

Community Update: Clarifying the March 10 Select Board Meeting & the Withdrawal Process

A point of clarification is needed:

The March 10 gathering was a regular Select Board meeting—not a public information meeting, not a workshop, and not a withdrawal-related briefing.

A Select Board meeting is governed by Maine’s public-meeting laws, which strictly limit what the Board may discuss if an item has not been properly submitted, noticed, and placed on the agenda.

At this meeting, a group of residents attended to advocate for ending the withdrawal process and dissolving the Withdrawal Committee. They also wished to discuss a petition related to that goal. However:

- No petition had been submitted to the Town Clerk
- No signatures had been certified
- Nothing had been formally presented to the Board

When a petition is formally submitted and certified, it will be placed on a future agenda as required by law.

Clarifying Comments Made During Public Comment

One speaker, stated that he had been appointed to the Withdrawal Committee and later asked to remove a social media post after seeking community input. To clarify:

- He was asked to remove the post because he identified himself as a Withdrawal Committee member, which could lead people to believe he was speaking on behalf of the committee, which he was not authorized to do.
- He was free to repost the same content without identifying himself as a committee member, or simply edit the post to remove that reference.
- Instead of making that correction, he chose to resign.

This was about ensuring clarity regarding who speaks for the committee.

Clarifying the Withdrawal Process

Several statements made during the meeting about the withdrawal process were inaccurate. Here are the facts:

- The Withdrawal Committee exists because the voters approved it.

The committee was formed after a referendum vote of the people of Phillips directing the Town to begin the withdrawal process under 20-A M.R.S. §1466.

- The committee's composition is set by state law.

The Commissioner of Education instructs the Select Board to appoint:

- one petitioner
- one Select Board member
- one School Board member
- one public member

- The committee's job is to gather information—not to withdraw the Town.

It analyzes financial impacts, explores logistical options, negotiates a draft withdrawal agreement, and ultimately presents that agreement to the voters.

Only the voters, at the final referendum, can decide whether Phillips withdraws.

- The timeline is normal.

Across Maine, the withdrawal process typically takes 18–30 months. Some towns finish sooner; some take longer. Phillips is within the normal range.

Regional Context: Two Other Towns Are Also Exploring Withdrawal

Residents should also know that Strong and Kingfield are currently exploring withdrawal from MSAD 58. Each town is gathering financial and logistical information just as Phillips is.

If one or both of these towns ultimately vote to withdraw, the financial outlook for Phillips could change significantly. Cost-sharing formulas, student population, state subsidy, and operational expenses could all shift.

Because of this, it is in Phillips' best interest to continue gathering information so residents can understand:

- what the district looks like if no towns withdraw
- what it looks like if one town withdraws
- what it looks like if two towns withdraw

The Withdrawal Committee's work ensures Phillips has the full picture before any final vote.

A Note to Those Opposed to the Process

Some residents have voiced strong opposition to the withdrawal process. Community engagement is welcome-but meaningful engagement also includes bringing ideas and solutions forward.

If the goal is to improve the district and address long-standing concerns, it is fair to ask:

- Have those opposed to the process brought their concerns directly to the school district?
- Have they encouraged the district to work collaboratively with the towns to address financial pressures, communication issues, or governance concerns?
- Have they proposed constructive alternatives that help Phillips navigate the challenges ahead?

Phillips deserves a full, informed understanding of its options, especially with two neighboring towns exploring withdrawal as well. The Withdrawal Committee's work is about gathering that information so the voters, not the Board, can make the final decision with the facts in hand.