

Newtown Board of Education
CIP/Facilities/Finance (CFF) Sub-Committee Minutes
October 17, 2023 6:00pm
BOE Conference Room

PRESENT: Alison Plante, Deborra Zukowski, Christopher Melillo, Tanja Vadas, John Barlow, Steve Goodridge, Board of Finance

CALL TO ORDER: Mrs. Plante called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

BUSINESS

Mrs. Plante asked for a motion to approve the minutes of September 20, 2023. Ms. Zukowski stated that the CFF stands for CIP/Facilities/Finance so the CIP is redundant. Ms Zukowski moved to amend the motion to say the BOE CFF minutes as opposed to the CFF/CIP minutes Mrs. Plante seconds the amendment. All in favor of the motion as amended. Motion passes unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Financial Report and Transfers

Mrs. Vadas presented the summary of the financial report of September 2023. She stated there was not much to report as we are still working on salary encumbrances, forecasts, and data that is coming in. The projected balance of \$1.3M is very premature. Once we get through October/November we will have a more realistic balance.

Salaries are driving the overall balance right now. Most of the other accounts are projected as a full spend. We do that this time of year as we anticipate to fully expend our budget.

Other purchased services have a balance of over \$500K which is being driven from out-of-district tuition. We know that this is not going to be the case as there are more encumbrances in the works.

She stated she put in one to two projections with a few encumbrances in the budget but more encumbrances are coming in and again it is early because at the end of November we will send this to the state for review and we will recalculate our excess cost grant at that time.

Ms. Zukowski asked about SpEd and the projected balance and is it due to the fact that we have not received bills that we know students are attending or, is it we anticipate a number of students and some of them are not using the money.

Mrs. Vadas stated there are some changes as some students have graduated, maybe one or two came in and are being held in mediated agreements so we don't know where they are going to be outplaced so the encumbrances have not been entered into the system yet. She feels by October/November we will see a big change. In December when we recalculate all of the students that are in-district we send them out for the excess cost and see what is eligible and then the excess cost grant will be adjusted.

Mrs. Vadas talked about salaries. She stated the certified balance is \$160K but is not too concerned at this time. We are working on teacher reclassifications, movements, and some adjustments with our encumbrances.

Non-certified salaries we see a big balance in our educational assistants. She stated she looked back at last year with many unfilled positions but the balance was not that high at this time. We had 22 open positions at the end of September and we are struggling in this area with bringing in Paras and retaining them. She further stated we have also seen a lot of movement into other positions such as BT's teaching, sub positions, job coaches and clerical positions.

In SpEd services we have a large deficit of \$171K due to an increase in BT's. She said with the BT's we have 2-3 positions still open.

Ms. Zukowski asked how many in-house BT's were budgeted. Mrs. Vadas stated 18 total.

Ms. Zukowski confirmed we have about 15 in-house and 1 out of house.

They continued to talk about the open positions for BT's

Ms. Zukowski asked if this had any impact on our students.

Mrs. Vadas stated the BT's are tied to a student's IEP and they are working double time. She further said they have a contracted service that fills the gap.

They continued to talk about the BT's and how they are filling gaps with schedules and the levels of service.

Mr. Melillo stated he did not think it was the BT's that are stretching us thin but the Paraprofessionals. He said with the BT's we can cover the hours from in-house or contract out for those hours. We don't have the ability to contract out for Paraprofessionals. With that, we have administrators, sped teachers filling the gap. He said we are able to cover but it is coming at a cost. He further stated that we cannot speak too much about this topic in public as we have to remember it's a bargaining unit so this is work that we would need to do with their union.

Mrs. Vadas brought up the electricity account and stated we are at a zero balance. She said our virtual net metering was a huge hit. It runs on a calendar year and we hit our cap this past September. We totaled close to \$1M in credits and continued to say there is an expense offset with this.

She said we are waiting to analyze some data and we had to catch up on the credits and do a lot of work on the forecasts so that is why we are seeing a zero balance in this report. She does anticipate we will likely see some credits emerge in that account.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the total of the offset charges against the credits. Mrs. Vadas stated the overall balance was about \$3K at the end of the 22-23 school year.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the winter increase in electricity. Mr. Barlow stated they always do a winter increase but did not think they were going to go as high as last year.

Ms. Zukowski asked about what percentage of our energy expenses are covered with our credits. Mrs. Vadas said we capped in September so October, November and December we will not see any credits because we are done for the calendar year. We will resume in January with the virtual net metering.

The conversation then closed on the financial statement.

The committee talked briefly about the paraprofessionals, positions and their levels.

Reed Chiller

Mr. Barlow stated there has been discussion of taking the money from the non-lapsing. The price is \$120K. He was notified by Trane if we wait to do the transfer from the non-lapsing to the spring we probably won't see the parts until late August. He stated we need to do the transfer now to get the parts on order. They are seeing a lead time of at least 26 -36 wks on parts. We would like to get the chiller up and running before the heat comes in. If we can get it done now we will have enough time to get it up and running.

The committee had a conversation regarding the facility study and the benefits with the town and community and moving forward.

Mr. Barlow stated the RFP for the facility study is all set.

Mrs. Plante asked the order of operations.

Ms. Zukowski stated it needs to go to Board of Finance before Legislative Council.

Mr. Goodridge stated he would look into how it could be moved forward at a quicker pace.

Mr. Barlow stated in looking at the chiller that we are doing the r-newal, we will take all of the mechanicals off and replace them with new. He said there are a fair number of mechanicals that are functional and talking with Trane they will give them a stockpile of parts to keep the other chiller going.

It was agreed the committee would take this to the BOE meeting.

Transportation Update

Mrs. Vadas stated it is getting into cold and flu season and all-star is running really tight. There are 5 drivers out on medical leave.

The operations manager for All-Star has been out driving with callouts of bus drivers.

She said we are down quite a few drivers. All-star was pulling in others to cover drivers.

Mrs. Plante asked what our full strength numbers are.

Mrs. Vadas stated 48 routes, and typically we have between 5-6 spares.

Mr. Melillo stated part of the problem is when the state decided to go with paid medical leave for bus drivers; the drivers are taking their medical leave now vs. waiting until the summer in order to not lose pay.

Ms. Zukowski made a statement now that the bus drivers have paid medical leave we may need to look to the future to raise the amount of bus drivers/spares that we need to accommodate for absence.

Mr. Melillo stated there are not any bus companies around that will come in to fill in with extra buses. He stated we have not had to use any charter/coach buses for our sports.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the capacity of buses and can we trim routes.

Mr. Melillo stated he has been getting feedback from parents that buses are overfilled.

They further talked about the contract and number of students.

Ms. Zukowski stated it would be good to see the head counts of each of the buses. Also she questioned the amount of time and reducing the stops and getting the number of bus stops per bus. She further stated it would be interesting to see that information and maybe we can't do anything with it but it would be good to know about it.

Mrs. Vadas stated consolidated stops are a big issue in Newtown.
Mr. Melillo stated we did have some consolidation conversations with All-Star.

Ms. Zukowski left the meeting at 6:50.

Facilities Update

Mr. Barlow stated he was informed by Trane that the HOM condensers ship date has moved to mid November.

He stated he was not going to have Trane working on the roofs during the cold weather due to the condition and aging of the roof. So he will set this up for spring so the condensers will be stored on Trane's property until then.

Mrs Plante asked if there was any impact to us before the warm weather. Mr. Barlow said no.

Mr. Barlow also added there could be a potential moving of the ship date for the air handling units at the high school. They are scheduled to come in at this point in March.

Operations has done a lot of work chasing leaks at the high school with 1 leak left and having difficulty finding. The roof needs to be replace but it is holding.

He stated everything else is routine maintenance that is being done now.

Mrs. Plante asked about the final piece for the Middle Gate playground and Mr. Barlow stated we still don't have a ship date yet.

Mr. Barlow stated another note worthy project is the Eagle Scouts project at Middle Gate School for a Ga-Ga Pit. The pit was built by the Eagle Scouts and its very small. It was originally intended for the 3-4 playground and right now it is on the Kindergarten playground. There has been a request from the principal to make it larger. He said our maintenance dept. has come up with a plan to make it larger and move it to the other playground. This will happen in the next couple of weeks.

Superintendent Update

Mr. Melillo stated there was no update for this committee and will speak at the Board meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting ended at 6.57 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanne Morris

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

Newtown Board of Education
CFF/CIP/Facilities/Finance Sub-Committee Special Meeting Minutes
September 20, 2023 6:30pm
BOE Conference Room

PRESENT: Deborra Zukowski, Alison Plante, Christopher Melillo, Tanja Vadas, John Barlow, Steve Goodridge, Board of Finance

CALL TO ORDER: Mrs. Plante called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

BUSINESS

Ms. Zukowski moved to accept the BOE CFF/CIP minutes of August 17, 2023. Mrs. Plante seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously for the approval of the BOE CFF/CIP minutes of August 17, 2023.

NEW BUSINESS

Facilities Update

Mr. Barlow stated there was not a lot to report. He indicated he is starting to compile information for his budget for year 2024-2025.

