

SCHOOL TAX RATE STABILIZATION AND QUALITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE MINUTES

October 2, 2018

Committee Members Present: Thomas Smith, Diana McGrath, Gwen Selleck, Raymond Doubleday, Craig Simpson, Cathy Colby, Michael Colby, Beth Carignan, Tim Carignan, Lori Williams, Reagan Hubbard, Sheila Post, Jim Trudell-Selectman

Others Present: Donna Clark-AA, Selectman Bruce Beane, Selectman Steve Moscicki

Chairman Thomas Smith called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

The minutes of the September 24, 2018 meeting were reviewed and approved. Chairman Thomas Smith signed the minutes on behalf of the Committee.

The Town Hall was arranged for the public meeting and members reviewed the information to be presented.

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The Selectmen opened a Public Information Meeting at 7:00 pm

Members of the Public Present: Lee Veilleux, Beth Hubbard, Darren Hubbard, Jeremy Aldrich, Skylar Boutin, Christine Pallozzi, Jacqueline Daniels, Christine Meserve, Steve Sherry, Richard Hubbard, Brian Hubbard, Sam Hubbard, Phil Clark, Clark Brooks, Cindy Brooks, Jeff Cozzens, Andrew Dorsett

Committee Chairman Thomas Smith explained that the Committee was created by a warrant article at the March Town Meeting. The group started with 19 members and lost a few along way which has resulted in this great group of about a dozen residents working together to a common goal of finding solutions to the increasing school tax burden Lyman is facing. He introduced the committee members. The Committee has come up with a good plan to present to the Lisbon School Board but nothing will change unless Lyman residents show up and vote at the Annual School Meeting.

Craig Simpson and Tim Carignan then gave the PowerPoint presentation. Tim spoke on the first few slides - Amended Warrant Article, Committee Formation, How We Got Here / Initial Thoughts and Pressing Toward Fairness and Equity. Craig then took over and explained the financial data that has been collected and displayed a variety of graphs focusing on cost per student comparisons.

See attached PowerPoint slides for presentation and commentary.

Andrew Dorsett asked if there are other schools using the 100% ADM formula and was told there are. Craig explained we looked at a number of cooperative school breakdowns as this information is available on the State websites.

Beth Hubbard asked if the School Board has tried to bring Landaff in as a member of the Regional. Landaff is a tuition town, not a "member" of the regional so they have school choice. Sharing costs between three towns would be beneficial to Lisbon and Lyman but Landaff has just signed a multi-year tuition agreement.

Jeff Cozzens asked if this would impact prospects for school choice. There are only two towns in our cooperative school district and withdrawal is not feasible due to legal requirements, legal costs, transportation, need for a school board, need for funds to be set aside for potential special needs students, etc. It would be better to improve the current school situation by coming up with a more equitable cost sharing formula.

Andrew Dorsett asked about the possibility of "soft" school choice like in Warren, allowing "some" students to go elsewhere. The situation he described may that of a tuition town like Landaff, not the situation we have with Lisbon. Lyman parents can send their children to any school they want but at their own expense. There is no mechanism in the current articles of agreement to have Lyman pay to send children to other school districts.

Sheila Post explained that work is being done of the federal level supporting nationwide school choice but right now we have to work within the existing system.

In closing, it is the Committee's and the Selectmen's opinion that a change in the apportionment formula is the only way to correct the unfairness of the current 80/20 formula to Lyman. It is also understood that any decrease in Lyman's per student cost will mean an increase for Lisbon.

The Committee will make a similar presentation to the Lisbon School Board Oct 10th at 6:00 pm to request that a warrant article for a change to the apportionment formula to 100% ADM (average daily membership) be placed on the 2019 Annual School Warrant. Some audience members indicated they may attend this meeting. This warrant article will require a 2/3 vote to pass so voter turnout will be key.

Hearing no further questions or comments, the Public Informational Meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.

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The regular Committee Meeting continued with suggestions about how to adjust the presentation for the Oct 10th Lisbon Regional School Board Meeting and getting the support of the public. Comments included:

- Adding the percentage of difference between the costs to the slides
- Putting a "respectful" deadline on when the Committee would like a decision from the School Board about supporting a warrant article to change the formula
- Letting the School Board members know some history about the articles of agreement and previous formulas
- Make up flyers to get voters out for the Annual School Meeting in March
- Have a presentation at Lyman's Town Meeting

- The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

The next meeting of the School Tax Rate Stabilization and Quality Education Committee will be the October 10, 2018 presentation of the Findings Report to the Lisbon School Board at 6:00 pm in the school library.

Approved:



Chairman

12-4-2018

Date

Signed on behalf of the Committee

Lyman School Tax Rate Stabilization Committee

Findings Report to Town of Lyman

October 2, 2018

7:00pm

Tom Smith to welcome to Lyman residents, introduce committee members, and turn over presentation to Craig and Tim.

Amended Warrant Article

Article 8. To see if the Town will vote to endorse the appointment by the Board of Selectmen of a committee for the purpose of investigating and evaluating ways to stabilize school taxes related to the Lisbon Regional School District and to instruct the committee to prepare a report of their findings for presentation at a meeting to be announced and posted. At least 50% of the membership shall be parents of current Lisbon Regional School District students.

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This warrant article was adopted last March during our town annual meeting as amended. It was amended to read that the committee was to be formed with at least 50% of its members as current Lisbon parents. It is this committee's charter and driving force. Allow me to read it for you. (READ ARTICLE). **Article 8.** To see if the Town will vote to endorse the appointment by the Board of Selectmen of a committee for the purpose of investigating and evaluating ways to stabilize school taxes related to the Lisbon Regional School District and to instruct the committee to prepare a report of their findings for presentation at a meeting to be announced and posted. At least 50% of the membership shall be parents of current Lisbon Regional School District students.

Committee Formation

- 19 initial members
- Just over one dozen active members
- Average about 12 per meeting
- 8 meetings from April to September of this year

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Once the warrant article was passed, word was spread to all Lyman residents inviting them to participate in the committee's work. We started with 19 members, meeting the 50% Lisbon parent threshold, and met in April, the first of our 8 meetings. Since that first meeting, we have leveled off at just over 12 active members and we average 12 members per meeting. Though we no longer meet the 50% Lisbon parent threshold due to initial declining numbers, the committee agreed to continue on as the remaining members were committed and work was progressing.

How We Got Here / Initial Thoughts...

- Declining state stabilization funding
- Expanding mentoring and internships
- Grant opportunities
- Review of current curriculum options

So, how did we get to where we are tonight. Well, in keeping with the warrant article, we started brainstorming as a group to determine how best to “investigate and evaluate educational alternatives, including legal issues, financial considerations, availability of alternatives and other related matters.” Our initial thoughts could be classified as “external to internal;” with the reality of declining state stabilization funding staring us square in the face, losing 4% per year, we focused on ways to get more money into the school budget with the idea that it could potentially reduce Lyman’s portion of the overall educational bill. The declining state funding results in huge increases for all affected school systems, but Lyman in particular. More on that in a bit. We looked at the existing mentor programs and internships and learned that the Lisbon school does a good job at reaching out to the local businesses in the community for partnerships, so we moved on in our thinking. We started researching grants, both large and small, technology and service focused, and learned that though the process of writing grants was not as difficult as initially thought. However, we also learned that the key to securing any grants was the submission timing, many needing action a year in advance. And we just didn’t have time for that, at least not now. So then the committee looked at alternative educational options, such as expanding online classes, honors, AP, vocational, to name a few, with the intent of finding ways to lower Lyman costs.

Pressing Toward Fairness and Equity

- Lyman's School Board representation
- Apportionment formula history
- Tuition inequity – Lyman, Landaff, Bath

