

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

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a regular meeting on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 7:00 pm in the New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT.

MINUTES – January 18, 2024

PRESENT: Dominic Cipollone (Chairman), Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Greg Flanagan (arrived 7:15 p.m.), Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion (via phone) and Ed Sbordone

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw, Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy, Pupil Personnel Director Maria Kennedy, Secondary Special Education Supervisor Monika Krepsztul, Elementary Special Education Supervisor Alex Lambert, High School Principal James D’Amico, High School Assistant Principal Michael Chapleau, High School Assistant Principal Scott Rohwedder, New Fairfield Middle School Principal Karen Gruetzner, New Fairfield Middle School Assistant Principal Cheryl Milo, Elementary School Principal Allyson Story, Elementary Assistant Principal Jennifer Hilderbrand, Elementary School Assistant Principal Rob Spino, Director of Buildings and Grounds Phil Ross, Director of Technology Paul Gouveia, Selectman Pat Del Monaco, Selectman Tom Perkins, BOF Chairman Doug Jendras, BOF member Thora Perkins, BOF member Claudia Willard and Architect Scott Pellman from Colliers Project Leaders

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

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 4, 2024 - Regular meeting - approved by consensus

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA- approved by consensus

**V. PRESENTATION OF SUPERINTENDENT’S FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025
RECOMMENDED BUDGET**

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw spoke of the upcoming budget for 2024-2025. He noted that the district is dedicated to continuous improvement and thanked the administration and staff for all their hard work with the budget.

Main points of the presentation included:

- Compelling Direction,
- Return on Investment including the two new schools,
- Enrollment and Class Size,
- Staffing Plan,
- Budget efficiencies.

The budget is broken down into the following categories:

- Payroll and Benefits - 76.8%
- Special Education - 9.7%
- Transportation - 3.6%
- Utilities - 2.0%
- Buildings and Grounds - 1.6%
- Other non-payroll - 6.3%

Budget considerations that are unique this year include the expiration of ARPA and ESSER funds, reduction of the Entitlement Grants and Teacher Turnover saving reduced.

The Superintendent's recommended operating budget for 2024-2025 is \$48,833,259 which is a percent increase of 5.25% (\$2,435,220) over the 2023-2024 voter approved budget of \$46,398,038. The proposed Capital budget equals \$794,577 and includes improvements to the replacement of the student transportation van, replacement of the stadium turf and track and upgrades to the Middle School.

Budget workshops will be held on Tuesday, January 23rd, Wednesday, January 24th and Tuesday, January 30th. The budget presentation and documents can be found on the district website.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - New Fairfield School Bus Driver Patty Aibohn spoke in support of putting the bus lot at the old Consolidated School. She spoke of safety concerns with the temporary lot at the high school and urged the BOE not to have the high school and middle school on the same schedule until the bus lot issue can be resolved.

VII. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

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

- Noted that he and Board member Sue Huwer attended a CABE meeting regarding the State mandate for Reading Initiatives.
- Thanked the bus drivers for all their hard work and encouraged the Town to come to a decision regarding the bus lot as soon as possible.
- Encouraged the Board of Finance to work with transparency with all the other Town Boards, especially during the budget process.

B. Superintendent's Report - None

C. Student Representative Reports

Senior Representative Brennan Hearty noted that:

- Mid-term exams will be given this week and next week.
- The first semester ends on January 19th.
- There will be a half day on January 24th.
- There will be a Transition Night for Middle School students and parents.
- Congratulated Senior Joe Mahoney for winning his 100th Wrestling match.

Junior Representative Emilia Sedlak noted that:

- World Language Students saw Madame Butterfly at the Metropolitan Opera House.
- The Yearbook Club was nationally recognized by the Scholastic Press.
- Yearbooks are currently for sale. They can be purchased online.

D. Committee Reports

1. Business Operations/Resource Management - Ed Sbordone noted that the Business Operations/Resource Management subcommittee met on January 18th and discussed budget vs. actual numbers. It is possible that there will be a deficit in Special Education that may be covered by the end of the year. There was a Google Vault reconciliation and all were legitimate entries. The subcommittee had a presentation from Greenleaf regarding solar panels on the Middle School and High School. The subcommittee approved the budget transfers.

E. Liaison Reports

1. Board of Finance - The BOF met on January 17th. The requests for surplus funds from the BOE and BOS was tabled. The projected fund balance for the Medical Fund is approximately \$1.4 million as of December 31, 2023. This is down approximately \$100,000 from last month.

2. School Security and Safety Committee- Samantha Mannion noted that this subcommittee met with most of the meeting held in Executive Session.

VIII. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Temporary Bus Parking Lot Update

Scott Pellman from Colliers Project Leaders gave an update on the proposed bus lot. He gave a history of the bus lot and how it was affected by the school construction projects. He spoke of the number of buses and the routes and gave a list of a half dozen possible sites for the buses that were reviewed at a high level but deemed not appropriate. The possibility of an out-of-town bus lot was explored but it was deemed to have additional costs. Funding considerations and extra costs for keeping the bus lot at the high school were discussed.

High School Principal James D'Amico spoke of the challenges of having the bus lot at the high school, specifically congestion and safety concerns. Members of the Board of Education gave their opinions regarding the location of the bus lot.

Permanent Building Committee Chairman Don Kellogg spoke of the study regarding the number of trips for the driveway at Consolidated School and noted the number of trips has been reduced and there will be no parent traffic.

Selectman Tom Perkins spoke of other possible uses for the old Consolidated School property instead of the bus lot and suggested the high school near the dog park.

B. Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget

Dr. Craw spoke of the upcoming budget workshops. He asked Board members to send any questions to the central office so that he can be prepared for future meetings.

IX. ACTION ITEMS

A. Personnel Report

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of the Personnel Report for January 11, 2024, as recommended by the administration. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone.

B. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Transfers

MOTION: Ed Sbordone made a motion to recommend to the full Board of Education the requested FY 2023-24 budget transfers as presented. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone.

C. Retirement Settlement

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval to award the retirement settlement bonus per Article 48 for those eligible teachers who, by Wednesday, February 21, 2024, tender their resignation to be effective at the end of the school year. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Millie Kellogg spoke of concerns of having the bus lot at the high school and spoke of her support for the Consolidated School location.

Eileen Hacaj spoke in support of moving the temporary bus lot from the high school and using the Consolidated School property.

Megan Mariani noted that there is plenty of space at the Consolidated property for both fields and bus lots. She encouraged residents to allow the elected officials to make the decisions.

Selectman Tom Perkins defended the Board of Selectmen and noted that it works with transparency. He encouraged all the boards to be civil and to follow Roberts Rules of Order.

Cynthia Ross-Zweig spoke as the chair of the Planning Commission and noted the requirement of 8-24 referrals for the bus lot.

XI. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Attendance records compared to last year will be discussed at the next meeting.

XII. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Greg Flanagan questioned the bus lot lawsuit and asked why the town didn't want to receive as much information as possible.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos