

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

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a regular meeting on Thursday, May 2, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT.

MINUTES – May 2, 2024

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

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Kristine Woleck, Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy, Pupil Personnel Director Maria Kennedy, High School Principal James D’Amico, Middle School Principal Karen Gruetzner, Elementary School Principal Allyson Story, Director of Technology Paul Gouveia, Selectman Tom Perkins, Board of Finance member Wes Marsh, Board of Finance Alternate member Peggy Katkocin, Permanent Building Committee Chairman Don Kellogg, and 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. April 4, 2024 - Regular meeting - approved by consensus
- B. April 11, 2024 - Special meeting - approved by consensus

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to move Information Item VIII. A. “New Fairfield High School/Consolidated School Building Project Update” to immediately after Public Participation. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

MOTION: Greg Flanagan made a motion to add agenda Item IX. C. “Electricity Consortium.” Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

V. RECOGNITION - CABA STUDENT LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Craw congratulated students that are receiving the CABA Student Leadership awards.

Middle School Principal Karen Gruetzner presented CABA Leadership awards to Lauren Madureira and Logan Coster.

High School Principal James D’Amico presented CABA Leadership awards to Erik Muhlenberg and Anne Johnston.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Katie Williams thanked the Board of Education for their hard work and support for the budget. She spoke of an exit poll after the budget on Saturday and noted that 333 out of 387 surveyed voted “No” for the BOE budget because they felt it was too low.

Board of Finance member Wes Marsh reviewed the results of the BOF meeting from April 29th in the wake of the budget referendum failure of April 27th. At this meeting, the BOF voted to increase the BOE operating budget by \$100,000 to be funded by bond premium. The proposed percentage increase does not change from the April 27th referendum. He encouraged voters to answer the advisory question that will be on the ballot.

John McCartney congratulated all the students that were awarded the CAFE Leadership awards. He encouraged taxpayers to support the Education budget and to vote too low on the referendum.

INFORMATION ITEM

New Fairfield High School/Consolidated School Building Project Update

Scott Pellman from Colliers Project Leaders spoke of the issues and plans for remediation with the propane system at the high school. There was a discussion of the timeline for fixing this issue and the errors and omissions policy in the contract.

VII. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

A. Chairman’s Report - Dominic Cipollone spoke of the budget process and cautioned residents about getting information on social media. He encouraged taxpayers to reach out to the BOE with any questions. He spoke of the need to fund capital projects properly.

B. Superintendent’s Report - Dr. Kenneth Craw spoke of the following:

- June 7th is the 5th Grade Step-Up Ceremony;
- June 17th is the Middle School Moving Up Ceremony;
- June 21st - High School Graduation.

Dr. Craw gave a presentation about chronic absenteeism and noted that there has been significant improvements in the district since last year. Dr. Craw congratulated Paul Gouveia and staff for the CAFE Award for the District Calendar and Guide.

C. Student Representative Reports

Senior Representative Brennan Hearty noted that:

- May 6th to May 17th will be AP Tests at the high school.
- The Junior Prom will be held on May 10th.
- The Senior Prom will be held on May 18th.
- NGEA testing for Junior will be held from May 20th to May 23rd.

D. Committee Reports

1. Business Operations/Resource Management - Greg Flanagan noted that this subcommittee met on April 30th and discussed year-end projections. There is a possible deficit in Central Office, Special Education and oil costs at the old high school. Some savings were realized in out-of-district Special Education Transportation. A projected surplus of approximately \$48,000 is expected after the excess cost grant is received from the State.

2. Policy - Samantha Mannion noted that this subcommittee met on May 1st and discussed policies on suicide prevention and an update on the policy for non-resident students. It was noted that over \$374,000 was saved in the district since the implementation of the new policy for non-resident students.

Director of Technology Paul Gouveia explained the team effort with many town officials to validate that students attending New Fairfield School actually live in town.

3. Field Fees - The Field Fees subcommittee for April 18th was cancelled. This subcommittee will meet on May 13th at 4 p.m.

E. Liaison Reports

1. Board of Finance

Ed Sbordone noted that the BOF Medical subcommittee met on April 22nd and it was noted that claims for the month of March have decreased significantly and are the lowest in the last five months. The Medical subcommittee will meet next on May 20th at 3:30 p.m.

