

Local News

Brass Tacks

Parent organizer fires e-mail darts at Region 14 chairman

Things have reached a boiling point in Woodbury and Bethlehem between parents of elementary schoolers and the Region 14 Board of Education.

Witness an e-mail exchange last Thursday between **John Howard**, chairman of the school board, and **Erica Barber**, organizer of Families for Region 14 Elementary, which opposes the planned reconfiguration of Mitchell Elementary School in Woodbury and Bethlehem Elementary School.

Barber fired the first salvo in the early afternoon Thursday when she took Howard, Superintendent **Robert D. Cronin** and the school board to task for meeting last Tuesday night in the Nonnewaug High School library media center, which has a capacity of only 64 people.

At least 50 people were barred from entering by **Woodbury Fire Marshal Janet Morgan**. Barber reminded Howard that school board meetings are open to the public, and wondered why a larger room wasn't used when board members knew a big crowd was coming.

"Perhaps it would have been better to find another room rather than having aggressively prepared to exclude people," she wrote.

Howard wrote back four hours later to defend the decision to meet in the library. He said the auditorium stage was being used during the meeting, and the cafeteria was not equipped to handle a live cable TV video feed.

He also responded to a statement in Barber's e-mail that read, "The total disregard for public input and participation that has characterized the behavior of this board and this administration both on Tuesday night and over the last few months is very disappointing."

"Until these last several meetings there are generally 10-15 people who regularly attend (school board) meetings," Howard wrote. "I recognize that your experience with the ... meetings is limited to from roughly mid-October to now but I can assure you that there have been in the past and will be in the future many opportunities for people to participate."

Barber returned fire a couple hours later. "Moving forward I can assure you that given the gravity of the reconfiguration decision and the failure to properly include the public in the reconfiguration debate prior to the Oct. 16 'discussion,' you will have more than 10 to 15 people attending future meetings. Perhaps you should make an effort to adapt accordingly," she wrote.