<u>Present:</u>   **Committee members:** Jim Sysko (Chair), William Andrews, Gary Wight, Bonnie Largess
            Educational consultant: Dr. Mark Eastman
            Community members: Brooks Morton**,** Bobby Lowell, Doug & Deb Webster, Tama & Gary Drown,
            Alison Aloisio,
<u>Absent:</u>   **Legal consultant:** Dan Stockford

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<u>Open Session Proceedings</u>: Meeting was called to order just after 5:00 pm by Chair, Jim Sysko.

<u>Citizens' Comments:</u> Jim noted that comments may be made at any time during the meeting.

<u>Previous Meeting's Minutes:</u> The minutes of the February 25th meeting were reviewed. **William Andrews moved that the minutes of the previous meeting be approved; Bonnie Largess seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

<u>Old Business:</u>
a) **Financial Status:** Jim reported that the committee has $3297.80 remaining in its budget; that is enough money for the committee to have another meeting prior to the June 14th vote to either abolish this committee or keep it active. Jim will ask attorney Dan Stockford to attend that meeting.

<u>New Business:</u>
a) **District Funding Formula Committee update:** Bobby Lowell reported that the Funding Formula Committee is scheduled to have its first meeting next week on May 19th at 6:30 in the Telstar Library. Brooks Morton asked if the local TV station could televise that meeting; Jim will ask Dan Stockford if that's okay. Mark Eastman named the 12 committee members: 3 representatives from each of the 4 district towns.

b) **Public Hearing:** Jim noted there is a public hearing scheduled for May 17th at 5pm at the Newry Grange Hall. Three topics will be discussed: this withdrawal process, a change in the fire department ordinance, and a property conveyance at the Head of the Tide Cemetery.

The NWC and audience members discussed having a withdrawal presentation or handout available at this public hearing. Jim noted that William has written a 3-page letter explaining what the committee has done thus far and why the townspeople should support the continuation of the withdrawal committee.

c) **June 14th Vote:** The vote on June 14th is a majority vote; absentee ballots will be available prior to that meeting. The voting will include the State's primaries, the town's referendum questions – including the withdrawal question, and the vote on the school budget. It was noted that the public hearing on the school's budget will be held on May 31st at 6:30pm in the Telstar Auditorium.

d) **Letter written by William Andrews:** Copies of the letter were distributed. The group discussed posting this letter in the paper. William explained his opening statement of "nothing to gain, but a lot to lose" in regards to stopping the withdrawal process - emphasizing the importance of explaining to the citizens that if this withdrawal process is ended, then the Town has nothing to help push the new funding formula forward.

The committee members and community members talked about their frustration with how the Town of Newry is being treated by the SAD 44 School Board – noting that the administration budget is much higher than the state average. Bonnie spoke up in support of the School Board and some of the good happening in the Administration office. She explained some of the issues that Board is dealing with – i.e. the money that is being spent on lawyers for this withdrawal process and Andover's withdrawal; the lack of money available to hire a Business Manager since Bruce Powell retired. Both sides spoke of the testing scores and whether or not other programs are showing positive results.

Mark stated that as an observer of this process, much of the frustration he has experienced is in regards to the disrespect being shown to the Town of Newry by SAD 44. He spoke of the changes that have occurred in the Commissioner's office due to Jim Riar's retirement, and the role that office plays in this process – approving the withdrawal proposal before it goes to the citizens for a vote and ensuring continuity of educational services for the students.

The group discussed the wording of the withdrawal question on the ballot. Many thought the question is misleading with the word "committee" not included, and because it's worded in a way that a "yes" vote <u>stops</u> the process; a "no" vote keeps the process (and the committee) active. The group discussed ways in which they can clarify the question for the voters. It was suggested that the actual ballot question, with the "NO" box checked, be added to the top of William's letter.

Gary moved to approve William's letter with the added statements subject to further review from the committee. Bonnie seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

e) **Executive Session:** cancelled

f) **Strategies for a positive vote**:
   - A possible rally – or work session- at Tama & Gary Drown's home.
   - Holding another committee meeting in June; Mark Eastman confirmed that he can attend.
   - Telephone calls to drive voter turnout; William suggested organizing a committee to make these calls.
   - Reminder postcards mailed just before the vote; the voting list can be printed on address labels. Deb Webster offered to create the postcard, put the address labels on the postcards, and do a Facebook blast.
   - William mentioned the importance of canvasing the neighborhoods to get the information out; this method allows for any questions to be answered directly.
   - Brooks offered his services if anyone is interested in doing a promotional video. The video could be shown on Channel 11 and posted on Youtube and Facebook.

g) **Date of next committee meeting**: Monday, June 6th. The committee will meet at 5pm for a regular meeting; then those interested will gather at the Drown's house to work on some of the strategies noted above (i.e. the mailing).

h) **May 17th Public Hearing at the Grange** – Mark Eastman confirmed that he can attend. He agreed to speak on behalf of the committee.

<u>**Adjournment**</u>: **William moved to adjourn; Gary seconded. The motioned passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:16 pm.**