may offer more courses.

Board Member Brian Lynch stated as you read Statement No. 1 it states “there will be an expansion of programs” but in Statement No. 2 it states “that Horseheads will be maintained” which makes it seem like there may be a conflict with no addition of programs, just maintenance of the program. Board Member Pam Strollo stated she completely understands Brian’s point and inquired, “How can it be both, it has to be one or the other, is it maintained or enriched?” Brian stated due to the confusion of the way the statements are worded, he is concerned that there needs to be clarification for the public. He stated he agrees with what is being said and that the opportunities are there, but the wording needs to be clarified.

Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus stated in Statement No. 2, it talks about consolidation of many of the existing programs that might be in danger of being eliminated due to low enrollment but if there are enough students to maintain the course, it would not be eliminated. Jim stated he understands what Board Member Strollo is saying involving AP and ACE courses.

Board Vice-President Karen Boulas stated when talking about educational benefits we are looking at the benefits of the new District once it has merged, we are no longer looking at two individual districts.

Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus stated there is potential for increased modified sports participation and there is nothing that prohibits a school district from having more than one team in a modified sport if you choose to do so. Also, opportunities at the Varsity Level in certain sports would be eliminated because of large numbers which would be a drawback of a merged District.

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish stated with a merged District you would start to build school trends from Day 1 and there are parents who feel very strongly about a New District and New Beginnings such as the logo, colors, name, etc.

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish presented the Finance: Advantages, Drawbacks, Issues of a Combined District. Harry stated he is very concerned as there is nothing in the Consolidation that will put back all the staff cuts of 157 positions between both Districts because the Incentive Aid is not advised for recurring expenses, such as staff salaries, so it would not fund restoring what was lost in recent years and stated another concern is that Universal Pre-K is here in many places and will be state-wide which will increase school district budgets. Also, Consolidation would lower the tax rate in Elmira Heights, but actually raise it in Horseheads. The Study recommends using some of the Incentive Aid to keep the new district’s tax level at least what it is now in Horseheads. Property Tax would be \$18 per \$1,000 of a property’s assessed value in the New District, compared to \$22.05 now in Elmira Heights and \$17.84 in Horseheads.

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The Districts would receive more than \$60 million in Special State Incentive Aid to merge to be paid over 14 years and 95 percent State Aid to renovate or build instructional facility space for the first 10 years before it is reduced to a lower aid level and the Building Aid Rate is superior to the 80 percent Horseheads gets now, Harry stated there are substantial one-time costs not addressed in the Study such as the cost of \$50,000 to \$60,000 for each set of textbooks for one class in Elmira Heights, there will be new athletic uniforms and equipment, new school colors which are very large expenses.

Horseheads Board Member Warren Conklin inquired as to why is Horseheads being singled out regarding the **replenishment** of the Reserve Funds, is it not the entire Consolidated District we are referring to? Interim Superintendent Dr. Susan Gray stated that she will make the change so that it refers to the replenishment of the Reserve Fund of the New District Horseheads Board Member Doug Johnson inquired if we could say, "The building up of Reserves." Elmira Heights Superintendent Mary Beth Fiore stated that Elmira Heights has not had any deficit spending in the last two years.

Horseheads Board Member Doug Johnson stated regarding the Tax Rate, the second sentence, states "It is recommended that," should it be, "A recommendation to the New Board?" Also, Horseheads Board Member Brian Lynch stated we need to make sure we are careful on the first sentence, maybe say, "At the time of Consolidation the tax rate will be brought down as we don't want the taxpayers misled and believe it will continue to go down." Horseheads Interim Superintendent Dr. Susan Gray stated these are good points and she will rephrase it to state, "at the initial time of Consolidation the tax rate will be brought down" and will also include the actual Tax Rate.

