

**NEW FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION
NEW FAIRFIELD, CT**

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a regular meeting on Thursday, April 4, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT.

MINUTES – April 4, 2024

PRESENT: Dominic Cipollone (Chairman), Kathy Baker, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone,

ABSENT: Tim Blair

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Crow, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Kristine Woleck, Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy, Pupil Personnel Director Maria Kennedy, Middle School Principal Karen Gruetzner, Director of Buildings and Grounds Phil Ross, Board of Finance member Wes Marsh, Board of Finance member Thora Perkins and Christine O’Hare from JCJ Architecture.

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Dominic Cipollone called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. March 18, 2024 - Special meeting - approved by consensus
- B. March 21, 2024 - Regular meeting - approved by consensus

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA - Approved by consensus

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Katie Williams spoke of an accident involving a student on Marty Morgan Field and the challenges of getting ambulances to the fields due to the temporary bus lot. She noted that this particular accident happened on a day when there was not a lot of traffic but spoke of concerns about possible accidents when there are multiple events going on and many cars are forced to park illegally.

Jena Alviti spoke of concerns with the temporary bus lot blocking ambulance access and the fact that no one had a key to the gate in order to let the ambulance in.

BOF member Wes Marsh noted that the BOF cut the BOE proposed operating budget by \$350,000 at the April 3rd BOF meeting. He further noted that the BOF voted to reduce the BOE proposed capital budget by \$600,000 but promised to commit to using the fiscal year 2023-2024 surplus for the replacement of the turf field and track. Interest income has exceeded the budgeted amount, so a surplus is expected.

Pat Bower asked for direction as to whether taxpayers should support this budget at referendum. He further asked for statistics on the difference between what the district pays to educate Sherman students and the amount of tuition money received.

John McCartney spoke of his disappointment with results of the budget votes at last night’s BOF meeting.

Terra Volpe thanked the BOE for all their work with the budget process and for not allowing politics to interfere with their work on the BOE.

Britney Kozlenko spoke of the dangers of cutting staff due to budget reductions.

Amanda DiCarvalo asked about the possibility of cutting an administrator or assistant principal.

Amy Kuntze agreed with the suggestion of cutting administrators and questioned why the Elementary School has three assistant principals. She noted that the separation of Consolidated School and MHHS as two schools despite being in the same building is confusing. She further spoke of support for the gifted and talented programs.

Andrew Lund noted that education budgets need to have increases in order to grow. He spoke in support of programs and not cutting any staff members.

Jena Alviti thanked the BOE for all their hard work and asked for guidance on how the taxpayers should vote at referendum.

VI. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

A. Chairman's Report - Dominic Cipollone reported on the following:

- Spoke of consensus building and thanked the taxpayers for speaking during public comment at all meetings and defended everyone's right to speak. He noted the need to fight for the most vulnerable students. He especially spoke in support of out-placed special education students and assured families that they will always get the support they need.

B. Superintendent's Report - Dr. Kenneth Craw thanked everyone.

- Thanked everyone for their participation at the April 3rd BOF meeting and noted that he was proud to be Superintendent in this district. He congratulated the Middle School and High School students that spoke at the BOF meeting in support of the budget.

C. Student Representative Reports

Senior Representative Brennan Hearty noted that:

- Spring Break will be from April 15th to April 19th.
- AP Tests will start in the beginning of May.

Junior Representative Emilia Sedlak noted that:

- Many students were selected to perform in the All-State Music Festival.
- Students in Grades 9-11 participated in Restorative Peer Leadership training.
- Junior Prom tickets will be on sale next week.
- Scholarship applications will be due soon.

D. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum - Sue Huwer noted that the Curriculum subcommittee met on March 25th and discussed the following Information Items:

- Middle School Unified Arts Program.
- World Language Department expansion.
- Increasing Foreign Language instruction in the Middle School with the goal of bringing scores up.
- Instructional Coach roles and responsibilities were explained.
- K-5 Reading Pilot Update

2. Special Education Ad Hoc - Kimberly LaTourette noted that this subcommittee met on April 4th and discussed the following:

- Reviewed the roles of paraprofessionals to make sure they are used efficiently.
- There are currently six vacancies for paras in the district.
- Discussed coverage due to the resignation of a special education teacher.
- To date, thirteen students have registered for Unified Sports. Track and Field will begin soon. A grant was received for the Unified Sports program.
- The subcommittee discussed the expansion of the STRIDES program and the move to a new location. There is a plan to partner this program with Newtown.
- The subcommittee discussed opening the STRIDES program to other districts on a tuition basis, but it was decided to hold off on this for now.
- The subcommittee discussed transitioning for Special Education students that will be moving up to a new school for next year.

E. Liaison Reports

1. Board of Finance - Ed Sbordone noted that the BOF met on April 3rd and voted on the final mark-up. A cut of \$350,000 was made to the BOE proposed operating budget. The BOF voted to approve \$119,000 for the capital and nonrecurring fund. A cut of \$600,000 was made to the requested BOE capital budget with a promise from the BOF that they will commit to using \$600,000 of the 2023-2024 budget surplus for the turf field and track replacement.

Dr. Craw spoke of the how the removal of the oil tank at the Middle School will affect the capital and nonrecurring fund for next year.

VII. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. New Fairfield Middle School Feasibility Study Presentation and Discussion

Dr. Craw spoke of the need for improvements to infrastructure at the Middle School.

Christine O'Hare from JCJ Architecture gave a presentation of the possibilities and needs for the Middle School, including improvements that can be made in the near future to make the best use of the space. She spoke of the current spaces and ways to use some of the old high school building. Phase I would include a STEAM Room, Media Center, and outdoor recess area for the Middle School.

Director of Buildings and Grounds Phil Ross explained the timeline and process for the projects.

Dominic Cipollone invited BOF and BOE members to reach out to him if they would like a tour of the Middle School.

B. Fiscal Year 24-25 Budget Update

Dr. Craw spoke of the reductions made by the BOF and noted that there are limited spaces to make adjustments. He will come back to the BOE with recommendations for cuts using the guiding principles and doing what is best for students and staff. He explained the reasons for the administrators at Consolidated/MHHS and noted that reducing an administrator will not save money in the budget.

C. Temporary Bus Parking Lot Update

Dr. Craw noted that the work group for the bus lot met recently and discussed alternative locations. They will meet again on April 5th.

D. STRIDES Program Expansion

Kimberly LaTourette spoke of the increase in rent for the new STRIDES location but noted that the increased cost would be offset by savings on transportation because Newtown has a van that can be used at no cost.

VIII. ACTION ITEMS

A. Personnel Report

MOTION: Kim LaTourette made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of the Personnel Report for March 28, 2024, as recommended by the administration. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone (Greg Flanagan temporarily left and did not vote on this motion)

B. 2024-2027 Sherman Contract

There was a discussion of the accounting for Sherman tuition as non-tax revenue that goes into the Town budget. Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy spoke of how per pupil expenditures are calculated and the challenge of figuring out the exact costs to the district for Sherman students.

MOTION: Ed Sbordone made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of the contract between the Town of Sherman and the Town of New Fairfield for the period beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2027, and to authorize the Board secretary to sign the contract. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

C. Healthy Food Certification

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion that Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the New Fairfield Board of Education certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion that the New Fairfield Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

D. Board of Education Policies

MOTION: Samantha Mannion made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of the Board of Education Policies listed below as presented: 1. Policy 4115 - Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support 2. Bylaw 9323 - Construction of the Agenda 3. Bylaw 9324 - Advance Delivery of Meeting Materials. Amy Johnson seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

1. Policy 4115 - Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support
2. Bylaw 9323 - Construction of the Agenda
3. Bylaw 9324 - Advance delivery of Meeting Materials

E. Paraprofessional Leave of Absence Request - Executive Session

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Maureen Kenny spoke of the wonderful morale in the schools and thanked the BOE for all their hard work with fighting for the budget.

Millie Kellogg asked the BOE to continue to fight to have the Sherman tuition become part of the BOE budget instead of the Town's non-tax revenue.

Rachel Penny thanked the BOE for fighting for the budget and the students.

John McCartney thanked the BOE for looking out for the needs of the students.

Britney Kozlenko noted that she is a mentor for the Robotics Team in Brewster and offered her services as a volunteer if New Fairfield would like to establish a similar program.

X. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS - None

XI. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Samantha Mannion spoke of the budget referendum and encouraged everyone to get as much information as possible before voting. She referred to comments from taxpayers asking for direction from the BOE about how to vote for the budget and spoke of being uncomfortable telling anyone else how to vote.

Amy Johnson spoke of her disappointment with the cuts to the BOE capital budget.

Greg Flanagan thanked everyone that supported the BOE budget and noted that New Fairfield has a wonderful school district and should be proud.

Ed Sbordone expressed his support for the Superintendent and thanked everyone that supported the budget. He noted that the BOE has been very transparent throughout the whole budget process and found comments made to the contrary at the April 3rd BOF meeting disturbing.

Kim LaTourette noted that she trusts the administrative team to make the best decisions with the budget and encouraged taxpayers to continue to participate in the process.

Dominic Cipollone read a letter from absent BOE member Tim Blair expressing his support for the budget and the administration. He spoke against any cuts to the proposed budget and noted that New Fairfield is guided by the right team and will continue to grow.

Dominic Cipollone spoke in support of the budget and noted that momentum for support of the budget needs to continue.

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING PARAPROFESSIONAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE REQUEST

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to go into Executive Session at 9:34 p.m. for the purpose of discussing a paraprofessional leave of absence request. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion.

IN FAVOR: Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

MOTION: Greg Flanagan made a motion to come out of Executive Session at 9:36 p.m. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

MOTION: Kimberly LaTourette made a motion to recommend to the full Board of Education the approval of Margaret Brady's request for an unpaid leave of absence beginning on April 1, 2024, with a return to work on May 28, 2024. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 p.m. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos