

**Kingfield Selectmen Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025; 6:00 PM Webster Hall 38 School Street**

**Attendance**

**Municipal Officers:** Hunter Lander, Wade Browne, Chris Rushton, Morgan Dunham,

**Municipal Staff:** Leanna Targett (Town Manager), Travis Targett (Wastewater Superintendent)

**Public:** Terry Coffin, Myra Coffin, Brad Orbeton, Diane Christen, Audrey Tague, Rob Woodhouse, Susan Davis, Julie Talmage, Mary Nodine, Kathy Houston, Henry Williams, Jeff Maget, Neal Tranten, Laura Columbia, Liz Marble, Brianna Franchetti, Johnny Maynard, Caitlin Ringle, Mathias Ringle, Julie Swain, Robin Konieczko, John Witherspoon, Whitney Rhodes, Michael Kankainen, Nykola Hanczar, Barbara Nickerson, Marie Daigle, Tom Hildreth, Myriah Eaton, David Eaton, Dorrie Robinson, Claudia Diller, Cliff Norton,

**Via Zoom:** Penny Hall, Danielle Mathieu, Andy, and Sacha Gillespie

**Absent:** Kim Jordan

Chairman Lander calls the meeting to order.

The board reviews meeting minutes from August 4, 2025 . Selectman Browne makes a motion to accept the minutes as written. Seconded by Selectmen Rushton. Motion passes 3 to 1 abstain.

Chairman Lander asks for a motion to recess the selectmen's meeting and enter into a public hearing to discuss the possible withdrawal from MSAD#58. Selectman Browne makes a motion to recess and move into a public hearing. Seconded by Selectmen Dunham. All in Favor.

Chairman Lander states that the purpose of this hearing is to provide Kingfield residents with information regarding a vote to pursue withdrawal (not withdraw, just pursue) which will be held on September 16th from 8:00 am to 8:00pm. If the vote passes the process of gathering data and exploring options will begin. This hearing will provide information on the withdrawal process, the reasons for considering withdrawal and the potential impact on the town and Kingfield students. Residents are encouraged to ask questions of the town officials and the School Options group.

Chairman Lander asks for any public comment.

John Maynard states that he is adamantly against withdrawing from the district. He says looking around the room he is guessing that many of the faces in the audience do not have kids currently in the district. John says for one does this improve the quality of education my children will receive? The short answer is no. It hasn't been discussed or even approached in any way, shape, or form. And the state dictates the curriculum and establishes acceptable standards anyway. Individual towns cannot change this. Number two does this move solve the problem we have with declining enrollment? Again, the short answer is no. In fact, it is more likely to compound the problem. New Portland kids have been attending MSAD58 for years now, and while we do receive the subsidies that the state pays for each student, NP tax dollars still go to MSAD74. If Kingfield pulls from the district, NP would have to tuition their kids to KES. Do we really think NP taxpayers will just willingly pay tuition, when they can send their kids to 58 or 74 for free? Not even close to likely. As far as Superintendent agreements if I had a guess I would say  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the New Portland kids go to Kingfield.

And for number three, will this move lower my taxes? History shows us they will not! Stratton Elementary was the most recent school to pull from an established district in this area. In the first three years after withdrawal, their residential AND business taxes skyrocketed over 30% each!! And while the tax rate has somewhat stabilized in the decade since that climb, they have never returned to their former numbers, let alone lowered. Yes the mil rate went down due to a revaluation. Businesses went up 32.8%, one business I spoke with was an increase of \$126,800. These are all things to strongly consider. We've decided to cut education to save money how about looking at cutting other things 10%. Following further discussion John says our kids will be running businesses in this town someday.

Julie Swain says as a parent of a student that goes ½ the time I had discovered that I wanted my kids to graduate with more than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Julie says we are not getting what we are paying for. Services are being cut, and we need to find a solution prior to Strong/Phillips pulling out. Do we take on that burden when they close? I think my taxes have gone up 100%.

Mary Nodine says here question is can we improve. She says the superintendent agreement money goes to their town. She says my thoughts to pursue at this stage because we do not have the costs, we need to get the actual figures. Phillips and Strong have already started the process and are a few steps ahead of us. All of this is important information to consider.

Chairman Lander says the vote in September needs to pass in order to get the numbers.

John Witherspoon says this meeting to me is a discussion of if you want to go forward, this is all about a quality education. If we had a top-notch school like we used to we could be a vibrant community, we could be #1 in the state again. We have no control right now; we are a small minority. With that being said, I do not know how will vote in the end.

Julie Talmage states that she has been part of the district, a former school board member, has lived in Kingfield by choice and has been in education for 30 years. My opinions are the same as John Witherspoon's we need autonomy- our own choice. We need to be wiser to make a decision. We are in a sweet spot where we can own our school ourselves. When I served on the school board every year we were looking to slash something from the budget. We need to look at this seriously and honestly.

Cliff Norton asks what the vote is and the cost. TM, Targett explains that the vote will be in September the article is to spend an amount up to \$15,000.00 for consultation and legal costs. She explains that this vote must pass in order for Department of Education to provide the figures we need to investigate.

Selectman Browne and Kathy Houston explain that there has been communication with a woman who has been through this before and she feels she will be able to provide services from the first vote to the second one for \$4,500 to \$5,000.00.

Rob Woodhouse says this is a bureaucracy move. This is a step in order to make a further decision.

Kathy Houston says we need to build on what we want and may want to work with other communities.

Claudia Diller has questions on the value; the school could be under local control. She says we should look at Stratton school or Rangeley they receive huge assistance from parents. Parents are very involved because it is their school.

Selectman Browne asks if there is an explanation between Kathy Houston indicating that taxes did not go up in Stratton to the research John Maynard did indicating that they had. Kathy explains that for the last 11 years the Stratton school did not ask for additional money to operate the school which information came directly from the Superintendent of the school. When they did withdraw they had to pay their share of the district debt. Kathy says Stratton pays approximately 2.8 million for their school/kids; we currently pay 2.8 for our kids.

Kathy says I believe there is an opportunity to improve. I do not want to imply there is anything wrong, there is a lack of autonomy. People think we have presented to close Mt. Abram High School, we are not promoting this. It is about getting the right information.

Tom Hildreth says he hopes we all come to learn more to vote in September. It is a shame for this to get voted down by 35 people. It will take a long time to go through the process. Stratton is all about the kids. We want our kids to enjoy our environment.

John Maynard says he got his information from the Eustis/Stratton website for taxes.

Brad Orbeton speaks as a budget committee member and a school board director. He says it will behoove us to get the information. If Strong or Phillips pulls out we may need to.

The board explains that a committee will be formed after the first vote to include the following: One member from the municipal officers, one member from the general public, one member from the group filing the petition AND One member of the regional school unit board who represents that municipality.

Mike Kankainen says this is about the size of the school this is not about taxes going up. Small class size is a key benefit, and no one is disadvantaged.

Liz Marble says Phillips and Strong are being misled. There are a few people leading the charge. In 2008 the same people were leading the charge to close Mt. Abram, which has been their angle. Phillips will figure it out, Strong will take longer. You should be looking at who is most vulnerable, it happens to be our high school kids, the younger ones are protected. Where do we want our high school kids to go? Looking at k-12 in Kingfield is a waste of time, everyone is looking at k-8. She suggests that people should get into Kingfield school there are amazing things happening. Stratton is the only school in the area that has had a long outstanding recreation program, they have for decades so they already have a huge commitment to their kids and town – not to the school.

Selectman Browne says that Peter Farnsworth said they were told “we are closing your school” in Stratton.

Chairman Lander says he is concerned with shipping our high school kids out as we will have no voice, we would lose our say on everything. He says I do want the numbers to find out, I am just concerned.

Mary Nodine says Mt Abram losing the 20-30 kids from Kingfield does not close Mt. Abram.

Kathy Houston says to be careful of absolutes.

Selectman Rushton asks if Strong withdraws where our kids will go. Mary Nodine explains that they will be moved back around to Kingfield/Phillips schools.

Julie Swain says she remembers the round table discussions a few years back and there was discussion of a super school on Mt. Abram's property – should we look into this again. Would it cost more? Julie says there are lots of options, probably more to consider that we have not thought of. John Witherspoon asks would the Kingfield Cares support a super campus? Mary Nodine says from a school board level it has been discussed, and we would like to discuss it more as it may be an alternative.

Rob Woodhouse states that both Phillips and Strong have moved forward with the first vote that has passed and are starting the process of gathering the information. Rob Woodhouse says taxes are a non-starter. It is up to us if we want kids in our town, we need to go through the process.

Cliff Norton says the \$15,000.00 to start this is minimal and wants to move forward.

Brad Orbeton notes that even if the school board recommends to close a school the town will need to vote or pay the difference.

Whitney Rhodes says she is all for doing the research just wants to know what the timeline is.

Mary Nodine explains that the numbers must be received, information gathered and as the town manager said it could potentially go to a second vote next spring. It would need to be decided in November in order for it to be withdrawn the following year.

Laura Columbia says I have told Kingfield if you are talking about it then do something about it. This gets out into the community kids, teachers are hearing it, and I just want to say our schools are amazing, what is hurtful is speaking negatively it creates a lot of stress. Look at the numbers but do not put down others in the process.

Marie Daigle says that we have a bright intelligent community, and we need to determine the best way to continue. We need to be open, informed about decisions, not out of fear. We value these people, and shipping our kids a ½ hour down the road is tough, we were forced by the state to consolidate due to location. Let's be open.

Selectman Dunham makes a motion to close the public hearing and to reopen the selectmen's meeting. Seconded by Selectman Rushton. All in Favor.

**Old Business:** None

**New Business:**

Chairman Lander moves into reviewing the tax commitment for 2026 covering July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. TM Targett explains that she is happy to announce that the mil increase for this year is only 1.25. She says, I use the word “only” as we were looking at a potential 3.239 increase.

This means that an average home that is valued at \$100,000.00 will go from \$1,925.00 to \$2,050.00 or an increase of \$125.00. We played with the figures during commitment so that we tried different amounts from surplus and settled on \$350,000.00 this is the most we have taken since 2011 however I am comfortable with this amount knowing that we like to leave a buffer to cover the town for at least 3 months. Board reviews other documents provided by the town manager. Motion is made by Selectman Browne to accept the mil as provided. Seconded by Selectman Dunham. All in Favor.

**Town Manager Updates/Discussion:**

TM, Targett states she has nothing to discuss however she would like the board to reconsider the tif grant funds work session. Board agrees to reschedule it to August 27<sup>th</sup> at 5:30pm.

**Selectmen Discussion:**

Selectman Dunham asks that the public mute their phones during meetings as they are very disruptive.

**Public Comment/Other (not for new business):**

None

Selectman Browne makes a motion to adjourn meeting. Seconded by Selectman Dunham. All in Favor.

*\*The minutes provided above are a summary. The Town meets record management requirements and retention schedules by maintaining permanent records of electronic recordings of meetings to satisfy the requirements of §403-A. Minutes by Leanna Targett.*