Horseheads Board Member Doug Johnson also stated there could be an additional bullet along the lines of, "The Incentive Aid would eliminate the need for deficit spending which has occurred in the past which will be a way for us to get our finances to a better position where we can maintain our budget moving forward. Doug stated it is important for the District residents to see as we look at the financial liability of the new District and the addition of the Incentive Aid how it impacts the future once the Incentive Aid is gone. Horseheads Interim Superintendent Dr. Susan Gray stated a fifth bullet will be added regarding "Incentive Aid."

Horseheads Board Vice-President Karen Boulas stated because we want to be transparent to the people we want to share as much information as possible so that the people know what we are trying to achieve.

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish stated it will be of vital importance that the parents and the tax payers are well informed of the Pros and Cons of a Consolidated District and that we, the Boards, are not making a recommendation or a judgement, but are letting them know what they need to think about and what is best for the children and their education when they go to the Straw Vote on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Development of Joint Talking Points Including Community Input Sessions**

Elmira Heights Superintendent Mary Beth Fiore stated that Elmira Heights has scheduled Community Input Meetings on the Merger for 6:00 PM on September 10<sup>th</sup>, October 8<sup>th</sup> and November 12<sup>th</sup> in the Community Room at Thomas A. Edison High School, Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish stated that our concern is to get the word out to as many people as we can as we want full attendance at these meetings so that we are able to answer any questions the public may have during the sessions. Harry emphasized that everyone needs to fully listen to the facts in preparation for when they vote.

Horseheads Interim Superintendent Dr. Susan Gray stated that Horseheads has not set dates or times for similar meetings in its District but Horseheads School Board President James Jacobus said they want to hold them the same weeks as Elmira Heights, but not the same day so that people to have the opportunity to attend both Input Sessions.

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish also stated the Consultants did not include money for the cost of leveling up tax rate levels and fourteen new Union Contracts(Elmira Heights - 3 and Horseheads - 11) which will be a significant expense noting that the financial projections were based on the Horseheads District 2014-2015 contracts and since then there are some contracts have been settled with new financial figures. Harry stated there could also be some hidden costs that we have not thought about such as an increase in transportation costs depending on what buildings and bus routes will be used. The bus schedules will need to be worked out and kindergarteners may have to get up earlier and have a longer bus ride.

Horseheads Board Member Doug Johnson stated that Statement No. 4 should be reworded to include, "There will be leveling up on each item in every Contract," so that it is accurate. Board Member Warren Conklin inquired if we incorporate Doug's suggestion and someone asks how do people get paid during the time of negotiations, what do we say? Doug stated when BOCES merged there was enough lead time to negotiate new Contracts. We would need to have a timeframe established to have all new Contracts by Day 1 or another theory is existing Contracts could stay in place until settled or the new Board of Education(new employer) could put new contracts in place and set their own terms on Day 1.

It was inquired why Horseheads appointed a new Superintendent for a five-year term knowing that this Consolidation Study is underway. Board President Jim Jacobus stated it is required by law to have a Superintendent and until the vote has taken place, we are still one District standing alone in need of a Superintendent.

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish also stated that one of the biggest concerns and dilemma and an important issue in Elmira Heights is the future of Thomas Edison High School. Harry stated it is considered to be in top shape physically but the Study recommends no continual use of the school. Horseheads Board Member Kristine Dale stated that closing Thomas Edison High School and Center Sheet Elementary School is just one scenario but at the end of the day it will be up the new Board to decide. Board

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Member Pam Strollo also stated the statement needs to be re-worded so that it is accurate. It could be Facility Closure--It is recommended in the Study or the Plan recommends the closing of and specifically name the building(s)."

**Discussion of Communication Plans, Including Community Input Sessions, Q & A Sheet and Newsletter**

Elmira Heights Superintendent Mary Beth Fiore stated we need to make sure we get the information to the public and not skew a result one way or the other. Mary Beth stated there is a lot of information that needs to be shared, needs to be clarified and at the end of the day, we are not trying to say to vote one way or the other. Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish stated there are a lot more things to think about other than just the tax rate. Harry stated this will be very tough and emotional on everyone and even as a consolidated District we will still be facing tough financial decisions in the future due to the state of the economy.

Horseheads Board Member Kristine Dale suggested the use of a Webinar or Virtual Meeting for those who are not able to attend the Community Input Sessions. Public Relations Specialist Sue Pirozzolo stated there were 24 who participated in the Budget Webinar and since we are trying to reach as many people as possible we may have to try different venues to reach them. Board President Jim Jacobus stated if it increases participation then he does not have an issue with it.

Overall, both Districts will reach people through the use of Community Input Sessions, Newsletters to the Communities, Frequently Asked Questions and Use of the Social Media. Horseheads Public Relations Specialist Sue Pirozzolo stated that she will contact all the Parent/Teacher Organizations to make sure it is discussed at all their meetings, the District Website will be updated continually and it will be in the District newsletters.

**Horseheads Central School District Board of Education Approval to Hold the Straw Vote on December 3, 2015**

Moved by Johnson, seconded by Strollo.

RESOLVED, that the Horseheads Central School District Board of Education approve the District to hold the Straw Vote on December 3, 2015.

<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstained</u>	<u>Absent</u>
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Boulas

Christiansen

Conklin

Dale

Jacobus

Johnson

Lynch

Sadler

Strollo

MOTION CARRIED

Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus brought the approval to hold the Straw Vote on December 3, 2015, to the Board for Board action.

**Elmira Heights Central School District Board of Education Approval to Hold the Straw Vote on December 3, 2015**

Moved by Willard, seconded by Harris.

RESOLVED, that the Elmira Heights Central School District Board of Education approve the District to hold the Straw Vote on December 3, 2015.

<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstained</u>	<u>Absent</u>
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Blish			
Callas			
Harris			
Lepak			
Sullivan			
Willard			
Wolowitz			

MOTION CARRIED

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish brought the approval to hold the Straw Vote on December 3, 2015, to the Board for Board action.

Horseheads Board Member Doug Johnson inquired as to why the vote is on Thursday when Tuesday, December 1st, would be a better date. Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus stated it was in the documents that came from the Consultants. Doug stated he searched the Study Documents and the initial timeline that was sent to the State which did not have a specific date. Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish stated they used Thursday because that is when we have our Board meetings; therefore, Thursday would be on the people’s minds.

Elmira Heights Superintendent Mary Beth Fiore stated that both Districts will need to be consistent if we are going to vote using a paper ballot or use Electronic Voting Machines. Mary Beth stated that whatever format we come up with we need to be uniformed in both Districts. We will also need to consider the cost of the men coming to set up the machines, tearing them down and the people needed to run the vote. Horseheads Board President Jim Jacobus stated using the machines rather than the paper ballots will be more efficient and we will get the results much quicker. Jim stated this could be an Agenda Item for the August Board Meeting.

**Adjournment**

**Horseheads Central School District**

RESOLVED, that the Horseheads Central School District Board of Education adjourn from its Special Joint Board Meeting with the Horseheads Central School District at 7:04 PM.

Moved by Johnson, seconded by Lynch.

<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstained</u>	<u>Absent</u>
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Boulas			
Christiansen			
Conklin			
Dale			
Jacobus			
Johnson			

Lynch  
Sadler  
Stollo  
MOTION CARRIED

**Elmira Heights Central School District**

Moved by Sullivan, seconded by Lepak.

RESOLVED, that the Elmira Heights Central School District Board of Education adjourn from its Special Joint Board Meeting with the Horseheads Central School District at 7:04 PM.

<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstained</u>	<u>Absent</u>
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Blish  
Callas  
Harris  
Lepak  
Sullivan  
Willard  
Wolowitz  
MOTION CARRIED

Respectfully Submitted By:

*Candy L. Maine*

Candy L. Maine, District Clerk