Mr. Barlow talked about the ribbon cutting for the MG playground and said it went very well. He stated there is one outstanding piece of equipment that is missing and backordered. The foundation has been put into place and once this piece comes in they will un-mount the foundation and install it.

Mrs. Plante asked if it was affecting the use of the new equipment now.

Mr. Barlow said no that it was a stand-alone piece.

Mrs. Plante stated she has heard great reviews from parents, kids and the PTA. Everyone is very happy.

Mr. Barlow said he defers all of the thanks to his maintenance staff, Park & Rec and Public Works Dept. for all they did.

Hawley – Mr. Barlow stated we have the substantial completion letter. There is an addendum which is a list of 5 items that they need to continue with finalizing commissioning, painting and patching. Because of the timeline as to when we received the switch gear it pushed everything back.

He stated Principal Moretti expressed to him some concerns regarding feed-back in that we have spent money on air conditioning and it does not work. Because of the timeline of when the switch gear came in there should have had between 30-40 days at least to do all of the commissioning to work all of the bugs out of the system. Instead, there was 1.5 weeks so they are still working on it and addressing issues as they come up. He has communicated with Downes on this and the system has begun to stabilize as far as air quality and air conditioning in the rooms. He said it's not just an air condition system but an air quality system.

Mr. Melillo stated we knew and were told by Downes there would be at least 30 days minimum to balance the system. He stated all of this should have been done prior to moving back into the building but we did not have the luxury of time.

Ms. Zukowski asked if this work was being done during the school time or after school.

Mr. Barlow stated basically they are out of the building now and anything that needs to happen happens after hours so there is no disruption. He said the sad reality is we have run out of time this year to continue the work on balancing out the air conditioning system as we need the warm hot days.

He said we may have to push it off to the spring and defer to work on the heating system side of and get that all balanced and work on the cooling side in the spring.

Mrs. Plante asked if there would be any budget implications for them coming back in the spring.

Mr. Barlow stated no.

Mrs. Plante confirmed that nothing is wrong it is just part of turning on the system.

Mr. Barlow stated everything else is routine maintenance at this point. He stated we finally got ahead of some of summer maintenance and now we are into our routine maintenance that happens all of the time. He further said the state of all of the buildings is great.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the town building inventory that the former facilities director was involved in. Mr. Barlow said he is familiar with all of it and is on the committee and has been to 4-5 meetings already. He said it is a projected 3 year on-going project and what the town is trying to achieve does not exist anywhere. He stated there is a proposal that will be coming up in front of the council at some point which will involve a funding piece but everyone is not sure about a commitment for the funding. All of NPS building information has been uploaded by the previous facilities director. He said right now we are sitting idle because it is all of the towns departments to figure out how they are going to take their individual systems and match them up.

Mrs. Plante asked Mr. Barlow to keep the Sub Committee posted as to when the council presentation will land.

Mr. Barlow brought up the discussion of a new truck for one of the staff who is also the electrician. He presented some pictures of the ongoing rotting issues with the 20 year old truck. This truck currently has 120K+ miles on it with most being snow plow miles. He stated this cost was submitted in the budget last year but was dropped out due to funding purposes. He talked about all of the issues with the transmission, the body of the truck rotting etc. and stated it is not safe and needs to be replaced.

Ms. Zukowski asked about options new vs. used.

Mr. Barlow stated he could go with the used option and could get a better rate on, typically he has never seen municipalities go to the used truck market which the trucks are basically already half worn out.

He presented two quotes. The first quote was from the former facilities director and Mr. Barlow had to get an updated quote for an F250 truck. He stated the original quote was \$69K but has now gone up to \$82,846. He also went to Tasca Ford, which is on the state contract and received a quote for an F350 truck with all similar options as Hartford truck equipment and that was \$67,121. These are the only two quotes he has at this point and they are both state contract quotes.

Mr. Barlow recommended to go with Tasca because the price is what it is.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the difference in the 250 vs the 350 truck with regards to needs for maintenance.

Mr. Barlow said they are basically the same truck but the chassis in the 350 is more heavy duty and is better for snowplowing.

Mrs. Plante asked if the prices reflect a regular pick-up body or a utility body.

Mr. Barlow stated it was a utility body and what we currently have is a utility body. He further said he is not asking for anything other than the basic truck, utility body and the plow.

Mrs. Plante asked where the money would come from.

Mrs. Vadas stated that we do not have the money in our general fund and we would not know until April but we can't wait for the 2024-2025 budget so they are proposing to take the money from the BOE non-lapsing account.

