

1. **Members present:** Don Austin, Dave Witham, Todd Patten, Dana Rivers, Denis Messier, Todd Marsh, Mark Richardson and Robert Gadomski.
2. Austin called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM. He distributed a copy of "Procedures for Somersworth School District to Withdraw from SAU". Gadomski stated that this handout is pretty specific on what we are doing. He stated that we are already on Page 2 as this has gone to the School Board and the City Council. He stated that it is very specific on what needs to be done and when it needs to be done and the order of it all. He stated that we are looking at the end of January, 2020 with coming back with a report. Messier stated that Rollinsford needs to know if we are recommending to disband as they need to develop a Warrant Article and typically that is done in November, prior to their Town Meeting in March. Gadomski stated that this committee will not only figure out the options for Somersworth but, when the plan goes to the State Board, there needs to be a part of the plan as to what the options are for Rollinsford. He stated that Rollinsford School Board has already decided that they will be going through the withdrawal process which keeps all of their options open. He stated that it will be a Warrant Article this March for them to form this same committee. He stated that you will have two committees working on the same things at the same time. Messier stated it is a Warrant Article to form the committee. He stated that this plan will have to go to the DOE in October for approval. He stated that there are specific timelines that need to be met. Gadomski stated that there are a lot of different scenarios as to what will happen with Rollinsford that may not include a Warrant Article next year. He stated that if this committee decides to pull out of SAU 56, will they contract for services with another district, will they run SAU 56 on their own because they would be SAU 56. He stated in that case they would have to completely restructure what SAU 56 looks like. Patten asked what would happen if both SAU's decided to pull out? Gadomski stated he did not think a scenario like that would happen because if you pull out of SAU 56, they will own SAU 56. He stated that it does not mean that SAU 56 has to be this building or this staff. Patten asked if there will be any communication between the two committees? Gadomski stated that he thinks there should be some communication in the June, July, August timeframe because if Rollinsford's committee is thinking it is a better option to pull out then maybe, as part of this committee, we will stay as SAU 56 and do whatever we may need to do to restructure a bit. He stated if he works through all the scenarios the structure, the physical building, and staffing for Somersworth will remain pretty much the same. Messier stated that we could offer Rollinsford the choice to "rent" the staff they need. Gadomski stated if Rollinsford pulls out, do they contract services with us or Dover or do they form a cooperative SAU with Marshwood or do they hire a part time Superintendent and Business Administrator and do their own thing? He stated that there are many options that both committees will need to look at. He stated that both committees will gather all the scenarios, all the data, all the finances that go along with it and then bring forward a recommendation. Patten stated he would like some back story on how we got here. Austin stated that the withdrawal has been on the SAU's agenda since Rollinsford decided to withdraw their students from Somersworth. He

stated that the discussion came up at that time, but because we still had some students at Somersworth there was an opportunity to continue to collect revenue from them. He stated they decided to not proceed with the SAU separation until all of the Rollinsford students were gone from Somersworth and for all intents and purposes this happened in June, 2018, except for 1-2 Special Education students. He stated at that time our relationship as to educating Rollinsford students was over. He stated we no longer have any common interest with Rollinsford except for this SAU facility. He stated that we have seen some situations arise over the last couple years where the SAU Board, which is a combination of the Somersworth and Rollinsford Boards, the Somersworth Board by itself may have not made and were not entirely in the best interest of Somersworth. He stated that now we are at a point where we have no common interest with Rollinsford except running this building and we feel it is in Somersworth's best interests to separate and work independently for the school district. Witham asked if there were state wide SAUs that are not shared services within the districts? He stated that he thinks about Exeter where there are about a half a dozen districts under SAU 16. He stated that they all share a common high school and middle school. He stated that SAU in Northwood, Strafford and Nottingham each share the high school, Coe-Brown. He asked if there was an SAU with two different districts which share nothing except the SAU? Gadomski stated that one comes to mind. Witham stated that it is Middleton now contracting services from Wolfeboro. Gadomski stated that Nottingham, Strafford and Northwood is interesting also. He stated that each are independently school districts. He stated that a lot of their students go to Co-Brown but that is a Public Academy so that it is a Private-Public so you write the check. He stated that Northwood, Strafford and Nottingham are not working on anything together except for the SAU Office itself. Messier asked if all three towns have a voting interest in what goes on at the SAU? Gadomski stated that they do, it is a shared SAU. He stated that Rollinsford could contract for the services and have no voice in decisions. Messier stated that contracting would make it look good to the public. Richardson stated that if we do set up a contracted services contract it would be for anybody who wants to join us. He stated that right now Rollinsford has no say in those students going to Marshwood. He stated that if they are looking for an SAU that would give them no say, they are already halfway there. Gadomski stated that if they were to contract services with Somersworth nothing would change except for the votes at the SAU Board Meeting. Richardson stated that right now they are paying 16% which is far less than the services that they are getting for that 16%. He stated that we can generate revenue at a higher rate if we contract. He stated it would be the value for the services that we are contracting. Messier stated that the SAU would look at the services and a number that is reasonable for the services that they will provide. Patten asked if it would be more beneficial to join another SAU rather than this SAU paying for everything? Austin stated that this was something to consider if it was a feasible option. He stated that they are already paying \$.84 of every dollar to run this building so the immediate impact would be a onetime hit and whether there are some services or the structure of the office that we can gain. He stated that he believes that everything at the SAU Office would be pretty streamlined. He stated as to the impact to the budget or tax rate there may be some immediate impact for the one time the separation happens. He stated that we are talking about \$193,000.00 lost revenue. Witham stated that general budget year would require a tax

