

# **Six Town Regionalization Planning Board Report**

**March 2021**

On behalf of the Six Town Regionalization Planning Board (STRPB) representing the towns of Bernardston, Gill, Leyden, Montague, Northfield, and Warwick please accept our second report as an informational update.

This Planning Board was formed under the provisions of Chapter 71, Section 14 A and 14 B whereby two or more towns may join together to form a Regional School District Planning Board. Its purpose is to study the fiscal and educational advisability of establishing a larger Regional School District, with its current focus being that of merging the Pioneer Valley Regional School District (PVRSD) and the Gill Montague Regional School (GMRSD) into a new six town regional school district. Once the Planning Board finishes its comprehensive study it will make recommendations for all six towns to consider.

The underlying theme of this study is to explore the possibilities of providing more educational opportunities for our students by utilizing the strengths of a combined professional staff in a manner that would result in a more rigorous and robust curriculum and related activities for high school and middle school students that is sustainable, predictable, and affordable for the six towns. It is the expectation that elementary students would continue to be educated in their respective towns within the newly formed regional school district.

In 2019 the Gill-Montague Regional School District was awarded a grant and contracted with The Abraham Group and the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) to create both enrollment and financial baseline data and began an analysis of merging union contracts, health insurance and Central Office among other related topics. Additionally, the grant supported an analysis of student transportation. This initial grant, that looked at the possibility of combining GMRSD and PRVSD, and the information and data it produced became the impetus and reason for the six member towns to vote and approve the formation of this Planning Board in the spring of 2019. Shortly after, the Moderators from each of the six towns appointed three members to represent their respective towns. The 18-member Six Town Regional Planning Board held its first meeting on November 13, 2019 and in a subsequent meeting created four subcommittees to better manage its work: Education, Finance/Transportation/Facilities (FTF), Public Relations, and Planning/Organization/Logistics/Administration/Governance. In-person meetings ended abruptly when the Covid 19 pandemic gripped the nation and resulted in meetings continuing via Zoom. Each subcommittee planned and organized its work. Their respective purposes can be found on the STRPB website along with agendas, minutes, documents, and the consultants final report: <https://sites.google.com/view/strpb/home>.

The STRPB was awarded a DESE School District Regionalization grant in February of 2020 to take a deeper dive into the three areas mentioned already (finance, education, transportation). Two noteworthy findings were gleaned from the consultant's report: 1) Students may benefit significantly with the potential of more learning opportunities, thus a deeper dive into this area might help to identify specifics; 2) The financial benefits for the respective towns may not be realized if the present state funding for education remains static.

Before the pandemic, it was the expectation of the full Planning Board and each subcommittee to include all stakeholders in eliciting ideas, sharing information, and gaining feedback from public presentations. Much of this work has been put on hold and the consultants worked with the Planning Board on gathering and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative financial and educational data with limited staff input. A second DESE Regionalization grant was recently awarded in February 2021 for the Planning Board to continue its work, and each subcommittee is currently developing plans to involve as many stakeholders as possible through a variety of venues. The STRPB's work, up until now, has produced the majority of the back-end (behind the scenes) analysis needed to give the public a clear picture of the costs and benefits of a combined regional school district. This information will be very helpful in the near future when the planning board is able to engage the public stakeholders (students, parents, community members, elected officials, etc.) more fully. Additionally, the Public Relations subcommittee will focus on providing timely updates to the respective stakeholders and the general public.

The following is an overview of the STRPB Process and Goals:

- I. Write/submit/execute a new grant (completed, RFS in progress)
- II. Assimilate Subcommittee Findings into a Comprehensive Summary Document (in progress)
- III. Share with Both Districts' Administration, Faculty, Staff for Feedback (in progress)
- IV. Create Plan(s) for Sharing Documents and Obtaining Feedback
- V. Curate Feedback
- VI. Full Board Review and Discussion (several meetings)
- VII. Full Board Recommendation(s) to towns

We undertake this endeavor with the best interest of students and our towns in the forefront of our work while exploring the potential benefits and challenges of this initiative. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your Planning Board representatives. Special thanks to Abbi Pratt, Dawn Magi, Lance Fritz, Michelle Morrissey, and Heather Katsoulis for their contributions prior to resigning. Presently there are three vacancies, and we are looking for one individual to serve in each of the following towns: Bernardston, Montague, and Warwick. If interested in serving, please contact your Town Moderator.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Genovese, Chair

Greg Snedeker, Secretary/Treasurer

## Members

Bernardston:	Renee Kier, Jane Dutcher
Gill:	Greg Snedeker, Deb Loomer, Bill Tomb
Leyden:	Steve Richter, Michele Giarusso, Karen O'Neil
Montague:	Mike Naughton, Lynn Reynolds
Northfield:	Pat Shearer, Deb Potee, Reina Dastous
Warwick:	David Young, Alan Genovese

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