

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, September 16, 2021
Final Minutes

Present: Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Bethany Rose, Stephen Sullivan, members; Dan Hayes, Chair; Eric Stocker, Select Board; Rita Farrell, Select Board Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order by Dan at 7:11 P.M. Select Board meeting called to order by Rita at 7:11 P.M.

B. New School Committee Member - interviews with Select Board and vote to appoint (pending Select Board confirmation):

Dan thanked all members of both committees for making the time to meet here to confirm the new SSC member, who will serve a term of one year to be followed by the customary election for a full term. He also thanked all applicants for the open position. He explained how the process of nominating and voting on the applicants would proceed. First, each applicant would introduce themselves.

Ethan Todras-Whitehill, Jeanne Brown, Julie Martel, and Mary Lou Conca all introduced themselves. The members of SSC and the Select Board members also introduced themselves, then Dan invited nominations for the open SSC seat.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPOINT JULIE MARTEL TO SSC. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

RITA MOVED TO APPOINT JULIE MARTEL TO SSC. ERIC SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

Dan thanked all applicants again; it's wonderful to have so many people willing to serve in town government, and in particular on this important committee. Rita and Eric echoed these sentiments.

ERIC MOVED TO ADJOURN THE SELECT BOARD. RITA SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

C. Reorganization of the Committee:

Jennifer took charge of the meeting for the purposes of reorganizing the committee.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE DAN FOR CHAIR. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE BETHANY FOR VICE CHAIR. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE HERSELF AND JULIE FOR UNION #28 REPRESENTATIVES. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

BETHANY MOVED TO NOMINATE LAUREN FOR BUDGET AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE STEVE FOR REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE. BETHANY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE BETHANY AND JULIE FOR POLICY COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE STEVE FOR CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE. BETHANY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE DAN FOR COLLABORATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

DAN MOVED TO NOMINATE STEVE FOR BUILDINGS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

D. Public Hearings: None.

E. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar:

Dan noted that he wrote a letter explaining how SSC arrives at COVID-related decisions, gathering information from the community and other sources.

F. Warrants and Gifts:

LAUREN MOVED TO RECOGNIZE THAT WARRANTS HAVE BEEN SENT TO THE MINUTES TAKER AND WILL APPEAR IN THE PUBLIC RECORD. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

Payroll

301	7/12/2021	\$ 57,237.87
302	7/26/2021	\$ 63,757.75
303	8/9/2021	\$ 59,886.62
304	8/23/2021	\$ 54,134.22
305	9/6/2021	\$ 78,170.75

Payables

3029	6/28/2021	\$ 44,703.83
3030	6/30/2021	\$ 8,721.37
3001	7/1/2021	\$ 3,380.76
3002	7/13/2021	\$ 1,093.98
3003	7/26/2021	\$ 80,638.87
3004	8/9/2021	\$ 26,459.88
3005	9/8/2021	\$ 55,108.84
3006	9/9/2021	\$ 3,000.00

G. Approval of Minutes from June 16, 2021:

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JUNE 16. BETHANY SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

H. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. Review Protocols:

Dan noted the three primary roles of school committee members: to hire, monitor, and conduct contract negotiations with the Principal; to approve the school budget; and to create school policy. SSC doesn't do much to resolve problems at the school (directing parties to the appropriate authority at the school) or anything to carry out school operations (again, under the authority of the school administrators).

2. Capital Projects:

- Update on atrium glass doors: Bruce said the door for the conference room has been ordered, and quotes for installation are being gathered.
- Update on ventilation system: Bruce said we're getting quotes from engineers right now, since this will require some engineering design.
- Update on the roof: The interior drainage has been installed, and the roof is planned to be done Christmas week.

Jackie added that some complaints have come in about alterations to the landscaping in front of the school necessitated by the work being done in the school. It's not pretty right now, but once all the updates are done (including the roof), we'll be fixing all of that. Dan underscored that keeping water out of the school is the priority, although aesthetics are also nice. Bruce said returning everything to its original state is part of the process.

Dan asked about the MSBA budget process; Bruce said they're running way behind right now. We've been working on funding the roof for many years.

3. Joint SSC / SB / FinCom Letter to Regional School Committee: These committees have written a letter to RSC requesting information on the process that will be used for the regional budget assessment agreement. The request is also that education on the methods and past agreements be made available early to inform the process. Steve said the Amherst Town Council is the stumbling block here. Susie Mosher noted that's partially what prompted our letter; there are many members of the Council who are new to the budgeting process.

I. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. Face Masks - Discussion and Possible Vote:

Jackie said there are strong feelings about wearing masks in school, both ways. We do allow students to remove masks when playing outside, since we are following DESE and DPH recommendations (which allow no masks in outdoor settings). She solicited perspectives from SSC. Jennifer noted that Leverett has imposed an outdoor mask mandate as well.

Dan asked for information on mask breaks. Jackie: they happen! Students can request mask breaks whenever they feel like they need them, going outside for several minutes. The very young children spend a lot of time outside to provide for ample mask breaks. We're also very receptive to family feedback, especially around scheduled mask breaks for individual students.

SSC recognized an SES parent with epidemiology expertise who advocated strongly for an outdoor mask mandate; the public and institutional recommendations lag behind the science, which is showing that children don't have problems with masks, and that outdoor transmission of the virus under 15 minutes does occur. Another parent with medical expertise strongly echoed this sentiment. A third SES parent also strongly agreed with adopting an outdoor mask mandate.

Dan said he supports the school administration's decision to best protect the health of students and families. Jackie added that she's not had one problem with a student wearing a mask this year. Also, the staff would feel very supported if SSC were to adopt an outdoor mask mandate. Jennifer noted that one important reason we have this agenda item tonight is that school administration worked closely and transparently with SSC all last year to determine COVID policy and protocols, and this is an extension of that collaboration.

DAN MOVED TO STATE THAT SSC SUPPORTS THE DECISION TO IMPLEMENT MASKS OUTDOORS AS WELL AS INDOORS IN ORDER TO PROTECT STUDENTS, STAFF, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC LANDSCAPE AS NEEDED. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

2. School Choice Money - Discussion:

Lauren stressed that School Choice funds are not meant to supplant the budget (pay for normal operations), but to supplement it, since Choice funds fluctuate year to year. Jackie is always forthcoming with what she'd like to do with the funds, however, and we have open discussions about it. Jackie explained the background to the decision to become a School of Choice: we slowly added spots to fill out an unusually small class, unsure of how this decision would play out, but the Choice student population has grown and grown. We have substantial funds now and have done some brainstorming about what to do with them. One thing she'd like SSC to think about is to help support and fund positions and things that would not be a regular and permanent part of the school (for example, an ESL teacher hired to assist a student last year). There are two temporary positions she'd like to hire this year to help students transition through COVID. Bruce said we have about \$240K in Choice funds saved, with our income and outflow about balancing out this year. We need to be careful not to spend the funds down to the point where it's not sustainable.

SSC discussed how best to view these funds, how to communicate the nature of these funds to the FinCom and the Town at large, and how best to use them to benefit SES.

3. Home School Applications - Discussion and Vote:

Jennifer approved all of the home school applications submitted to SSC.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE HOME SCHOOL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

Dan noted that he will be attending the MASC conference, asking for approval from SSC.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPOINT DAN SSC REPRESENTATIVE AT THE MASC CONFERENCE. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

J. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report:

Jennifer reported that we had a wonderful Opening Day, including a speaker on diversity and learning we were supposed to have a year ago (pre-COVID). He was very well received. We also did a restorative circle in which we all discussed bright spots from last year, looking forward to what we could change this year. We're looking at the ESSER III application, convening a stakeholder group and doing a strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities analysis. The guidelines for ESSER funds focus on learning loss and social-emotional learning. Some of our ESSER II funds went to hiring U#28 Adjustment Counselors, and we want to continue that. Regionally, we're meeting virtually with local legislators to advocate for increased support for rural schools. She'll update SSC on this meeting after it happens.

2. Director of Finance and Operations:

Bruce reported that we had a pretty good summer. The roof work has finally started, we installed a mini-split in the school and AC in the Library, and we returned over \$20K to the Town from last year's budget. The lack of bus drivers is reaching crisis proportions across the state. He's been working with Steve and RSC to figure out some thorny problems with bus routes for SES.

3. Principal's Report:

Jackie reported that it's amazing to have children back in school. There's a WHOLE LOT of communication going on. It's been challenging juggling privacy, informing the public, and keeping everyone safe. She thanked Bruce for working on bus route issues, which we don't really have a say in. She had to hire two additional paras this year for SPED needs; perhaps we could use some Choice funds for those positions. We didn't have to go with a second Preschool class this year after all. We have very strict mitigation factors in the school and we follow our protocols quickly and fully; within 24 hours of our first confirmed case, we'd gone through our entire protocol, including contact tracing. Shout-out to our incredible School Nurse for working through the weekend to help us make that happen. Jennifer thanked Jackie for not only doing a phenomenal job, but also holding everyone in kindness and compassion as she does.

Jackie continued - we have a few open positions still. We're also advertising for volunteers to join our School Council (starting from scratch, since our previous members have all aged out of the school). She's starting to get some concerned emails around Amherst's discussion of moving 6th Grade into the Middle School. Jennifer said Dr. Morris is attending the next Leverett School Committee meeting, and we're doing some community outreach to explain to Leverett residents what this change would mean for LES students.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Steve reported that he told RSC that they might not see Shutesbury students in their Middle School for a long time. One community question is whether 6th Graders would get a head start in foreign languages: no. It's all about space rather than changes in curriculum. It's going to be an uphill battle. The only update to the Middle School that seems to be in the works for the 6th Graders is that the walls will be painted for the first time in 30 years.

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

6. CES Report: No report.

K. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, October 21, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, October 16, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – September 20, 2021
- Budget and Personnel Committee – October 2021
- Future agenda items –

Dan thanked SSC members for always being willing to listen, and to open their minds and open their hearts. Jennifer thanked Dan for conducting an open and transparent process bringing a new member on board.

L. Adjournment at 9:09