

# Town of Hague School Tax Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Second meeting of the School Tax Advisory Committee (STAC)

Members Present: Jack Bast, Peter Carney, Beth Barton-Navitsky, Amanda Peterson, Linda Fusco, Sandy Smith, Sally Thurston, Susan DeLarm-Sandman, Rolly & Kathe Allen.

Meeting opened at 10am

## Agenda:

- **The Pledge of Allegiance:** The meeting commenced with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.
- **Approval of Minutes from the 07/28/2023 Meeting:** The minutes from the previous meeting (July 28, 2023) were not discussed and will be reviewed and approved at the next meeting.
- **Review of the Assessment Averaging Resolution Event:** Jack discussed the Assessment Averaging Resolution presented to the Ticonderoga School Board. He mentioned that the group worked effectively to address this matter, even though the outcome may not have been favorable. Jack emphasized the importance of learning from this experience for future endeavors. He acknowledged that insufficient time may have been given for the School Board to consider the resolution and pointed out that the group's focus was primarily on taxes, with insufficient attention to educational aspects.
- **Initial Roundtable on Purpose and Organization:** Participants engaged in an initial roundtable discussion on the purpose and organization of upcoming events or initiatives.
- **Report of Local Archive Findings to Date by Linda Fusco:** Linda Fusco presented her findings from the Town of Hague vault files, including a document from Property Owners of Silver Bay (POSB) files called "Tax Assessment Advisory Committee Final Report" dated April 2004 Submitted by the Tax Relief Committee members: *Kathe Allen, Dick Gladu, Art Hatfield, Alice Patchett, Joe Stanislowsky, Judy Stock, Dave Swanson*

## Round table Discussion:

Peter identified two critical issues: economic concerns and the quality of education. He stressed the need to distinguish and clarify the group's focus on these two aspects, recognizing that different members may have expertise in one area over the other. Peter proposed leaving the meeting with two distinct charters outlining their objectives in both economic and educational areas. He expressed his willingness to contribute to education-related issues, highlighting the importance of leveraging local resources. Additionally, Peter acknowledged the need for improvement in handling historic assessments and the revaluation process.

Beth also identified the presence of two issues and expressed her willingness to contribute to addressing the educational aspect. She pointed out that Ticonderoga has a significant number of special education

students, which results in high program costs mandated by law. She acknowledged the difficulty of altering this situation, as it potentially neglected the needs of average students. Beth suggested the possibility of hiring a specialized lawyer to explore options for renegotiating the contract that was agreed upon in the past.

Amanda emphasized the importance of establishing a stronger and more cooperative relationship between the Town of Hague and the Ticonderoga School Board. She expressed concerns about encountering resistance and unwillingness to collaborate during the previous School Board meetings she attended. Amanda stressed that for any meaningful conclusions to be reached, it is crucial for Hague and Ticonderoga to work together.

Linda highlighted a two-pronged approach, emphasizing the need to assess education in Ticonderoga and surrounding districts, including the consideration of school choice. She questioned the possibility of securing pro bono legal representation for educational matters. Linda noted that the current climate supports innovative educational approaches and parent choice. She suggested exploring options for providing a different kind of school, leveraging technology, which could attract students from other districts looking for alternatives. She also mentioned the idea of forming focus groups through the year and engaging the community in discussions.

Sandy proposed a different way of thinking during the meeting. She suggested changing the group's name to incorporate the word "education" to better reflect their focus. She expressed concern that the current name might misrepresent their priorities. Additionally, Sandy emphasized the importance of securing funding for their initiatives, including potential legal expenses, and urged the group to consider if the town taxpayers would be willing to contribute to raise the necessary funds.

Sally raised several important questions and suggestions during the meeting. She inquired about the possibility of revisiting assessment averaging in five years and its potential benefits, emphasizing the need to run the numbers for analysis. Sally also highlighted the importance of building a more cooperative relationship with Ticonderoga and the implications for taxation and assessments. Furthermore, Sally proposed coordinating with representatives familiar with rural areas and the Adirondacks to address the community's specific needs. She mentioned a bill by Kirsten Gillibrand focused on rural development, including internet and healthcare, suggesting that they could reach out to Gillibrand's office to explain the town's situation, as it appeared to be a broader rural community issue.

Susan expressed deep sadness about the ongoing decline of Hague, which she believes is closely linked to the poor quality of education in the area. She argued that the low-ranking school system deters young families from moving there, leading to a dwindling population and a shift towards becoming a part-time retirement community. Susan pointed out the significant loss of businesses over the years and the town's struggle to attract dynamic individuals interested in community improvement. She stressed the need to provide parents with the opportunity to choose where they send their children to school as a potential solution to these challenges.

Rolly emphasized the need for a fresh approach, as the current one has consistently failed. He suggested focusing on understanding the specific challenges and objectives at hand instead of getting distracted by uncontrollable factors. Rolly proposed involving individuals from the state and federal levels due to the complexity of the issue. He stressed the importance of learning all the facts and seeking information from David Martucci regarding the use of Maxwell Appraisals in 2003 and their role in the current 2023 reassessment. Rolly agreed that changing the name and focusing on being a special committee would be a valuable step in addressing these issues.

Kathe shared statistics regarding the Ticonderoga School system. She noted that the revenue per student is \$33,708, which has increased by 11% over the past 4 years, and the spending per student exceeds the New York State average at \$34,241, with a 13% increase over the same period. The overall district rank in the state is 618 out of 780 schools. Kathe expressed concerns about the quality of education in Ticonderoga, particularly regarding math test scores. She mentioned that the graduation rate is in the top 20% of the state, ranging from 90-94%, while the state average is 83%. She also highlighted the significance of a high school's reputation in college admissions, drawing from her experience working with the alumni admissions program at the University of Vermont.

The Committee came together to make a list of “work streams” for brainstorming. Sally Thurston offered to draft the list for Committee review and use.

- ★ Legal
- ★ Assessment / Taxes
- ★ Communications
- ★ Rural Schools Association of NYS
- ★ Quality of Education
- ★ BOCES
- ★ Political
- ★ Budget / Fundraising
- ★ Revitalize Hague

Next meeting will be September 19<sup>th</sup> at 10am with special guest David Little, Executive Director, Rural Schools Association of New York (RASNY).

Meeting was adjourned at 11:38am.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*Amanda Peterson*