

Sandisfield Town Hall
66 Sandisfield Rd 01255
jbeardsley@sandisfieldma.gov
413-258-4711
July 17, 2024

Dear members of the School Committee,

We hope this letter finds you well. It is with regret but firm resolve that we write to inform you of the unanimous decision of the Sandisfield members of the Regional Agreement Advisory Committee (RAAC) to resign from our positions, effective immediately.

Our decision is rooted in recent developments that have fundamentally compromised our ability to effectively contribute to the RAAC's mission. Since the beginning, with the selection of the Otis members of the RAAC, the deck has been stacked against success. Specifically, remarks made by Ms. Terry Gould, as well as her consistent misrepresentation of our interactions and decisions within the RAAC, have created an untenable situation. Ms. Gould's statements, as excerpted from recordings of meetings and emails, inaccurately portrays our meetings and process as contentious and unproductive and casts aspersions on the Sandisfield leadership, all of which contradicts the reality documented in clear video recordings.

For clarity, we would like to address several key points:

Misrepresentation of RAAC Meetings: Ms. Gould's complaints made in the July 1 School Committee meeting that the June 20 RAAC meeting was characterized by discomfort, a waste of time, and unnecessary complexity are unfounded. In truth, the meeting was characterized by professional discussions and respectful deliberations, resulting in several unanimous decisions on crucial matters. This is substantiated by a video record and eye witness accounts. Nevertheless, on July 1, the unanimous votes were falsely characterized by Ms. Gould as "not all happy votes".

Allegations of Bullying and Intimidation: Ms. Gould's assertions of being "pressured and bullied" during the January 11, 2024 meeting are similarly baseless and damaging. These accusations, which she publicly shared without substantiation, undermine trust and cooperation between Sandisfield and Otis. She, along with Carol Lombardo made these claims in email, and at two public meetings. Ms. Gould's email to Jon Sylbert on 1/16 (which contained her allegations of being "pressured and bullied"), also said she "regretted her vote" to shift the responsibility for determining the apportionment methodology to the SC while the RAAC would focus on updating the RDA. Ms. Gould additionally claimed in that same email that Mr. Sylbert was "also a victim of the intimidation and bullying that has been going on there (Sandisfield) for quite some time." This unfounded accusation by Ms. Gould that a culture of "intimidation and bullying" is rampant in Sandisfield does nothing to promote an atmosphere of cooperation between the two towns. One of the meetings was a joint RAAC/Otis Selectboard meeting that was scheduled without notifying the Chair of the RAAC or any of the other RAAC members. During this meeting, Ms. Gould unilaterally read a "RAAC REPORT" to the Otis SB which repeated the since

withdrawn claims of bullying and intimidation. The irony here is that there are multiple RECORDED instances of Ms. Gould bullying and intimidating elected members of the SC during deliberations. During a single SC meeting on June 12, as a member of the public, Ms. Gould interrupted a SC member during deliberations. She was told to be quiet. She then shouted "Ridiculous" while the same SC member was speaking. She was told by the chair to be quiet. She then shouted "Ridiculous" again. The video record clearly shows she has had a hard time controlling herself in public meetings and frequently interrupts and heckles as a member of the public. To date she has faced zero accountability for her words or actions.

Distrust and Miscommunication: Ms. Gould has repeatedly emphasized a perceived lack of trust between the towns, despite clear evidence of collaborative efforts within the School Committee and RAAC. Indeed, in the July 1 School Committee meeting, Chair Denise Hardie polled the SC members as to whether anyone felt there was a "lack of trust". The response was unanimous that the members trusted each other proving that Ms. Gould's allegations are manufactured. Her persistent advocacy for external mediation even after the SC voted against consultants, further undermines our collective efforts to reach a mutually beneficial Regional District Agreement (RDA). Case in point, in the July 1 SC meeting Ms. Gould suggested (once again) that the SC is somehow being negligent in its duties by not considering a mediator or consultant to become involved in the updating of the RDA. She told the SC, "You refuse to do this and I don't know why".

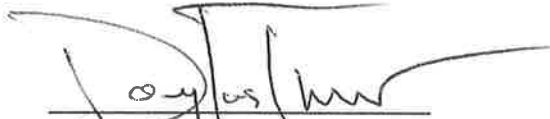
Refusal to Work in Good Faith : In March 2024 Brandi Page (Otis Town Administrator) sent an email to Jon Sylbert and Denise Hardie that stated quite clearly that HER select board would "not insert themselves" in this process. After looking at the data, Brandi thinks "Sandisfield has the capacity and ability to support the education costs by the FRRSD" and "the tax payers in Otis and Sandisfield share an equal burden". "This is the charge of the school committee and my select board is not going to insert themselves. Nor should they be expected to support a change to the assessment at town meeting. If there is a change someone from the school committee will have to answer why Otis already pays a significantly larger share and should pay more even more". Ms. Page denies writing this email.

Stalling and Obstruction : At the May 16 RAAC meeting the Otis members spent 45 minutes trying to convince the Sandisfield members that a quorum of four is the same as a quorum of four that includes at least one member from each town.. When it was stated emphatically that these were not the same thing, Sue Brofman disagreed and said "I think we're saying the same thing. This is semantics". When told that we needed to have another RAAC meeting soon to meet the deadline, all agreed except for Ms. Gould. She was unable to meet at any day at any hour for over 1 month even though the entire elected SC was able to schedule two meetings in one month. When told that this would interfere with our timeline, Carol Lombardo asked "what time line?"

The decision to resign is not taken lightly. However, the continued presence of Ms. Gould and other obstructors within the RAAC and her pattern of misrepresentation pose significant obstacles to constructive dialogue and progress. We believe that our resignation is necessary to maintain the integrity of the School Committee's work and to ensure that future discussions are conducted in good faith and with transparency. This decision in no way reflects a lack of support for the School Committee

and initiatives to foster cooperation between Sandisfield and Otis: rather it is a reflection of our commitment to each of these ends.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you require clarification or wish to discuss this decision further, please do not hesitate to reach out to Jbeardsley@sandisfieldma.gov.


Douglas Miner
John Field
Steve Seddon
Carl Nett