

Newtown Public Schools
BOE CFF/CIP/Facilities/Finance Sub Committee Agenda
March 16, 2023 – 5:30pm
BOE Conference Room

CALL TO ORDER

BUSINESS

Item 1 Approval of BOE CFF/CIP Minutes February 16, 2023

NEW BUSINESS

- Superintendent update
- Transportation update
- Non-Lapsing fund policy discussion
- Facilities Update
 - Hawley HVAC Update
- Financial Report and transfers

PUBLIC COMMENT

ADJOURNMENT

Newtown Board of Education
BOE CFF/CIP/Facilities/Finance Sub-Committee Minutes
February 16, 2023 6:00 p.m.

Call to Order: Mrs. Larkin called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Participants: Jennifer Larkin, Deborra Zukowski, Alison Plante, Chris Melillo, Superintendent, Tanja Vadas, Dir. of Business, Bob Gerbert, Dir. Of Operations, Lisa Kessler, Legislative Council, Steve Goodridge, Board of Finance

Item 1: Approval of January 12, 2023 Minutes

Mrs. Plante made a motion to approve the BOE CFF/CIP Minutes of January 12, 2023

Ms. Zukowski seconds the motion. Mrs. Plante asked to make the following change. In the section of Middle Gate Playground the statement that the Art program will contribute is incorrect. The statement should say the ARPA program.

All in favor, motion passes to approve the BOE CFF/CIP minutes of January 12, 2023.

NEW BUSINESS

Financial Report and Transfers - DRAFT

Mrs. Vadas presented the January financial report and stated the anticipated balance changed by \$2,500. She stated everything is holding steady. However, there may be changes to this draft before presented to the Board. There were some changes in our salaries. She stated the non-certified salaries are still driving the balance due to a lot of unfilled positions. Certified salaries are in the negative by \$50K while non-certified is in the positive of over \$500K. She stated we still have unfilled positions of 16 paraprofessionals, 5 behavioral therapists and one network specialist and a high school tutor.

Mrs. Larkin asked how we advertise open positions such as paraprofessionals. She asked if we have considered posting similar to what we do with bus drivers. She thought with paras we might find parents from the town who would want to participate.

Mr. Melillo stated he would work with the HR director to see about getting information out more.

Ms. Zukowski asked about putting an advertisement out in The Bee.

Mrs. Vadas stated with benefits there is a deficit in our pensions so she will ask for a transfer of \$12K from medical benefits and \$12K from the educational assistant account to cover the short fall.

She stated with contracted services we had a big deficit in the prior month due to the lack of behavioral therapists. She stated we do have some grant funding opportunities of \$132K that we are going to transfer out of the general fund and into the grant. Mrs. Vadas stated this is outside services.

She stated transportation is holding steady.

She said out-of-district tuition is currently showing a negative of \$454K which has increase over the prior month. This increase is due to anticipated additional costs in special education and out of district tuition. She also stated she is aware of an additional \$150K cost due to a mediated agreement that is not included in this report.

She stated we do have another legislation that is on the table right now. She stated we had a three tiered excess cost grant reimbursement at 70%-80%. The legislation is making an adjustment to try and address that gap and provide districts with more funding. If we come in at an 85% reimbursement we could be looking at an additional \$400K in grant funding. She stated she thought she would know on this within the month.

Ms. Zukowski stated the bottom line is our special education out-of-district tuition is going up by about \$600K for next year and this funding could possibly cut this down to \$200K or so.

Mr. Mellillo stated he would reach out to see if he can find any definite information on this.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the accounts that are pushing our budget up this year and if they could affect our proposed budget for next year.

Mrs. Vadas stated it is a possibility.

Mrs. Vadas stated we did receive a credit for our excise tax for alternative use of propane fuel which came in at \$36K.

She stated she is asking for two transfers. One to cover the pensions for the \$25K and the other is to transfer over to the Board of Education contracted services line to cover the balance of the Strategic Plan. She is requesting that this come out of our transportation line since we have a bit of a surplus there. She stated we have a surplus in transportation from the 6 buses that came off line.

Smart Funds Lunch Program Update

Mrs. Vadas stated the bill was signed this week and the state will be extending the free lunch program to the end of the school year. She said it will be seamless for our students. Our free lunches are going through March 3rd and we are just waiting for guidance from the state and we are anticipating that the program will start March 1st.

Mr. Melillo stated we will announce this as soon as we get the guidance from the state.

Mrs. Larkin stated she has been getting feedback from parents with concerns for expired milk and what is on the menu is not what the students are getting. She asked Mrs. Vadas to check into this with Chartwells.

Mrs. Vadas stated she has provided a 6 month review of Chartwells performance at the Board meeting. Mrs. Kessler mentioned also that students are confused as to what is free and what has a cost. Mrs. Vadas stated that the first meal is free, second meals and a la carte items are at a cost. Mrs. Vadas stated she would look into possibly adding some signage in the cafeterias.

Transportation Update

Mr. Melillo stated the transportation committee met and talked about where they stand as a committee. Right now we have worked with All-Star to get 5 substitute drivers from other yards. We were informed this week that they will keep the drivers on with Newtown until the current class of trainees come through. He stated the last two weeks we have not had a call out and all bus runs have gone through. He further said Mrs. Vadas will followup with All-star to ensure that the sub drivers will continue to show up.

Mrs. Vadas stated All-star does have sub drivers from other districts that include New Milford and Washington. Washington will stay here indefinitely. New Milford has to go back in another two weeks. She said All-Star has had many interviews in the past month. They have 9 potential drivers that are actually training right now.

Mrs. Larkin asked when we can expect the driver graduates to be on the road.

Mrs. Vadas stated 6 weeks from the middle and end of January.

Mr. Melillo stated middle to end of March.

Mrs. Plante asked if we would still keep the subs.

Mrs. Vadas stated New Milford will have to go back in a few weeks but said that All-star has a few drivers that can jump in if need be.

Mrs. Larkin asked if they will be able to cover the sports routes as well.

Mrs. Vadas stated yes if they come through with all of these drivers.

Mrs. Larkin asked what about right now.

Mr. Melillo stated we are better. We have asked them to reschedule events and have shared with other districts the costs with charter routes.

Mrs. Larkin asked when we will get rid of the charters and get back to usual.

Mr. Melillo stated maybe in the spring. He stated we also have our vans and coaches are going through the process to get their licenses.

Ms. Zukowski asked Mr. Melillo if they were still looking into consolidating buses.

Mr. Melillo stated they will continue to work on routes.

The discussion continued around the transportation committee researching and studying and conversing on additional ways to tighten the bus ride times for students.

Hawley HVAC Update

Mr. Gerbert stated Hawley is doing great. He stated the big push is in the 21 section of the bldg. where a lot of the duct work and units have been added in the attic. The work in the 48 and 97 wings is nearly done. Downs is now bringing in people to do inspections which looks at duct work, insulation, etc. He stated the 48 and 97 wings have been fully inspected. Downs is expecting by end of March or early April to be pulled out and have everything to a point of substantial completion.

Mrs. Larkin asked about the switch gear. Mr. Gerbert stated we are still looking at the end of May. When they get word that it will be coming they will remobilize and get the electrician in and the other subs they need to facilitate the work and see if Eversource will follow with the new primary circuit from the pole.

Mr. Gerbert stated he has the same moving company who helped with the move out and they will walk around and look at RIS, SH, HOM and walk through Hawley so they can get re-familiarized with what is going on. We will then look to get a quote from them and lock that in.

Mr. Gerbert presented the overall same summary he has been providing showing where the budget stands and the contingency balances.

Mrs. Kessler asked what moving company we are using.

Mr. Gerbert stated Siracusa from New Britain.

Ms. Zukowski asked about Hawley having access to two circuits as a backup.

Mr. Gerbert stated he did not think so and that would not be included in the current work that is being done. He stated history with outages in the town when power was out for up to a week, Hawley was back up in 24 hours and that area comes back quickly. He stated that strip on Churchill Rd seems to bounce back quickly.

Mrs. Kessler asked about the lighting at night at Hawley and why it is all lit up.

Mr. Gerbert stated there is a lot of exterior lights at the school which are operated on a photocell and when the sun goes down they come on. A lot of what is going on is temporarily construction lighting which is on all of the time. The 21 wing still has a long way to go so the lights will remain on as a safety issue.

Propane RFP

Mrs. Vadas stated the RFP (Request for Proposal) is still in draft format and that the contract will probably be about \$170K. She stated it is a one year contract with a one year extension. A couple of changes are our usage to 15% vs 10%, we added performance damages and default and added information about some of our equipment which was not in our prior contract.

Mrs. Plante asked who our current vendor is.

Mrs. Vadas stated Hocon.

She stated we would be sending this RFP out to all of the local vendors and adding it to the town website.

She stated we also increased the amount of our storage for propane.

Mrs. Larkin clarified that this is propane RFP is all for buses.

Mrs. Vadas stated yes.

Mrs. Larkin stated we are locking into the rate and not the amount of propane.

Facilities Update

- **Middle Gate Playground**

Mr. Gerbert stated the PTA approved their \$10K contribution. The ARPA committee is willing to contribute \$35K.

Mrs. Plante asked if this was a done deal.

Mr. Gerbert stated it is in committee and still has to go through the Board of Finance and the Legislative Council so it still has 2 more hurdles to clear.

Mrs. Larkin asked if all goes well then when can Mr. Gerbert place the order for the play equipment.

Mr. Gerbert stated it could be ordered right after the Legislative Council approves it. He further stated that the target would be to install during the summer.

Mrs. Kessler asked if this was for a total playground and what the total cost would be

Mr. Gerbert stated \$65K but does not include the demo which he stated we would do ourselves.

- **High School Pipe Burst**

Mr. Gerbert stated it was an unfortunate event that happened during the deep freeze. He stated at the high school he said its nearly a 24/7 operation where there are events going on all of the time. He stated there were no events on that Sunday and it just happened that we had that deep freeze and there was no one at the high school.

He stated Belfour restoration came out on Monday and they started immediately. He said for our benefit, the building is all concrete block instead of drywall which prevented extensive repairs.

We were able to get pretty much everything cleaned up in one day and dried out and only lost school on that one day. The culinary and a few classrooms on the ground floor, the science lab on the first floor and a bank of 4 classrooms on the second floor got hit the hardest.

He said we had Belfour in the school this week to start repairing and all through the President weekend to continue to work.

Mrs. Plante stated she wanted to commend Mr. Gerbert and Mrs. Longobucco and the team on how fast everyone jumped into action. She said it was an incredible team effort.

Mr. Gerbert stated the chiller (a/c) on the roof is a self-contained cooling tower. He stated it should not have been there and typically these are drained and winterized.

The conversation continued regarding adding sensors, costs for these sensors and ways to prevent this in the future.

Non-lapsing Fund Discussion

Ms. Zukowski presented the history of the non-lapsing fund policy and how the Board of Education made recommendations to the appropriation process which was accepted by the town.

She further discussed now the Board of Finance wants to make a few recommendations in the language of the Non-Lapsing Education Fund policy.

Mrs. Larkin stated due to time constraints and that this committee is not prepared to make a recommendation we will add this to our agenda for next month for further discussion and possibly with a recommendation to the BOE policy committee.

Superintendent Update

Mr. Melillo announced that Mr. Gerbert, Director of Facilities for the Board of Education will be leaving and taking a position with the University of New Haven. Mr. Melillo stated this is a great loss for us as Mr. Gerbert has done a tremendous job. Mr. Gerbert will be leaving in about a month.

Public Participation

None

Adjournment

Ms. Zukowski made a motion to adjourn the meeting

Mrs. Plante moved the motion. Ms. Zukowski seconds the motion. All in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 7:30

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanne Morris

THESE ARE DRAFT MINUTES AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE BOE CFF/CIP SUB COMMITTEE.