

So, What's Up with the School Merger?

-Eve Schaub

If you've heard of Act 46, then you know the state of Vermont is requiring school districts to merge into larger units. Everyone agrees it's complicated, but you can read an excellent plain-English summary of the law here:

<http://vtdigger.org/2015/11/10/decoding-act-46-what-it-means-how-it-works/>

To this end, the town of Pawlet, along with neighboring Rupert and Wells are conducting a merger study right now. Are you wondering what's happening with the Pawlet/Rupert/Wells Merger Study? I was. Some friends mentioned there was a meeting the other night, (7/13/16) so I went. The meeting lasted about two hours, but lucky for you! I have condensed it all for you here. This, in a nutshell, is what I found out:

-The committee has hired former BRSU Superintendent Dan French as an advisor.

-**Currently the committee is in the "study" phase.** Their job is to determine if a merger is desirable. If not, they will disband and the process begins again with a different committee, merger proposal and study.

-If this merger is found desirable by the committee, **they will compile a report** arguing to that effect and present it to the public.

- **There will be a public hearing, in late August or early September** at which both written and verbal testimony will be taken from the public.

- **The goal is to have the merger proposal complete in November.**

-If accepted by the state board in December, the plan then goes to the voters. Ideally, this vote would take place by March, 2017. **In order to be accepted, all three towns have to vote in favor of it.**

-In order to achieve certain tax incentives, the deadline for a merger to be accepted is one year from now: July 2017.

-According to advisor French, the three key merger issues are:

1. The size/ composition of the new school board
2. The assets versus the liabilities of such a new set-up
3. Designation versus choice- ie: will the high school be designated or not?

-Members of the committee include: Sue Ceglowski, Arlene Bentley, Sue Hostley, John Malcolm, Diane Mach, William Meyer, Sue Burke, Rico Balzano, Courtney Bishop

As you can see, the timeline is key, and has many pieces. So, just to recap, here is what the committee is shooting for:

*July/August: Merger Committee Study Phase*

*August/September: Public Hearing*

*November: Merger Study complete and submitted to state*

*March 2017, or before: Merger Proposal Vote*

Don't believe me? Think I have gotten all the facts horribly wrong? Come to one of the next meetings, and decide for yourself! Here is the current schedule:

Thursday July 28	6:30-8:30pm	Mettawee School
Monday August 8	7pm	TBA
Monday August 22	3:30-8:30pm	Wells Village School
Thursday September 1	6:30-8:30pm	Mettawee School