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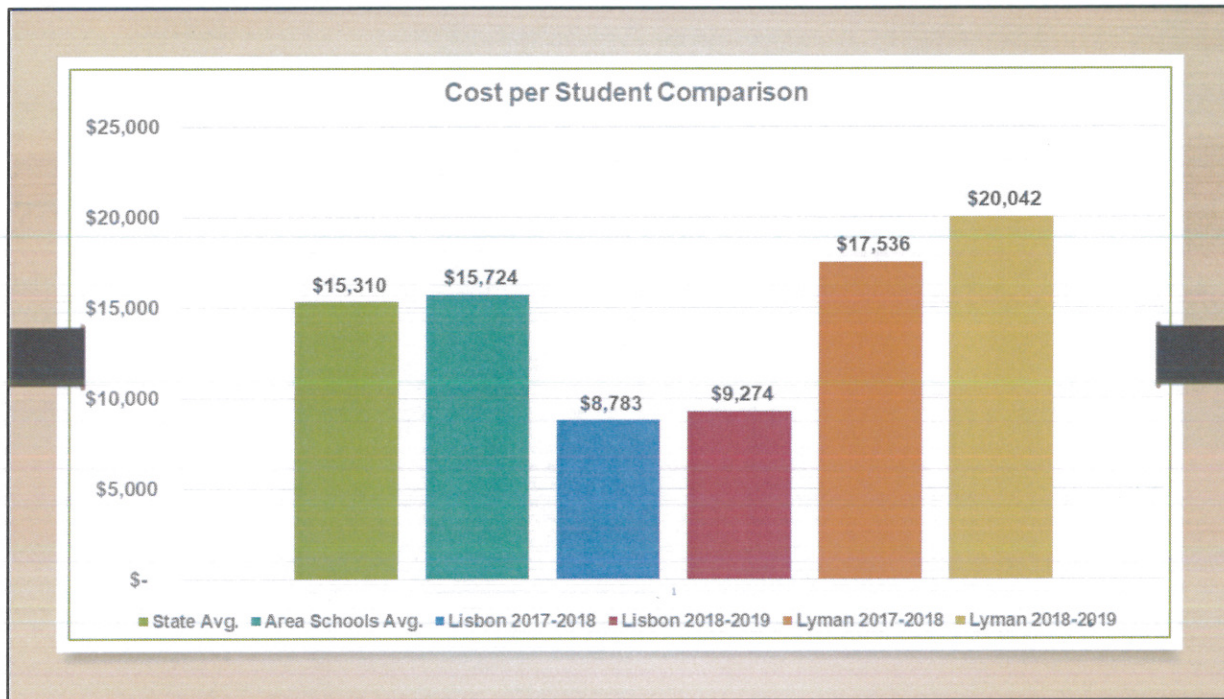
Lyman currently occupies two of the nine school board seats on the Lisbon School Board, putting our town at a distinct disadvantage for making changes specific to Lyman interests. The original Articles of Agreement in 1969 included three parties – Lyman, Lisbon Town, and Lisbon Special. At that time, both Lisbon Town and Lyman were given two seat each and Lisbon Special was given five seats. In 1989, pursuant to Article 14 of the original Articles of Agreement, Amendment #1 was adopted, which combined Lisbon Special and Lisbon Town and merged their respective individual school board seats to form a seven seat majority on the school board, with Lyman still occupying its original two seats. This result placed Lyman in an untenable position and board members from our town have found it exceedingly difficult to make major changes with Lyman interests in mind. Thought this is the current situation, we decided as a committee that it is not feasible to suggest or recommend a change in seat distribution presently since it would not address this year's more pressing issue of striking fairer, more equitable school taxation.

In the March 1999 annual school district meeting, Article #5 was voted and approved that changed the apportionment formula from a then unfair 60% ADM (which student attendance) / 40% equalized valuation (which is property tax assessment) to a more fair 80% / 20% formula. This adjustment was the result of a Lisbon School Board decision to form a Formula Study Committee, that determined of more fair and equitable formula

was needed for Lyman do to increases in Lyman's student population. Once we as a committee learned of the apportionment formula history, we agreed that the best course of action to affect immediate change would be to recommend another adjustment in the apportionment formula as a first step to once again create a more fair and equitable environment between our two towns.

Then, we researched tuition equity and discovered that a gap had once again been create such that it presented an unfair and unequitable situation for Lyman town members.

Specifically Lyman's cost per student is double that of Lisbon's for last year, 2017-18, and this year, under the approved budget Lyman will pay more than \$20,000 per student versus Lisbon's \$9,300. Additionally, we discovered an inequity in tuition rates between Lyman and Lisbon when compared with surrounding feeder schools, namely Bath and Landaff. In 2017-18, Bath tuition rates to Lisbon were \$15,500 for middle schoolers and \$16,500 for high school student. For Landaff that same year, tuition to Lisbon was \$12,540 for middle schoolers and \$15,015 per high school student. Lyman during the same school year paid \$1,000 more than Bath and \$2500 more than Landaff per student, yet we are the school participating in the cooperative with Lisbon. The committee found these tuition costs to be inequitable and they became the driving force behind our request to adjust the apportionment formula once again.

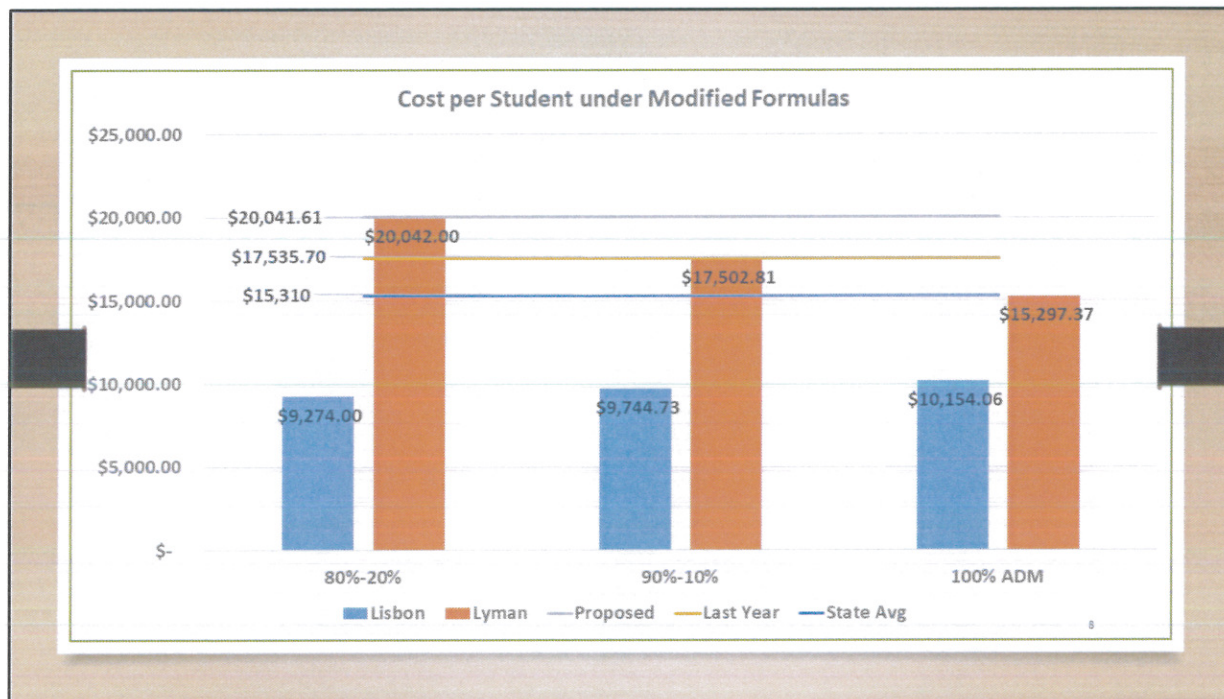


This is a graphic that shows tuition rate comparisons per student. The far left column indicates the state average cost per student at \$15,310. Next, is the state average cost per student from schools in our immediate surrounding area, roughly a 25 mile radius from Lisbon. The average cost is \$15,724 and includes Littleton, Landaff, Profile, St. Johnsbury, Haverhill, and Lisbon. The blue and red columns in the middle represent Lisbon's tuition costs from last academic year and this year and shows a tuition increase of 5.6%. Last year's tuition was \$8,783 and this year's is \$9,274. The two columns on the right in orange and yellow show Lyman's tuition costs per student. Last year's tuition was \$17,536 and this year's tuition is \$20,042, an increase of 14.3%, which translates into \$2,500 more per student this year alone. This is the main point of evidence why we as a committee have decided to recommend an apportionment formula change with Lisbon.

