

## **CONFERENCE REALIGNMENT COMMITTEE**

**April 29, 2026**

The Conference Realignment Committee Meeting and Hearing Regarding Placement of Decorah CSD and Waverly CSD was called to order by Marty Fonley (West Monona, West Harrison, Whiting) at 9:00am at Ankeny Stadium Meeting Room.

Committee members in attendance included Trevor Miller (Exira-EHK, Audubon), Andy Crozier (Central Lee), Brent Jorth (Central Lyon), Adam Riley (Decorah), Scot Lamm (Mount Pleasant), Eric Boyle (Waukee), Tara Paul (Indianola), Bill Watson (Martensdale-St. Marys), Brandon Ruffridge (Fort Dodge), Zach Clark (Central Decatur), Deron Durflinger (Van Meter), Cade Lambert (Des Moines Christian), Brent Cook (Dubuque Senior), Barb Schwamman (Osage, Riceville), and Julie Girsch (Columbus Catholic).

Absent: Tara Williams (Pleasantville), Jeff Bissen (Glenwood).

Representing the IGHS AU: Kylee Walker, Elise Boulton, and Erin Gerlich

Representing the IHSAA: Tom Keating

**Motion to approve the April 29, 2026 agenda by Jorth, second by Miller, unanimously approved.**

**Motion to approve the April 22, 2026 minutes by Watson, second by Durflinger, unanimously approved.**

### **Opening Remarks:**

Committee introductions were made. Fonley provided a brief history of the committee and explained the committee's authority. The committee will hear all testimony related to the two school districts and will deliberate following the conclusion of testimony. Appreciation was expressed for the work of all involved.

### **Overview of Appeals:**

Durflinger provided an overview of the appeals process. A subcommittee developed the procedures, as this is a new process. Committee members outlined the process to be used, including established time limits for each school; no extensions will be granted. The committee will not ask questions until all presentations have concluded. A maximum of two speakers per district will be permitted.

Fonley asked that any committee members who felt they had a potential conflict of interest recuse themselves at this time. Adam Riley (Decorah) and Barb Schwamman (Osage, Riceville) were recused from discussion regarding Decorah's application.

### **Opening Remarks from Decorah CSD:**

**Representing Decorah CSD:** Adam Riley, Activities Director, Decorah and Tim Cronin, Superintendent, Decorah. The presentation began at 9:10AM.

The Decorah Community School District is requesting placement in a conference for the 2027–2028 school year after the Northeast Iowa Conference (NEIC) effectively dissolved when most member schools left for other conferences. Decorah was left without a viable conference and was denied entry into the Upper Iowa Conference (UIC) by the UIC, in mediation, and upon appeal to the Department of Education. Decorah also had discussions with the WaMac Conference and was informed that if they applied the application would be denied. Because these efforts were unsuccessful, Decorah is proposing the creation of a new conference in northeast Iowa consisting of seven schools: Charles City, Crestwood, Decorah, New Hampton, North Fayette Valley, Osage, and Waukon.

The proposal aims to:

- Provide a stable, long-term solution for conference alignment in the region
- Minimize disruption to existing conferences
- Maintain reasonable travel distances for students
- Preserve traditional rivalries
- Support appropriate competition and participation opportunities

Decorah acknowledges it would be the largest school in the proposed conference but notes projected enrollment declines. The district emphasizes that the proposal prioritizes student opportunities, competitive balance, practical scheduling, and reasonable travel. The presentation ended at 9:20AM.

### **Presentations from potentially Impacted Conferences (Decorah):**

**Representing North Central Conference:** Tony Neuman, Superintendent, Iowa Falls-Alden and Joe Carter, Superintendent, Algona. The presentation began at 9:21AM. Carter stated that the conference has worked to maintain competitive balance, and removing a member (Charles City) would disrupt that progress. He also noted that neither reducing to 11 teams nor expanding to 13 is ideal, and that travel distances remain a challenge. It was further noted that the North Central Conference is one of the longest-standing conferences, with many historical decisions influencing its current structure. The presentation ended at 9:23AM.

**Representing Top of Iowa Conference:** Jenn Peter, Superintendent, Belmond-Klemme. The presentation began at 9:23AM. The Top of Iowa Conference indicated that adding

Decorah would not be a good fit due to differences in school size and geographic location. Travel distance was identified as a significant concern, with some trips estimated at approximately 2½ hours one way. The conference also expressed concerns regarding the impact on travel time, instructional time, and associated costs. The presentation ended at 9:25AM.

**Representing Upper Iowa Conference:** Shane Wahls, Superintendent, Clayton Ridge and Wendy Meyer, Attorney, Lane & Waterman LLP. The presentation began at 9:26AM. Four key themes were highlighted regarding potential impacts on schools. The Upper Iowa Conference expressed respect for the history and integrity of Decorah, while emphasizing that the conference exists to serve student-athletes. It was noted that any action altering the current alignment would have consequences, affecting both current operations and long-term conference decisions. This includes impacts on scheduling, the balance between small and large schools, and the overall structure of the conference. In addition to operational disruptions, the conference urged consideration of the broader impact and emphasized the importance of maintaining stability. Meyer then asked those in attendance representing the Upper Iowa Conference to raise their hands. The presentation ended at 9:35AM.

**Representing WaMaC Conference:** Nathan Levin, Attorney, F3 Law and Matt Thede, Athletic Director, Mount Vernon. The presentation began at 9:36AM. The conference noted that Decorah previously approached them in 2024 and was denied membership at that time, and they continue to be opposed to the request. The committee was asked to consider the legal requirements involved in adding Decorah to the conference. Significant concerns were expressed regarding travel distances, with average trips estimated at 110 miles, or approximately six hours round-trip—effectively requiring students to spend an entire school day traveling. The addition of more schools would further increase these distances. It was also noted that most competitions are scheduled as doubleheaders at multiple levels on the same night, which would further impact travel demands. These factors were cited as having a negative effect on instructional time and student academic success. Concerns were also raised about the feasibility of middle school competition under such conditions. Thede spoke to the importance of supporting both the academic and athletic well-being of students, noting that schools represent their communities. Rising costs were also discussed, with gate revenue impacted by weather and travel distance, being a key factor in supporting athletic budgets. It was emphasized that any changes could create a ripple effect across communities within the conference. In closing, the conference expressed sympathy for Decorah's situation but stated that inclusion would not be a viable option for the WaMaC Conference. The presentation ended at 9:44AM.

#### **Presentations from Impacted School Districts (Decorah):**

**Representing Allamakee CSD:** Jay Mathis, Superintendent, Allamakee and Brian Hilsabeck, Athletic Director, Allamakee. The presentation began at 9:45AM.

Concerns were expressed regarding the overall morale of students and coaches if placed into a conference that was not chosen. It was noted that gaining buy-in under those circumstances would be difficult. There were also concerns that participation could decline and community engagement could be negatively impacted. The Upper Iowa Conference was described as providing competitive balance and opportunities for success, which support stronger participation numbers and positive student experiences. Mathis noted that the conference has maintained stability over time. Strong opposition was expressed to being placed in a newly formed conference, with the indication that there would be little interest in remaining in such a structure long term. It was emphasized that removing Waukon from its current conference would be disruptive, as members feel they belong in their existing alignment. The presentation ended at 9:54AM.

**Representing Charles City CSD:** Dana Sullivan, Athletic Director, Charles City and Brian Burnight, Superintendent, Charles City. The presentation began at 9:55AM.

It was noted that in January 2024, the district was satisfied with its placement in the North Central Conference (NCC). While travel challenges exist, the district expressed gratitude for conference membership and identified both positives and negatives. Overall, the NCC was described as the best fit in terms of stability and school size. Concerns were raised that changes to conference alignment could divide the community, and the importance of prioritizing what is best for students was emphasized. The district shared that its experience with the NCC has been very positive and that it values remaining in the conference moving forward. It was also noted that moving schools out of established conferences can be disruptive, and the district values its neighboring schools and existing relationships. It was further shared that Charles City has experienced a significant enrollment decline, losing approximately 200 students in recent years, with projections of around 90 students per grade level in the near future. The presentation ended at 10:03AM.

