

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

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a regular meeting on Thursday, February 1, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT.

MINUTES – February 1, 2024

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

ABSENT: Greg Flanagan

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Kristine Woleck, Director of Business and Operations Carrie DePuy, Pupil Personnel Director Maria Kennedy, Secondary Special Education Supervisor Monika Krepsztul, High School Principal James D’Amico, and Elementary School Principal Allyson Story,

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. January 18, 2024 - Regular meeting - approved by consensus
- B. January 23, 2024 - Special meeting - approved by consensus

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA - approved by consensus

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Rick Regan spoke in support of the BOE budget and encouraged the BOE to present potential cuts to the BOF as soon as possible.

Chairman Dominic Cipollone read a letter from resident Megan Karloutsos in favor of using the former Consolidated School property for the bus lot. She noted safety should be a priority when making the decision of where to put the buses.

VI. ACTION ITEM

A. Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget, Capital Budget and Debt Service

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Craw gave a list of possible reductions to the budget in order to keep the budget increase to below 5% over the 2023-2024 budget. The potential reductions cut \$138,168 from the increase and yield an increase of 4.95% over the 2023-2024 budget for a total of \$48,695,091. Possible additional reductions that may be available in the future include pension contributions and Sherman student transportation which, if taken, would yield an increase of 4.75% over the 2023-2024 budget or \$48,603,882.

There was a discussion of budget drivers, including eliminating certain workbooks that no longer serve a purpose, the stipend for athletic events, reduction in pension contributions and the possibility of an increase in the amount of Sherman students. Pro forma, environmental conditions and investments and mandates were considered. There was a discussion of the allocation of the Sherman tuition and whether it should be allocated to the Town budget or the BOE budget. There was a suggestion of using the additional Sherman revenue to offset Sherman transportation costs.

MOTION: Ed Sbordone made a motion to recommend to the full Board of Education the approval of the 2024-25 Board of Education's operating budget in the amount of \$48,695,091, an increase of 4.95%, the 2024-25 Board of Education's capital budget in the amount of \$794,577, and the 2024-25 Board of Education's debt service budget in the amount of \$7,953,108. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

VII. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

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

- Spoke of the budget and noted that the BOE strives to present a budget that is reasonable and meets the needs of the district. He spoke of the Sherman tuition going into the Town budget instead of the BOE budget. He spoke of the need to renovate the turf and track and noted that the facilities are used more by Youth Sports and Club Sports instead of student athletes. Finally, he encouraged the town to come up with a reasonable solution bus lot location.

B. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Craw spoke of a State Grant program through ESSER funds that will give teachers up to \$1,000 for classroom supports. He encouraged classroom teachers to apply for these grants.

1. Attendance Update - Dr. Craw spoke of chronic absenteeism and noted that it is trending down with improvements in the elementary and middle school. Chronic absenteeism is defined as being absent 10% of the days or more. It is hopeful that the absentee rates will go below 10%.

C. Student Representative Reports

Senior Representative Brennan Hearty noted that:

- SATs for Juniors will be given soon.
- There is no school on Monday, February 19th and Tuesday, February 20th.

Junior Representative Emilia Sedlak noted that:

- Course Selections for next year will be held this month.
- The National Honor Society will hold a blood drive on March 6th.

D. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum - Tim Blair noted that this committee met on January 22nd. They discussed the World Language Program. The committee discussed a timeline for expanding the language department. There was an update on strategic planning and the reading pilot.

2. Policy - Samantha Mannion noted that the subcommittee met on January 31st. Three policies were discussed. The committee is waiting for more information on electronic participation at BOE meetings. Policies on substitute teachers and non-resident students will be on a future agenda.

3. Special Education Ad Hoc - Kimberly LaTourette noted that this subcommittee met on February 1st. Pupil Personnel Director Maria Kennedy, Secondary Special Education Supervisor Monika Krepsztul, and Elementary Special Education Supervisor Alex Lambert were in attendance. There are currently 95 staff members who received PMT training with a possibility that 20 more will be trained in the near future. Adaptive physical education was discussed. A grant was received for Unified Sports for both the Middle School and High School. ESY (Extended School Year) will be held from July 18th to August 1st. There is new legislation effective Feb. 5th that requires a statement to be read at all PPT meetings. Maria Kennedy will be holding focus groups with families in February.

E. Liaison Reports - None

VIII. INFORMATION/ACTION ITEMS

A. Solar Project

Kevin Siebrecht from Greenleaf Energy Solutions gave a presentation regarding solar energy for school buildings. He spoke of a guaranteed payment that the district can get on any power that is produced on the roof at a rate of 20 cents per kilowatt hour. He noted that the system is guaranteed to perform for 25 years. Mr. Siebrecht spoke of the financial benefits for the solar panels. There was a discussion of the application process and the procedures if the district is chosen through the lottery system. Members of the BOE asked about “worst case scenarios”

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to recommend to the full Board the approval of the New Fairfield High School Solar Project as presented and \$10,000 refundable bond from the capital budget. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion.

AMENDMENT TO THE MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to the previous motion to specify that the \$10,000 bond would cover both the high school **and** Consolidated School buildings. Ed Sbordone seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR OF AMENDMENT:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Amy Johnson, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone **ABSTAINED:** Sue Huwer **IN FAVOR OF MOTION AS AMENDED:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone **OPPOSED:** Tim Blair, Amy Johnson, and Sue Huwer

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 25, 2024, as recommended by the administration. Kim LaTourette seconded the motion.

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

B. Acceptance of Donation

1. Rebels Booster Club

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to recommend to the full Board to accept with gratitude the Rebels Booster Club donation of \$10,000 for the purchase of a wrestling mat. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone.

The Board thanked the Booster Club for the generous donation.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Eileen Hacaj spoke in favor of the solar project and gave information regarding solar projects in other towns in Connecticut.

John McCartney thanked the Booster Club for the generous donation of the wrestling mat. He spoke in support of the solar project. He also spoke of sources of revenue for the BOE budget.

XI. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS - Maria Kennedy will give a presentation of the expansion of the STRIDES program in the near future.

XII. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS - Tim Blair and Sue Huwer explained their reasons for voting against the solar project and noted that although they are in favor of solar power, the contract felt rushed. Kathy Baker noted that she feels comfortable with the solar project since it's already installed at MHHS.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Dominic Cipollone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Tim Blair, Dominic Cipollone, Amy Johnson, Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Ed Sbordone

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos