

**TOWN OF NEW HARTFORD**

**SPECIAL TOWN MEETING**

**ANN ANTOLINI SCHOOL**

**MARCH 3, 2016**

A special town meeting of the electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meeting of the Town of New Hartford, Connecticut, was held in the Ann Antolini School, 30 Antolini Road, in the Town of New Hartford, Connecticut on Thursday, March 3, 2016 at 7:00PM.

First Selectman Dan Jerram asked that the assembly treat each other kindly and with courtesy regardless of any difference of opinion. He clarified that there will not be a vote this evening. This is an informational meeting which will adjourn to an advisory referendum where voting will be available all day on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Jerram shared that the Town and the Board of Education had prepared a mailer that was sent to all the households in New Hartford. He asked if anyone had not received the mailer as he had extra copies available. This meeting is an opportunity for those present to become an informed voter by asking questions. He reminded the assembly that tonight is about becoming informed with facts, figures and details not to promote a position or read a letter.

First Selectman Dan Jerram called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM.

First Selectman Jerram opened the floor to nominations for Moderator. Motion Mary Lou Rayno, second Penny Miller to nominate Daria Hart as Moderator. First Selectman Jerram asked if there are any further nominations. Motion Peter Anderheggen, second Tom Buzzi to close nominations. Motion to close nominations unanimously approved by voice vote. First Selectman Jerram called for a vote on the motion to nominate Daria Hart for Moderator. Motion unanimously approved by voice vote.

First Selectman Jerram then mentioned he would turn the meeting over to the Moderator.

Moderator Hart asked for the cooperation of the audience in remaining quiet, being respectful of others and turning off their cell phones. There was to be no booing, hissing, clapping or cheering. She additionally asked that if anyone addresses someone to use their title, if referring to someone who previously commented, do not use their name but refer to them as the person who previously commented.

Moderator Hart read the call of the meeting:

**TOWN OF NEW HARTFORD  
NOTICE OF SPECIAL TOWN MEETING -MARCH 3, 2016  
NOTICE OF ADVISORY REFERENDUM –MARCH 15, 2016**

The Board of Selectmen of the Town of New Hartford, Ct hereby notifies all electors and citizens entitled to vote in Town Meetings in said Town of New Hartford, Connecticut that a Special Town Meeting will be held on Thursday, March 3, 2016 at 7:00 pm at ANN ANTOLINI SCHOOL located at 30 Antolini Road in New Hartford for the following purpose:

1. To hold a public informational meeting to address resident concerns and respond to questions regarding the question of “Should the Bakerville Consolidated School be closed?”
2. To adjourn said Special Town Meeting at its conclusion and to submit the question “Should the Bakerville Consolidated School be Closed?” to be voted upon using voting tabulators on Tuesday, March 15, 2016, between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Electors residing in the Voting District #1 shall vote at the New Hartford Town Hall, 530 Main Street in New Hartford. Electors residing in the Voting District #2 shall vote at the South End Fire House, 20 Antolini Road in New Hartford. Voters qualified to vote at town meeting who are not electors shall vote at their respective polling places. Absentee ballots will be available from the Town Clerk, 530 Main Street, New Hartford, CT and will be counted at their respective polling places. The question to be voted upon shall be placed on the ballots as: “Should the Bakerville Consolidated School be Closed?”

Voters approving the question will vote “Yes” and those opposing the question will vote “No.”

Dated at New Hartford, CT this 23rd day of February 23, 2016.

Daniel V. Jerram, First Selectman

Alesia Kennerson, Selectman

Laura DiFelice Garay, Selectman

Donna LaPlante, Town Clerk

Moderator Hart read the Return of Posting and Publication:

**RETURN OF POSTING AND PUBLICATION  
OF NOTICE OF SPECIAL TOWN MEETING**

I, Daniel V. Jerram, First Selectman of the Town of New Hartford, Connecticut, hereby certify that I caused a copy of the foregoing Notice of the Special Town Meeting to be posted on the Town signpost on Friday, February 26, 2016, and also published in the Hartford Courant, a newspaper published in Hartford, Connecticut and having a general circulation in the Town of New Hartford, on Friday, February 26, 2016.

Dated this 3rd day of March, 2016.

Daniel V. Jerram, First Selectman

**ITEM NUMBER 1:**

To hold a public informational meeting to address resident concerns and respond to questions regarding the question of “Should the Bakerville Consolidated School be closed?”

Moderator Hart instructed the assembly that anyone with a question should come to the microphone so that everyone can hear the question.

