

Annexation - Straw poll OK'd



Photo by David Clode / Unsplash



Jack Beaudoin

Jul 12, 2023

Archive

First Published: 1994-09-09

'Port selectmen reject request for special town meeting vote

By JACK BEAUDOIN
Journal Tribune Staff Writer

KENNEBUNKPORT - Voters will be polled during the November 8 general election on the possible annexation of three Biddeford coastal neighborhoods upset with their city. The non-binding straw poll was suggested by Kennebunkport selectmen after they rejected a proposal to hold a special town meeting on the question.

In a cautious meeting with the Little River Boundary Group Thursday night, Kennebunkport selectmen refused to commit any tax dollars to pursuing the annexation question. Board members estimated that warrant question at town at meeting would cost between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Linda Leeman, who presented the group's proposal before the board, had requested a three-tiered series of meetings. She suggested a public hearing on October 15, followed by another informational meeting in early November, and culminating with a special town meeting on November 19.

and culminating with a special town meeting on November 17.

"This would give the people of Kennebunkport the chance to vote on whether to accept or reject our proposal before the state legislature takes up the issue in December," she told the board. "We're looking for an indication from Kennebunkport before we go full-force."

But the board was clearly uncomfortable with the proposal. "Frankly, it sounds to me like all you would be getting is an expression of sentiment," selectman Erland Hardy said. "If we scheduled special Town meeting for just an expression of sentiment, we'd get clobbered." sentiment, we'd get

Funding any kind of inquiry into the annexation process would put Kennebunkport into an awkward situation, town manager Jane Duncan said. It's a chicken-and-egg argument, she told the group, adding that any town initiative before the communities vote on secession would look like a "land-grab."

Despite its reservations, the board did vote to allow town department heads to go on "windshield" tours of the Biddeford areas seeking to secede. Leeman had urged the town allow department heads to survey the coastal communities' roads and infrastructure.

"It's easy for us to say we have 11 miles of road, but what kind of roads are they?" she told the board. "These tours would be mutually beneficial ..."

Leeman said the windshield tours would run from an hour to an hour-and-a-half.

At one point in the evening, David Seaborn, a member of the Little River Boundary group, said that the group would be willing to pay for department heads' time. But selectman Bob Brown waved off the offer, saying, "I think we're getting a little bit picky here. I think I could donate a couple of hours to look around."

Nonetheless, selectwoman Olive Holmes warned the group that it would take more than tours to convince the board support annexation if the communities do secede from Biddeford.

"We're looking for hard facts," she told the group. "The burden of proof is on your shoulders, not ours."

She asked Leeman to provide technical data, road maps and information on septic systems for the upcoming public hearing. Holmes suggested several times that the group hire an independent auditor to evaluate issues such as the need to extend sewer lines to Hoyt's Neck and Granite Point. She also advised Leeman to take a closer look at the education figures the group had previously provided.

"After the state determines its share of the school budget, SAD 71 implements a cost-sharing formula based on property tax and school population.

"If we took on \$90 million in new property valuations, that would put par with Kennebunk," she caplained. "And that would result in significant increase in

of our share of the school budget."

Holmes also inquired into the debt that the seceding communities would carry.

"If you represent 10% of Biddeford's value, are you then responsible for 10% of its current debts?"

Leeman said the exact amount would depend on negotiations with the city of Biddeford following successful secession vote. "There's no doubt that the revenue we'd bring to you would increase some costs," she admitted, "but we feel the revenues generated would outweigh those costs."

Seaborn added, "We can give you tons of facts and figures, but eventually it will come down to a gut feeling on your part."

In making its final recommendations, the board suggested the Little River Boundary group continue with its planned public hearing on October 15. The selectmen also supported second meeting in the week preceding the November 8 general election. As for the straw poll itself, Hardy recommended the group check first with the town clerk regarding applicable election laws, and then "find spot in the back of the gym" of the Consolidated School, where the entire town votes.

"Inasmuch as this is going to be large election, you'll probably get larger number of voters than you would get at a special meeting in the gym," selectman Don Fiske predicted. "You might get 2,400 to 2,500 voters, as opposed to 400 or so at town meeting."

The proposed annexation of the three neighborhoods to Kennebunkport has been the subject of bitter debate in Biddeford, as has the move to secede by residents of the Biddeford Pool area. Coastal residents complain that they do not receive essential city services and that they are not included in the city's decision-making.

City officials have said the loss of tax revenues from high-valuation coastal areas could be devastating to the city budget and have vowed to oppose any attempt by coastal neighborhoods to secede or annex themselves to a neighboring community.

Clips

Annexation: Straw poll OK'd

'Port selectmen reject request for special town meeting vote

By JACK BEAUDOIN
Journal Tribune Staff Writer

KENNEBUNKPORT — Voters will be polled during the November 8 general election on the possible annexation of three Biddeford coastal neighborhoods upset with their city. The non-binding straw

poll was suggested by Kennebunkport selectmen after they rejected a proposal to hold a special town meeting on the question.

In a cautious meeting with the Little River Boundary Group Thursday night, Kennebunkport selectmen refused to commit any tax dollars to pursuing the annexation

question. Board members estimated that a warrant question at town meeting would cost between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Linda Leeman, who presented the group's proposal before the board, had requested a three-tiered series of meetings. She suggested a public hearing on October 15, followed by another informational meeting in early November, and culminating with a special town meeting on November 19.

"This would give the people of Kennebunkport the chance to vote on whether to accept or reject our proposal before the state legislature takes up the issue in December," she told the board. "We're looking for an indication from Kennebunkport before we go full-force."

But the board was clearly uncomfortable with the proposal. "Frank-

■ KENNEBUNKPORT
Continued on Page 12

■ KENNEBUNKPORT From Page 1

It is harder to me like all you would be getting is an expression of sentiment," selectman Erland Hardy said. "If we scheduled a special town meeting for just an expression of sentiment, we'd get a chicken-egg."

Nothing, selectman Olive Holmes warned the group that it would take more than hours to convince the board to support annexation if the communities do secede from Biddeford.

"We're looking for hard facts," she said the group. "The burden of proof is on your shoulders, not ours."

The selectmen to provide technical data, road maps and information on septic systems for the upcoming public hearing. Holmes suggested several times that the group hire an independent auditor to evaluate issues such as the need to extend sewer lines to Roy's Neck and Granite Point. She also advised Leeman to take a closer look at the valuation figures the group had previously provided.

"After the state determines its share of the school budget, SAE 71 represents a cost-sharing formula based on property tax and school population. If we look at 350 million in new property valuations, that would put us on par with Kennebunk," she explained. "And that would result in a significant increase in our share of the school budget."

Holmes also inquired into the debt that the seceding communities would carry. "If you represent 10% of Biddeford's value, are you then responsible for 10% of its current debt?"

Leeman said the exact amount would depend on negotiations with the city of Biddeford following a successful secession vote. "There's no doubt that the revenue we'd bring to you would increase some costs," she admitted, "but we feel the revenues generated would outweigh those costs."

Seaborn added, "We can give you tons of facts and figures, but eventually it will come down to a gut feeling on your part." In making its final recommendations, the board suggested the Little River Boundary group continue with its planned public hearing on October 15. The selectmen also supported a second meeting in the week preceding the November 8 general election. As for

the straw poll itself, Hardy recommended the group check first with the town clerk regarding applicable election laws, and then "find a spot in the back of the gym" of the Consolidated School, where the entire town votes.

"Inasmuch as this is going to be a large election, you'll probably get a larger number of voters than you would get at a special meeting in the gym," selectman Don Fiske predicted. "You might get 2,400 to 2,500 voters, as opposed to 400 or so at town meeting."

The proposed annexation of the three neighborhoods to Kennebunkport has been the subject of bitter debate in Biddeford, as has the move to secede by residents of the Biddeford Pool area. Coastal residents complain that they do not receive essential city services and that they are not included in the city's decision-making. City officials have said the loss of tax revenues from high-valuation coastal areas could be devastating to the city budget and have vowed to oppose any attempt by coastal neighborhoods to secede or annex themselves to a neighboring community.

