

Ashford Board of Education
Regular Meeting Minutes – April 23, 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 7:07 PM. Present were Marian Matthews, Jane Urban, Shannon Gamache, Tess Grous, Al Maccarone (7:16 pm) and Tina Fradette (7:32 pm). Also present were Superintendent Dr. James Longo, Interim Business Manager Karen Munroe, Principal Troy Hopinks, Director of Pupil Personnel Cindy Ford, Interim Acting Asst. Principal Polly Borysevich and recording secretary Jen Barsaleau.

Approximately 65 members of the public were signed in during the course of the meeting.

Communications

Chair John Lippert read a statement from AEA Co-President Jennifer Lindsay regarding the FY 21 budget.

Approval of Minutes: 03/05/2020

Motion made by Jane Urban to approve the minutes of 03/05/2020 with one correction; mill rate should be spelled “mil” rate. Motion seconded by Shannon Gamache and carried with one abstention by Marian Matthews.

Old Business

a. COVID-19 Update

Dr. Longo provided an update. The cafeteria is serving meals for over 200 students, the custodial staff are cleaning daily on a rotating work schedule, paraprofessionals are assisting with meal and learning packet preparation and drivers are delivering them. Mr. Hopkins reported that they will continue to send packets home and have held several electronic faculty meetings and staff are receiving professional development. There is a great deal of collaboration among the staff and good feedback is being received from parents.

Marian Matthews asked about student access to the internet. Mr. Hopkins responded that most students have access. Some parents are picking up paper packets, and if necessary, some are being delivered via email. If there is no access, teachers and counselors are calling homes.

Information for free wifi has been sent to homes.

Tess Grous asked how families are handling access with multiple children. Mr. Hopkins indicated laptops have been offered to families to use during this time.

Marian Matthews asked if we could find out how many families do not have internet or wifi access.

Tess Grous inquired if the school was getting all appropriate grant waivers and extensions by the federal government. Dr. Longo responded that notification was sent to Superintendents that all grant funding will remain intact. Mrs. Grous asked for a list of grants and where they will be allocated in the budget.

b. FY 19 Audit

Karen Munroe reported that the FY 19 audit is complete and was submitted to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) as required by law. There are some items that will require a written response, some have already been put in place. Discussion followed.

Members of the board gave praise and thanks to Mrs. Munroe for all of the time and effort she put forth during this process. The Board of Finance and the auditors also spoke appreciatively of the efforts of Mrs. Munroe.

New Business

a. Extension of Bicknell Scholarship

Student applicants had expressed difficulty in obtaining necessary transcripts to attach to applications, therefore, a request to extend the deadline is needed. Discussion followed.

Motion made by Jane Urban to extend the deadline to award the Bicknell Scholarships as needed. Motion seconded by Tina Fradette and carried unanimously.

Jen Barsaleau will contact Scholarship Management to discuss timeline to complete the award process for this year.

b. Staff Resignation

A resignation from middle school math teacher Kristine Melo was received effective June 30, 2020.

A discussion was held concerning an exit interview with the BOE. Dr. Longo will contact the teacher and inform her that she has this option available to her.

Motion to accept the resignation of Kristine Melo made by Shannon Gamache. Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried with one abstention by Tess Grous.

c. Public Use of School Facilities

Dr. Longo wanted to be sure that the board and others are aware that when the school building is closed, it is closed to all activities. Given the COVID-19 situation, we have to be sure there is no public access as it would violate social distancing measures directed by the state.

FY 21 Budget Worksession

Dr. Longo reported that the Board of Finance reduced the Education budget to a zero increase, leaving few areas left to apply reductions, this would mean cutting 3 teachers.

