

## OUUSD BOARD MEETING

Via Zoom December

3, 2020

Present:

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

Administration: Emilie Knisley, Bruce Williams, Morgan Moore, Jean Wheeler, Robin Wozny, Marla Ianello, Brian Emerson

Others: Andrea Dennis, Emily Ross, Lottie Page, Sarah Reinheimer, Marvin Harrison, Bud Haas, Andrew Gendron, Edith Fogarty, Skip Barrett, Amy Hayward, Marcia Tomlinson, Ted Pogacar, 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. Board Business
  - A. The agenda was reviewed and approved
  - B. Motion by Melissa Gordon, seconded by Angela Colbeth to approve the Board minutes of November 18, 2020. Motion voted on and approved with one abstention (Timm Judas)
  - C. Correspondence
    1. Danielle Corti has received a lot of emails from community members. Most have been asking for clarification.
      - A. An email was received from the Bradford/Newbury School Advisory Group saying they support the budget and will do what they can collectively and individually to help it be passed. Several recommendations included
        1. Schedule the next vote as soon as possible.
        2. New committees be put in place, especially the Budget/Finance committee, and begin meeting in December.
        3. Clear communications with the voters in the OUUSD district.
      - B. Another communication was received from Dan Perry III saying many of the same things. It has been posted on the website.
    2. D. Corti has also received communications via Facebook, which she is compiling.
  - D. Public Comment
    1. Several Newbury Elementary staff members gave a jointly prepared presentation
    2. A presentation was given by Bradford Elementary staff
    3. D. Corti gave heartfelt thanks to the NES and BES staffs for their presentations.

4. Timm Judas: stated that voting down a budget does nothing to work toward dissolution of the OUUSD. We need to put forth a budget that needs to get approved.
5. Melissa Gordon: feels like we have let our school communities down. She apologized to all the staff and students.
6. D. Corti: Tonight, as I listen to our educators, on top of the weight we are placing on them in asking them to educate our children, we are now asking them to educate our community. I hope our community realizes how lucky we are to have educators that can educate us. Thank you for coming and educating us and carrying that load.
7. Marvin Harrison: most of our group feels that you shouldn't cut anymore. Submit the same budget. Don't send ballots out to everyone. It's time to get a budget.
8. Bud Haas: Don't send ballots out to everyone in the community. Set the earliest date possible, have an in-person meeting at Oxbow, and you can come out of there with a budget.
9. Andrew Gendron: the main confusion in Newbury is that nobody can understand the extra million dollars. With transparency, we need to tell people what the extra \$1 million is in the budget.
  - a. Caitlyn: We need transparency and clarification in getting it out to the community. We shouldn't have any cuts to staff, especially now.
10. Edith Fogarty: thinks we should share the Board minutes out to each school so all the staff can see them. Push the information out to the schools, and then out to the community.
11. Skip Barrett: Only about 15%-16% of the homes in our towns are directly connected to the schools. We need a better and clearer way to reach out to get the word out.
12. Timm Judas: If people aren't attending our virtual meetings, they will not be filled in on issues. A group will be organizing, and part of their mission is to get the word out. We are trying many different ways, but there are still people that are not being reached.
13. Danielle Corti: a great deal of information is on the website.
14. Andrew Gendron: Maybe we need to try to get the information out in smaller chunks. Maybe we can have community events.
15. Amy Hayward: feels communication has been clear and the Board has made great effort. She thanked the Board for doing a lot.
16. Marcia Tomlinson: thinks that a good quarter of the voters don't do anything on line. Thanked the Board for meeting people in person. She feels there is a loss of connection in the community. Somehow, we have got to get the community to "see" the schools again.
17. Timm Judas: would people go to the library to see a live stream? Socially distanced?

18: Marcia Tomlinson: We have got to get folks loving our schools again even when they don't have family involved.

III. Budget

- A. Carol Cottrell: doesn't think we should cut anything. We need to do a better job communicating. She feels this budget is reasonable. We need to keep programs in place.
- B. Motion by Timm Judas, seconded by Melissa Gordon to approve a proposed budget of \$16,780,183 and the warning. After discussion, T. Judas and M. Gordon rescinded the motion and the second.
- C. Motion by T. Judas, seconded by M. Gordon to approve a proposed budget of \$16,780,183 with per equalized pupil spending of \$17,741 which is a 5.5% increase in per pupil spending over the current year and the warning as amended to read January 13, 2021 as the date of the budget vote. Motion voted on and approved unanimously.
  - 1. The polling location will be changed to the Newbury Elementary School.  
Morgan Moore: We can do a full remote day. Bradford Academy Auditorium will be the polling place in Bradford.
- D. An Information Meeting was set for January 4<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM via Zoom. It is not possible to have a meeting at Oxbow, even outdoors, because it's against the Governor's Executive Order that we not have a gathering of more than one household.
- E. By consensus, it was decided to have wording on the warning that if you wish to receive an absentee ballot, please call your respective Town Clerk
- F. Motion by Melissa Gordon, seconded by Angela Colbeth to approve the warning as presented. Motion voted on and approved unanimously.
  - 1. Motion by Melissa Gordon, seconded by Angela Colbeth to rescind the previous motion. Motion voted on and approved unanimously.
  - 2. Motion by Melissa Gordon, seconded by Angela Colbeth to approve the warning as clarified. Motion voted on and approved unanimously
- G. Danielle Corti: will plan to have the communications received and the statements read by the NES and the BES staff posted on the OUUSD website

IV. Financial Implications (Emilie Knisley)

- A. Cash Flow. We are not running the schools on 87% of the budget that we were given last year. We are allowed 25% of our typical money from the state. We are not allowed to have any local tax money. That means we have to borrow the difference from the 25% we get from the state and the 87%. As of this week, the OUUSD has borrowed a little over \$4 million. Interest is accruing and is estimated to be between \$87,500 and \$100,000. If a budget passes in January, there is a 30-day period before we get any money from the state until late February or early March. The current note we have from the bank will carry us through January. Then we will need to apply for another note from the bank. After a budget passes, the towns can release their funds after the 30-day reconsideration time has passed. We could not keep schools open and provide the things we are required to provide by state law at the 87% mark. We have cash flow challenges and cash flow constraints. Under terms of the collective bargaining

agreement, after a budget fails, we have 10 days to make decisions around RIF for staff. For support staff, we have a 45-day notice for RIF. If we continue with 87%, would be looking at:

1. Suspending transportation for students
2. Reduce programming to levels below the demands of the VT Educational Quality Standards
3. Large scale lay-offs of staff
4. Cuts to guidance, mental health and social services
5. Moving all schools to remote schooling to cut-down on expenses
6. Cut extracurricular activities and athletics

V. Board Decision Points

- A. Are cuts to current operations necessary at this time in order to adjust spending closer to 87%?
- B. At SU, staffing costs are below budget this year. We have been able to save about \$100,000 this year.
- C. If we keep trudging along at 87%, we hit a brick wall in March, and all of these 6 cuts listed above would need to be done.
- D. Carol Cottrell: Can we draw up RIF letters in case we have to use them? If we take away things like extra-curricular now, would that help? I think it would be a better message to the community that we understand that we have this obligation. We will not be asking for as much money in a loan because we are not doing X, Y, and Z. It might be prudent to pull in some of the things that we can pull in without affecting academic programs. I'm not suggesting that any staff be RIF'd in the next month and a half. We just need to be prepared. She emphasized that she does not advocate cutting staff.
- E. Ted Pogacar: While it might be prudent to make a contingency plan, if you look on School Spring, there were 70 jobs posted in the last 3 days. Telling a teacher ahead of time that they might get RIF'd might mean that they will leave the district, and then OUUSD will be left with openings in the middle of the year.

VI. Executive Session

- A. Motion by Melissa Gordon, seconded by Angela Colbeth to move into Executive Session at 7:03 PM pursuant to VSA 313. (a) (1) to discuss Contracts, after making a specific finding that premature general knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage. Motion voted on and approved unanimously. Accompanying the Board were the Supt., the Assistant Superintendent, and the Principals.
- B. The Board exited Executive Session at 7:31 PM

VII. Danielle Corti: The Board has made the decision not to take any action tonight. We will move forward in a cautious way and continue operations. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, if the budget doesn't pass, the Board will have no choice but to take significant action that will be impactful.

VIII. Public Comment—None

- IX. Danielle Corti thanked the people that came tonight, the teachers that teach the entire community, the administrators that have listed cuts that may have to be taken and then will show up at work tomorrow, going forward with a positive attitude.
- X. Motion by Angela Colbeth, seconded by Melissa Gordon to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 PM. 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.**