**Representing Howard-Winneshiek CSD:** Kris Einck, Superintendent, Howard-Winneshiek. The presentation began at 10:04AM. A question was raised as to whether the focus should be on what is best for a small number of students or the majority. Reference was made to data available on the Upper Iowa Conference website. It was stated that while Decorah's proposal emphasizes minimal disruption, Mr. Einck believes it would actually result in significant and unnecessary change, primarily benefiting Decorah. Concerns were also raised that conferences should consist of schools with similar classifications for postseason competition, noting that schools like Waverly-Shell Rock and Decorah would not typically compete against smaller schools. The speaker recommended that Decorah would be better aligned with the WaMaC Conference. It was also noted that both represented districts are currently satisfied members of the Upper Iowa Conference, and concerns were raised about the impact on the conference if schools were removed. The presentation ended at 10:12AM.

**Representing New Hampton CSD:** Erik Smith, Superintendent, New Hampton. The presentation began at 10:13AM. From a competitive standpoint, it was noted that athletes may find it difficult to commit under changing circumstances. Speaking on behalf of

conference competition, it was emphasized that removing four districts would disrupt the competitive balance among the remaining schools. The importance of maintaining a truly competitive conference and ensuring all schools have the opportunity to compete was underscored. It was also shared that there has been a commitment over the past 18 months to support and strengthen the Upper Iowa Conference, which has developed into a highly competitive league. Overall, the focus remains on minimizing the impact on student-athletes. The presentation ended at 10:18AM.

**Representing North Fayette Valley CSD:** Joe Griffith, Superintendent, North Fayette Valley. The presentation began at 10:18AM. Concerns were raised regarding enrollment disparities, noting the competitive imbalance highlighted by state championship outcomes involving schools such as Decorah and Waverly-Shell Rock. As a rural district, continued enrollment decline was emphasized, along with challenges in supporting multi-sport athletes and consistently fielding junior varsity teams. It was noted that these factors can reduce opportunities for student-athletes to develop and experience success. Additionally, the proposed changes were seen as potentially disrupting the current stability of the Upper Iowa Conference. The speaker expressed the belief that Decorah would be better suited in a conference that more closely aligns with its competitive profile and stated that they do not support the proposed new conference or Decorah being placed in the UIC. The presentation ended at 10:21AM.

**Representing Osage CSD:** Trevor Molitor, Athletic Director, Osage and Mike Kennedy, High School Principal, Osage. The presentation began at 10:21AM. It was noted that the district would become the smallest school and the only representative from the Top of Iowa Conference (TIC) under the proposal to form a new conference. It was stated that conference titles alone should not drive decisions, particularly given declining enrollment trends. It was expressed that the Top of Iowa Conference may not meet the Osage's needs in the next 10 years. Osage was described as having a strong, premier program, but concerns were raised about maintaining a consistently competitive schedule. The question was posed that if not now by moving with Decorah what future opportunities would exist for realignment. Overall, it was stated that the proposal to form a new conference represents a logical option for Osage, as it would provide stronger competition and better align with current needs. The speaker emphasized that a move to a newly formed conference makes sense in the current environment. The presentation began at 10:30AM.

**Closing Remarks from Decorah CSD:** Adam Riley, Activities Director, Decorah and Tim Cronin, Superintendent, Decorah. Closing remarks began at 10:31AM. The committee was reminded that its decisions will impact multiple districts and that all schools must be prepared to make sacrifices when considering changes to conference membership. It was noted that Osage, the smallest school in the proposal, has expressed interest in the realignment. Questions were raised regarding the potential impact on the WaMaC Conference if Decorah were to be added. It was also asked whether a school should be excluded from consideration due to its success. The speaker clarified that the proposal is

not to alter existing conferences, but rather to establish a new Northeast Iowa Conference (NEIC). At approximately 10:35AM, Fonley asked whether the schools included in the proposal had been contacted prior to submission of the proposal for a new conference. Riley answered, no, they had not been contacted. Closing remarks ended at 10:36AM.

