

## OUUSD BOARD MEETING

Via Zoom

September 9, 2020

Present:

Board Members: Angela Colbeth, Danielle Corti, Carol Cottrell, Melissa Gordon, Timm Judas, Chelsey Perry,

Administration: Emilie Knisley, Bruce Williams, Allison Kidder, Morgan Moore, Skip Barrett

Others: Janet Mitchell, Marvin Harrison, Claude Phipps, Monique Priestly, and other members of the public

- I. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Danielle Corti, Chair. Those present were welcomed, and the protocols of Zoom meetings were reviewed.
- II. The agenda was reviewed. The approval of minutes will be postponed until next meeting. It is possible that an Executive Session may be needed.
- III. Public Comment—None
- IV. Budget
  - A. The budget did not pass. After a poll of the Board members, general consensus is to leave Provision II in; being creative with some of staff in schools and in the SU office, and the principal position open at BES; building projects at SU office that can possibly wait?; summer meals through December 31<sup>st</sup> or until money runs out; releasing a message from the Board as to what cuts might be made and how they would impact students and community.
  - B. Emilie Knisley: The Board got a short term note for cash flow. Under state statute, the Board can operate under 87% of last year's budget. Now there is about \$3 million difference from what we proposed and the 87%. The Schools cannot access full allotment from the Education Fund. The towns have to set interim tax rate for local taxes. Billing to towns goes out at that interim rate. Any money collected cannot be given to the school. The district has to borrow money, minus the 25% from the Ed Fund. In terms of cash flow, the note taken out will take the District to October 1. The District has applied for another gap loan, which is being considered by the bank. We will get a disbursement from the Education Fund (25% of the regular allotment).
    1. Carol Cottrell: Do gap loans cover other districts? Emilie Knisley: no, this is just for OUUSD.
    2. C. Cottrell: if the budget had passed, would you be asking for loans for each school or for one large loan for the entire SU? E. Knisley: This is done for each school district within the SU.
    3. Melissa Gordon: what would happen if they won't loan us the money? E. Knisley: if they wouldn't lend us the money, we would be asking the governor for some emergency money or to allow a fronting of money from the Education Fund. There is nothing in the statute that answers this question. This is not very common.

4. Timm Judas: Is the interest difference about the same on the tax anticipation loan and gap loan? E. Knisley: Yes.

5. T. Judas: when a budget goes down, what extra cost do we have to cover printing, town clerk, postage? Danielle Corti: The voting cost for the combined two votes was just over \$8,000.

C. Danielle Corti: Marvin Harrison is asking when we typically get town money. E.

Knisley: We will start seeing it in October. D. Corti: Do we always use the same bank? E.

Knisley: this bank is a little larger, and we might have to borrow \$9 million.

D. E. Knisley: in terms of any changes in staffing levels, the collective bargaining agreements dictate any changes there. A 10-day notice period is required for any changes for anyone in the teacher's contract. A 45-day notice is required for support staff. Any changes now would impact employees, who are working right now in the schools. There is seniority to take into consideration, so it can have a domino effect. Some are on administrative contracts, which may be for one year or multiple years.

E. D. Corti: The Board is interested in keeping Provision II. With the summer meals program, what is the impact on the budget? Can we still do Provision II? E. Knisley: Because of the extension of the summer school program, it is looking like we can take over \$79,000 off the budget. This assumes funding through December 31<sup>st</sup>.

1. Bruce Williams: This is a percentage of an estimate. With the budget failure, we will be past the October 8<sup>th</sup> deadline for applying for Provision II. Rosie at the Agency believes the Federal Government will extend the deadlines. The reimbursement on the summer program was robust, so there is additional revenue. The meal program from March through August is in the black.

2. D. Corti: If we go to Provision II in the middle of the year, can we seamlessly do that? B. Williams: Yes, we can transition from the summer food program to Provision II.