The full BOF met on April 24th and voted to approve an additional appropriation of \$245,000 from the unreserved fund balance into Capital and Nonrecurring for a town truck and voted to approve the transfer of \$33,327.01 to BOE capital and nonrecurring. The \$33,327.01 is a combination of the 2022-2023 expenditure surplus plus the close out of fiscal year 2022. The BOF discussed giving the BOE \$75,000 but needed to get a legal opinion to determine if approval is needed from the BOS.

At the April 24th meeting, the BOF discussed the Capital and Nonrecurring update and voted to form a committee to review capital projects for the Town and the BOE. Cheryl Reedy and Thora Perkins will serve on this committee and will ask for a representative from the BOE. The final item at the April 24th meeting was a review of the unassigned fund balance of the General Fund and it was noted that it is estimated to be 16.67% by the end of the fiscal year.

The BOF met on April 29th to discuss the failure of the budget referendum. There was a motion to reduce the cut for the BOE operating budget by \$250,000 and to add money back to Town capital. This motion failed. The BOF ultimately voted in favor of adding back \$100,000 to the BOE Operating budget to be funded by bond premium that will result in no change to the proposed tax increase.

There will be a special Town Meeting on Wednesday, May 8th to set the date for the second referendum.

VIII. INFORMATION ITEMS

B. Elementary School Structure

Dr. Craw spoke of the existing structure for the Elementary School (Meeting House Hill School and Consolidated School) and clarified that it operates as two names and two schools on one campus. There was a suggestion of the possibility of changing the name of the schools to have one name.

Elementary School Principal Allyson Story spoke of the Mission and Vision statement for the schools and the design for the building.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Kristine Woleck spoke of the K-5 Community and Coherence and supporting of students, staff and families. She spoke of the roles of the Principal and each Assistant Principal. She noted that this will be discussed more in the future. She thanked Allyson Story and staff for all their hard work.

C. FY25 Budget Update

Dr. Craw noted that since the budget failed at referendum on April 27th, the BOF met and voted to add back \$100,000 to the BOE Operating budget that will be funded by bond premium. He spoke of the negative effects if this budget were to pass because only \$97,000 will be left in the bond premium which could result in a significant increase in next year's budget. The capital budget has remained unchanged. It

was noted that it was promised that the track and field will be first on the list for the budget surplus funds but due to the timeline, it is unlikely that it can be completed this summer.

The overall budget increase remained at 4.27% despite significant public comment requesting an increase to the BOE budget. He spoke of the exit poll at the referendum and noted that there is a lot of support for the budget.

IX. ACTION ITEMS

A. Additional Appropriation

MOTION: Ed Sbordone made a motion to recommend to the full board to authorize the Superintendent to request an additional appropriation from the Board of Selectman in the amount of \$41,672.99 for Capital Projects, specifically the Middle School intercom and the Middle School STEAM room. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

B. Personnel Report

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of the Personnel Report for April 29, 2024, as recommended by the administration. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion.

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

C. Electricity Consortium

MOTION: Greg Flanagan made a motion to authorize Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy to lock in a rate for electricity. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy spoke of the 3-year lock in and partnership with the town.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Terra Volpe spoke of her frustration with the budget process and encouraged support of the education budget.

John McCartney congratulated Paul Gouveia and his staff for his hard work that resulted in savings for the district. He further spoke in support of the teachers and administrators and the Fire Marshal. He thanked the BOE for their support of the budget and especially spoke of the need to properly fund capital projects. Mason Cipriani gave his opinion and spoke of concerns regarding the political nature of a song performed by the New Fairfield High School Chorus.

High School Principal James D'Amico addressed the concerns regarding the high school chorus and explained the background of the performance. He noted that the choir was invited to play at Carnegie Hall and explained that parents were informed of the performance ahead of time and were given the option to not have their student participate.

Members of the public spoke in support of the chorus performance and applauded the choir for addressing racial injustice.

XI. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

The following will be discussed at future meetings:

- The bus lot;
- Possible change of name for the Elementary School (MHHS/Consolidated);
- Leadership and guidance about cell phone usage and how it affects mental health.

XII. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Members of the BOE encouraged residents to put politics aside when deciding on the budget. They spoke in support of the original BOE budget that was presented to the BOF and spoke against any cuts to the BOE budget.

Amy Johnson spoke of disappointment with issues with the new buildings and hopes that they can be fixed soon.

Sue Huwer clarified that she was not contacted by anyone regarding the chorus performance despite an article that said she was contacted but did not return messages. She spoke in support of the performance.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:32 p.m. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos