

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

Call to Order: Mrs. Larkin called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Participants: Jennifer Larkin, Deborra Zukowski, Alison Plante, Bob Gerbert, Tanja Vadas, Chris Melillo, Superintendent, Michelle Ku, Legislative Council, Steven Goodridge, Board of Finance, Ed Schierloh, Board of Selectman

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

Mrs. Larkin made a motion to approve the BOE CFF/CIP minutes of February 16, 2023

Ms. Zukowski seconds the motion. All in favor, motion passes unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

Superintendent Update:

Mr. Melillo reported that the Legislative Council approved the ARPA funds for Middle Gate School's playground (\$33,000), the chiller project at Reed Intermediate (\$71,000) and the Project Adventure equipment at Newtown Middle School (\$23,000). The Legislative Council requested that the Educational Committee start setting up dates for meeting to discuss the budget. Mr. Melillo is looking forward to working with the Legislative Council.

Mrs. Vadas was not sure how much the PTA at Middle Gate was able to contribute.

Mrs. Plante answered that the PTA passed \$10,000 for the playground.

Mrs. Vadas said the purchase order for the playground equipment (\$64,389) is ready to go.

Transportation Update:

Mrs. Vadas reported that she received an update from Alan at All-Star. They currently have five drivers about to be licensed.

Mr. Melillo added that three of those drivers are testing at the DMV. One is testing this week and the last two are testing in the next two weeks. Four additional drivers are currently going through the training process and three potential drivers are coming in for interviews this week.

Mr. Melillo continued by stating that they are still sending flyers out. It seems that more people are applying than they did in previous months. All-Star is still providing drivers until the potential drivers officially start. Newtown has not been without daily drivers since February 3rd.

Ms. Zukowski asked when we will know when these drivers have officially started.

Ms. Vadas said we will know once they are licensed.

Mr. Melillo added that unfortunately, there is no contract for them to stay; however, it is encouraging that they have a pipeline of drivers in the queue.

Ms. Zukowski asked if their CDL prohibits them from driving tractor trailers.

Mr. Schierloh confirmed that a school bus is a Class B and a tractor trailer is a Class A.

Mrs. Larkin asked how many drivers Newtown technically needs.

Mrs. Vadas answered that Newtown is down two drivers.

Mr. Melillo added that to be “fully staffed” Newtown would need two drivers plus six backups. Mrs. Larkin asked what the commitment of a “backup” driver was. She would like to know if they signed up to solely be a backup driver.

Mr. Melillo and Mrs. Vadas were unsure of their agreement and inner workings of All-Star.

Ms. Zukowski said that she believes that the backups have to be at the bus yard at each of the bus runs to confirm that there are enough drivers. She also believes they are compensated comparably.

Mrs. Vadas anticipates credit coming for December (\$2,000), January (\$5,000) and February (\$500).

Mrs. Larkin asked how the runs were going for athletics.

Mr. Melillo answered that we have some bus drivers picking up some runs. For the smaller teams, they are using the school vans to charter the athletes. As of March 2nd, there have been sixty runs that used the school vans. The price is \$100 per run which is less expensive than the charter bus.

Non-Lapsing Fund Policy Discussion:

Mrs. Larkin explained that this is a follow up from last month where Ms. Zukowski brought the committee the Non-Lapsing Fund policy which would help triangulate the Board of Education, Board of Finance and Legislative Council in the non-lapsing fund.

Ms. Zukowski reported that the Board of Finance talked about the policy at their last meeting. She gave feedback to the Board of Finance that the committee did not understand how the behavior would change in the case of the threshold because there were three edits that the Board of Finance was suggesting. One edit was having a threshold between 2 and 5 percent which they would provide added scrutiny.

Ms. Zukowski continued by stating the committee did not understand what would change with the proposed edit. Another edit would be outlining more of what the deliverable in terms of the annual report would be. The last edit would be having a process in which to review the policy on a periodic basis.

It would be the responsibility of the CFF committee to determine the threshold.

Ms. Zukowski said that the Board of Finance could not answer the questions regarding how the threshold would change anything or add any value. Unfortunately, the Board of Finance was not able to vote at their last meeting due to the Chair being absent.

Mrs. Larkin asked if anyone knew if the Board of Education had two million dollars in the non-lapsing fund.

Mrs. Ku answered that they never did.

Ms. Vadas showed the committee a history of the non-lapsing fund. The Board of Education started making deposits in 2012. Currently, there is \$475,205 in the non-lapsing fund.

Ms. Zukowski asked if there was a way to add an earmark the money for a certain expense.

