

**TOWN OF WINCHENDON
JOINT MEETING
BOARD OF SELECTMEN / SCHOOL COMMITTEE / TOWN MODERATOR
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2019 6:30 P.M.
Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium
109 Front Street, Winchendon, Mass.**

Board of Selectmen Members Present:

Audrey LaBrie, Chair
Mike Barbaro, Vice-Chair
Barbara Anderson

Keith R. Hickey, Town Manager
Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant

School Committee Members Present:

Greg Vine, Chair
Dawn Fronte, Vice-Chair
Larry Murphy

Joan Landers, Superintendent
Rich Ikonen, School Business Manager
Carolyn Hendricks, Administrative Assistant

Absent:

Felicia Nurmsen
Roann Demanche

Town Moderator:

Rick Morin

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Letters of Interest to Serve as Winchendon's Representative to the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School District (filed):
 - Michael Barbaro
 - Ruth DeAmicis
 - Maureen Ward
 - Amy Salter

Chairman Greg Vine called the School Committee meeting to order at 6:33p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Chairwoman LaBrie called the Board of Selectmen meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Chairman Vine explained they are meeting tonight to pick their next representative to the Monty Tech School District Committee. He said they would take each applicant by alphabetical order starting with Mr. Barbaro.

1. APPOINTMENTS:

1.1. Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School District Committee

Mike Barbaro stated his interest in the position is based on the nine years he sat on the School Committee in Winchendon and the focus of vocational education has changed as we have known it. Vocational education use to be thought of as plumbing, wood work and concrete work but has now changed and has become more involved with more technical terms, like engineering, robotics

programs and more with computer graphics. Also, he understands Winchendon has concerns with how Monty Tech chooses kids and the finances. He feels being part of the Finance Committee of the School Committee at one point gives him years of experience understanding finances and budgets and being able to ask the right questions. He feels he is more than capable to handle the position and would represent Winchendon the best that he could.

Vine said what is important to him, whoever gets the position, that they be as persistent as reasonable and trying to get the Monty Tech School Committee to at least agree to put together a committee to open the district agreement and would like to go further and say have their Monty Tech School Committee reopen it. It's a fifty year old agreement and bears re-examination and asked Mr. Barbaro how he felt about that.

Barbaro agreed it has to be looked at as the way it was drafted at the time. Winchendon is the third largest sender of student. We should have and will have some more influence in how we go about it. They have brought it up but not as persistent as it could have been to continue to move it on. There was support from us and surrounding towns but thinks we have to grow support within and then drive that consensus and an agenda to bring forth to the board. He thinks it's important to look at it as a whole, times have changed; the finances have changed to the degree we are the second largest sending town and there has to be fairness in the selection process. He'd like to look at this and address in a fairer and more equal manner.

Murphy asked how he sees changing down the road and what his vision was for Monty Tech and the nineteen communities that are involved. Barbaro replied that technical education is getting to a point where it's evolving to be more computer based. He would like to bring up to speed on what's coming in the future. There are more technical programs for computer graphics, with gaming programs being one of them, computer arts and the engineering programs are now more computerized. Kids need to be brought up to speed and is part of why they have AP courses. They opened a nice veterans program that we need in this area. They are looking in different ways to expand their program but again the future is going to be more computer based, yet the traditional programs that they offer there still is a need for. Hands on training on building things are the future too but it needs to meld the old and new together so kids learn both ways to do things, even engineering programs and drafting are now computerized. They are no longer on draft boards. The combination of both is where they will continue to grow.

Murphy asked Barbaro if they continue to grow and take more of our students, where does that leave Murdock. Barbaro replied there are two schools of thought. With a traditional school like Murdock, part of what we need to do as a community is expand our programs to retain our children. He doesn't fault a parent for choosing that but would ask the parent to reconsider as there are good offerings at Murdock. As Monty Tech grows, it puts a big onerous on us to compete.

Rick Morin asked if he would want to limit the number of students in Winchendon who would choose to attend Monty Tech. Barbaro replied he would look at that in a different way. We do have so many slots that we are allowed and the secondary slots are filled through their system. It seems Winchendon students are more favored there in a way that it does hurt us and he would like to see to cap the number but not wanting to take away a child's opportunity to do a program that we do not offer them.

