

Ashford Board of Education
Meeting Minutes – November 5, 2020
7:00 pm
Meeting Held Via Zoom

Note: Per CGS 10-218, Board of Education Meeting Minutes are provided in a draft format within 48 hours of the date the meeting was held. With the exceptions of motions and votes recorded, the minutes are unofficial until they have been read and approved by a majority vote by the Board. Should edits be necessary, they will be made at a regularly scheduled meeting, noted in the meeting minutes, and so voted upon.

Call to Order

- Chair John Lippert called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m.
- Present were members Marian Matthews, Tess Grous, Tina Fradette, Kim Kouatly, Jane Urban, Al Maccarone, and Ex Officio/First Selectman Cathryn Silver-Smith.
- Also present were Superintendent Dr. James Longo, Asst. Principal Polly Borysevicz, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Head Custodian Mike Mellady, and Zoom meeting host/Technology Consultant Scott Waddell, as well as approximately 10 other members of the school staff and the public.

Communications – No communications.

MOTION by John Lippert to add an item to the agenda, 8d Board Roles and Responsibilities. Motion seconded by Tess Grous and carried unanimously.

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Kim Kouatly asked for board meetings to be announced on K12 alerts.

Approval of Minutes

- Discussion about level of detail in minutes: Tess Grous said there was a lot left out of the minutes for the special meeting on 10/29/20. John Lippert said current process is Recording Secretary Sara Wilson preparing the minutes and sending to John for a proofread before being sent to Jen Barsaleau to have agenda items attached and sent to the town. John said if anyone else wanted to proofread, they could contact him. Kim Kouatly asked if Secretary Tess Grous should be reviewing them. In future, Sara Wilson will send draft of minutes to John and copy Tess.
- ***MOTION by Marian Matthews to approve minutes from 06/18/20. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone. Motion carried with three abstentions (T. Fradette, J. Urban, K. Kouatly).***
- ***MOTION by Marian Matthews to approve minutes from 10/15/20. Motion seconded by Tina Fradette.*** Jane Urban wanted to clarify what she had said about the possible future therapy dog program in 4th bullet of Cindy Ford's report, hoping that it could be similar to the town's library program. ***Motion carried unanimously.***
- ***MOTION by Jane Urban to approve minutes from 10/29/20 (special). Motion seconded by Al Maccarone.*** Tess Grous mentioned several things that were left out of the minutes. She would like to see the Zoom recording and add important details. Cathryn Silver-Smith said the Recording Secretary prepares the minutes and the Secretary is responsible for the minutes being taken and filed with the Town Clerk. The board decided that 10/29/20 special meeting minutes would be addressed at a later meeting, to give Tess an opportunity to review them with the recording. Cathryn will talk with John and Tess. ***Motion was not carried.***

Administrative Reports

Dr. Longo

- The underground fuel tank expires in 2023. They need to update and review capital projects request plan.
- Dr Longo encouraged John Lippert to meet with Board of Finance Chair Chuck Funk to set up a schedule for a three-board meeting.
- Jane Urban asked if we currently have anything budgeted for the underground fuel tank. Dr. Longo said we do not. It would have to be through capital. Jane has experience with this and said there is no flexibility on tank expiration. There would be a daily fine accrued for each day beyond the expiration date.
- Dr. Longo said the town owns the school building. It is not owned by the BOE. Cathryn Silver-Smith said she did not have any information and asked Dr. Longo to forward the notice to her.
- Marian Matthews asked about the board goals. Dr. Longo thinks our commitment to investing in the facility might be worthy of its own goal, since there will be capital expenditures presented soon.

- The meeting with the Education Commissioner was very good. Ashford has had the least drama in terms of opening. There is talk now about opening regional 15-minute testing sites for the virus that are free for schools.
- Tess Grous said Ellington opened up a testing site and only 29 people showed up. Dr. Longo said this would be something new. He stated it is being done by the state and we will just receive information. Dr. Longo will inquire through Eastern Highlands Health District for a summary of all the rules regarding it.
- Al Maccarone said he had a COVID-19 test done last Friday. He was asked to limit social contacts until he got the test results. He had the results in 4 days.
- Jane Urban thanked Dr. Longo and administrative team for being proactive in having teachers reach out to families and assess technology needs and other issues in regard to potential distance learning for everybody.
- Dr. Longo said there is a rumor that the state may ask us to close for 2 weeks after Thanksgiving.
- John Lippert said he is thrilled that we are still in school.
- Cathryn Silver-Smith expressed concern about the reliability of the 15-minute test. She will send out some information about free testing available.

Maintenance Report – Mike Mellady

- Mike is very proud of the way his team is working hard to keep the school clean.
- There is a typing error in the maintenance report in regard to upper boiler coil. It was rebuilt 17 years ago, not in 2017. The rebuild was \$12,000-15,000 back then and would have been \$40,000 to replace it. He is getting prices now for that.
- John Lippert asked if they were fully staffed. Mike said yes. Ryan is doing well and working 25 hours per week.
- Kim Kouatly asked about the heat. Mike said the heat is up and running. He thinks he can probably get a year or two out of the coil, that it is operational but in bad shape.
- The hot water tank in the primary wing was replaced. They wanted to make sure there was warm water for washing hands.
- Tess Grous asked Mike how long he has been with the school. He started in 2002. Tess said, "What would we do without you?" She appreciated the detail provided in his report. Tess asked about kids being cold and having to wear coats inside, wondering if that was due to the problem with the upper boiler coil. Mike said the heat was working. He thought it had more to do with the windows being open with the current pandemic situation.
- Mike said Dr. Longo understands what the building really needs. He said the building is in the best overall shape it has been in since he has been here.
- John Lippert seconded the praise for Mike and said nobody takes as much ownership as Mike does.
- Jane Urban said upgrading the windows will help the school be warmer. She asked what year the oil tank was installed. Mike said it is a 30-year fiberglass tank embedded in sand.
- Jane Urban asked if the roofing people gave any dire predictions about how long we have. Mike said The Garland Company gave him a nice kit, and he has patched some holes. The warranty ran out about 7 years ago. Since then, they have been bringing in outside companies every 6 months to try to repair what they can, and they will keep up with patching. Mike mentioned ad hoc committee formed to look at town buildings in need of attention. Some capital projects will need to be bundled together to get a grant.
- Jane Urban thanked Mike and Ryan, saying they are a big reason why we are still in school. Marian Matthews seconded that and said they are doing an awesome job. Marian asked if anybody else knows what Mike knows about the mechanical aspects of the school. She hopes Mike is training someone else too.
- Al Maccarone mentioned E.O. Smith considering the addition of solar when they put on a new roof. Marian Matthews said we will definitely look at solar when we replace the roof. She said it will be a bonding issue, not just a grant.
- Tess Grous asked if replacing the roof is in our long-term goals. Marian Matthews said it is. Dr. Longo said it is for 3 or 4 years from now. Marian has been pushing to move that forward on the timeline. Jane Urban stated she supports Marian's thoughts on that, that we cannot wait.
- Mike said, in regard to solar, the roof is not structurally sound to hold that much weight up there. We need to have a plan B, maybe putting panels on the land on the side of the school. Marian Matthews said previously they had considered putting solar panels in the parking lot and that there are all kinds of possibilities.
- Tess Grous asked if we could have Mike come in when they discuss the goals.
- Cathryn Silver-Smith said there is an Ashford Advisory School Building Committee, a temporary committee that they are making a permanent committee. There is a special town meeting 11/07/20 in regard to this. The

committee will be evaluating the Friar report. Cathryn said we need to make sure we have good communication between the Advisory School Building Committee and the BOE Building Committee. She mentioned the Capital Improvement Committee for the entire town and things going through them to get to the Board of Finance.

- Marian Matthews said the Advisory School Building Committee needs to look at the audit as well as the Friar report. Cathryn Silver-Smith said she does not have a copy of the audit. Marian will follow up to make sure Cathryn gets a copy of the audit.