**The committee recessed for a break at 10:37AM and reconvened at 10:55AM.**

Fonley noted for the those in attendance that all materials were required to be submitted by April 22nd, which was the reason additional handouts were not accepted by the committee . It was also stated that approval of any decision requires a majority vote of members present with a quorum of ten committee members being the minimum for a quorum. Placement decisions would be for competition in the 2027–2028 season. It was clarified that Decorah did not request placement into a specific conference, only the creation of a new conference. Conferences that may be impacted were made aware that placement decisions could involve them because the committee has a responsibility to not only consider the request of an appealing school but also any other potential options that may be a better solution.

**Committee Member Questions began at 10:55AM.**

Fonley stated that each group that presented may be called up for further questions and that committee members should plan their questions so as not to require a group be brought back up for questioning a second time.

**The committee called Decorah for questions.** Representing Decorah: Adam Riley, Activities Director, Decorah and Tim Cronin, Superintendent, Decorah. Crozier asked for clarification, noting that WaMaC had been identified as a potential fit. He asked whether Decorah would accept placement in the WaMaC if selected. Cronin responded that the school board would need to discuss that decision. It was noted that there could be an appeal from Decorah and potentially from the WaMaC. Riley stated that travel is the primary concern, particularly regarding participation at all levels and the impact on open enrollment. Paul noted that Decorah currently schedules WaMaC schools such as West Delaware, Independence, Center Point-Urbana, and Marion. Cronin state that any winter contests are held at neutral sites. Cronin added examples such as games at Upper Iowa University. Durflinger asked about lower-level (JV and freshman) scheduling. Riley explained that many of those contests are still being scheduled, often with Upper Iowa Conference (UIC) schools. While volleyball scheduling was manageable, basketball still needed 5–6 additional dates. Lamm asked about middle school participation. Cronin indicated that middle school schedules are largely filled with UIC schools, though some schools send lower-level teams or do not field teams. Participation has generally been feasible. Watson referenced past conference alignment responsibilities and asked whether proposed schools had been contacted. Riley stated that Charles City and Osage

were aware, but not all schools had been contacted. Fonley asked about enrollment projections, and it was confirmed that data came from the Department of Education.

**The committee had no questions for the North Central Conference.**

**The committee had no questions for the Top of Iowa Conference.**

**The committee has no questions for the Upper Iowa Conference.**

**The committee called the WaMaC Conference for questions.** Representing the WaMac Conference: Nathan Levin, Attorney, F3 Law and Matt Thede, Athletic Director, Mount Vernon. Crozier asked what the best placement would be if not the WaMaC. Thede indicated that a restructured NEIC could be a viable option, noting it would include similarly sized schools and reasonable travel distances. Watson referenced a prior statement that travel was the primary barrier. Representatives confirmed that travel distance, scheduling balance, and maintaining even divisions are major concerns. Neutral site scheduling is sometimes required, and long travel (e.g., Grinnell) can result in late returns. Fonley reviewed WaMaC scheduling structure, including divisional play and conference events. Concerns were also raised about scheduling capacity, concessions revenue, and logistical challenges.

**The committee called Allamakee for questions.** Representing Allamakee CSD: Jay Mathis, Superintendent, Allamakee and Brian Hilsabeck, Athletic Director, Allamakee. Crozier asked for input on the best placement for Decorah. The superintendent stated the Upper Iowa Conference would not be a good fit due to differences in participation levels, competitive levels and programming. The WaMaC would be the best fit but travel was acknowledged as a concern.

**The committee called Charles City for questions.** Representing Charles City CSD: Dana Sullivan, Athletic Director, Charles City and Brian Burnight, Superintendent, Charles City. Crozier again asked for input on the best placement. The Activities Director noted frequent involvement in mediation and emphasized the need for long-term stability. The superintendent stressed that the focus should be on providing opportunities for students rather than competitiveness alone. Durlinger asked what factors should weigh most heavily. Travel distance and stability were identified as top priorities. It was noted that Charles City schedules many nearby schools and has had a positive experience with the NCC. Fonley asked whether recreating the NEIC would provide stability. Concerns were raised that without clear guidelines keeping members in the conference, it may not.

**The committee called Howard-Winneshiek for questions.** Representing Howard-Winneshiek CSD: Kris Einck, Superintendent, Howard-Winneshiek and Wendy Meyer, Attorney, Lane & Waterman LLP. Crozier again asked for input on the best placement. Representatives stated they were not interested in the proposed conference and had concerns about competitiveness. One representative noted they would prefer not to play

Decorah due to competitive imbalance. It was stated that remaining in the UIC would provide more stability for Crestwood.

**The committee called New Hampton for questions.** Representing New Hampton CSD: Erik Smith, Superintendent, New Hampton and Cory McDonald, Athletic Director, New Hampton. Smith emphasized the importance of competitive balance and manageable travel, while still allowing opportunities for success such as competing for conference titles. It was noted that New Hampton already competes against Decorah in most sports. Fonley asked whether a new conference could create stability. The response indicated it could work if schools commit to collaboration despite existing tensions.

**The committee called North Fayette Valley for questions.** Representing North Fayette Valley CSD. Joe Griffith, Superintendent, North Fayette Valley and Justin Heins, Athletic Director, North Fayette Valley. Representatives stated the committee faces a difficult decision. Concerns were raised that a new conference may not provide long-term stability. Watson asked whether the current Upper Iowa Conference would remain sustainable without changes. It was stated that it likely would, but that Decorah and Waverly-Shell Rock are too large for that conference.

**The committee called Osage for questions.** Representing Osage CSD: Trevor Molitor, Athletic Director, Osage and Mike Kennedy, High School Principal, Osage. Osage indicated that if a new conference is not created, they would likely seek membership elsewhere and leave the Top of Iowa Conference. They stated that the proposed NEIC would be the best fit for Osage and that if that isn't created they will likely apply to the Upper Iowa Conference in the future to provide better competitive opportunities for their students.

#### **Clarification of Next Steps and Notification Process**

Fonley outlined the next steps for the committee, noting that the goal is to reach a decision today. Following deliberation, the committee will issue a ruling by simple majority vote. It was stated that parties will be notified of the decision in the coming weeks, after which an appeal process will be available. The committee plans to hear from Waverly-Shell Rock following the lunch break and will then begin deliberations.

**The committee recessed for a lunch break at 11:57PM and reconvened at 12:45PM.**

**The Afternoon Session began at 12:45PM.**

**Absent in the Afternoon Session:** Tara Williams (Pleasantville), Jeff Bissen (Glenwood), Trevor Miller (Exira-EHK, Audubon).

Fonley asked that any committee members who felt they had a potential conflict of interest recuse themselves at this time. Adam Riley (Decorah), Brent Cook (Dubuque Senior), and

Barb Schwamman (Osage, Riceville) were recused from discussion regarding Waverly's application.

### **Opening Remarks from Waverly CSD:**

**Representing Waverly CSD:** Brady Weber, Principal, Waverly and Austin Cole, Athletic Director, Waverly. The presentation began at 12:47PM. Waverly–Shell Rock would like to express sincere appreciation for the efforts of the Conference Realignment Committee and the leadership. Waverly–Shell Rock acknowledges that there have been missteps in its efforts to secure a viable conference home. While the process has not been perfect, the district's commitment to serving its students has remained constant. This experience has provided valuable lessons, which will be applied moving forward. The district's goal is to secure a stable conference home, to be a positive and cooperative member, and to contribute meaningfully within its future conference. The district provided a timeline of events related to their specific situation. It was noted that Waverly–Shell Rock was voted out of the Northeast Iowa Conference (NEIC) in spring 2022 due to enrollment disparities and resulting competitive imbalance. Since that time, the district has sought conference membership aligned with enrollment, programming, geography, and competitive balance. The WaMaC Conference was identified as the preferred option due to similarities in school size, geographic proximity, and extracurricular programming. The district emphasized the importance of conference membership in providing consistent competition, balanced scheduling, reasonable travel, and opportunities for student participation and recognition. The district further stated that while the WaMaC was the preferred destination, they would welcome any placement provided by the committee. The presentation ended at 12:56PM.

### **Presentations from Impacted Conferences (Waverly):**

**Representing Mississippi Valley Conference:** Mitch Gross, High School Principal, Iowa City West. The presentation began at 12:57PM. The conference expressed a desire to maintain its current membership structure. It was noted that adding Waverly would not be an ideal fit. Travel distance was identified as the primary concern. It was also noted that both the conference and Waverly–Shell Rock have indicated that the alignment may not be the best fit. The presentation ended at 1:02PM.

**Representing Upper Iowa Conference:** Shane Wahls, Superintendent, Clayton Ridge and Wendy Meyer, Attorney, Lane & Waterman LLP. The presentation began at 1:03PM. It was noted that Waverly–Shell Rock did not request placement in the Upper Iowa Conference, and therefore the conference does not view this as a viable option. Meyer referenced that Iowa law directs the committee to consider conference placements that are beneficial to all students. It was further noted that the Upper Iowa Conference serves approximately 8,300 students. Wahls highlighted concerns regarding disparities in school size, potential disruption to conference stability, and the logistical challenges that could result from realignment. Overall, the importance of maintaining the stability of the Upper Iowa Conference was emphasized. The presentation ended at 1:13PM.

**Representing WaMaC Conference:** Nathan Levin, Attorney, F3 Law and Matt Thede, Athletic Director, Mount Vernon. The presentation began at 1:14PM. It was noted that Waverly–Shell Rock has been denied membership in the WaMaC Conference on two previous occasions, and while this represents a third request, the underlying factors have not changed. Concerns were raised regarding the potential impact on smaller schools within the WaMaC, including competitive imbalance. It was also noted that Waverly–Shell Rock was previously voted out of the NEIC, and questions were raised due to size disparity and student conduct. Additional concerns included scheduling challenges, with an example cited of West Delaware being unable to fill a full varsity girls basketball schedule, as well as broader enrollment issues. Travel distance and its impact were also identified as key considerations. It was further noted that the addition of Waverly would affect access to conference honors and recognition for students due to more schools being involved. The presentation ended at 1:22PM.

**Presentation from Impacted School Districts (Waverly):**

**Representing Allamakee CSD:** Jay Mathis, Superintendent, Allamakee and Brian Hilsabeck, Athletic Director, Allamakee. The presentation began at 1:22pm. They noted that Waverly–Shell Rock is both significantly larger in enrollment and located at a greater distance. It was also mentioned that Waukon currently has limited interaction with Waverly–Shell Rock, participating together only in boy’s golf. The presentation ended at 1:23PM.

**Representing Charles City CSD:** Dana Sullivan, Athletic Director, Charles City and Brian Burnight, Superintendent, Charles City. The presentation began at 1:23pm. Shorter travel distances were noted as a positive for creation of a conference including Waverly, but enrollment differences remain significant. The district expressed satisfaction with its current conference. While there is respect for Waverly–Shell Rock and its administration, it was noted that Waverly is much larger. The district competes with Waverly–Shell Rock when possible but faces challenges due to the size difference. The presentation ended at 1:25PM.

**Representing Howard-Winneshiek CSD:** Kris Einck, Superintendent, Howard-Winneshiek and Alison Holton, Board President, Howard-Winneshiek. The presentation began at 1:25PM. It was stated that the Upper Iowa Conference (UIC) is not an appropriate fit when considering enrollment differences. Concerns were expressed about ensuring schools are placed in conferences that better align with their size and competitive level. A recommendation was made that Waverly–Shell Rock be placed in the WaMaC Conference. It was also emphasized that decisions should prioritize what is best for students, acknowledging that some students may be impacted regardless of the outcome. The presentation ended at 1:31PM.

**Representing New Hampton CSD:** Erik Smith, Superintendent, New Hampton. The presentation began at 1:32PM. Maintaining a competitive balance within the conference was emphasized. It was noted that the presence of larger or more competitive schools could place others in a noncompetitive position, and that the conference would be more competitive overall without them. The presentation ended at 1:34PM.

**Representing North Fayette Valley CSD:** Joe Griffith, Athletic Director, North Fayette Valley. The presentation began at 1:34pm. It was stated that Waverly–Shell Rock is too large in enrollment compared to current conference members, particularly given the district’s own declining enrollment. Representatives emphasized the effort that has gone into building a stable conference in the UIC and expressed concern that proposed changes could disrupt local decision-making. The presentation ended at 1:35PM.

**Closing Remarks from Waverly CSD:** Brady Weber, Principal, Waverly, and Austin Cole, Activities Director, Waverly. Closing remarks began at 1:35PM. Representatives acknowledged the challenges facing the district and emphasized the need to secure a conference home. They requested a solution that supports long-term success, takes enrollment size into consideration, and provides stability moving forward. Closing remarks ended at 1:38PM.

**The committee recessed for a break at 1:38PM and reconvened at 1:48PM.**

**Committee Member Questions began at 1:49PM.**

Fonley stated that each group that presented may be called up for further questions.

**The committee called Waverly CSD for questions.** Representing Waverly CSD: Brady Weber, Principal, Waverly, and Austin Cole, Activities Director, Waverly. Crozier asked about the reasons Waverly–Shell Rock was previously denied entry into the WaMaC Conference. Representatives cited enrollment size and travel as primary factors. Enrollment projections were noted, with BEDS figures declining from approximately 539 to 368 over a 10 year period. It was also mentioned that Waverly Christian is opening, though overall projections indicate no significant impact. Watson noted that Waverly–Shell Rock listed three potential alignment scenarios but did not include specific schools for a newly formed conference. Representatives stated this was intentional to avoid creating confusion, emphasizing that their focus was on identifying solutions, with the understanding that legal pathways could be pursued if necessary. When asked about potential competitiveness in the MVC, it was stated that the margins are too narrow for Waverly–Shell Rock to be a viable fit. Representatives reiterated that enrollment projections do not indicate growth.

**The committee called the Mississippi Valley Conference.** Representing Mississippi Valley Conference: Mitch Gross, High School Principal, Iowa City West. Crozier asked

where Waverly–Shell Rock would best be placed. The representative indicated the WaMaC Conference is the most appropriate fit.

**The committee called the Upper Iowa Conference.** Representing the Upper Iowa Conference: Wendy Meyer, Attorney, Lane & Waterman LLP. Durflinger asked Meyer whether Iowa Code addresses decisions related to conference structure and whether the NEIC could still exist. It was stated that additional research would be needed to determine this.

**The committee called the WaMaC Conference.** Representing the WaMaC Conference: Nathan Levin, Attorney, F3 Law and Matt Thede, Athletic Director, Mount Vernon. Crozier asked whether Cedar Rapids serves as a central hub for the WaMaC Conference. It was noted that, following the departure of some eastern schools and the addition of Grinnell (2022–2023), the geographic center has shifted closer to Vinton. It was noted that the travel distance between Grinnell and Waverly–Shell Rock is similar (approximately 1 hour and 16 minutes). However, representatives emphasized that enrollment size and competitive balance were key factors in Grinnell’s acceptance, not solely travel distance. The ideal BEDS range was described as being somewhere in the middle of current membership. Durflinger asked whether alternative divisional structures could be considered if Waverly–Shell Rock were added. It was noted that this would require discussion among all conference members. Watson asked about concerns regarding larger schools within the WaMaC Conference. Representatives acknowledged that some schools, such as CCA may be outgrowing the conference, but noted that adjustments have been made over time. Fonley asked whether current enrollment discrepancies are manageable. It was noted that some schools have successfully transitioned to larger conferences after outgrowing smaller ones.

**The committee had no questions for Allamakee CSD.**

**The committee had no questions for Charles City CSD.**

**The committee had no questions for Howard-Winneshiek CSD.**

**The committee had no questions for New Hampton CSD.**

**The committee had no questions for North Fayette Valley CSD.**

**Clarification of Next Steps and Notification Process:**

Fonley stated that the committee’s goal is to begin deliberations and reach a decision today. If a decision cannot be reached, the committee will reconvene at a later time. Final documentation is expected to be completed within a few weeks following a decision. It was noted that, per Iowa Code, a formal notification letter will initiate a 60-day appeal

period if those impacted wish to appeal any decision to the Director of the Iowa Department of Education.

**Committee deliberation on Decorah's application began at 2:10PM.**

Adam Riley (Decorah) and Barb Schwamman (Osage, Riceville) were recused from discussion regarding Decorah's application. Fonley explained that the first consideration the committee must act on is whether to approve or deny Decorah's request for the creation of a new conference. The committee discussed Decorah's proposal to create a new conference involving the schools represented at the meeting. Members considered the level of interest from the proposed schools, the fact that several schools expressed opposition, and whether Decorah should be directed to continue discussions with those schools through a traditional process. Committee members discussed travel distance, instructional time, comparable programs, competitive balance, enrollment differences, long-term stability, and the impact on schools that may be moved unwillingly. Several members noted concerns about placing schools into a conference they did not wish to join, while others noted that Decorah's proposed alignment appeared to provide reasonable travel and that many of the schools already compete with Decorah. Crozier asked Keating to provide background on the history of conference realignment. Keating explained that past realignment matters were guided by Chapter 37 and generally involved mediation after a school was denied entry into a conference. He noted that prior processes focused on reaching agreement and that final decisions could be appealed to the Director. Members also discussed whether the committee had authority to create a new conference, whether a decision was required this year, and whether Decorah should further engage the proposed schools before action was taken.

**Motion to accept Decorah's application to create a new conference beginning with the 2027- 2028 school year with schools including Allamakee, Charles City, Howard-Winneshiek, New Hampton, North Fayette Valley, and Osage by Durflinger, seconded by Jorth.**

A roll call vote was taken by Fonley.

**Ayes:** Crozier, Durflinger, Jorth, Lambert

**Nays:** Boyle, Clark, Cook, Fonley, Girsch, Lamm, Paul, Ruffridge, Watson

**Motion failed, 4-9. Decorah's request for the creation of a conference is denied.**

Four conference options were presented for consideration. The committee discussed the relative merits of each option. It was noted that central geographic location can provide scheduling advantages and reduce travel burden. One option was identified as favorable due to geographic proximity and existing scheduling relationships. The committee discussed that certain conferences do not appear to be an appropriate fit based on

enrollment size. This narrowed the viable options to two conferences, with one being viewed as more favorable due to travel considerations. Travel distance was identified by several members as a primary factor in determining placement. It was noted that one conference option presents significant travel demands, with average travel times exceeding acceptable limits. Members discussed the balance between travel distance and competitive equity. Some indicated that travel should be prioritized, while others supported options that better align size and competitive ability, even if travel is greater. Concerns were also raised regarding the impact of placement on existing conference members, including competitive balance and socioeconomic disparities.

**Motion to place Decorah in the Upper Iowa Conference beginning with the 2027-2028 school year by Jorth, seconded by Girsch.**

A roll call vote was taken by Fonley.

**Ayes:** Cook, Girsch, Jorth, Lambert

**Nays:** Boyle, Clark, Crozier, Durflinger, Fonley, Lamm, Paul, Ruffridge, Watson

**Motion failed, 4-9.**

**Motion to place Decorah in the WaMaC Conference beginning with the 2027-2028 school year by Durflinger, seconded by Ruffridge.**

A roll call vote was taken by Fonley.

**Ayes:** Boyle, Clark, Cook, Fonley, Lamm, Ruffridge, Paul, Watson

**Nays:** Crozier, Durflinger, Girsch, Jorth, Lambert

**Motion passed, 8-5. The committee recommends placement of Decorah into the WaMaC conference to begin competition in the 2027-28 school year.**

**Committee deliberation on Waverly's Application began at 3:20PM.**

Adam Riley (Decorah) and Brent Cook (Dubuque Senior) were recused from discussion regarding Waverly's application.

The committee considered placement options for Waverly–Shell Rock, identifying the Mississippi Valley Conference (MVC) and the WaMaC Conference as the two primary options.

**Motion to place Waverly in the WaMaC Conference beginning with the 2027-2028 school year by Paul, seconded by Crozier.**

A roll call vote was taken by Fonley.

**Ayes:** Boyle, Clark, Crozier, Durflinger, Fonley, Girsch, Jorth, Lambert, Lamm, Ruffridge, Paul, Schwamman, Watson.

**Nays:** None

**Motion passed unanimously, 13-0. The committee places Waverly into the WaMaC Conference to begin competition in the 2027-28 school year.**

**With no further business, Clark motioned to adjourn, second by Schwamman and approved unanimously at 3:27PM.**

Kylee Walker  
Recorder