Discussion followed amongst members of board and included, but was not limited to:

- Consider cutting after school programs and activities
- Fuel/electric savings – does any savings carry over to next year?
- Dr. Longo to send statement of cuts, will go out on Monday (K-12)
- Does the budget include a new phonics program, around \$20,000?
- Eliminate Spanish altogether
- Could Mrs. Borysevich become part-time principal/part time teacher?
- Spanish/Assistant Principa?
- Is there any savings eliminating a position vs. lay off?
- Spanish is important, do not support eliminating the whole program Further discussion followed with regard to the Spanish program.
- Dr. Longo recommended the BOE vote to make a \$20,000 cut, then on May 6 plead with public/BOF to reverse the 0 increase.
- Discussion followed regarding unions and pay freeze.
- It was stated the BOF approach is foolish. If Town sentiment is negative, may consider restoring funds. Need to outline what cuts we'll make to get to a zero budget.
- If Spanish is eliminated, we will have to contract for required ELL Services which is covered by Spanish teacher (15% of time)
- Could Spanish be an after school program?
- Dr. Longo noted that if Sports and After School program were cut, that would amount to \$46,000 which would still require a reduction of 1 Spanish teacher and 1 Classroom teacher.
- Other towns are not cutting their budgets.
- Statement by Chuck Funk, BOF Chair: Ashford is unique due to R19. Increase equates to $\frac{3}{4}$ mil due to R19. No control over it. The tax collection rate is good.
- BOE wants to hear from the public.
- Specify some cuts – rest are teachers – not sure what they are yet.
- Tina Fradette asked for Executive Session before next meeting. John will reach out to her. Tina left meeting at 8:51 p.m.

Motion made by John Lippert to add Item 8.5 to the agenda “ 2nd Budget Work session”

Motion seconded by Al Maccarone and carried unanimously

Opportunity for Public Comment

- Jen Lindsay – Letter sent to cooperate. Responded to statement that “teachers are being selfish” – spouses could be out of work.
- Rebecca Haeger – has Grade 8 child – concerned – has a passion for education in Town. Spanish would be a major mistake. Consider After school programs, sports to pay to play, reduce Spanish.
- John Kopec – BOE Budget reduction is due to the Pandemic situation. # out of work – dramatic impact on collection rate.
- Meghan Champagne - Support for Spanish Program. Little to no increases for many years.
- Emily Johnston, Junior at EO Smith – Eliminating Spanish would put Ashford students at a disadvantage. Ashford would be the only feeder with Spanish, it gives students a comfort level.
- Jesse Burnham - This is looking at one year of reductions for Education. Will have a lower budget obligation to EO Smith the following year. Don’t hire Assistant Principal.
- Corbin 0 If a large amount of people are out of work and can’t pay their taxes, where do you think the \$ for your budget will come from? If we can’t collect it, it simply doesn’t exist.
- Jennifer Leszczynski -Thanked teachers for amazing job. Should not ask for pay cuts. This is a temporary thing. The BOF is reacting before knowing the impact. Don’t cut Spanish. Make sure no teachers are cut.

Discussion ensued on the cost per household for the \$156,000 increase. A few numbers were discussed, one said \$4 per month, another \$8-11 per month per household. EO Smith and Fire Department increases equal 1 mil. Would require an additional .5 mil increase.

Dr. Longo expressed his sympathizes for the BOF. They have struggled with budget and are concerned for the Town. However, it is his responsibility to represent the school, students, staff and must advocate for them. He stated he is amazed by what the staff is doing.

Next Meeting Date/Agenda Items

Discussed availability of Board to hold another meeting. A special meeting will be held on Wednesday, 4/29/20.

Second Budget Worksession

Discussion of the Asst. Principal position was held. It is currently filled by Polly Borysevicz as an intern.

BOF chair Chuck Funk was asked about the impact to individual taxes of residents. He will contact Linda Gagne in the Assessor’s Office for a calculation.

Adjournment

Motion made by Marian Jane Urban to adjourn the meeting (9:54 pm). Motion seconded by Marian Matthews and carried unanimously.

Recorded by:

Jennifer Barsaleau, Recording Secretary and Karen Munroe