Technology Coordinator Report

- John Lippert expressed apprehension about the identified hardware needs for the next school year and asked if it was a lot more than we usually do. Scott Waddell said it is not a lot more. He said one of the labs is aging out and cannot be upgraded past where it is (the 25 desktop computers in the media center). Scott said this lab is used for whole classes as well as for testing in the spring.
- John Lippert asked why desktops, as opposed to laptops? Jane Urban said she thought desktops were usually less expensive and would keep the lab from being dismantled by someone who needed a laptop somewhere else.
- Jane Urban asked about 45 iPads for grades K-2. Scott said that is 5 iPads per classroom for kindergarten through grade 2 so they can use them as a center. They currently have approximately 25, but those 25 are with distance learners. Jane thanked Scott for dealing with incredible challenges every day.
- Tess Grous asked if we already have 350 laptops and 250 desktops in stock. She thought it sounded like a lot for 380 students. Scott said we are blessed. He said there are no extras for grades 6-8; they are a 1:1 program with their own assigned computer. They are hoping to make 5th grade 1:1 as well next year. Tess asked if the students pay for insurance on the equipment. Scott answered they do not have insurance, but they do have an extended warranty. Apple is coming out with a special school warranty. The iPads they currently have are 6-7 years old and reaching the end of their life cycle.
- Kim Kouatly asked if iPads were replacing desktops in primary classrooms. Scott said the desktop computers in primary are aging out and rather than replace them, they want to go with iPads. The computers are for staff as well as students. She asked why we are looking at 5th grade doing 1:1. Scott said years ago, when they started the 1:1 program, they wanted to include 5th grade. With changes in the curriculum, they hope to get there. Kim asked why Apple? Scott said when you consider the total cost of ownership of a Mac, in the end Macs are cheaper. They last longer and have better software.
- Marian Matthews agreed with Macs lasting longer. She asked Scott if they were addressing the issues that contribute to technology pitfalls. Scott said he is working with administration. Kate Craven has offered classes. Educators share answers with each other. There is not a lot of time to explore during the school year. Scott said teachers are doing well, but he would love to see them do more with innovative technology pieces. Kate Craven is on the Technology Committee.
- Tess Grous said it sounds like Scott would like to see teachers utilize technology more, but there is not time afforded for that. She asked if it would be a good idea to have a teacher training day. Scott said they are looking at professional development days for that.
- John Lippert asked Scott if it was possible to see a spreadsheet that displays current inventory of hardware. Scott has it and can make it available. Seventy of those devices are in their labs. Scott will get this information to Jen to be included as information in the next meeting.
- Dr. Longo said there are 5 desktops in every classroom so teachers can have stations. There is a cart of laptops for every grade in primary. Some of the machines are 9 years old. They are trying to purchase computers every year as some age out. There will be a workshop in February about things available to the teachers through Apple. He said Scott Waddell and Mike Mellady are wonderful employees. Scott is an Apple genius.
- Jane Urban asked Dr. Longo about the enrollment summary showing 374 kids. She thought historically they had around 408 kids and wondered about the reason for the drop. Dr. Longo said their numbers go up and down. He was only aware of 3 or 4 families that had gone to home schooling. These are the numbers from October 1st. Cindy Ford said we couldn't take as many preschool students due to numbers.
- Al Maccarone asked Dr. Longo what percentage of students are distance learners. Dr. Longo said about 25% are distance learners.

MOTION made by John Lippert for the board to consider agenda items 8b and 8c at this point in the meeting. Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried unanimously.

