

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Ellington, Connecticut

Operations Committee Meeting Minutes

A special meeting of the Operations Committee of the Ellington Board of Education met on Wednesday, January 13, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. via teleconference.

Attendees:

Board of Education Members: Mr. Gary Blanchette, Ms. Miriam Underwood, Mrs. Jennifer Dzen, Mrs. Kerry Socha and Ms. Liz Nord.

Administrative Team Members: Mr. Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations, Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent and Ms. Jennifer Brown, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Human Resources Coordinator.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Kerry Socha at 9:07 a.m.

Agenda Items:

1. *Windermere Elementary School Building Project*

Mr. Greenleaf explained to the committee the first objective from the last Operations Committee meeting was to get an updated enrollment figure for the 8 year projection. The 8 year projection showed a significant decrease in projected enrollment from a high of 779 last year to a new high of 688. If the lower projection is used, the number of classrooms needed could be reduced by 6 or 8 classrooms. This could possibly require the need of portable classrooms on a newly renovated school to meet the classroom needs at Windermere, if the enrollment returns to the higher projection.

The referendum could be moved to next year in order to get another projection for enrollment and to determine if the current projection is due to COVID and the amount of homeschooled student at this time. Ms. Nord asked about moving the referendum to November 2021. Mr. Greenleaf stated the application would still need to be submitted by June 30, 2021, and the district would not have the opportunity to revise the project scope and size. If the project was submitted using the enrollment figure of 688, but designed and built larger than the maximum, the Town would lose reimbursement from the state. The biggest differential in enrollment figures is due to the Windermere kindergarten classes over the next 8 years which were 8 – 10 students lower than previous years.

Members of the Board raised creative suggestions for creating additional space within the school where the State may not penalize the town for building extra. These included additional storage space that could be finished later, establishing

a magnet program to increase the size of the school, adding central office space to the project or creating a tuition based program for Special Education students.

Mr. Greenleaf stated the two most practical options would be to plan for the larger building project and lose reimbursement, or to build the project at the current enrollment and plan for an expansion if the enrollment figures should spike at a later date, though this option would require going back to the Town.

If the Board does not submit this project for June 30, 2021, it would be a full year before the project could proceed with the proposal and this would also push out the completion of the project and increase the cost of the project as well.

Ms. Socha raised the question as to the need for a distance learning program post COVID and would that mean that we would not need the extra classrooms for the Windermere project. Dr. Nicol stated if the State does not require a distance learning program it would be the district's decision of whether or not to continue the distance learning model. Question was raised as to the need to send out a survey to see if Ellington residents are interested in continuing with distance learning program after COVID.

Mr. Greenleaf stated if project is delayed, the Board could be more comfortable in the projection of enrollment figures. The drawback would be added cost of repairs, structuring the bonding (Center and EHS Project off the books) to not be as big of a tax impact on the tax payers of Ellington.

Dr. Nicol stated that he is concerned to move forward with building project at this time due to so many variable in place due to COVID. This is the largest investment for the Town in a long time and it needs to be done to better the district. He stated the Town needs to have a clear plan of the intentions for the Windermere School. However, the administration will support whatever the Board decides.

Board members discussed their opinions on the status of the project, ultimately leaning towards a recommendation to delay the project one year. This was not unanimous (although all members ultimately will support the delay), and there would need to be a full discussion with the Board on January 27, 2021.

The position of the committee is to wait one more year to proceed with this project. Dr. Nicol suggested that an agenda item be added to the next Board of Education meeting regarding the building project.

If the Board decides to accept the recommendation of the committee, the district will still continue with the planning for the project and get another enrollment projection.

Motion to adjourn the meeting.

1st J. Dzen

2nd M. Underwood

The meeting adjourned at 10:29 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Kerry Socha, Operations Committee, Chair