Robert Boyan asked about extended expenses to reopen Bakerville School and whether any hard numbers are available. First Selectman Jerram explained that the local Fire Marshal has toured the school who indicated that there should not be a problem reopening the school, but he has since heard conflicting opinions. He does not have hard numbers available.

Glenn Phillips asked for a hard figure on how much has been spent on repairs to the Bakerville School over the past five years. First Selectman Jerram indicated that a spreadsheet from the Board of Education indicated they have spent an average of about \$78,000 per year on maintenance including utilities. Security upgrades of \$113,000 were completed in 2013 with reimbursement by the State on grant of about \$36,000.

Sean Harris asked about the driving factors for a decreased budget figure rather than a zero budget increase. Superintendent Brian Murphy explained that there would be savings of \$210,000 to the Board of Education budget with the closing of Bakerville School. Mr. Harris asked for the driving force in the negative increase. Mr. Murphy indicated that it was a fiscally responsible approach.

Corina Hughes asked about the proposed class sizes at the New Hartford Elementary School and what would be done if suddenly additional space is needed. She foresees an expansion to NHE. Mr. Murphy explained that the plan is for class sizes of 18, possibly 20 or 21. Mr. Murphy also indicated that there will be one additional classroom at NHE and several classrooms will be opening at Ann Antolini due to declining enrollment. The Board of Education will determine how to address the need for additional space. Mr. Jerram added that NHE cannot be expanded due to the flood plain.

Bridget Seyer and Kathleen Tancreti asked for the evidence that supports taking the current fourth grade from five sections down to four sections next year. This class has had significant needs for intervention since Kindergarten and they have responded well to the smaller class sizes this year. Mrs. Seyer asked what evidence shows that these students have made sufficient gains to be able to function in the larger class size as the closing of Bakerville School will not permit the flexibility to have the additional section. Mr. Murphy indicated that the smaller class size was a trial period for one year and the evidence he received has been anecdotal from speaking with the principal and the teachers.

Moderator Hart reminded the assembly that tonight is not for testimony. Mrs. Seyer asked which teachers had spoken with him and Mr. Murphy declined to discuss those conversations.

Kathleen Tancreti shared that the Kindergarten classes are 21 students although there had been discussions about adding a section of kindergarten. She would like to know if larger class sizes even at the lower grades is becoming the norm. Mr. Murphy replied that the Board had considered the additional section but had decided against adding the section.

Tom Buzzi inquired if anyone has asked the nurses if they spend a third of their day doing nothing. He would like to know if anyone has asked the nurses if that is a prudent cut to save money. Mr. Murphy explained that no one has spoken with the nurses but student safety is of the utmost importance.

Kate Radano inquired about the nurse being used to back-up the secretary at Ann Antolini to buzz in visitors, but what happens when the nurse is treating a student and is not able to fill in as that relates to student security. Mr. Murphy indicated that other staff members do cover the security when needed.

Ms. Radano also asked about traffic concerns regarding parking and bus traffic at New Hartford Elementary. Jennifer Zenuh, BOE member and Chair of Transportation subcommittee addressed that there have been discussions with Dattco to arrange the best way to handle the additional traffic and there may be changes to where buses drop off versus where parents drop off /pick-up.

Alicia Boucher asked about the empty classroom that Mr. Murphy mentioned earlier and referred to the floor plan that was distributed at the meeting discussing the closing which shows that room assigned to special education and occupational therapy. Mr. Murphy explained the Special Education classroom could be used as an additional classroom if needed.

Steve Tuxbury asked if following this change there would be more students at NHE than there have been in the past. Mr. Murphy indicated No.

Mr. Tuxbury asked if there were more nurses on staff when we had 658 students between the three schools. Mr. Murphy indicated that he was not here at this time, but would assume that three schools had 3 nurses. Moderator Hart asked Sue Lundin, Chair of BOE to reply. She confirmed one nurse per school was the past practice.

Robert Bailey asked what the current enrollment is compared to capacity. Mr. Murphy expressed that he did not have figures on maximum capacity and would need to get back to Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Bailey additionally asked what the town's growth rate has been over the past 5 years. Mr. Jerram replied that he would research and provide population figures for the past five years.

Rebecca Carter asked the Superintendent for projected enrollment for the next five years. If there is an error in your projected enrollment and an addition needs to be added to Antolini who would pay for that. Mr. Murphy indicated that they had hired Peter Prowda who did the enrollment projections. He indicated that all anyone can do is make the best decision with the information available.

