

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

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a regular meeting on Thursday, March 6, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. in the New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT.

MINUTES – March 6, 2025

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

ABSENT: Kathy Baker

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Kristine Woleck, Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy, Middle School Principal Karen Gruetzner, Elementary School Principal Allyson Story, and Selectman Tom Perkins

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. February 6, 2025 - Regular meeting - Approved by consensus.

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA - Approved by consensus.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

John McCartney spoke in support of having the bus lot at the former Consolidated School.

Jennifer Pappas asked about a rumor of having a separate Board of Finance for the Board of Education.

VI. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

A. Chairman's Report - Dominic Cipollone spoke of the following:

- Thanked Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy for going above and beyond her job duties.
- Spoke of recent racist incidents at the high school. He noted that these incidents were addressed immediately, and students were brought to an assembly to discuss the matter. He encouraged parents to talk to their children about appropriate behavior.
- He spoke of the recent resignation of Cheryl Reedy from the BOF and thanked her for all her years of service and dedication to the town.

B. Superintendent's Report - Dr. Kenneth Craw reminded everyone that Daylight Savings Time begins this Sunday, March 9th. He congratulated Monika Krepsztul on becoming the new Director of Pupil Personnel Services.

Dr. Craw presented notebooks to the Board members in honor of "Connecticut Board of Education Member Appreciation" month.

C. Student Representatives' Reports

Senior Representative Emilia Sedlak spoke of the following:

- Spring Sport Registration is now open. The official start of the season begins March 22nd.
- Customized lawn signs are available for purchase for student athletes and extra-curricular participants. A portion of the proceeds will help offset costs for the Washington, DC trip.
- Boy Scout Troop 137 will be hosting their Annual Pasta Dinner on Friday, March 28 from 5-8 p.m. at Company A Firehouse.

Junior Representative Ella Skogstrom spoke of the following:

- The Spring Musical “Little Shop of Horrors” will be performed from March 20th to March 23rd.
- Submissions for the poetry contest are due on March 15th.
- The AFL/CIO Workers Memorial Day Scholarship essay is due by April 1st.
- New Fairfield Soccer Club registration has begun. The season starts on April 5th.
- The Juniors will go to Washington, DC next week.
- SAT Day for Juniors is March 25th.

D. Committee Reports

1. Business Operations/Resource Management - Greg Flanagan noted that this committee met on February 20th. They reviewed budget vs. actual and the district is in line with last year. They are watching a few line items but at this point, a budget freeze is not necessary this year. The subcommittee discussed the Excess Cost Grant.

The company that built the playground at New Fairfield Elementary responded and is willing to work with the district to come up with a solution to fix the playground.

2. Curriculum - Tim Blair noted that the Curriculum Subcommittee met on February 24th. They discussed the New Fairfield High School Course of Study. New Fairfield High School will work in conjunction with West Conn to offer ECE (Early College Experience) classes in Italian and Mandarin. Students that participate in Wind Ensemble or Chamber Singers will be able to have an Honors designation. Dr. Kris Woleck and High School Teacher Jean Gephart spoke of the Science program. Dr. Woleck spoke to the subcommittee regarding a five-year plan for curriculum.

3. Policy - Samantha Mannion noted that Policy met on February 25th and discussed the need to roll back specific policies due to new regulations. They discussed the new FASFA rules for the Class of 2027.

4. Field Fees Committee - Ed Sbordone noted that this subcommittee met on February 24th. The field turf replacement is on schedule. A contribution of \$50,000 will come from the BOE 2025-2026 budget. The subcommittee discussed the Field Fees structure, and it was decided that it will remain the same. The Field Fees Committee voted unanimously to waive the \$1500 fee from the Baseball League for this year provided that the league makes an investment to improve the drainage and level of the infield by the spring. The value of the drainage project is estimated to be \$22,000. The Field Fees Committee discussed the status of the Rebel Pavilion.

E. Liaison Reports

1. Board of Finance - Ed Sbordone gave a summary of recent BOF meetings:

February 26th BOF Meeting

- Thora Perkins introduced Jon Russo as the new Alternate member of the BOF.
- Parks and Rec Director Russ Loudon explained the purpose of the Lock Box for the Boat Docks.
- There was a discussion of how the Mil Rate is calculated and how it is affected by the Grand List.
- The BOF noted that medical claims for January were high and there is a negative balance in the reserve fund.
- The BOF discussed the options for the Bus Lot.

March 1 - Public Hearing

First Selectman Melissa Lindsey presented the BOS budget to the Board of Finance. The total requested municipal budget for 2025-2026 is \$14,691,870 which represents an increase of \$564,163 or 3.99% over the 2024-2025 budget.

BOE Chairman Dominic Cipollone thanked everyone involved in preparing the budget for this year. He encouraged everyone to act civil and respectful during the duration of the budget season. He spoke of the many accomplishments of the district over the last year.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw spoke of the many accomplishments throughout the district.

He spoke of key budget factors for the Operating budget and the Capital budget. Factors that affect the Operating budget include enrollment and staffing adjustments. Dr. Craw spoke of the enhancement of many

programs, especially the Fine Arts programs and the need to find appropriate space in the Middle School for the Strings programs.

Dr. Craw further spoke of budget efficiencies including relocating of staffing resources, in-district special education programs, savings to facilities and operations, revenue offsets and grants. He especially thanked Director of Technology Paul Gouveia for his work and diligence in securing a Cybersecurity Grant in the amount of \$316,708.

The total requested operating BOE budget for 2025-2026 equals \$50,055,039 which is a \$1,810,949 increase from the 2024-2025 budget which represents a 3.75% increase. This is compared to a 5.99% increase for 2023-2024 and 4.95% increase for 2024-2025 fiscal years.

The capital budget request is \$735,000 with the majority of needs for the Middle School.

March 5 - BOF Meeting

The BOF had their first budget discussion on March 5th. They noted that the audit filing for 2023-2024 fiscal year has been delayed until the end of March. They discussed the Grand List and how it affects the Mil Rate. They spoke of the budget tool, non-tax revenues, and adjustments to taxes. \$194,652 was realized as a result of closing out some past BOE projects. This money can be used to bring down debt service. The BOF also reviewed capital and medical areas of the budget. There will be a special BOF meeting on Tuesday, March 11th to discuss the Medical budget. The BOE budget will be discussed at the March 12th BOF meeting.

2. Parks and Recreation

Kimberly LaTourette noted that this committee met on February 10th and discussed the following:

- Parks and Rec Director Linda Lull spoke of the possibility of opening the Town Beach without lifeguards. The beach hours will be the same as last year.
- Camp counselor interviews will begin soon.
- Summer programs include Day camp, Soccer and Basketball.
- Linda Lull noted that she met with the BOS regarding the budget and there was a request for a list of possible upcoming repairs for the High School Pavilion. It was noted that this a Town building and there was a discussion of turning this building to the purview of the Board of Education.
- Summer activities for Parks and Rec include: Saturday, May 3rd - Sip and Stroll; Friday, July 11th - Boat Parade; Saturday, September 27th - New Fairfield Day; Friday, October 24th - Trick or Treat; Sunday, November 23rd - Turkey Run; Saturday, November 29th - Santa's Workshop

VII. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget

Dr. Craw noted that the BOF will review the Board of Education budget at their March 12th meeting. A list of questions and answers regarding the BOE budget will be sent to the Board of Finance. Dominic Cipollone noted that the BOE is looking forward to working collaboratively with the BOF.

VIII. ACTION ITEMS

A. Personnel Report

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to recommend to the full Board the approval of the Personnel Report for February 27, 2025, as recommended by the administration. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion.

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

B. New Fairfield High School Graduation

MOTION: Greg Flanagan made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of June 13, 2025, as the graduation date for the NFHS Class of 2025. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion.

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

C. Finance Department Operations

Dr. Craw spoke of a letter that he sent to First Selectman Melissa Lindsey regarding problems and concerns with the operations of the Finance Department. He spoke of the collaborative work with the First Selectman to resolve these issues. He thanked Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy for her help with this process.

Carrie DePuy gave an overview of nine issues of concern and reported that all have been resolved except the audit. She noted that the BOE is not looking to have their own services or a separate Board of Finance. She stressed that everything is in compliance and there are no reporting issues of concern. There has been no loss of revenue. She thanked the Shared Services Team for all their help.