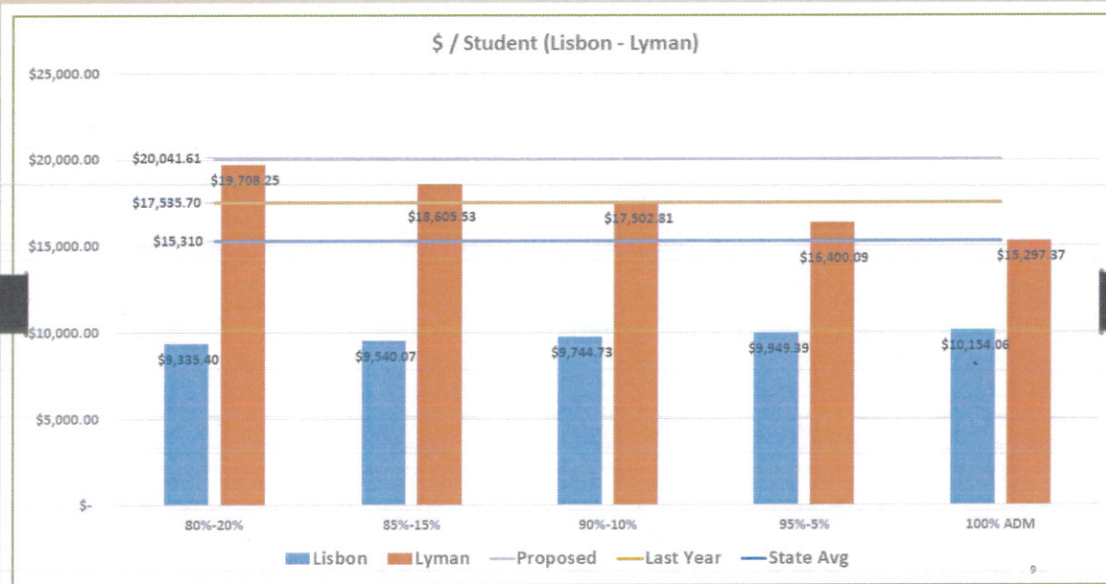
Pressing Toward Fairness and Equity 2

- Proposed apportionment formula change
 - We will be proposing a change from the 80% student attendance (ADM)/20% property tax assessment (Eq.Val.) to a 100% student attendance (ADM)

Here is our recommendation. We recommend a new apportionment formula that is based on 100% student attendance (ADM). This formula is a first step toward creating a more fair and equitable cost share agreement between our towns and more closely reflects state average tuition rates and those rates paid by Bath and Landaff. The next slide shows the impact to both towns of recommending such a change to the formula.



The three lines atop the bar graph represent tuition costs. The blue line indicates state average costs per student, which stands at \$15,310. The yellow line indicates Lyman's tuition costs last year to Lisbon, at \$17,535. And the gray line indicates what Lyman will pay per student this year to Lisbon, \$20,042. The sets of vertical bars indicate apportionment formulas. The left set of columns show our current apportionment formula at 80%/20%. This is what we will expect to pay if no agreement is reached to modify the apportionment formula between our towns. The 14.3% increase in this year's tuition is nearly \$5,000 above the average cost per student in the state. The middle set of vertical bars represents changing the formula to 90%ADM/10%Eq.Val. It would basically bring us to last year's tuition rate and show a middle point of reference between the current formula and the desire new formula. The third set of vertical bars represents the formula we are seeking with Lisbon. It is based solely on student attendance and would reduce tuition per student to \$15,297, a drop of 24% in tuition costs per student. Conversely, this formula is asking Lisbon to take a step toward fairness by increasing their tuition costs by about 9%, or \$880 per student.



Committee Next Steps

- Present findings to Lisbon School Board
- Offer to work with School Board and SAU to seek a more fair and equitable apportionment formula to share the cost of education in our cooperative
- Seek to secure a warrant article at March 2019 annual school district meeting for final vote
- Energize Lyman townsfolk to attend March 2019 annual school district meeting to cast vote in support of formula change warrant article

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Questions? Comments?

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