Kelly O'Dell Longhi asked the First Selectman if he had spoken with Senator Witkos who expressed an opinion that the savings in closing the school was not sufficient to justify closing the school. Mr. Jerram replied that he had spoken with Senator Witkos and provided him with the data that had been used to make the decision. Mr. Jerram believes that the Board of Education is trying to make the best decision possible.

BOE member Jennifer Benaitis commented in response to Mr. Tuxbury's question in 2011 - 2012 there were 110 students at Bakerville and 112 at NHE. Currently, NHE houses 61, Bakerville has 109 and Antolini has 300. The projections forecast current enrollment to be 590 students for this year but we are currently at 470 students, therefore it is a reasonable expectation that future enrollment could be even lower than projected. Ms. Benaitis also commented that birth rates in town have been declining. The Town Clerk recorded 51 births in 2011, 49 in 2012, 47 in 2014 and 37 in 2015.

Scott Spencer inquired about space at Antolini. Mr. Murphy replied that Oak Hill currently uses a classroom and a half. Mr. Jerram added that they have reached out to meet with Oak Hill to see if they could use more space at Bakerville.

Mr. Spencer had a follow-up question on what other options were investigated prior to deciding to close Bakerville School. Mr. Murphy explained that one of the options was to keep Bakerville open with Central Office and PreK located there or to keep Bakerville open and close NHE, but NHE has a larger gymnasium and a sprinkler system which were factors in making the decision. Mr. Jerram added that the local and State Fire Marshal walked through the Bakerville School with

the Selectmen to discuss options for the space and the most problematic issue is the lack of a sprinkler system.

Tim Goff questioned the findings of the school consolidation committee which showed there was no benefit to consolidating the schools compared to the findings of the long range planning subcommittee. He also asked what changed since that initial finding in 2013. Mr. Murphy indicated that NHE will be near capacity, but not full capacity due to the special education room. He deferred to Mr. Jerram regarding what had changed. Mr. Jerram clarified that the school renovations begun in 2001 were funded by a state grant with requirements that the building be used as a school for 10 years. After 2014 the property is no longer subject to the grant restrictions with a penalty payment to the state.

Mr. Goff then asked about the \$115,000 security upgrades in response to the Sandy Hook shooting. That was partially funded by a state grant. Has the Superintendent confirmed that the State will not require repayment of the grant if that building is no longer used as a school? Mr. Jerram indicated that he believes that the type of grant for the security upgrades is different from the typical school construction grants. Mr. Goff questioned who pursued the grant. Mr. Jerram indicated that the grant was handled by the school building committee and signed by the Board of Selectmen and the Superintendent.

Kevin Longhi asked about missing data from the flyer that was handed out. He asked why home transfers were not included in that information. Mrs. LaPlante expressed that while her office records sales, that information does not indicate whether the purchaser has children or not. Mr. Longhi also questioned why the figures on the zoning commission website reflect such different projections from the consultant figures provided to BOE. Mrs. LaPlante explained that the figures on the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) show an aging population. She explained that we currently have over 5000 registered voters, four years ago for the last Presidential election we had about 4500 registered voters. Her office will gather information on property transfers and provide to the First Selectman's office.

Brendon Field expressed his opinion that the reason for the enrollment decline at NHE is the cost of connecting to the town sewer system. If there is a systemic problem causing the population decline, how does the town intend to handle it? Mr. Jerram expressed that he does not believe that housing is more expensive on the side of town connected to the sewer and there is no data to support the sewer rates as the reason why residents are leaving the state in search of jobs.

Bill Marcano asked if real estate companies could provide real numbers or real facts on families moving into town. He further inquired if real information is being used or if the projections were a guesstimate. Mr. Murphy indicated that Peter Prowda prepared the projections in 2013 under a different superintendent. Ms. Lundin indicated that the Board has used experts to identify projections throughout her service on the Board of Education.

Bridget Seyer asked a follow-up question regarding flexibility in programming should enrollment increase or additional special education needs come forward as to what would happen to the special needs and speech therapy if that classroom is needed for an additional section at NHE. Mr. Murphy confirmed that yes those functions would need to be relocated if the additional classroom would be needed at NHE. Mrs. Seyer then asked which classrooms would be used at Antolini if space is needed. Would Science/Health and Spanish be relegated to a cart? Mr. Murphy replied that he foresees reductions in some of the grades where fewer sections would be needed in the future freeing up classroom space at Ann Antolini.

Nancy Butler, PE teacher commented that she sees all the classes and cannot believe that anyone supported the 4<sup>th</sup> grade going to 4 sections or the kindergarten classes not having an extra section next year. She asked why the negative budget savings could not be used to hire 2 additional teachers. Mr. Murphy indicated that the budget constraints made some decisions necessary.

Jay Bailey, asked the Superintendent if smaller class sizes equates to better education. Mr. Murphy agreed. He also asked the First Selectman if the larger class sizes is contrary to the plans to grow the town with the Town for All Seasons



motto. Mr. Jerram explained that “A Town for All Seasons” tries to bring all people to our community and expressed that this is a difficult decision.

Karl Hermonat expressed concern that the student enrollment projections like those for the sewer plant are wrong and could cause us to make a bad decision. He asked the Chair of BOE if she felt it is unreasonable to delay closing the school in order to further evaluate the possible changes in population. Ms. Lundin replied that the Board has been working on this for years and delaying it for a year would just be a delay. Moderator Hart commented that she was chair of the WPCA at the time the sewer plant was approved and clarified that the size of the sewer plant was imposed by the State based upon potential uses of the property in the sewer area.

Mr. Hermonat asked how a population spike would be handled. Mr. Murphy indicated that it would need to be addressed as necessary. Mr. Hermonat was at the October BOE meeting and asked why a public informational meeting was not held prior to the decision being made by the board in December. Mr. Murphy indicated that the Long Range Planning subcommittee began meeting in March and data had been evaluated extensively. Numerous meetings of the subcommittee had already been held.

Amy D’Amboise asked where the OT/PT would be held at NHE if the classroom was needed. Mr. Murphy explained that Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Special Education could be done in the conference room, but that classroom is intended for those services at this time. Ms. D’Amboise asked a follow-up question about the proposed pre-K pilot program and who would perform the Special Education function with the teacher dedicated to the pre-K program. Mr. Murphy expressed that staff has been identified who are trained for Special Education. At Tuesday’s BOE meeting they discussed the pre-K class and expect to have 15 students which is lower than originally estimated. If they do not have the necessary staff the issue can be revisited with the Board of Education.

Tim Goff asked for future plans for the Bakerville School building. Mr. Jerram explained that there is not a clear plan for the building. It will be turned over to the town in September, so there is time to identify a use. The Seniors have

expressed an interest in using that building instead of the third floor of Town Hall. Mr. Goff asked what measures town will be taking to protect the building from vandalism. Mr. Jerram indicated that once the town takes over control of the building measures will be taken to adjust schedules to handle those issues. The police can make additional patrols in the area if needed. Mr. Jerram pointed out that the school buildings are currently empty at night and on weekends. Mr. Goff then asked what the cost to taxpayers will be for those adjustments and how does that relate to the \$90,000 figure mentioned earlier. Mr. Jerram expressed that the \$90,000 figure is a BOE number and the janitorial number mentioned of \$17,000 relates to services at town hall and maintenance of the school building would not necessarily be the same number of hours. Lawn maintenance and plowing would be added to the schedule for the DPW crew.

Carolyn Solak asked if the reason for fewer sections of 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 1<sup>st</sup> grade next year is due to lack of space. Mr. Murphy indicated that space is not the reason for fewer sections. Ms. Solak then inquired what the comments of the Consolidation Committee were at the Sunday morning meeting in October. Mr. Murphy indicated that he did not recall the specific comments that were made. Ms. Solak noted that Mr. Adams made a recording at that meeting, but the comments are not reflected in the minutes which consist of three lines. Ms. Solak indicated that she had spoken with a member of the consolidation committee who was present and had been told that the committee did not recommend consolidation. She then asked for the reasoning and consideration of this decision for such nominal savings. Mr. Murphy expressed that the savings is an annual savings not just the initial year.

Robin Bielawiec asked why BOE did not accept the motion to reconsider their decision based on the outcome of the referendum. Ms. Lundin expressed that she could not answer for the other members of the BOE their motivation in voting. When members of the audience began commenting, Moderator Hart expressed that Robert Rules of Order do not permit a Board member to speculate on the opinions or motivation of other Board Members.

Ms. Bielawiec also asked why the funds were being spent on the referendum if the results would not be recognized. Mr. Jerram explained that the Selectmen

are hopeful that residents' voices will be heard. Ms. Bielawiec asked what the town is doing to enable young families to remain in town. Mr. Jerram indicated that they have been working on economic development along the 44 corridor and offering recreation programs for children and concerts for families during the summer.

Rebecca Carter asked about the impact of closing Bakerville School on the value of real estate. Mr. Jerram indicated that unintended consequences sometimes result, but properties are not worth what they used to be. Ms. Carter expressed that there have not been any answers on what will happen to the children if population grows and BOE has to scramble to react. Mr. Murphy expressed confidence that the Board of Education could handle a student population increase with proper planning. She asked that the planning start now.

Karl Hermonat asked if the zero percent change in the budget is possible while keeping Bakerville open. Mr. Murphy explained that about 72% of the school budget is salaries and benefits. He does not believe that 0 percent is possible every year without impacting the students. Mr. Hermonat inquired if a 0% budget this year could be possible without impacting student services. Mr. Murphy indicated that by closing Bakerville School they could return a lower budget without impacting student services.

Beth Paul pointed out that the Board of Education was elected to represent the interests of the residents.

Sean Harris quoted from Tuesday's BOE meeting regarding the voter turnout at the advisory referendum. What vote would be necessary for the Board to reconsider? Ms. Lundin indicated that she cannot speak for the other board members on whether they would reconsider the decision to close the school.

Mr. Harris inquired whether any steps have been taken to adjust the bus routes to ensure that young children are not riding the bus for an hour. Mr. Murphy indicated that Dattco has committed to a 3-5 minute increase and they would be held accountable.

Tim Goff expressed that it is evident that the bus routes will increase he has heard projections ranging from 3-5, 5-8 and up to 15 minutes longer. Mr. Murphy indicated that the 3-5 figure is an average and the representative had misspoken on the 15 minutes comment. Mr. Goff inquired about the cost of adding an additional bus. Mr. Murphy indicated that an additional bus would cost \$42,000, however adjustments to the route among existing buses could be made to balance the times of the routes.

Kurt D'Amboise asked the Chairman of the Board of Education how she voted and why. Ms. Lundin expressed that she was heavily in favor of closing the school.

Nicole Helt asked for data on the bus information prior to the vote. Mr. Murphy committed to providing that data. Ms. Helt then asked about the rates for the 5 year contract signed with Dattco. Mr. Murphy indicated that the first 2 years are at 0 percent then 3-3.5% in the last 3 years. Ms. Helt asked if the contract was put out to bid. Mr. Murphy indicated that it had not been put out to bid. Ms. Zenuh, Chair of the BOE Transportation sub-committee indicated that the BOE voted to accept the 5 year Dattco contract at Tuesday's meeting. The subcommittee had asked to negotiate a one year contract and Dattco presented several additional contract options of varying duration.

Carolyn Solak asked why the BOE would not consider the 0 percent budget with keeping the school open instead of closing the school. Mr. Murphy indicated that the first budget was approved at Tuesday's meeting although he had presented an alternate budget on Tuesday with cuts to offset the closing of Bakerville School.

Patty Casella asked where the authority came to the Board to call a non-binding referendum. Mr. Jerram explained that the Superintendent has a legal opinion that the Board of Education has the authority to close the school. The Board of Selectmen after receiving a petition of 411 signatures thought it was in the best interest of the community to hold the vote for the Board of Education to be aware of the opinion of the residents.

Ms. Casella then asked how closing the school is different from a prior vote to not build a new school building. Mr. Jerram explained that the spending initiative is

different because building a new school requires bonding which must be approved at a Town Meeting/Referendum vote of the legislative body.

Moderator Hart clarified that statutorily the Board of Education has the authority to close the school not the Board of Selectmen.

Kelly O'Dell Longhi asked the Superintendent to explain the role of the Board of Education. Mr. Murphy declined to answer. Moderator Hart explained that the role of the Board of Education is defined by state statute. Ms. O'Dell Longhi asked the Superintendent if he believes the BOE is following the will of the people. Mr. Murphy indicated that he believes the BOE is doing the best they can. Penny Miller asked to speak and expressed that as a member of the BOE she regrets her vote to close the school. As she continued to speak, Moderator Hart reiterated that this meeting was for questions.

Karl Hermonat expressed concern about staff morale and asked if principals, teachers and non-certified staff were asked their opinion on consolidation and class sizes. Mr. Murphy indicated that individual teachers were not polled.

Jennifer Benaitis commented that many of the board members have put a lot of time and effort into researching their decisions including newly elected Board members, one of whom took a day off from work in order to review the data prior to the vote. She noted that she made her decision based on facts not emotion.

Scott Spencer asked what cuts would need to be made to keep Bakerville School open with a zero percent budget. Mr. Murphy expressed that the major cuts would have to be in staffing. Mr. Spencer stated that losing 2 or 3 teachers would not affect the ratio as much as closing the school which has a bigger impact on the children. He suggested that the Board of Education take a step back.

Kate Musler asked if the enrollment pattern in New Hartford is different than surrounding towns. Mr. Murphy expressed that student enrollment is similar across the state. She further inquired about the impact of consolidation. Mr. Murphy indicated that having all our primary students in one school will allow for more teacher collaboration and team based educational opportunities.

Pat Spaziani expressed that a report from former Superintendent O'Reilly included comments from Principal Amanda Shaw and former Principal Lunetti supporting school consolidation.

Glenn Phillips asked about the projected development on Ramstein Road and another possible development somewhere in New Hartford. Mr. Jerram explained that the Ramstein Road development is 9 lots and has been approved. The conceptual plan for the Hurley development is for 150 units, but there has not been a developer interested in the project for the past year. Mr. Phillips extrapolated that figure to estimate the potential for 250 additional students. Mr. Murphy agreed that additional allowances would have to be made.

Bridget Seyer explained that the PDET Committee is the Professional Development and Evaluation committee and asked if that committee had been asked for an opinion related to consolidation. Mr. Murphy expressed that the committee had not been asked.

Tim Goff expressed that the Torrington Town Clerk's office has indicated an increase in births for the area at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital in five of the last seven years which is contrary to the New Hartford birth records which show a decline from 70 in 2002 to 37 in 2015 so he asked about the credentials of Mr. Prowda. Mr. Murphy indicated that Peter Prowda does analysis for many other districts in the state besides New Hartford and has an established track record. Mr. Murphy added that tracking the births of children residing in New Hartford has been a good indicator of the size of the Kindergarten class, but if additional families move in that could change.

Karl Hermonat asked about other potential sources of revenue such as Oak Hill or pre-K which could help to offset declining enrollment. Mr. Murphy indicated that Oak Hill no, but the pre-K pilot if successful could increase to an additional section.

Robert Bailey asked to verify the enrollment numbers cited by the BOE member earlier and asked if there is some other factor driving the declining enrollment at NHE. Mr. Jerram responded that the BOE adjusts the swing/boundary line to control the division of enrollment at each school. Mr. Bailey questioned if the

boundary limit is restricted by the distance from the school. Mr. Murphy expressed that the goal would be to have the line equidistant from each school, but that is not always possible.

Paul LeClair, asked about why the pupil transportation had not been put out to bid. Mr. Murphy indicated that the 0 percent increase for two years was the driving force in not putting the contract out to bid. Mr. Leclair asked if greater savings couldn't have been realized from the bidding process. Mr. Murphy expressed that due to our location there are not a lot of competitors out there.

Mr. LeClair asked about the next steps if the BOE will not reconsider their decision. Town Clerk Donna LaPlante explained that she has responded to several inquiries on this matter and compared this situation to decisions made by Planning & Zoning according to state statute where their decision is not open to a public vote. Accordingly, closing the school is the responsibility of the BOE and there is no alternative.

Mr. LeClair expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to ask questions this evening and hopes that the Board of Education will reconsider.

Laura Wearne asked the First Selectman if the BOS hoped that the BOE would take note of the outcome of the referendum. Mr. Jerram replied that they set up the referendum as an opportunity for residents to express their opinion. They hope that there will be a strong turnout on March 15<sup>th</sup> so that the BOE may consider the information.

Robert Bailey asked Town Clerk what action the residents may take in controlling the approval of the education budget. Town Clerk replied that she may not be the best person to answer that question, perhaps the First Selectman or the Board of Finance could better explain the budget process. Ms. Hart as Registrar of Voters, she would like to point out that everyone has the right to vote and express their opinion in selecting the elected officials. Mr. Jerram outlined the budget process in three parts, the Regional 7, town government and education components are presented to the Board of Finance for approval and then presented to the residents to vote at referendum.

Mr. Bailey inquired if the best recourse for residents would be to vote in new members of the respective boards. Moderator Hart agreed.

Tom Buzzi asked a follow-up question on the transportation contract not being put to bid on when the savings from the bidding process could have offset the need to close the school. Mr. Murphy explained that the entire Board of Education voted on that contract and the two years at 0 percent was a strong motivator.

Mr. Buzzi asked for a copy of the letter from the Board of Education's attorney, Shipman & Goodwin in which the opinion was given that the Board of Education had the authority to close the school. Mr. Murphy replied that on the advice of the attorney the opinion letter is not available to the public.

Kate Musler asked if the BOE in closing the school has the right to hand the responsibility for the building over to the town thereby impacting the town budget. Mr. Jerram indicated that the school building has always belonged to the town, just the maintenance cost shifts from the Board of Education budget to the town budget.

Paul LeClair asked if the legal opinion relates to the right of the Board to make the decision and whether the town has seen it. Mr. Murphy indicated that the town has not seen the opinion and that the Board of Education had reviewed the letter in executive session. Moderator Hart clarified that the opinion confirms interpretation of statute that authorizes the Board of Education to close the school. Mr. LeClair asked whether that letter should be public information prior to the vote. Moderator Hart explained that by discussing the letter in executive session it is protected from FOI under attorney client privilege. Town Clerk Donna LaPlante explained that she also asked for a copy of the opinion and Superintendent Murphy declined to share it with her. She checked with the FOI commission and learned that as long as the opinion is not shared with anyone outside the BOE it remains confidential. Once it is shared with someone outside the Board it becomes a public document.

Corina Hughes asked if the contract with Dattco includes a hard study if a bus has to be added since an additional bus would eliminate the savings in closing the



school. Jennifer Zenuh explained that she met with Dattco to see their computer modeling software that establishes the bus routes and they did a rough draft of routes for current students without knowing the incoming kindergarteners. Mr. Murphy commented that there are 31 children registered for kindergarten at this time.

Patty Casella asked if the BOE made the referendum non-binding. Mr. Jerram clarified that the BOS set the advisory referendum because they understand that they do not have the authority to make this decision but would like to understand the will of the people. Mrs. LaPlante commented that we have previously voted non-binding advisory questions on a referendum usually in the years when the budget has needed multiple referendums for approval. Moderator Hart explained that although non-binding this referendum will be conducted as close to a full referendum as possible. Ms. Casella expressed a desire to remove non-binding as that would resolve a lot of this issue. Moderator Hart reiterated that the First Selectman has clearly stated that the Board of Selectmen does not have the authority to make the referendum binding.

Chris Pietras inquired about the savings per household in closing the school. Mr. Jerram expressed possibly about \$40 per household per year.

Marcia Jones expressed concern that there is no plan for the Bakerville School and many questions have been answered with “we will address that when it comes up”. She asked why there had not been a public forum like this before the decision had been made. Sue Lundin expressed that there had been a public forum back in October before the decision was made in December. The decision to do this now was to improve educational opportunities by having all sections of the grades together in the same school with increased teacher collaboration. Moderator Hart clarified that once the building is turned over to the Town, then we would decide what would be done with the building.

Jennifer Benaitis addressed the question by commenting that Dr. O'Reilly and Ted Stoutenberg had expressed an opinion back in 2013 which indicated that due to penalties related to grant funds used for the renovation the school could not be closed prior to 2015.

Ms. Jones expressed that she would be happy with a 0 percent budget but does not understand why the school needs to be closed to present a -2% savings. Mr. Murphy indicated that the budget has been approved to meet the needs of all of our students.

Lou Helt inquired if any other options had been considered to save funds such as administration positions being reduced to part-time or eliminated. Sue Lundin commented that the Board voted to present the -2.72% budget to the Board of Finance. Mrs. Helt inquired if BOE considered any reduction in administration citing 454 students with 5 top level administrators. Ms. Lundin expressed that there is still time to review those positions. Mrs. Helt inquired about the legal cost to obtain the legal opinion on closing the school. Mr. Murphy estimated a couple thousand dollars.

Amy D'Amboise described her calculations to estimate cost savings of \$43.11 per household to close the Bakerville School or the cost to keep it open.

Paul LeClair inquired where the projected savings of \$210,000 would go. Mr. Jerram explained that the \$210,000 figure is not taxpayer savings as the maintenance costs would shift to the town and would not be savings to the residents. The remainder is not necessarily going somewhere else, it is just not being spent. Mr. LeClair also asked about the benefits to the children. Mr. Murphy explained that having the single grade level classes at NHE intermixed with students in the same grades from Bakerville would provide students with a more diverse learning environment. Additionally, the principal would be in the building all day instead of being split between two schools.

Carolyn Solak asked why having the principal on site is important. Mr. Murphy explained that in most schools across the state and the country there is one principal dedicated to that building. They believe it is important for the principal to be the educational leader of the building

Karl Hermonat asked if the current principal supports having the principal in the school all day. Mr. Murphy indicated that she does.

Kelly O'Dell Longhi asked Superintendent Murphy to repeat his earlier statement about more students in a classroom. Mr. Murphy explained that currently there are students who are with the same group of students for multiple grades but by bringing the other sections together in the same building the classes will be intermingled so that there will be more diversity in each section of a grade. Ms. O'Dell Longhi questioned whether he believes that adding students to the classes is more important than smaller classes with more teacher interaction. Moderator Hart clarified that Mr. Murphy's reference to classes was intended to be grades or schools. Ms. O'Dell Longhi stressed that class sizes will increase with the consolidation. Mr. Murphy stated they will not. The average class size will be 18 next year.

Karl Hermonat expressed his frustration as the parent of a kindergartener with 21 students per class and wondered if the teachers were asked about the decision to keep the class size so large. Mr. Murphy explained that the teachers were not asked.

Paul LeClair asked about the CT magazine ranking New Hartford as #2 in education based on the current class size and school configuration and whether the changes would bring us to #1. Mr. Murphy expressed that the goal is to always strive to improve.

Laura Polakow asked about an earlier comment regarding the benefits of having all the primary students in one school and wonders if 2<sup>nd</sup> grade moving to Antolini means they are no longer primary. Mr. Murphy expressed primary is a loose definition but that 2<sup>nd</sup> grade is moving to Antolini due to space. Ms. Polakow asked if BOE could have asked for a referendum prior to making their decision. Mrs. LaPlante stated that although she is not an attorney, she believes they could asked for a non-binding referendum if they deemed it appropriate.

Jennifer Benaitis described her experience in attending New Hartford schools where some of the classes in her grade attended Bakerville and others attended Ann Antolini and how it was difficult to be separated from her friends. Ms. Polakow expressed that when she taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade they were considered primary students but had to be moved to Ann Antolini due to space and were no longer

referred to as primary students. With 2<sup>nd</sup> grade moving to Ann Antolini will they no longer be considered primary students as she believes the needs of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student are vastly different from the needs of a 6<sup>th</sup> grade student.

John Bartram thanked the town for the meeting and the emails with information on town meetings and recommended that all subscribe. He then asked who requested the savings needed that resulted in closing the school. Mr. Murphy clarified that a specific number was not requested but the BOF sent a letter requesting a lean budget year. Mr. Bartram asked if the question could be changed to reflect the savings per household. Moderator Hart explained that it is not possible to change the question after the legal notice and ballots have been printed.

Kathleen Tancreti has attended BOE meetings and listened to comments from residents with suggestions to save money. She asked for Board of Education's motivation in closing the school because she does not believe it is the money. Moderator Hart expressed that the BOE members have looked at a lot of information in making their decision but we cannot ask for their motivation.

Rebecca Carter asked about the letter from the BOF on budget savings and why Mr. Murphy makes a 10% higher salary than the prior superintendent. Ms. Lundin expressed that she was not the chair at the time and cannot answer why the superintendent's contract was negotiated in that way.

Kate Musler asked about the comment that if Bakerville is closed, it cannot be reopened without costly upgrades. She would like to know what those costs would be and whether the school is currently safe for the children who are there now. Mr. Murphy confirmed that the students are safe. Mr. Jerram described some of the steps that had been taken to evaluate future uses of the building and there may be some renovations needed.

Moderator Hart asked if there were any further questions from the audience. Hearing none, she asked again. Hearing none, she asked a third and final time if there were any further questions.

## **ITEM NUMBER 2:**

Moderator Hart stated

Seeing that there are no other questions, this meeting will be adjourned to an ADVISORY REFERENDUM VOTE that has been scheduled by the BOARD OF SELECTMEN to be held on Tuesday, March 15, 2016, between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Electors residing in the Voting District #1 shall vote at the New Hartford Town Hall, 530 Main Street in New Hartford. Electors residing in Voting District #2 shall vote at the South End Fire House, 20 Antolini Road in New Hartford. Voters qualified to vote at town meeting who are not electors shall vote at their respective polling places. Absentee ballots will be available from the Town Clerk, 530 Main Street, New Hartford, CT and will be counted at their respective polling places. The question to be voted upon shall be placed on the ballots as: "Should the Bakerville Consolidated School be Closed?" Voters approving the question will vote "Yes" and those opposing the question will vote "No."

Moderator Hart declared the meeting adjourned to referendum at 10:14 pm.

A True Copy

Attest: Donna N. LaPlante, Town Clerk