

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 25, 2021
Final Minutes

Present: Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Jen Malcolm-Brown, Katie Fiander members; Dan Hayes, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order by Dan at 7:01 P.M.

B. Public Hearings:

Dan invited the public to comment on the FY22 Budget. He noted that he'd had some conversation with Becky Torres.

Becky Torres (FinCom) noted that last year, we were able to edge the tax rate down just a bit. Right now, our first town budget draft is coming in at just under \$24/\$1000 for the property tax rate (which is capped at \$25/\$1000). Are there any changes to the SES budget that could give us a little more breathing room? Also, we've gone out to bid for a study of the condition of the SES roof through FRCOG. The bid we find acceptable so far is \$28,700, and we want to know whether SES can pay for that. Additional design costs would be handled by the Town.

Susie Mosher (FinCom) said she feels SSC and the Town have been working well together, recognizing the circumstances we all face. Sustaining a good educational program is very important. She hopes we can look at any changes that would benefit us all, given the volatility with which we all seem to be living now.

Dan noted that he's submitted the Annual Report on behalf of SSC. There was a workshop sponsored by MASC on diversity and equity that Dan attended this week that was excellent. It was very informative and engaging.

C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar: Dan noted that it's SSC election season, so he asked everyone to be mindful of dates for nomination papers and so forth.

D. Warrants and Gifts:

#316 2/8/21 \$68,482.69
#317 2/22/21 \$69,375.69
#318 3/8/21 \$70,775.78
#3019 2/8/21 \$19,536.18
#3020 2/18/21 \$5,523.78

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE WARRANTS AS REPORTED. KATIE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

Dan asked whether we have any gifts. Jackie: wah-wahhhn...

E. Approval of Minutes from January 21, 2021:

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 21. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

F. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. FY22 Budget - Discussion and Vote on Final Adoption of Budget:

Dan noted that at SES, we operate with a zero-base budget, meaning we look at all our needs from year to year in response to changing circumstances. He praised SSC for exercising balanced discipline in putting together the budget, and the Town for stepping in when the school runs into an unexpected major expense. Generally, we don't try to spend our whole budget if we need to, and instead return money to the Town if we're in a position to do so at the end of the FY. A few years ago, we returned \$48,000, and in the following years, we had to ask for \$17,000 a couple of times from the Town. This system has worked great so far. Bruce has been able to look at items in the budget we've not had to spend on due to the pandemic, and he found that we'd be giving more money back to the Town this year than we normally do. We believe our budget could support paying the \$28,700 to study the roof, as well as for a shed roof and sliding doors opening on the courtyard. We also need to keep looking at innovative ways to educate our students, and we think we can add outdoor wifi at the school at a cost of \$8,000. Even given all of that, it looks like we might have some excess to return to the Town. Dan asked how that would suit the Town.

Becky said that the gym roof is our first priority, and we'll try to get an MSBA loan for it, but we really appreciate this big first step being paid for by the school. Dan asked Becky and Susie how they feel about the FY22 Budget. Becky said the building project and the FY22 Budget are separate in her mind. It really depends on the degree of uncertainty about how the school is going to operate next year. Jackie noted that every year, we're super mindful of our spending, and there's not much left we could cut. The most we could find that wouldn't impact teaching and learning at the school would be \$8,000, tops, from a variety of lines.

Jackie briefly reviewed how we've had a decent amount of money coming in through School Choice, but also highlighted how Preschool has struggled to become a self-sustaining program (it isn't right now). We need to support it if it is to remain a vital program for the community. We think it's an absolute must-have, for both the school and the community. She hopes we can use some of our School Choice money to support the school. Also, we'll have to be updating technology on a regular basis nowadays, which School Choice funds could help. Finally, our students are going to need extra support next year to help them overcome the lag in their social-emotional and academic development; to do this, we might use our School Choice money to support a one-year position. Jennifer noted that relying on School Choice funds for normal school operations is concerning; other neighboring towns have become reliant on Choice funds and are in a difficult position as a result.

Susie said FinCom is dealing with the same variables and the same uncertainty, and we have Prop 2 ½ to contend with as well. We're trying to be prudent and conservative about putting together a budget that works. This year, thanks to the CARES Act, the PPP program, and so forth, the community is being served by higher levels of government in a way it hasn't been before. We certainly understand SES's budget has no fluff in it. She appreciates our ability to be honest about our needs so we can move forward together. Becky noted that she's concerned about the \$8K that Jackie said could still be cut; FinCom is not trying to put SES in that position. She was just hoping to hear that some grants came through. Jackie thanked her for understanding and said that we are able to do this \$8K for next year because of other support (grants) we have right now, but all that will have to be put back in the budget next year. Becky said we just don't know what's going to happen with the tax rate next year; what happens with valuations will be critical. If we hit

that \$25 rate, we won't have any more flexibility to support expanding operational costs in the budget. There are many stories of towns going bankrupt. Dan noted that there are some things we've cut out (like conference attendance) to help. Susie said she doesn't want to be penny wise and pound foolish; it's better for the school to return money to Free Cash if necessary. Some of those funds might be able to go towards the Johnson control systems; Becky said we want to make sure that gets fixed.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY22 BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,363,879, A 1.75% INCREASE OVER LAST YEAR. JEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTE ALL AYES. UNANIMOUS.

SSC members did not feel the need to trim the \$8K in question from the budget. Susie noted we have until June 12 to make changes.

2. 2020/2021 Reopening:

Jackie said we have about 68% of our students at school in the mornings. Our amazing teachers are teaching students at home simultaneously. So we're making it work. We have a very detailed, streamlined safety process that the kids pick up on within a day or so. It's going great. The kids are exhausted, though. We're getting a lot of reports of sleepy children in the afternoon. The state has specific learning time requirements, which means we need synchronous learning times in the afternoons as well. It's gone very smoothly overall. We do have one shift in personnel: the 3rd Grade teacher is taking a leave of absence for the rest of the year, and we're moving a long-time para into that position. We also have a team of people who can support that classroom through the rest of the year.

Jennifer said Commissioner Riley announced that he's moving to return students to school in April. We're continuing to follow CDC and DESE guidelines for mitigation; DESE recommends 6 feet distance where possible, but allows as low as 3 feet when other guidelines are being followed. In-person instruction is encouraged for elementary schools. We need to shift away from hybrid and remote learning models and return to in-person education. There's a point coming at which hybrid and remote learning models will no longer count for instruction in the state. We need to prepare for this transition. Jen asked what the impact would be on SES. Jennifer said if the return to all in-person instruction is recommended by the Commissioner, any remote learning won't count toward our requirements, and we'd have to make it up. Jackie said we're already starting to think about returning; we may be able to do lunches outdoors, or do them in cohorts, etc. The strategy is to plan ahead so we're ready when and if the recommendation comes. Dan said other schools do things variously (like closing Weds for cleaning), but he thinks it's important to return. He's worried about public schools and what will happen to them; there are charter schools with waiting lists now. We really need to move back to in-person instruction not because the state tells us to, but because it's really the best thing for students and teachers.

Jennifer praised the Leadership Team and SES staff for standing tall during this entire crisis. Jackie thanked the Board of Health and Jennifer for being absolute champions for the school. We do have some problems at the school, but we also have great air quality, and enough space for us to be able to return to in-person instruction safely. Dan also praised Jennifer for her leadership within the Union, and for Bruce for his hard work.

G. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. MOA - Discussion and Vote: Moved to Executive Session.

2. SEESAW 2020-2021 Contract - Discussion and Vote:

SSC still has some pieces to discuss with regard to the MOA.

DAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MOA. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

3. School Choice Money:

Jackie noted we've been getting a lot of calls about School Choice, much more than before.

H. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report: Jennifer reported on the situations of the other U#28 schools in terms of in-person instruction; EES is fully in-person, while LES and SRS are in hybrid stages. Annie Foley Ruiz will become the permanent Principal of LES, and we're very happy to have her. We're getting a new remote phone system. We've posted our Director of Student Support Services job, since Pru is retiring.

2. Director of Finance and Operations: Bruce reported that we're getting a quote to improve the air flow system at SES and is having someone else look at the windows. Storefront windows are \$16K apiece from Greenfield Glass. Bruce would like to have both sliding doors done; they're beginning to rot. We did get some additional grant money last month: \$6300 from the state, around \$8800 for social-emotional learning (we'll likely need to hire someone to help with this), some funds through SR2 that we can spend through July.

3. Principal's Report: Jackie reported that we're looking into setting up outdoor wifi set up for the school so that students could work in cohorts outside and teachers could teach both in-person and remote cohorts at the same time. In general, this would be a very interesting option going forward. Debbie Lee shared some slides about this prospect showing bird's-eye views of SES and the technology setup that would be required to provide outdoor coverage of various sizes. SSC praised the plans; it seems like a good solution. Jackie reported that we've received an artist grant to do an outdoor theater production with the 5th Grade.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report: No report.

5. Union #28 Report, including Budget & Personnel: No report.

6. CES Report: Dan said we haven't had a meeting, but we're still going through the search process for the new CEO.

I. Policy Review:

First Reading On:

DA – Fiscal Management Goals

DJ – Purchasing

DJA – Purchasing Authority

Second Reading, First Vote On:

BEDH – Public Comment at School Committee Meetings
IHBEA – English Learner Education
JB – Equal Educational Opportunities
JBB – Educational Equity
CHCA – Approval of Handbooks and Directives

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY BEDH - PUBLIC COMMENT AT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETINGS. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY IHBEA - ENGLISH LEARNER EDUCATION. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY JB - EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY JBB - EDUCATIONAL EQUITY. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY CHCA - APPROVAL OF HANDBOOKS AND DIRECTIVES. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

J. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Monday, March 15, 2021 - 6:30 p.m.
- Budget and Personnel Committee – TBD
- Future agenda items –

K. Executive Session to Discuss Strategy With Respect to Collective Bargaining or Litigation:

DAN MOVED TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS STRATEGY WITH RESPECT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING OR LITIGATION, TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION AFTERWARD. JEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYES. UNANIMOUS.

L. Adjournment: 8:05