The Regional Agreement Amendment Committee (RAAC) working to update the Farmington River Regional School District Agreement (RDA) has completed the basic work to clean up and eliminate redundant language that does not apply to the regional district. These are the basic items needed to amend the RDA for compliance.

The RDA as it currently exists follows the rules set down by the Commonwealth and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Assessments and equalized valuations as listed in the RDA follow the state guidelines.

However, there is a push by the member town of Sandisfield to change the overall financial responsibilities to favor Sandisfield. The town of Sandisfield feels that the town of Otis does not assume it's fair share in support of the school.

I have proposed that the committee enlist the guidance of a professional from the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) and or DESE. This is not acceptable to the other member town. Even though the guidance could work in their favor there is resistance to this.

The options put forth at our most recent meeting were confusing and weighted. The evening was difficult and long. We were intimidated and bullied. This is unacceptable to anyone working toward a common goal. We felt pushed into a vote and if we had the opportunity to work through this again; we would not have voted to move this information to the School Committee for decision.

It is the responsibility of the RAAC to present a completed RDA for consideration to the school Committee. This is recommended by DESE.

There seems to be no appetite to do the work correctly. There is a lack of trust between the members from the two towns. For this very reason we should be bringing in a consultant to assist us.

It was pointed out that we voted not to bring in a consultant. I do not find a record of this vote anywhere. As I understand the discussion of this at a previous meeting; we discussed being able to do the basic updates that need to be done to bring the RDA into compliance. If other, more contentious changes were to be considered, we would seek assistance from a hired consultant.

When we were given the overview of the RAAC by Mr. Putnam, superintendent last year, he explained that the RAAC was a stand-alone committee that would work on the basic business agreement between the two towns. He also highly recommended the assistance of an objective consultant. It is important that the RAAC works within the guidelines set forth by DESE and MARS and the Required Components of Agreements, M.G.L. c. 71, section 14B.

Please note that Commissioner approval is needed for all RSD agreements and amendments. An RDA seminar was offered virtually last week and Otis members attended. No members from Sandisfield took advantage of the presentation.

Basic language corrections that update the RDA and bring it into compliance could be completed and brought before the voters. However, if the town of Sandisfield wishes to change the way assessments and valuations are done, I cannot see this work being completed before the Annual Town Meeting even if we could access a consultant and/or legal counsel.