D. Shared Services Study

Dr. Craw spoke of the possibility of conducting an evaluation of shared services model. He recommended hiring a consultant to review documents. He spoke of the rationale and process for this evaluation and recommended the firm of Clifton Larson Allen LLC in West Hartford. There was a discussion of the cost of this consultant and if the Town should absorb some of the cost from their budget.

MOTION: Ed Sbordone made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval of the Shared Services Study as presented. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, and Ed Sbordone **OPPOSED:** Sue Huwer and Samantha Mannion

E. Summer 2025 New Fairfield Middle School Project

It was decided to delay the discussion of the Middle School Project until Director of Buildings and Grounds Phil Ross can give an update.

MOTION: Kimberly LaTourette made a motion to table the approval of the New Fairfield Middle School Summer Project. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

F. Continuation of Health Benefits

MOTION: Kimberly LaTourette made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval to authorize the Superintendent to offer continuation of health insurance benefits for teachers who notify the intent to resign by Friday, May 23, 2025. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion.

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

G. Acceptance of Donation

1. T-Mobile \$5K Fridays Contest

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to recommend to the full Board to accept with gratitude the T-Mobile \$5K Fridays donation of \$5,000 to rebuild the New Fairfield High School shed. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

H. Board of Education Policies

Suspension of the Rules (Policy 4118.112/4218.112, Policy 5145.5, Policy 4000.1/4200.1, Policy 5145.44)

MOTION: Samantha Mannion made a motion to recommend to the full Board suspension of the rules referring to Policy 4118.112/4218.112, Policy 5145.5, Policy 4000.1/4200.1 and Policy 5145.44. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

1. Reinstate Policy 4118.112/4218.112 – Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace
2. Reinstate Policy 5145.5 – Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment
3. Rescind Policy 4000.1/4200.1 - Prohibition of Sex Discrimination, Including Sex-Based Harassment
4. Rescind Policy 5145.44 – Prohibition of Sex Discrimination, Including Sex-Based Harassment

Rescind Policies 5145.44 and 4000.1/4200.1

MOTION: Samantha Mannion made a motion to recommend to the full Board to rescind Policy 5145.44 - Prohibition of Sex Discrimination, including Sex-Based Harassment and to rescind Policy 4000.1/4200.1 - Prohibition of Sex Discrimination, Including Sex-Based Harassment. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Reinstate Policy 4118.112/4218.112 and Policy 5145.5

MOTION: Samantha Mannion made a motion to recommend to the full Board to reinstate Policy 4118.112/4218.112 - Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace and Policy 5145.5 - Prohibition of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment. Tim Blair seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

I. School Security and Safety Request (Executive Session)

J. Paraprofessional Leave of Absence Request (Executive Session)

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Selectman Tom Perkins asked about the job descriptions of the employees of the Finance Department. He referred to a suggestion regarding having the Town share the cost of the Shared Services Study and reminded everyone that residents pay one tax bill no matter which department the money comes from. He also cautioned everyone to get their information about the Town and BOE from meetings and not social media.

John McCartney spoke in support of the Shared Services Study. He thanked Dr. Craw, Carrie DePuy, her team and the entire BOE for bringing to light the issues in the Finance Department and encouraged getting issues in the Finance Department fixed as soon as possible.

X. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS - None

XI. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Greg Flanagan spoke as his role in BOE Finance subcommittee and noted that the issues in the Finance Department are a recent development. He further thanked Cheryl Reedy for all she did for the Board of Finance and her support of the schools and wished her well.

Tim Blair thanked Cheryl Reedy and wished her well.

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING SCHOOL SECURITY AND SAFETY

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

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:28 p.m. for the purpose of discussing School Security and a Paraprofessional Leave of Absence request and to invite Carrie DePuy and Dr. Craw into the Executive Session. Kimberly LaTourette seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to come out of Executive Session at 8:51 p.m. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, 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 to approve and expedite school security and safety improvements in the amount of \$23,965 from Cap and Non.

Tim Blair seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

MOTION: Samantha Mannion made a motion to recommend to the full Board of Education the approval of Diane Vannucci's request for an unpaid leave of absence beginning on January 22, 2025, with a return to work on April 1, 2025. Amy Johnson seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Sue Huwer, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos