

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE

The Board of Finance held a regular on Thursday, February 23, 2017 in the Council Chambers at the Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT. Chairman John Godin called the meeting to order at 7:31pm.

Present: James Gaston, John Godin, Aaron Carlson (7:49), Kelley Johnson, Mark Boland. Absent: Sandy Roussas

Also Present: Finance Director Robert Tait, School Superintendent Dr. Joseph Erardi, Business Director Newtown Public Schools Ron Bienkowski, Financial Analyst Newtown Public Schools Tanja Vadas, Board of Ed Chair Keith Alexander, Newtown High School Principal Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Director of Pupil Personnel Deborah Peterson, Legislative Council Members Dan Wiedemann, Judit DeStefano, Board of Ed Members Andrew Clure, Michelle Embree Ku, Rebekah Harriman-Stites, John Vouros, 7 members of the public and 2 members of the press.

VOTER COMMENT – None.

COMMUNICATIONS – Email communications received regarding BOE budget. (Attachment A) Ms. Johnson shared communication regarding purchasing agent discussion. (Attachment B)

MINUTES – Mr. Gaston moved to approve the minutes of the Public Hearing on February 16, 2017 meeting. Mr. Boland seconded, motion unanimously approved. (Mr. Boland and Ms. Johnson abstained.) Mr. Gaston moved to approve the minutes of the meeting on February 16, 2017. Mr. Boland seconded, motion unanimously approved.

FIRST SELECTMAN REPORT: None.

FINANCE DIRECTORS REPORT – Mr. Tait distributed the recent S & P ratings report. (Attachment C) Last week he had a conference call with S&P. We have maintained AAA rating. Strong positions and framework noted in the report. Mr. Gaston asked about having a meeting with Moody's. Mr. Tait replied no, in order to save some money just go with one rating agency at this time as advised by financial advisor. Mr. Tait would be happy to answer questions after reviewing the report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Board of Education 2017 – 2018 Budget

Dr. Erardi shared the enrollment projections (Attachment D), recent testimonies (Attachment E), and Dalio Foundation Grant announcement (Attachment F). Dr. Erardi and Mr. Alexander acknowledged the work of the grant writer for achieving the Dalio Foundation grant to Newtown Public Schools in the amount of \$145,000 to support the social worker and psychologist at Reed Intermediate School during the 2017-18 academic year. The budget can now be reduced by that cost. Mr. Bienkowski said that there is now a healthy fund balance of \$472,000. Mr. Godin commented that he has received positive feedback. Mr. Gaston asked for more detail on the source of the \$472,000 balance. Dr. Erardi explained that cost avoidance and cost control are main contributors.

Dr. Erardi noted that Special Ed costs are going up, but expenses are under control. Pupil services and mediated services was discussed. Ms. Peterson explained that they use existing year actuals to project next year's budget. Dr. Erardi said that increases include the number of students that qualify for special programs. Mr. Godin asked about how costs are contained yet still fulfill the needs of the students. Ms. Peterson explained that she works in depth the staff to understand the needs of the students, develop positive relationships with parents. They look to meet the needs within the district. Ms. Johnson asked about why we are reclassifying. Ms. Peterson explained that it is not a reclassification, but adhering to state-wide classification. Dr. Erardi pointed out that the number of students in these programs has increased, there have been a wider range and more students have been identified, example at the high school. Mr. Gaston said that there are multiple staff involved in this thorough project. Dr. Erardi gave the example of a category of behavioral therapist, stays with the student, autistic spectrum, that therapist has a behavioral analyst. Those roles did not exist years ago.

Dr. Rodrigue discussed the Possible Computer Science Pathways. (Attachment G) These programs offer more technology to students. Ms. Johnson asked about AP exam possibilities. Dr. Rodrigue said there is more interest by students each year. Ms. Johnson asked about maker-space opportunities for students. Dr. Rodrigue said that there is a program at the high school involving maker-space as a pilot program gaining more participation.

Mr. Godin asked about the enrollment in the high school. Dr. Erardi said that we are prepared for high school enrollment - going forward it will be static, then a continual drop. Significant drop in the intermediate school currently.

Mr. Gaston commended on the state mandate and high school ranking. Brief discussion of ranking. NHS is ranked 18th or 14th depending on ranking, fewest dollars per student was noted.

Mr. Godin initiated the conversation about bus transportation. Mr. Gaston asked about ramifications of 3 to 2 tier. Dr. Erardi said that the board will talk about school start times. The cost would be increased from 3 to 2 tier, but they do not have all the data yet. He will pose the question to find out and get back to the board. Mr. Godin asked for the report to be sent digitally. Mr. Boland asked about how ridership is calculated. Mr. Bienkowski said that the counts are taken at the school as students exit the bus in the morning and enter the bus in the afternoon. Mr. Boland felt it was important to gather the information per stop. Dr. Erardi is looking to improve upon that. Mr. Boland referred to the budget as flat for

transportation. He asked about grant application. Mr. Bienkowski said that the buses do not qualify for a rebate because they are relatively new. Ms. Johnson referred to the obligation of providing a seat for each student. Dr. Erardi referred to the calculations of oversubscription. Fuel costs were discussed, Mr. Bienkowski is looking to keep under \$2 gallon. Mr. Carlson expressed that though there is a push for cost reduction in general, be careful of the safety risks. He has fielded two complaints from parents who saw bus drivers driving at unsafe speeds.

Regarding building maintenance projects, Mr. Carlson asked about HVAC in Middle Gate, why is Middle Gate on the schedule? Mr. Bienkowski said that it will make it compatible with other schools. Dr. Erardi will provide from Mr. Faiella what was put out into future years. Mr. Gaston asked about the prioritization process for safety issues. Dr. Erardi said that listing a safety issue out 2 years does not mean it is unsafe today. Mr. Faiella will provide priority listing. Decommission water pressure vessel for Head of Meadow, high priority. Mr. Bienkowski explained that an old pressurized tank is there now that needs to be replaced due to Department of Health to commission water supply and they will not recertify it. Mr. Gaston asked about Building Professional Services, radon and lead testing. Mr. Bienkowski said that is a state requirement. Regarding expansion and architectural reviews, Mr. Bienkowski said that is a built in contingency (example of heavy snow on buildings). Mr. Godin asked about adding custodial staff to Sandy Hook, did they look at reallocate staff. Dr. Erardi said that there is no overabundance of staff to reallocate. Dr. Erardi said due to the size and maintenance of the school, additional custodial is needed.

Mr. Boland asked about non-certified staff increase. Dr. Erardi said that refers to the PBT process. Mr. Boland asked about difference in employee benefits. Mr. Bienkowski pointed out the certified salary line.

Mr. Godin said that they will meet again Monday, he requested that they please get questions by Monday. Deliberations may start Monday and Thursday.

Voter Comments: Lynn Edwards, 3 Sand Hill Road, Sandy Hook – response on transportation, their bus was so early, 95% of the time her children are not on the bus, walking is not an option, the route is dark and dangerous. Not having sidewalks is a real issue, longer bus rides will result in fewer kids riding the bus. Take into consideration the length of time it takes to ride the bus.

Announcements – None

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:55 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
June Sgobbo, Clerk