cap over ride to achieve that. He stated that this is what your normal increase would be under the tax cap. He stated that it would be a big hit. He stated that the discussion point about separating the SAU has many merits. He stated that the piece that worries him the most is the hurdle, the financial hurdle. He stated that he has a hard time selling this just yet. He stated that this committee is important to helping him get to that. He stated that he has a guarded view of it because of the financial impact. Richardson stated that the loss of \$193,000.00 is a very legitimate issue. Witham stated that when he looks at what Rollinsford pays to the SAU it does not seem to equate to the services that they get. He asked if we could just change the model so that we charge Rollinsford more and he was told no. Messier stated that some of the issue is the voting issue of the SAU Board. Austin stated that there are 5 Rollinsford members and 9 Somersworth members. He stated that 5/14ths of the vote, about 1/3, comes from a community that we have no commonality with. Messier asked when they went from 3 members on their Board to the present 5-member Board? Austin stated that this was a vote that they took in Rollinsford. He stated that the statute says that if you have a certain number of students you are entitled to a certain number of members on the SAU Board. He stated the statute supports them having 5 members on the Board. Rivers stated that the Rollinsford School Board has an incredible turnover. He stated that the amount that Rollinsford is charged to be part of the SAU is also driven by statute. Patten asked what kind of services do they get from the SAU? Gadomski stated that they get the services of the Superintendent, the Business Administrator, payroll, accounts payable, Special Education services, secretarial, posting, HR services. He stated it is full services but obviously it is less time because it is Rollinsford. He stated that it is a full service SAU when they need it. Messier asked if they pay to tuition their Special Education students to Somersworth? Gadomski stated they do. Patten stated that we have never tracked how much of the services go to one community or the other. He stated that we all know that over the course of a year they get more than 16% of services. Gadomski stated that it is so difficult to track this. He stated that you are bouncing from district to district in several minutes. He stated that some days Rollinsford gets 6 hours of the day and some days they may get none. Messier asked if it was possible to ask the DOE to modify the SAU Agreement and try to get Rollinsford to not be a voting member but still stay a part of the SAU? Gadomski stated no and one of you has to pull out. He stated that if neither one pulls out, nothing changes. Messier stated that it is a problem when they have 5 votes out of 14 and they are pushing their agenda over the greater agenda of the majority. Rivers stated that some may say what is the problem with \$193,000.00? He stated that everyone has a good job and it is as good as it is going to get. Patten stated that it is as good as it is going to get and that is the point. He stated that in 2007-2008 the government slashed everything and now we have an opioid crisis. He stated that they were going to cut mental health services. He knew that you could not do that without repercussions. Witham stated that since Rollinsford has pulled students out of Somersworth Middle and High Schools, they have been looking at other districts to tuition their students into our schools. He stated that in 2019 the students are a commodity. He stated that we have looked at Barrington and had conversations with Milton. He stated that it does not mean some other community cannot become a part of our SAU. Messier stated that Superintendents are a dire commodity. He stated that Milton is looking for another Superintendent. He stated that if