Anderson asked what his goals would be if appointed. Barbaro said first he would like to try and understand their finances wanting to see what we are getting for our money and pass this information

to the School Committee. Secondly, he would try to work his way into understanding how we could look to negotiate a new agreement within the whole district. Thirdly, and most of all, is to see what programs they have that local communities could take advantage of.

Vine asked in opening up the agreement for reconsideration, would one of your priorities be how they choose the students that go to Monty Tech. In his opinion, a lot of the kids that could benefit going to Monty Tech are being left behind because they may have disciplinary issues or have issues with attendance or not getting higher grades. Barbaro replied that one of the driving forces for him wanting this position is for those kids that might want to go but don't qualify under this current system and hurts them. That is part of the negotiations we will look at; unfortunately everything is test based driven and should not be in that type of environment because kids that want another path, that are not going to college and want to learn a skill, are being left behind. He would look to address that feeling; it has been overlooked statewide.

Morin said he misunderstood Mr. Barbaro's prior answer and his concern is trying to limit smart students from going to Monty Tech. He would like to have a smart electrician working at his house, a smart plumber and doesn't feel we should be limiting choices for students that have shown the ability to get into that school and suggested maybe we concentrate more on upgrading our own schools to keep them here instead of trying to force them to stay here.

With no further questions, Mr. Barbaro was thanked.

Ms. Ruth DeAmicis, one of the applicants, was not present this evening.

Ms. Amy Salter, another applicant, was present this evening and withdrew herself.

The final applicant, Maureen Ward, came forward.

Ward said she has forty-five plus years in education as a teacher, principal, superintendent and has worked to turnaround schools in the state of Arizona and Connecticut and since she's retired has kept her hat in education with evaluations in New Hampshire. This is an opportunity that she could give back, promote education and do things in her expertise. It would be something to keep her involved and up to date in education and help our students as well.

Vine asked her how she felt about re-opening up the agreement. Ward said she was surprised there isn't a clause to look at the agreement every three years or so. In New Hampshire, we looked at it every three years. Some of the problem with the last go around where we had some pushback was because there was a feeling in some communities that it wanted to be changed to limit students that was met with a few brick walls. She thinks you have to go into it with an open mind. The agreement has been amended in prior years with four amendments ten to twelve years apart, so it's not impossible to do but to do it with the right mindset.

Vine's priorities with his position to open up the agreement giving students the opportunity to go to Monty Tech that are not just the A and B students, that might not be as talented or have disciplinary problems, asked how she felt about that. Ward replied she had spoken to the Superintendent of Monty Tech and asked her about applications. She said less than 9% of the students that apply are turned down. Most of those are because the application is incomplete. The Superintendent said she has no problem with students with discipline problems or absentee problems because very often those students are in the wrong place but when you put them into woodwork, into auto mechanics, into

metal work, that's where they will shine. They actually have a program at the school that helps the students that are having struggles. They are more than willing to take those children. On our part, Ward continued, we have to work closely with the kids at the school to see what it is they actually need so they can qualify to enter there.

Murphy wondered, in her experience, what the mission was of vocational schools when they opened in the 1950s and 70s and has it changed and should it change today. Ward replied, its changed big time. In prior years, it was wood working, it was mechanics, it was those non-academic skills; now it's not. It is Veterinary School, its technology, CAD plus woodworking, plus auto mechanics. Auto mechanics have changed too with computerized cars. Students need to know computers to work on cars. Public schools and technical schools should both change. A small district like Winchendon can't offer the breadth of programs that a regional technical school can. We can work on what we do best, our academic programs, possibly some of our computer programs and celebrate our successes and advertise and sell our own programs. Regional schools can do a much broader scope and bring a bigger audience. Looking at "we are losing money here because our kids are going to Monty Tech" is a state funding issue. That shouldn't be on the back of our students. We need to celebrate the successes of Winchendon students that are going to Monty Tech. Mr. Cyganiewicz is a good example. Whoever gets this position should make sure we at least have quarterly reports coming back to the School Committee and Board of Selectmen celebrating our students. We should have student of the quarter from Monty Tech and see what our kids are doing. We should be proud and support them.

