

**North Country Regional Economic Development Council
Meeting Summary
St. Lawrence University
September 20, 2013**

Present: Tony Collins, Garry Douglas, Randy Douglas, Kate Fish, Carolyn Fitzpatrick, Paul Grasso, Hugh Hill, Billy Jones, Betty Little, Cheryl Mayforth, Carl McLaughlin, Bill Murray, Jon Putney, Marie Regan, Addie Russell, David Tomberlin, Donna Wadsworth, Dan Wilt, Jim Wright

Also present: Sharon Addison for Jeffery Graham, Rodney Brown for Jim Langley, Brian Quiara for Lt. Gov.'s Office.

Absent: Ken Blankenbush, Cali Brooks, John Donoghue, Janet Duprey, John Ettling, Bill Farber, Joseph Griffo, Bridget-Anne Hart, Donald Kasprzak, Jim McKenna, Anne Merrill, Patty Ritchie, Michael Tabolt, Mark Tryniski, Eric Virkler, Lisa Weber

Public Session

Tony Collins opening the public meeting at 1:20pm.

Tony Collins provided an update and review of the working session. He said that the council voted on priority projects, the council's progress report, and CFA scores. A resolution was passed supporting the economy and the environment and the upcoming election ballot items 3, 4, and 5. The council also passed a resolution encouraging the DOT to consider and investigate opportunities for a potential bypass around the Canton-Potsdam area and factor that into critical needs of the regional economy and the area.

Public Comment:

Tom Burns, Superintendent, St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES

Introduced Regent James C. Dawson from the board of education

Tom Burns explained two different feasibility studies regarding consolidation of school districts in the region. Please think about schools as a primary engine for economic development and how things have changed in the last few decades. We need to meet the needs of students and economic development.

We ask for legislative and financial incentive changes. Give us some more flexible ways to pursue the regional school concept. Current bills that let schools consolidate are from the 1960s.

Regent Dawson: The regents reform effort has two elements that matter to this: Adoption of common core standards, and moving towards multiple pathways, a concept from Harvard, where students in middle school with exploratory forces can concentrate their high school program in particular subjects, or take standard academic track that most of us have gone through.

Tony Collins: Our process is typically that we accept comment; you have done a wonderful job of keeping this brief.

Bill Murray: I have talked to many in the region about consolidation and the majority don't happen because of emotion, even though it makes sense logically. More mandated measures from Albany might help make it happen.

Tom Burns: It should be about students, not about adults. We need to get parents excited about what is offered at different locations. In our region, 44% of students are already going to technical locations.

Addie Russell: The two studies seems to be in contradiction.

Tom Burns: The first study was a broad brush of what is possible across 18 school districts. The second study was an initiative of three districts that wanted a closer look.

Addie Russell: Has anyone looked at the concept a county-wide school district and redrawing district lines?

Tom Burns: I became superintendent in 2009 and regents did have a policy paper based on research of county wide model. Regional high schools may be an intermediary step to a countywide system. I don't know how the boundary lines were drawn.

Betty Little: Thank you. I have been saying this for a long time. However, I was on Lundin Commission and I voted against letting the commissioner make these decisions. First, we need to build trust—have the same calendar, the same time the bell rings to switch schools, or have a 2- day schedule. Our schools are beginning to realize they have to do this. You can't forget the tax rates, though. There is a lot to be considered, but building trust between communities and efficiency at the administrative level with our BOCES is important. We need to use the system we have.

Jim Wright: From an economic development perspective, we should be embracing and encouraging this action. The reality is, from an economic standpoint, if we're not supportive there will be a decline in further enrollment and continued outward migration. Employers look at the quality of education before relocations and continuing dialogue of school district difficulties upset current employees looking for stability. This affects universities in the region too. It is our mission to see that these guys are successful in what they're trying to do. Do it and ask for forgiveness after.

Tony Collins: We're going to ask our workforce work group to take this on.

Marie Regan: I applaud this effort. It is astonishing how few seniors graduate and how little they get because of the smallness of the community. I was wondering about long distance learning. Is there any possibility that instead of using transportation money to move people that we might use distance learning to enhance the choices that they have. Is this part of the mix?

Tom Burns: We have a fairly robust distance learning network, but it's already becoming old technology. We are looking at the more blended online options. Teaching loses something over online media. We're trying to deal with all the mandates and keep our heads above water. We need to give students and parents the choice first.

Tony Collins: Thank you for coming.

No further public comment.

Tony Collins adjourned the meeting at 2:01pm