our structure for cost is right, they may say, maybe we need to look at joining Somersworth. Patten stated that this will mean going out to recruit another district to join us. Messier stated if this happens it needs to be under a contract and not an SAU Agreement. Marsh stated that we should not make decisions when everything is rosy or dire. He stated that we need options. He stated that we need to be careful moving forward. Richardson stated that if we were to partner with someone else we cannot limit ourselves to a contract. He stated that we have to look at the options and the long run down the road. He stated that he had been a proponent of Rollinsford while on the Somersworth School Board and got kicked in the teeth every time that I tried to support them. He stated that every community is not like Rollinsford and every community has different components to it. He stated that right now he could not say that the only way he would accept another community would be by a contract. He stated that there is no guarantee that Rollinsford would want to contract with us. He stated that you have to look at the situations where both sides are. He stated that we do ourselves a disservice if we do not look at where the other side is coming from. Messier stated that Rollinsford made the choice and they wanted the divorce. He stated that when they made that choice he thought they were out of the SAU. Richardson stated that he thought that also. Gadomski stated that the committee is having good discussions about getting additional students and group up with another SAU, but you are limited in the range that you can pull that off. Witham stated that there is a cost implication to this decision. He stated that we are trying to put our fingers into those leaks in the cost dike. Messier stated that we need to decide if we are in or are we out. Gadomski stated that he did not think that was up to the committee now. Messier asked if we were not here to decide that we want to get out? Richardson stated that we are here to explore all the options. Austin stated that the committee will decide one of three ways. He stated the first is that we do not withdraw which the City Council would have to approve. He stated that the committee could recommend that we do withdraw which requires public hearings and plans. He stated the other option would be to join an existing SAU which is worthy of consideration but he does not know if this will be a feasible option for us. Witham asked if we know what that cost would be. Austin stated that a district would have to do the same thing as we are talking about to present us with a cost structure. Messier stated that we can look into this but it will be an issue where students may not get the same services. He stated that Dover probably pays more per pupil than we do. Richardson stated that we are a long way from sending our kids anywhere. He stated that we have schools in Somersworth that we are not going to leave empty. Gadomski stated that we are talking about the SAU. He stated that you can hitch up with Dover's SAU but students will not be moving. He stated that staying in the SAU or withdrawing from the SAU will not change anything for the students. Witham stated that if we contracted with another SAU we would lose our Superintendent. He asked if this causes a conflict by him being on this committee. Gadomski stated that he is a non-voting member of the committee. He stated that when he is here in Somersworth he is doing the work for Somersworth and when he is in Rollinsford he is working for them. He stated that he is not concerned about his Superintendent position. He stated that there are 12-15 openings for Superintendents throughout NH. Richardson stated that if we withdraw we will lose him. He is the Superintendent of SAU 56. He stated that we have to figure all this out as well as everyone in this office. Rivers asked if the January 2020 date was a finite

date when this had to be completed or could it be reviewed at that time and additional time given. Gadomski stated that he did not know that answer but felt that a years' time was enough to get things done. Witham stated that in his mind, if he played out all the scenarios, the SAU staff is not going to change. Gadomski stated that the City owns the building. He stated that if you keep SAU 56 and Rollinsford pulls out, you remain with the same staff. He stated that if Somersworth pulls out and Rollinsford goes their own separate way you will have a different SAU but you will not need the same size staff. Patten asked if we were to join a different SAU would the staff be let go. Gadomski stated the entire staff would not go and join that SAU. Messier stated that he feels we would not join another SAU unless there was a cost savings. Gadomski stated that they would have to make a decision as to whether they contract with us and Somersworth has no say or do we enter into an Agreement. Witham stated that if we contract or enter into an Agreement with Dover, we are in the position that we have no votes. Richardson stated that we would still have control over the school and the school budget. He stated that what we lose are the Administrative Services of the SAU. Austin stated that there are 12 people in the SAU Office. He stated that those are the ones that the SAU Board has control over and the services that they provide. Patten asked for a situation where the vote of Rollinsford may have tipped the scale in their favor. Austin stated that the most obvious example is when we are trying to determine the SAU budget and there have been years when we have, for example, wanted to improve the district phone system and we have not been able to garner enough votes to do that. He stated that it requires the Rollinsford Board Members to convince the Somersworth members to vote with them. He stated that there are times that we do not have 100% of our Board present for votes. He stated that the biggest thing that the SAU Board does is hire a Superintendent. He stated that it is possible that you run into a hiring situation and all of the Rollinsford Board Members are there but you do not have a quorum of Somersworth Board Members and Rollinsford could drive that decision but because they are so different than Somersworth is and they might want an entirely different person than Somersworth does. He stated that he is not saying that this has happened but it is the outside of things that could happen. Austin stated that the last time we discussed the maintenance of the SAU building, the roof, and Rollinsford has been able to drive this discussion to say we do not want a new roof. He stated that they feel they do not want to pay for something that they may not own anymore. Witham stated that the chance of Rollinsford pulling out is slim because they have not formed a committee. Gadomski stated that the School Board has approved putting a Warrant Article on for the March vote. He stated that if the vote is yes, then they will form the same committee that we have to look at the process of pulling out. He stated that if the vote is no, they are staying with SAU 56. Messier stated that it would be just by name. Gadomski stated that Somersworth owns the building. He stated they would be SAU 56. He stated that it would be operating somewhere out of Rollinsford with a drastically changed staff. He stated that he would remain with SAU 56. Messier stated that they could not afford him. Austin stated that it would be an interesting vote in March to see if they move forward with this. Witham stated that this is complicated and he hopes that the people know what they are voting on. Messier stated that they knew what they were voting on when they voted to send their kids to Marshwood.