Mrs. Vadas said that they have written a yearly letter in the past indicating what they would like to use for Special Education and what they would like in the general deposit.

Ms. Zukowski would like history in the accounting system so future administration could see.

Mrs. Ku would like to clarify what was happening with the non-lapsing fund policy approval.

Ms. Zukowski answered that the Board of Education and Legislative Council both approved this policy and is now waiting for the Board of Finance to approve.

Mr. Melillo continued by stating that they are trying to avoid mistrust.

Ms. Zukowski summarized by saying that this is a current policy with three minor tweaks. This policy will need be approved by the Board of Education in April. The Legislative Council will look at this policy in May. Ideally, all three councils will have this updated policy.

Facilities Update:

Mr. Melillo reported that Mr. Gerbert’s position has been posted with a total of sixteen applicants. The posting will close on March 17th. A committee will interview this person in the next couple of weeks. This position has the possibility of becoming a shared position with the Town.

Mrs. Larkin asked if there was enough time for one person to do both jobs.

Mr. Melillo said there still needs to be a lot discussed regarding that option.

Mr. Gerbert reported that he was pleased that the Legislative Council approved the ARPA funding. He confirmed that he entered the requisition for the playground equipment. He anticipates this being a summer project that would take a few weeks.

Mrs. Larkin asked if anyone notified Middle Gate about this project.

Ms. Zukowski said that she notified the appropriate parties about the decision the night before via email.

Mr. Gerbert said that he does not have a financial update from Downes regarding Hawley. However, they do anticipate being done at the end of the month with about 98% of the work. The focus is in the 21 building (area C) by installing ceilings, finishing duct work and prepping for painting. They will continue the project at the end of May when the switch gear arrives. The final part of the project which will happen in the summer will be the commissioning process which includes going room to room to make sure every switch works and the controlling is responding appropriately.

Mr. Gerbert confirmed that they maintained being on time and on budget. He said this has been a successful project overall.

Mr. Gerbert said that they met with the moving company and they are more than ready to help when it is time. He expressed the need for extra crates during the move.

Ms. Zukowski confirmed that anything we did not spend was appropriated specifically for Hawley and so it cannot be used for any other project.

Mr. Melillo said that the money will go to Capital.

The committee thanked Mr. Gerbert for his hard work getting this project off the ground.

Mr. Gerbert expressed his gratitude towards his workers and everyone that worked daily on this project.

Mrs. Larkin asked if there were any spring break projects planned.

Mr. Gerbert said they thought they would need to do flooring but they were able to finish that project during the mini winter break in February.

Mr. Gerbert continued by saying that there has been some roofing issues that are being worked on. Unfortunately, these leaks can just “spring up” on you without notice.

Financial Report and Transfers:

Mrs. Vadas reported that the finances look good this month. We increased the balance by just under \$100,000 (\$98,156) showing a total projected balance of \$491,314. Not much has changed in the salary account and still seeing a negative balance in the certified salaries. The majority of the balance is being driven by the non-certified salaries. There is currently a big balance in Special Education and Mrs. Vadas

anticipates having to transfer some of that to contracted services because another purchase order for \$60,000 has to be created for the behavior therapists contracted services. They are very costly.

Mrs. Larkin asked if the behavior therapists from the agency are reliable.

Mrs. Vadas answered that they are reliable and not a lot of turnover. There are currently five open positions.

Mrs. Vadas continued by saying that the biggest change she can see if in the supplies line item with electricity. This account now shows a positive balance of \$320,000. Due to the increase in the Eversource energy supply rate, we are experiencing a windfall in credits from the virtual net metering project. This is an estimate now as there are a few variables that can affect this account. This is definitely a win for the Board of Education.

Mrs. Vadas presented the Essex Grant spreadsheet to the committee. She said that they received 75% of the 1.8 million dollars. The grant reimbursement rate for eligible expenses was calculated by the state at 70%. Mrs. Vadas has heard that it could potentially increase by 15% and we would receive an additional \$380,000.

Mrs. Larkin asked if this will carry into next year's budget.

Mrs. Vadas said that the 85% will. As of now, there is a \$491,000 balance and could potentially go up another couple hundred thousand dollars.

Ms. Zukowski asked if we are still trying to fill positions.

Mr. Melillo said they have been seeing more people applying for jobs.

Mrs. Vadas stated that the propane RFP was sent out to ten vendors and advertised in the Newtown Bee. There were questions from two different vendors and we expect them to come in next week.

Mrs. Vadas confirmed that there were no transfers.

Public Participation

None

Adjournment

Mrs. Plante made a motion to resign to adjourn.

Mrs. Larkin seconds the motion. All in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 6:43 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sarah Connell

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