3. T. Judas: Have we had a good response from people filling out paperwork for free and reduced lunch? B. Williams: Oxbow has had a better than usual response. We continue to emphasize the importance of that. T. Judas and D. Corti: There will be about an \$80,000 savings for the Summer food program to be continued until December 31<sup>st</sup> and then Provision II from there on.

F. D. Corti: We are looking creatively at staffing in the buildings and in the SU. E. Knisley: A 1% reduction in Ed spending is \$123,000. We can't RIF 20% of everyone. We would have to RIF a whole person or half a person. The Paras are working 5 days a week with students on IEP's. To shuffle OESU staff, it would need to be discussed in Executive Session. Some OESU employees are grant funded. There are no paras who don't have impacts on kids.

G. Allison Kidder: We do time study documentation to see how support staff are being used. Some are used in a general ed capacity and some in a special ed capacity. If we make decisions that impact students on IEP's, we could find ourselves in legal difficulties. We did the last time study in February of last year. We have learned how to do a better job on how we use our support staff. E. Knisley: the COVID factor is also to be considered—all the COVID related tasks.

1. C. Cottrell: Will there be any reimbursement for the support staff that is doing COVID related work? E. Knisley: We will put in a claim for reimbursement.
2. Morgan Moore: All support staff are assigned to IEP services. The only general ed services are bus monitors.
3. Skip Barrett: We are not able to group kids together for services now. With COVID, we need more recess coverage because they can't be together. Five staff have had to wait for COVID tests because of their relationships. Some schools have hired full time subs because they have anticipated this. Right now, do not have enough staff at BES.
4. Melissa Gordon: I have not heard anyone in the community talking about cutting staff. T. Judas: We also need to have all the information and take everything into consideration. Is it the plan that we will pull subs from the support staff? E. Knisley: The priority of every school in VT is to do what we need to do to keep schools open. We don't have the bodies. We've been spending hours to be sure we can pay people on October 1<sup>st</sup>. We don't know if teachers will need to be out. Many people don't want to sub because of the risk.

H. BES position. E. Knisley: We have a posting for an interim position. Skip Barrett has graciously been helping out. There are licensed personnel who have applied and are going through the vetting process. We can talk more in Executive Session

I. Are there any building projects that can wait at the SU building? B. Williams: No, we are done.

J. We will be releasing a statement to the public as to cuts. D. Corti asked each Board member what they have gathered from the community.

1. M. Gordon: The consistent message was that the OESU beautiful building has gotten the community charged up and is symbolic of lack of trust in the OESU. Board members haven't done a good job getting people's input so they feel they are part of the decision-making process of the SU. Also, Act 46 had an expectation of savings from the merger. To see such a huge increase in the budget came as unacceptable. Those are the two things we can't do anything about to change our budget. She also heard frustration from community members that ballots were not sent to them on the second vote.
2. Chelsey Perry: She heard similar things as Melissa. Voters feel that they don't get to be involved with the OESU budget. The new building is a concern.
3. Carol Cottrell: Heard basic complaint about the building. Perhaps the information was not well shared, and there was not a lot of community feedback, so it's a sore subject. Act 46 is a bitter pill to follow. There was a strong support for Provision II. We are in a situation where there isn't much we can do. We need to have a good faith attempt to meet the anxiety of taxpayers over the 8% increase. When this is all over, we need to do a better job at communicating with our community. Our job as Board members is to balance the needs of the schools with the ability of our constituents to pay. There is nobody that doesn't care about the school and the kids. We need to be more responsive.

4. Timm Judas: Same thing. There was concern over the 5% increase at OESU level and the building. The other piece was why are we even opening? Some said they hate OUUSD, and we should have left it like it was. We need to get information out better. People are fearful of the opening. People are upset at the OESU. We need to remember that change takes 3-5 years to implement.

5. Angela Colbeth: Most feedback is regarding the move and the office. If we were shut down, shouldn't we have saved some money? Lots of worry about financial stability. Some shared worries that if schools close and we have to go to remote, how will families manage? A lot of people are afraid of the future and what's going to happen.

6. D. Corti: Most of the same thing. She didn't realize the depth of the frustration regarding the building. Knowing what the Board knew when making the decision, maybe wouldn't have changed it. There is frustration with OUUSD and Act 46. There are concerns that the Newbury school building might be closed. D. Corti would not like to see a reduction in the budget of more than 1%. She fears for what they would be cutting.

7. T. Judas: Everything talked about tonight would impact student learning.

8. C. Cottrell: Is hesitant to pick an arbitrary percentage. She thinks we should look at what we have, where our money is going, and if we can find savings anywhere. Personnel is the place where the vast majority is spent. We should be looking at the programs. The budget should be the bare minimum so we can support it.

9. D. Corti: The Board should not be overseeing every single thing in every single school. We should be overseeing Supt. Knisley, and she will oversee every building.

10. M. Gordon: What is your definition of fluff? C. Cottrell: We should not have a budget that has any padding. We need to decide if this is a bare bones budget. T. Judas: We can't get so caught up in the minutia that we can't get to the decisions we need to make.

11. E. Knisley: Believes that Act 46 has caused more pain than help. However, do people in Newbury and Bradford have a good sense of how Act 46 works?

M. Gordon: Believes that the Board has to prove to the community that Act 46 works. E. Knisley: the timing on the building is less than ideal. There is a shortage of buildings in the area. The air quality in the building where the SU was previously located was causing health problems, and there were safety issues.

12. D. Corti: Is ready to take leadership of passing the budget. Feels there is not fluff in the budget. Not great timing. We need to bring the conversations from the community to the OESU Board.

13. T. Judas: A year-round budgeting group will help solve some problems.

14. C. Cottrell: From the community: a good will gesture would be that the OESU staff would not take an increase.

15. B. Williams: There are some other savings in addition to the over \$79,000 from the summer food program.

16. E. Knisley: Potential savings: food service savings. Some of the independent contracts, one of which would save about \$10,000. Looking at the funding in the budget for \$54,000 for the Bradford after school program. This is an operational savings for a year. Possibly revenue coming from the sale of Boltonville. About \$28,000. Need to look at tuition students at Oxbow. The number is up a little bit. Some of the students may go to River Bend, so they would get part of tuition. Possibly a savings in assessments from OESU. It's possible the Board might decide to offer early retirement incentive to teachers. B. Williams: possible savings of about \$20,000 for alternative funding of a bathroom at River Bend. A. Kidder: can't see a place where a special ed student has shifted out and therefore doesn't need a para.

17. T. Judas: Maybe non-union or administrators would not take an increase. E. Knisley: All administrative contracts have negotiated an increase. A. Kidder: Not all administrators have taken an increase this year. E. Knisley: There are many employees at OESU. D. Corti: Has calculated a roughly potential \$171,000 savings, which is over 1%.

V. Building Administrators

- A. Skip Barrett: A decision was made on the BES after school program during the summer because of space concerns. Parents were told that it would be reconsidered after first trimester.
- B. Morgan Moore: The NES staff is doubly assigned right now with direct instruction and remote. Support staff is at capacity, and OESU services are extremely valuable right now.
- C. Lori Blood: An opportunity exists when we start claiming from COVID funding. A request will go to the state to find out what they will cover. The money would go into the general fund to cover expenses already paid.
- D. Janet Mitchell: How much have we been awarded for CARES funding? E. Knisley: There is an allocation, but the claiming process is complicated. It is all reimbursement.
- E. Bruce Williams: He has been through some difficult budgeting seasons. Regarding Act 46: You are primed and ready to move forward with a Leadership team that is incredibly talented, a Principal leadership group that has bought into this, and a teaching staff that is receptive and has bought into that future.

VI. Public Comment

- A. Claude Phipps: Comments from the community weren't about numbers, they were about the emotional issues. We need to find a way to deal with the emotional issues.
- B. Monique Priestley: There is a transparency piece. Minutes from the last meeting are still not on the website. A Community info session will help the relationship with the community
- C. Marvin Harrison: Some of these ideas were on the table in April, and here it is September.

VII. Next meeting Agenda Items: Committees. Possible year-round budget. Articles of Agreement. Communication.

VIII. Two meetings a month were discussed and thought to be valuable. It was suggested having one with the Supt. and Asst. Supt. and Lori Blood and then the other one for other types of business.

1. D. Corti looked at trainings for the Board, and the suggested dates weren't going to work out.
2. M. Gordon: would like to focus on increasing participation in this vote and have a Town Meeting style vote, perhaps outside, so we can leave with a budget.
3. D. Corti: We would like to have an informational meeting either this weekend or early next week before our next meeting. It would be good to have it outside to meet with voters in a less formal setting. She also has been thinking about having a Town Meeting style vote. E. Knisley is waiting to hear back from the Sec. of State's office to see if the Governor's directive would allow this.
4. C. Cottrell: Is concerned about meeting in large groups. Maybe have a question and answer session on WYKR where people could call in. This would be safer. It would give the community the opportunity to ask the questions.
5. D. Corti: would like to do a Facebook Live.
6. T. Judas: Can the high school students interview their parents? How can we give voice to all our community—the haves and the have nots. E. Knisley: is hesitant about getting the kids wrapped up in the stress of the politics. T. Judas: What about sending a questionnaire home with the students? M. Gordon: We need to encourage community members to vote. D. Corti will call WYKR to see about having a Q&R. She will also set up a Facebook Live as well as setting up a face to face outdoors somewhere. T. Judas: wants to be sure to include the retired community who don't have a student in the school. C. Cottrell: Each time 60% of those who voted, voted against the budget. T. Judas: We should use List Serves.

IX. Executive Session

A. Motion by T. Judas, seconded by A. Colbeth to enter Executive Session at 8:50 PM, pursuant to VSA. Sec. 313 a. (1) Negotiations after making a specific finding that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body, or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage. The Board was accompanied by Supt. Emilie Knisley and Asst. Supt. Bruce Williams.

B. The Board exited Executive Session at 9:08 PM

X. Action—None taken

XI. Further Board General Discussions

A. Why are we still talking about cutting when everything discussed from the Board members' reports expressed more of an emotional feeling with the community?

B. Roughly 60% of the votes were against the last two budgets. We need to look at possible savings. We are not considering an early retirement package.

C. There is a feeling that teachers are not feeling supported by the community and are feeling down. Lack of participation by the overall public and accurate representation is not happening within our communities. Communications need to be better.

D. Agree with not offering early retirement, addressing emotional community problems of not feeling they are involved and part of conversations.

E. Keeping the savings through cuts to \$79,000 from Provision 2 and the independent contract.

F. The Board needs to commit to committees, and that they have vision, organization, and follow through and acknowledge the hours that it will take for the Board and community members to do that work.

G. In particular: Communications Committee, Year-Round Budget Committee.

H. Some concern about the roles and responsibilities within committees and that they do not become just a "Time Sink"

I. The RAB Board is a good example of how an advisory committee might run: By-Laws and clear mission.

J. Would we gain anything from quarterly "listening sessions"?

K. Agreement that two meetings a month for the time being, with the goal being that the committees take on the bulk of the work that could then be part of a reporting out.

L. Clarity in committees charge, and that they work alongside the Board

M. The Board is advising the Superintendent to not support the independent contractor contract.

N. The Board is committed to meeting twice a month, committees, and reaching out and improving communication with the community at large: Utilizing face-to-face, Live events, List Serves, and other means

O. The Board would like to acknowledge our OUUSD families, educators, school administrators, and OESU Administrators and personnel for doing an outstanding job and hard work through these tough times

XII. Motion by Melissa Gordon, seconded by Angela Colbeth to adjourn the meeting at 9:44.  
Motion voted on and approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted:

Nancy Perkins, Minutes Clerk

**The minutes are in draft format and are unofficial until formally approved by the Board at a subsequent meeting.**