New Business

b. Certified Staff Resignation

c. Certified Staff Appointment

- John Lippert said he is always chilled when he sees staff resignation on the agenda but always pleased when it is followed immediately by staff appointment.
- Cindy Ford said she is chilled as well but also happy for School Psychologist Alicia Marceau to move on to another opportunity for herself. She said we have always had two school psychologists. Currently, there are 23 openings for school psychologists in Connecticut. It is challenging to compete with other districts and what they are able to pay. Social workers do similar work. The biggest difference is the assessment piece. The school psychologist looks more at diagnosis and eligibility for special education. They also do counseling, work with general ed kids who are struggling, and reach out to families. Social workers do a lot more of family outreach; they are trained for that. This feels like a good opportunity to round out our team, with a school psychologist, school social worker, and school counselor. This team can work collaboratively with the Youth Services person in town and the community health person.
- John Lippert had asked Cindy years ago what the ideal team would be. Her answer was psychologist, social worker, and counselor. If we approve the hire brought forward, we would have that team. Cindy said Alissa Tatro has a lot of experience and a lot of contacts within the community and beyond.
- Kim Kouatly asked what grades each of them be focusing on. Cindy said that would be something that they develop as a team. They can play different roles in different areas. They are already thinking about it and trying to come up with a good plan.
- Tess Grous asked if there is a difference in their financial contract? Cindy said it will be about a \$9000 increase. Tess asked if the new person happens to have a dog for therapy.

MOTION made by Kim Kouatly to accept with regret the resignation of School Psychologist Alicia Marceau. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously.

MOTION made by Jane Urban to accept the appointment of Alissa Tatro as School Social Worker. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.

Committee Break Out Sessions – Committees entered break out sessions at 8:57 p.m. and returned from break out sessions at 9:24 p.m.

- **Building & Grounds Committee:** Marian Matthews said they need to spend some time really looking over the Friar report and the audit. They want to delve into this pretty deeply to see how fast we can get to bonding to replace the roof as well as the other items in the audit and the Friar report. They are interested in having the school join the Pollinator Pathway, a big push in Connecticut right now.
 - Jane Urban got to make two new pollinator gardens, and she has a lot of contacts involved in this. She asked Building & Grounds Committee to let her know how she can help.
 - Marian Matthews has done two pollinator gardens, one at her farm and one at the town.
 - Dr. Longo is thinking about trying to get a solar panel to connect to the greenhouse and asked if Building & Grounds Committee could be of assistance in that. It will help the kids learn about solar, and they can go home and talk about it with their parents.
- **Personnel:** Jane Urban said the AEA has requested a meeting with the Personnel Committee, like they have done historically, to discuss school climate. They will set a meeting date for that.
 - Dr. Longo said this spring it will be time to start negotiating contract for noncertified staff.
 - Dr. Longo requested an executive session to discuss his contract.

Old Business

a. Audit Update

b. FY 20 Budget Update

c. FY 21 Budget Planning

- The Business Manager was not in attendance.

- Dr. Longo met with Martha Guidry, Karen Munroe, and Kelee Calkins. He gave them what he feels like is the schedule. He said they are on a good path, that the team is ready to dig in and start working on things.
- Dr. Longo said there is no news about the current audit. It was put on the agenda in the hope that something might have come up about it, but nothing has come up.

New Business

a. Request for Leave of Absence (Certified Staff)

- Dr. Longo said Cindy Ford is going to look for a substitute. It is tough to fill these special positions, but they will find somebody.
- ***MOTION made by Jane Urban to accept School Counselor Jessica Bernardi's request for leave of absence. Motion seconded by Kim Kouatly and carried unanimously.***

d. Discuss Board Rules and Responsibilities

- John Lippert asked if everyone has the blue booklet. There are three sections. John recommends board members read through page 5 and discuss at next meeting.
- Marian Matthews said there is CABA workshop 11/16/20 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. on Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members. Marian recommended that everybody do that before the next meeting. Board members were asked to contact Jen Barsaleau to register if they would like it to be paid for by the board.

Opportunity for Public Comment – No public comment.

Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

- Dr. Longo has requested an executive session to discuss his contract.
- John Lippert is still missing some evaluation forms. The board will have a special meeting on 11/12/20 at 7:00 p.m. to discuss superintendent evaluation responses in executive session. Kim Kouatly and Al Maccarone will not be able to attend.
- Policies for a second reading.
- Updates on Bicknell scholarship.
- Advisory School Building Committee. Marian Matthews wants to be on that committee, and the only way she can be on that is to be nominated from the floor. The town meeting is at 11:00 a.m. on 11/07/20 at Pompey Hollow Park.

Adjournment

MOTION by Marian Matthews to adjourn the meeting (9:49 p.m.). Motion seconded by Jane Urban and carried unanimously.

Sara Wilson
Recording Secretary