Richardson stated that he does not think they did know. Witham stated that we have discussed a number of things and as we move forward at this stage we need to gather information.

3. Messier asked if we should decide on a Chairman of the Committee. He made a motion seconded by Patten to nominate Witham as Chair of the Withdrawal Committee. Witham stated that he does not accept as he has too many irons in the fire. Rivers made a motion seconded by Witham to nominate Austin as Chairman of the Withdrawal Committee. Austin stated that he is not sure, from a broader and community perspective that it would be right for me to accept this nomination as Chair as he is Chair of the Somersworth School Board. He stated that if this committee thinks it is not a problem, then he is fine with it. He stated that public perception may think that we will drive the decision to whatever we want. Witham stated that he knows Austin is in the SAU constantly and communicates with the Superintendent more than any of us and as we gather information and generate reports it will be easier because of your common link to the SAU. Richardson stated that he understands that argument but those of us who were elected here, may be out of office before this is over with. He stated that he felt that it would be better for a non-elected person to act as Chair. Witham stated that he withdrew his nomination. Richardson made a motion seconded by Austin to nominate Messier as Chairman of the Withdrawal Committee. VOTE: motion passed, unanimously. Richardson stated that he trusts Messier and that he asks the questions that need to be asked. Patten asked if Messier could function in this position with an open mind of where we are going to go.
4. Messier stated that we need to discuss the expectations of the committee. He asked what kind of information are we looking for from the SAU? Witham stated that we need to know the budget of the SAU and the yearly contribution from Rollinsford. He stated that this will help us to know the financial implications. He stated that he would also like to know the cost of us joining another SAU. He stated we should use the current model and not a contracted service. Patten stated that would depend on the number of students. Gadomski stated that if you are thinking of joining another SAU, they would have to accept you. Witham stated that it is not just as easy as applying a formula. He stated that they would have to think about what additional staff they would need to make us a part of their SAU. Messier stated we need to get the basics so that we can make recommendations as to what we want. He stated that Witham is the Chair of the Somersworth Financial Committee and he can find how the cost of the \$190,000.00 is driven. Messier asked if there were models of what other districts in this state have done? Gadomski stated that they could do the budget information. He stated that the cost if you pull out and you are your own SAU we can do. He stated that he could probably give the committee 3-4 scenarios to think about. He stated that you, as a committee could then discuss the scenarios and see if they would give you any information on which way to head. Austin stated that they have samples that have been put together in the past and these may be helpful. Gadomski stated that he has Goshen, Franklin, Cornish and SAU 6. He stated that Franklin was in a similar situation as here. He stated that Franklin is the big dog and Hill was the Rollinsford in that situation. He stated that he would email all the documents. Messier stated that if you are going to email information please save questions for when we are here in a meeting together. Witham stated that if we are going to put forth any particular recommendation as to joining another district do we need to know what that district is and the cost? Messier stated that we

may have to send out letters to area SAU's asking if anyone would be interested? He stated that we can draft a letter asking if any surrounding SAU would be willing to take us on. Gadomski stated that he could get the realistic list of SAUs that may be options. Messier stated that this does not mean we will be sending students out to surrounding districts. Austin stated that it does mean that if you needed a Superintendent to show up in a building timely you need to realize travel time is an issue. Richardson stated that in the CTC we already share students. Messier stated that we are information gathering only to make an informed decision about withdrawal. He stated that this is a withdrawal committee and there are three things that we need to decide. He asked if the mission could be written up? Gadomski stated that this committee is talking about this office only. Witham stated that we are talking about the services. Patten stated that some of the hysterics that you may get from the public is that we are going to send the students to Dover. Messier stated that he wants it to be transparent and that it is about the SAU services.

5. The next meeting is scheduled for February 13, 2019 at 5:30 PM at the SAU. Witham made a motion seconded by Austin to adjourn. VOTE: motion passed, unanimously.
6. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 6:50 pm.

Melinda Sullivan  
Board Secretary