

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Ellington, Connecticut

Operations Committee Meeting Minutes

A special meeting of the Operations Committee was held on Thursday, September 16, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. in the Center School Conference Room, 49 Main Street, Ellington, CT. This meeting was moved from its original posted location with the public directed to the new location.

Attendees:

Board of Education Members: Ms. Kerry Socha, Mr. Gary Blanchette, Ms. Jennifer Dzen, Ms. Liz Nord, Ms. Angela Moser

Administrative Team Members: Mr. Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations, Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent and Mr. Gregory Kliman, Director of Facilities

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Ms. Kerry Socha at 9:08 a.m.

Agenda Items:

1. *American Rescue Plan Priorities Discussion*

The town as part of the American Rescue Plan Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds is receiving \$4.8 million. There was consideration as to what the Board of Education could put forth as potential project in the \$4.8 million. Mr. Greenleaf also presented the list of items from the Capital Improvement Plan that match with the fact sheet of the usages of the American Rescue Plan funds.

Ms. Socha asked if the town was aware that the Board of Education would be presenting a request. Mr. Greenleaf suggest that a 15-20% request would be a reasonable request from the Board of Education for capital improvement projects to be addressed from this fund. The air conditioning upgrades would fall under the category of supporting the public health response – ventilation improvement in key settings. Better ventilation within our school facilities in the larger areas will contribute to mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

Dr. Nicol mentioned that these air conditioning projects have been on the capital improvement plan for quite some time and town recognizes the need for the improvement. The high school would be our first priority due to the number of large events that take place there and they are a primary shelter for the town. Dr. Nicol felt that the town would be looking for the facility improvement items.

Ms. Underwood also mentioned that any expenditures that are over \$100,000 has to go to a town meeting as well as getting the approval from the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectman.

Mr. Greenleaf wanted the recommendation of the Operations Committee as to what would be presented to the Town. The high school and middle school would be the top priority for air conditioning in the gymnasium and cafeteria.

The high school gymnasium and cafeteria as well as Ellington Middle School are the most important as they are to locations with the largest amount of space for activities and also primary shelter locations for the town.

Mr. Kliman discussed the process for the calculation and pricing for the air conditioning in various buildings. It is based on the occupancy number per the fire code to determine the tonnage that is needed for the air conditioning units. The significant difference in the numbers from previous quotes is based on adding new equipment and new coils to our existing infrastructure. To bring that up to current code would make it less cost effective than putting in new compact units that did the heating and the cooling. The capital improvement quotes from before are approximately 6 years old and does not include the combined units. We will present these quotes but will work on getting these quotes down in price.

Dr. Nicol said we would discuss this now with the Operations Committee and then present these figures to the Board at Wednesday's meeting and have them approve with the understanding that we would negotiate with the vendor to reduce the costs. Then we would take that to a motion and include the statement to continue to negotiate prior to taking this to the town so the town would see that we are working on lowering the costs of the projects.

Mr. Greenleaf indicated that he has just received the quotes and would probably go out to another vendor to see that the conceptual aspect of the project are in line with regards to pricing and if we should do a new system or refurbish our existing system.

Ms. Socha asked if the gym floor at Crystal Lake School was on the list. Mr. Greenleaf indicated it did not meet the criteria to be included. We have to remember that the Crystal Lake Project came under budget and we returned a lot of money back to the town. Overall this budget went very well with the exception of the gymnasium floor. We did have several meetings with the town with regards to warranty but could not get anywhere with fixing the gymnasium floor.

The question was asked as to why we have a "TBD" indicated for the Ellington Middle School gymnasium. Mr. Kliman explained that the vendor and engineer we had come out to look at the project regarding the air conditioning for the gym indicated we needed to add units on the roof and the roof could not handle the weight of the units and we had to move them down to the ground. The only accessible location would be through the fire egress walkway. This will need some additional work to reengineer the project. Mr. Kliman is looking to contact another engineer to see if we can use our existing equipment.

Mr. Greenleaf indicated that he would get more answers before the next board meeting and potential vote as to what would be presented to the town. Our goal is to have a budget number to give to the town and we can continue to work on that number to reduce the costs.

Mrs. Socha asked if any of this funding can be applied towards COVID testing? Mr. Greenleaf said these funds can be applied towards COVID testing. There are two elements to the testing. One being the diagnostic testing – testing if you feel sick. Those are free in the State of CT and insurance does need to pick up the cost of that testing. If you don't have insurance there are community testing sites you can go to.

The screening testing which is for unvaccinated individuals where you are asymptomatic for weekly testing as mandated by the State of CT is not covered by insurance. This is where we have been looking at this with regards to a labor shortage passing the cost to the employee can be costly especially if the employee is just working part time.

Dr. Nicol said that this was not thought of for the request to the town but would be a good idea if it is presented as a needed resource due to labor shortages. We are using labor shortage because we want to make sure our schools are properly staffed and is in the best interest of everyone in our schools. The State of CT does not want to provide funding for testing for non-vaccinated individuals. They want the individual towns to address this issue and not have it fall on the State of CT. Different districts are taking different stances and Ellington is taking the stance of labor shortage. To what extent is Ellington doing to keep their staff health.

For a budget number we are planning on \$70 for each test. If we have 10% of our staff not vaccinated, that would mean 60 people times \$70 per test per week and about 40 weeks left in the school year we would need to set aside about \$150,000 to \$180,000 for testing. We will not know for another week or so the percentage of staff not vaccinated through our survey we currently have in place.

The priority for the request to the town should be as follows:

- Funding for testing for non-vaccinated staff – labor shortage
- Air conditioning for Ellington High School two spaces
- Air conditioning for Center School Cafeteria
- Air conditioning for Ellington Middle School

A motion was made to adjourn at 10:12 a.m.

1st L. Nord

2nd J. Dzen

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Kerry Socha, Operations Committee, Chair