Mrs. Vadas presented a spreadsheet with the years and transfers that went into the non-lapsing account and where we are pending the approval of the current transfers to the non-lapsing account.

Ms. Zukowski then addressed her concerns of what was anticipated for spending with a possible facility study, the chiller at Reed, and the possibility of purchasing a truck.

Mr. Barlow stated he did not recommend we take money out of the non-lapsing fund at this time for the chiller. He would like to relook at the chiller in the spring when we would have a much better view of what our budget is and then make decisions.

He stated the \$120K is locked in with Omnia for the chiller.

Mr. Melillo stated he would like to make a recommendation. He stated we are asking to deposit \$184K into the non-lapsing fund with \$100K of that money put into special education. He stated the \$84K is not earmarked for anything but unanticipated expenses. The \$84K could be the truck as it is an unanticipated expense. The money that was put into the non-lapsing account last year for the chiller is still there.

Mrs. Plante stated we have sufficient funds to cover the truck, chiller and facility study. She stated what we are saying is we are keeping the funds in the account for the chiller and keeping our options open. We do not need the chiller at this time. By the spring we hopefully will be contracted for the facility study so we will know what that cost is.

The discussion continued around the facility study and when it should be started.

Mrs. Plante stated she agreed that she thought we should start the facility study this year.

Mr. Melillo stated we can still do the truck as the price was at \$67K and we need the truck, and do the facility study and hold on the chiller to see what our needs are around that.

Mrs. Plante stated mathematically we could do all three.

Ms. Zukowski stated we will know for sure about all three come April.

Ms. Zukowski asked Mr. Goodridge what his thoughts were regarding the Board of Finance thoughts on this.

Mr. Goodridge stated he would have to have a discussion with the Board of Finance and to also keep in mind that there is an election coming up and there would be basically a new board. He stated even though the Board of Ed recommended the \$120K towards the chiller from the funds that the Committee designated he thought it is still listed on the CIP as the full amount and if it is explained to the BOF fully he thought it could be considered. He thought it might be beneficial for Mr. Barlow to come and give a complete explanation to the BOF.

Mr. Barlow talked about the building temperature at Reed on the one chiller and how the temp was approaching 76-77 degrees during the heat wave and that was the best he could get the building cooled to.

He stated we do need that extra chiller and he is not advocating pushing off the chiller but is more concerned about the fact that this is our emergency savings account and dipping it down. So he feels we should sit back on the chiller until we have a better feel.

Ms. Zukowski made the statement we sit back on the chiller and go ahead with the facilities plan and the truck.

Mrs. Plante stated we all agree on the truck and wish we had budgeted for the facilities study.

Mrs. Plante stated she would like to see that we go out to vendors and get quotes for the facility study on cost and how long it takes and when they can start. Then we come back to this in a few months and then we can wait until January or February to start the study and it could be done by May and still inform the CIP which may buy us some time.

Mr. Barlow stated he has an RFP that needs to be updated and can give to the Purchasing Director to get quotes.

Ms. Zukowski stated the last time we had a CFF meeting we talked about the \$84K that we would tell the Board of Finance and Legislative Council 'pound wise and penny wise to use that money on a facility study'. She also stated out of the two we really need the truck but she does not want to give up the facility study and we should do it now before we have to justify on the following CIP.

Mrs. Plante agreed.

Mrs. Plante stated in a few months the RFP would have gone out and we would have quotes back and then we will have enough information to assess.

Mr. Barlow stated after talking with the Town Financial Director we break the Middle school out of the \$450K to make the money go as long as we can.

Transportation Update

Mrs. Vadas stated the buses are running. She spoke with All-Star and we originally started with 7 spares this year, Brookfield had to borrow 2, we have 2 out on medical and 1 is out sick, 2 are giving notice and leaving. With that, Brookfield will be returning our 2 spares, we are hoping that the 2 out on medical leave will be returning soon and the 1 on sick leave will be returning soon. She stated we are getting by and all the routes are filled including using our spares.

Mr. Melillo stated we have an upcoming meeting with All-Star to go over operations again.

He also stated buses are running on time right now.

Ms. Zukowski asked about the rules on buses going down on cul-de-sacs, dead end roads, and for stopping within a neighborhood and safe to walk for buses to stop every tenth of a mile.

Mr. Melillo stated he would check on the state laws for the rules for buses and stops.

Superintendent Update

Mr. Melillo stated he had no updates as he gave them to the Board the previous night at the Board meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Zukowski made a motion to adjourn meeting. Mrs. Plante seconds the motion. All in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanne Morris

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