Murphy is concerned about fairness and equity and he disagrees with her quite vehemently whether there is fairness and equity. Ward said she didn't mention fairness and equity. Murphy wants Monty Tech to be successful and he hopes the representative here will help them to be successful. He agrees with her that it's legislative and the way the school was set up fifty years ago for plumbers, construction workers and that kind of stuff. These things have changed but the agreement hasn't changed. Whoever the person is in the position needs to have a collaborative effort with Monty Tech and the Town. He doesn't believe it is that now. He experienced that when he spoke with Monty Tech. He felt unwanted. He hopes whoever the person is will help open up the agreement and will take some work on the legislative level and Monty Tech School has to be willing to open that up. He loves Monty Tech but right now it's at the expense of our students here. We need the finances to build the programs here. Wherever a kid goes to school in Massachusetts, it needs to be fair and equitable. Whatever a kid gets a Monty Tech, we should have some kind of opportunity for them here.

Murphy asked her what the difference is between the vision of Murdock High School students here and the Monty Tech student. Ward doubts that it is different at all. Murdock wants the very best possible education for individual students. Whether its Monty Tech graduating a student in computer automated drafting or wood work or auto mechanics or its Murdock graduating a student who is going on to the military or to a higher school, they want them to do the best and be the best they can. Murphy replied in order to do that, we need a system that is fair and equitable to all students. Ward said that's a whole different discussion. As a representative of the Board to Monty Tech, its policy, its finances which include how we are choosing our students and how we are hiring and evaluating our Superintendent based on performance, you can talk to other districts to open the agreement. We have amendments from years and years ago, but to your point when this school was originally developed and conceived; it is very different than now. Are we sure that we can't tweak this to make it a little better and every time we do that we might get closer to where we want to be but we can't jump in and change it all at once.

Rick Morin asked when Mr. Cyganiewicz applied, we had similar discussions and one of the things that came out was let's not undermine a good system; let's build up a system we have locally that needs help. Attracting the students is better than trying to limit their success in another area.

Anderson asked what her goals would be. Ward replied she is retired and has time to go spend time at the school. She wants to see each of the programs, see how they work, see the kids and see what they are struggling with and how we can help them be more successful there and talk to some of the students that haven't been successful in applying. How can those kids be helped, work with our school here to see what it is we can do to make sure that they are all successful.

Anderson asked how she would bridge the gap between the public school that has limited resources to a district that has many resources. Ward replied some of that might be on finances. She has gone through the Monty Tech budget. They are .75% over net school spending. Although their budget is much larger, they are not that much over net school spending. It just looks different because of the numbers. We are a very small community, we can't possibly compete so where are our resources going and let's look at it percentage wise rather than dollar wise. Anderson argued that net school spending for a regional tech school is on a different formula. Ward said that is what Mr. Murphy is referring to being fair and equitable. Ward thinks what would help is talking about this quarterly and also to see what the state is doing to make sure all is fair and equitable.

LaBrie pointed out through reviewing the annual report of 2017 that Monty Tech published, the total enrollment for Fitchburg is 356 students and they have three representatives on the board. Now there are four. Gardner and Winchendon have the same number of students, 152, but Gardner has two representatives and we have one. Representatives in the future could be addressed on student population. Ward agreed.

With no more questions, Ms. Ward was thanked.

Vine asked for a poll amongst the panel gathered who they would like to see in the position.

All voted in favor of Maureen Ward with one abstention from Mike Barbaro.

Vine thanked Mr. Barbaro and Dr. Ward for applying. Ward thanked the Board for their confidence and she thanked Mr. Barbaro. She encouraged all to send her an email if they have any questions.


Murphy noted he sat on a sub-committee for Monty Tech and offered to go along with her when a visit has been arranged.

Ward noted she would reach out to Mr. Cyganiewicz and Mr. Gould as they have tremendous history of the position and could help her.

The School Committee called for a five minute recess at 7:07 p.m.

Babaro moved to adjourn the Board of Selectmen meeting; Anderson seconded. By a vote of all aye, the Selectmen adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Linda Daigle
Executive Assistant

