

OUUSD BOARD MEETING

Oxbow High School Theater and via Zoom

August 11, 2021

Present:

Board Members: Maegan Ballou, Angela Colbeth, Danielle Corti, Carol Cottrell, Chelsey Perry

Administration: Emilie Knisley, Randall Gawal, Linda Metcalf, Loretta Cruz

Others: Scott Labun, Tim Woodward, Sarah Rinehimer, Geraint Jones, Walter Cottrell, Tony Omeara, Bud Haas, and other members of the public

- I. The meeting was called to order at 5:31 PM by Danielle Corti, Chair. Those present were welcomed, and the protocols of Zoom meetings were reviewed.
- II. Informational Meeting
 - A. Financial Information
 1. Linda Metcalf: explained the surplus. There are Fund Balances, both unassigned and assigned. \$282,358 are in unassigned funds. The warning will ask the voters of the district for authorization to use the unassigned funds.
 2. Danielle Corti shared key points on voting rules. School districts are allowed to do a ballot vote. The Board will consider holding next week's meeting outside. The Board hopes that there will be a motion from the floor next week to vote by paper ballot. Scott Labun: asked if district meetings will always be at Oxbow. Danielle Corti: No, but this time Oxbow allowed the most space for social distancing. Tim Woodward: asked about plans in case of inclement weather.
 - B. Newbury Property for Outdoor Classroom
 3. D. Corti shared property listing and a map of the school to Checkerbury. Regarding liability of forest-based classrooms, VSBIT has assessed the property, and usage and their advice will be used to train teachers and staff on how to manage risks.
 1. Property Management and community involvement. D. Corti stated that the district will use the Low St. John Forest model. Bradford Elementary is now working on a grant to enable their students to walk to Low St. John Forest instead of having to be bused.
 2. Tax implications: Now \$210.80 in tax money comes to the town annually
 3. Could we bus students to another locality? Yes, but the cost per year in busing for the same amount of time, in 4 years, would total about \$47,000. At that rate, the cost saved in busing would offset the total cost of the property after 6 years.
 - a. Gates and signs will be put up to show this is school property.

Potentially there will be a lean-to structure erected to provide some shelter.

C. Teachers' Presentation on the importance of an Outdoor Classroom

1. Why use outdoor classrooms? Holistic Child Development. Develops confidence and self-esteem. Sense of place.
2. How Has This Space Been Used? Grades K-6 go to Forest School weekly. Harmony with self and nature. Community Projects and Stewardship. Interdisciplinary.
3. Professional Development and Safety. Devoted and informed staff. Research in support of outdoor classrooms.

III. Public Comments and Questions

- A. D. Corti: in answer to a question, the property would be owned by the district.
- B. Concern from community member on liability
- C. John Fogarty: question on right of way. D. Corti: will get information before next week.
- D. What would be the increase in our taxes? D. Corti: no tax increase. The money would be approved by voters to use \$68,000 in surplus funds. If not approved, there would need to be a separate article.
- E. Joanne/Tony Omeara: How can you all of a sudden find that much money when it was said this is an austere budget? D. Corti: this surplus is from 2 years ago. We don't find out about the surplus until the audit is complete.
- F. Walter Cottrell: The community is looking for examples of financial conservatism. There is no reason why this money can't be applied to new programs. In our trip to the top of Checkerbury, he was concerned that the diversity of that spot is minimal. It is an over-mature forest, a sterile environment. It makes him worry about the messages that the youth will be given. If they learn that cutting trees is bad, it will conflict with a lot of home environments. Only two classes are using the forest school curriculum. The others are just moving out of the classroom to do the same things they would do in the classroom. Why do you need this space when you have Montebello? It really isn't an obstacle to walk across to Montebello. The grants don't include any benefits offered by the Fish and Wildlife Dept.
- G. Scott Labun: Newbury has some of the lowest test scores in the state. We need to teach the kids to read and write. There are lots of places kids can have outdoor experiences, and there is no other place for kids to learn to read and write.
1. Sarah Rinehimer: Spending two hours a week outside doesn't feel like lost instruction time. It's a different environment for them.
- H. Loretta Cruz: This is an opportunity to connect with someone like Walter Cottrell. She would like Mr. Cottrell to be on the committee.
- I. D. Corti: There will be another informational meeting next week prior to the vote.
- J. D. Corti: suggested voters provide the Board with a list of questions, and they will do what they can to provide answers before next week's meeting.
- K. Jim Stevens: why is this piece so much better than any other piece of property? Let's put the \$68,000 toward something other than a land purchase.

L. John Fogarty: He is a licensed forester. It is hard to make the case that these 10 acres should be purchased. He likes getting kids outside, but would rather just having them run around and playing. Montebello is just across Route 5.

M. D. Corti: asked again for questions to be submitted, and she will try to have answers before next week's meeting.

IV. OUUSD Meeting

A. Agenda review. Linda Metcalf's financial presentation will be moved to earlier in the meeting. Questions in Correspondence from Sukie Knight have been answered.

B. Financial Report: Linda Metcalf

1. Gave a 4th quarter review. Shared any items that were over or under budget by more than \$10,000. She reminded all that the report doesn't include any offsets for revenues

C. Supt. Report and COVID-19 Update

1. Randall Gawal: Energy efficiency audits have been done in the buildings. Food service served 9,000 meals this summer through Bradford Elementary. Because of COVID funding, meals will be free to students this coming school year. Student Services had year-round programing, that was successful. Co-teaching cohort worked on planning and curriculum over the summer. OUUSD sent a number of teachers to the BEST Conference. Curriculum committees have been meeting all summer. Oxbow high school started the summer with a credit recovery program. 40 students participated in relationship/team building at Oxbow. RBCTC held heavy equipment training this summer. NES drainage project is well underway. A letter went out to everyone yesterday with COVID protocols. We are using guidance from the Dept. of Health and AOE. Masks and contact tracing will be in use at the beginning of the year.

V. Discussion

A. There is a possibility of an outdoor setting for next week's meeting. If we were to do a ballot vote, this vote would have to be cancelled and another meeting warned. This would push the vote out several months. If the meeting is moved outside, a paper ballot could be used. Voters could hold up a piece of paper showing how they are voting.

1. Carol Cottrell: If we move outdoors, what is the purpose of a paper ballot instead of raising hands? Could the length of time be extended for people to vote that evening? D. Corti: We would have a check-in desk for folks to check-in as a registered voter. They would be issued a piece of paper to vote. Voters can stay in their car, if they wish. C. Cottrell would like to not delay this vote.
2. Bud Haas: Didn't hear a lot of what was said at this meeting. Feels having voting in car is a little crazy.

B. Motion by Angela Colbeth, seconded by Meagan Ballou that we move to an outdoor setting for the meeting next week, weather permitting. Motion voted on and approved unanimously

C. Committees.

1. Community Engagement work is continuing. Facilities committee: two Board members: Danielle Corti and Timm Judas will serve.

D. Exchange Student Tuition Waiver: Motion by Carol Cottrell, seconded by Angela Colbeth to waive tuition for the exchange student from Germany for next year. Motion voted on and approved unanimously

VI. Action Items

A. Motion by Carol Cottrell, seconded by Angela Colbeth to authorize a third-party management group to review the trust funds and scholarship funds. Motion voted on and approved unanimously

B. Motion by Angela Colbeth, seconded by Carol Cottrell to authorize the Board chair to sign the Low Forest project completion letter. Motion voted on and approved unanimously

VII. Public Comment:

A. C. Cottrell asked that the audio be set up so others can hear better before next meeting.

A. Bud Haas: Regarding the tuition student, isn't there a policy that speaks to this? R.

Gawal: feels it's important to act on a case-by-case basis.

VIII. Motion by Maegan Ballou, seconded by Angela Colbeth to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 PM

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.