

Thirty residents testify in Boston

By Elodi McBride

WORTHINGTON – Thursday morning, Sept. 19 found a group of 30 residents on a bus trip to Boston. This group

of people were going to the State House to offer testimony in support of the town's withdrawal from the Gateway Regional School District (GRSD).

This trip was the result of

a three-year course of leaving the GRSD after the town's elementary school was closed. Last spring, Worthington requested withdrawal from the GRSD agreement by the other district

towns. It did not pass. The Ad Hoc Education Committee took the next step by pursuing State legislation for withdrawal.

The bill, H. 3574 is an act

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Worthington

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Residents from Worthington at the State House where they offered testimony and support of the Town of Worthington's withdrawal from the Gateway Regional School District

Photo by Elodi McBride

TESTIFY

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relative to the withdrawal of the town from the Gateway Regional School District, which was filed by Rep. Stephen Kulik and Rep. Benjamin Downing. A panel of six residents were given a period of time to make their statements.

Tom Wisnaukas introduced the Ad Hoc Education Committee's plan to meet the needs of the town's children. He outlined the plan for operating an independent school system for grades Kindergarten to sixth, and tuitioning out grades seven to 12 to Hampshire Regional. His point was that the committee was not abandoning the regional model, but just shifting to a union model within a different district.

John MacDonald addressed the commitment to education after the elementary school's closing. The creation of the private school, R.H. Conwell Community Education Center, which served the elementary age children in town was a solution. Eliza Lake spoke of her returning to live in Worthington. She spoke on the incredible support of Worthington's residents for education and its overwhelming support for the withdrawal and the opening of a public school. She was extremely proud of living in such "an extraordinary place." Bev Bowman gave her background as an educator in town and spoke on Russell H. Conwell and his book, "Acres of Diamonds."

Dick Wagner addressed the towns' funding priorities. Alex Lak talked on both about the financial capability of the town to support a school, and about

the incredible importance of community involvement in children's lives.

Then Julia Sharron testified as a mother and community member, and Gretchen Eliason testified as a private citizen about the financial implications of the withdrawal.

Afterwards, those from Worthington felt that that the town's position was well explained and were hopeful. However, it was undetermined how this request was received by the state board.

Debbie Carnes-Reilly said, "This event was a culmination of efforts of those who testified on Thursday, the people from town, the votes of the meetings, the letters of support, and the group of the people who attended the hearing at the State House."

She continued, "It's not just a school issue, but a community one as well. There are ripple effects, such as less families moving here."

Janet Dimock said, "Worthington made a good presentation on the subject that needed to be addressed."

Eliza Lake thought that the hearing went well, and that Worthington presented itself as a community that cares deeply about the educational future of its children.

All of this will be taken under advisement by the Joint Committee and then there will be a vote.

Before everyone left, Rep Stephen Kulik gave a tour of the House and Senate Chambers and the Hall of Flags to anyone who would like to go. They posed for a picture on the Grand Staircase.