

Trust will give funds to help Village School

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Staff Writer

NORTH BENNINGTON -- The North Bennington Prudential Committee unanimously decided Tuesday the most effective way to "enhance the district" by using \$36,000 entrusted to it is to spend the money on efforts to close the public school and help an independent school take its place.

Money going to attorney fees

The Prudential Committee gifted \$26,000 from the trust of the late Ethel "Babs" McCullough Scott to the independent Village School of North Bennington to spend on attorney fees it has incurred over the past seven months. The board also voted to move \$10,000 from a trust to its general fund to pay for its own attorney fees incurred researching the process of closing the public school.

Scott's will asks that the money be used "for the enhancement of the district at the discretion of the school board after consultation with the principal and not to be used for reduction of taxes or other equivalent tax relief."

When the board first discussed the motions at its November meeting about 40 residents attended to speak for and against using the money to help close the public school. On Tuesday just one resident, Joyce Scarey, spoke against the motions.

"I don't know what principal in the state of Vermont would say, 'OK, let's give it to another school' instead of saying, 'let's buy \$25,000 worth of computer equipment or textbooks or hire a part-time teacher of some sort,'" Scarey said.

The entire board and Principal Thomas Martin advocated for financially supporting the Village School given their belief the independent school model is more sustainable than the public model because of an ability to attract out-of-district students and be more successful fundraising.

"While I understand the importance of some of those day-to-day items, and certainly every teacher would like more equipment (and) would like more things to offer students, there's nothing more important than having security and stability in the school where you work, and also being given a true voice in the way that school operates," Martin said.

Board member Matthew Patterson said the money will enhance the district because without the Village School there will be no school down the road.

"I have little confidence that investing that money in the things that (Scarey suggested), while not changing the model in which we operate, would be a bigger waste of money because I truly believe the school will not be here at some point. So what we're doing is thinking out of the box, creating a new model," he said. "This new model will have an opportunity to raise far more money, which can enhance (supplies that Scarey is) referencing. When there's two options in my mind, survival or not ... it's the way to go."

Scarey also suggested if the board wishes to give away its money to independent schools, why not support Southshire Community School, the only existing independent school in the public school district lines.

"I don't understand why you want to give money, the district money, to an independent school when there (is) another independent school in the district," she said.

Eva Sutton, co-chairwoman of the Village School Board of Trustees, said the difference is the Village School was determined by the school board and a committee of staff and community members to be the most viable option to

ensure North Bennington children continue being educated in the current school building.

It was asked in November how come the independent school has not been able to raise funds to pay their own attorney fees, at which time Sutton said because the Village School has not been approved by the state it is impossible to secure or ask for funds.

Sutton distributed a sheet detailing how the Village School will spend the funds it was given, of which nearly \$23,000 will be paid directly to its attorneys Meub, Gallivan, and Larson, P.C. for work the firm did between July 12 when an attorney reviewed the independent school's application to the state through Sept. 24 when an attorney read a related article in the Rutland Herald (which alone cost \$46).

Another \$2,500 will be paid back to the North Bennington Graded School District to reimburse it for bills paid to Meub, Gallivan and Larson on behalf of the Village School in June.

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