

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Ellington, Connecticut

Finance/Operations Committee Meeting Minutes

The Finance/Operations Committee of the Ellington Board of Education met on Monday, November 16, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. at the Media Center at Ellington High School, 37 Maple Street, Ellington, CT 06029.

Attendees:

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

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

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Ms. Socha at 5:08 p.m.

Agenda Items:

1. Windermere Building Project

Mr. Greenleaf indicated that in the April, 2020 the Board of Education voted on putting the Windermere project on hold due the ramping up of COVID-19. Mr. Greenleaf indicated to the committee that the deadline to submit to the State of CT is June 30, 2021 otherwise the project will be delayed by an entire year. The Board of Education will need to decide to just fix the items that are in need of repair or is a long term solution needed. Items in need of repair include the roof that is over 25 years old and has been patched multiple times, southern portion of the building has vinyl asbestos tiles that are safe for use but add extra cost if maintenance is warranted, windows are single pane and inefficient, and inadequate parking.

Several items need to occur in order to have the Windermere project proceed and get to a referendum in May, 2021. The following items need to occur in order to proceed with the application and proposal. A revision of enrollment number projections for another year out; revise cost estimates for the project due to the delay; educational specifications need to be finished; a plan needs to be given to the Board of Finance and the Board of

Selectman with multiple steps; update the bonding scenarios and outline a plan for a referendum.

Mr. Greenleaf discussed two big bonds that will be coming off the books related to the High School and Center School projects from the early 2000s. These bonds will come off the books in 2022-23 and 2023-2024. Mr. Greenleaf further discussed replacing debt for debt enables investing in capital assets, less variability for tax spikes in mill rates for tax payers and bond agencies want you to carry a certain amount of debt.

Mr. Greenleaf presented information regarding the current debt service schedule with a decrease in 22-23 and 23-24 due to the bonds coming off the books. If we were to do the Windermere project now using updated bonding figures, the difference from lull to peak in that 3 year period would be about a million dollars which would equate to a .7 mill increase over a 3 year period. If the projects was moved out one more year that impact would increase from 1 million to 1.7 million in that same 3 year period and would equate to a 1.2 mill impact. Escalation would increase the project by 4% each year. If the project was to go for referendum in the spring it would be a \$58,600,000 if we waited another year it would increase to \$61,000,000.

Mrs. Socha asked the questions as to whether the 4% increase was a sufficient increase based on the current cost of materials due to supply and demand related to COVID-19 and would it be advantageous for the district to wait another year based on the high demand for construction materials at this time. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that start of the project could be 3 years out and hopefully the costs of construction materials would be at reasonable rates. Mr. Greenleaf further reiterated that these are preliminary numbers and meetings still need to take place with the architects to finalize costs.

Mr. Greenleaf discussed educational specifications in relation to COVID-19. Due to impact of COVID- 19, there will definitely be changes to the way students will learn in the classroom and with these changes the buildings could accommodate those changes for the next 30 – 50 years. We will need to develop broad educational specification so we can meet the standards of the state and we still need to hire an architect to help us meet those specifications.

Mrs. Nord ask if the enrollment numbers being used are current number and are they less due to COVID-19. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that will need to look at multiple factors in order to address enrollment numbers to properly project a more accurate future enrollment for calculation of the project.

Mr. Greenleaf explained that multiple steps would need to occur prior to going to referendum with would include the approval of Board of Finance, Board of Education and Board of Selectman. All of these critical steps in the planning process are all contingent upon the application being filed by June 30, 2021.

Ms. Nord asked the question that if we go to a referendum and the referendum does not pass will the town still set aside funds for improvements that are needed? Mr. Greenleaf indicated that if the referendum did not pass it could be revised and go to a second vote or the project scope could be changed less costly option, or the decision could be made to just do the critical items on the list.

All of the members were asked what their opinions were with regard to this project. Members raised the issue as to whether the referendum should be in May or in the fall. Would the voters be able to decide to move on with the project based their own finance positon at the time of the vote.

It was the consensus of the board members that we should move forward with the application process with the understanding that the project could be adjusted. The Board of Finance and the Board of Selectman would have to decide whether or not it was in the best interest to bring to a referendum in May or in the fall. A decision could also be made not proceed if needed.

Mr. Purcaro discussed that there is a concern of where the state revenue will be based on this current pandemic and what the impact will be on town aid to the district for this school year and the next. He feels that if it is presented to voters that there is a need for this project and explain the impact if the project is delayed than the voters will have the knowledge they need to make an informed decision.

Date will be set for the Board of Education to make a decision as to whether they want to proceed with the project and make a formal recommendation since the entire Board of Education was not present at this meeting.

2. *Capital Improvement Plan*

Mr. Greenleaf discussed that core concrete samples were taken in the spring from Center, Middle School and High School due to date of the building project and falling in line with the time frame of concrete issues. The front wing of High School did have pyrrhotite. There is no visible deterioration, crumbling issues or safety issues at this time. This is something that will need to be added to our long term planning and will not impact the process for the Windermere project.

It is the intent that the concrete concern at the high school will be address based on long term plan done by the facilities study that the high school will need to be addressed and this could be addressed at this time.

Capital Improvement plan will continue to keep roof, windows and abatement projects for the Windermere School listed.

There are five projects that will continue to remain on the Capital Improvement Plan. First item is the fire doors. Due the change in codes in 2018, fire doors need to be inspected on a regular basis. There are few companies that can do inspections and perform updates that are needed. Mr. Greenleaf explained the various issues with the fire doors at different schools. Last Year \$40,000 was taken out of the Capital Improvement Budget to address these non compliance issues due to updated codes but their still remains \$130,000 worth of improvement that still need to be done.

Auditorium exterior stucco has been deteriorating and will eventually crack which will lead to the possibility of water infiltration. This will need to be addressed soon. Rebecca Gonzalez is currently in the process of getting quotes for this project that include various different products that could be used for the repair. This will need to go to a vote at the next board meeting.

Maintenance vehicle with utility boxes will need to be replaced. The utility boxes on this truck have been replaced once, the truck has over 200,000 miles and has rust issues. The proposal is for a Chevy 2500 cargo van outfitted for a plumber. Cost of the van is \$24,700 with an allowance of \$3,300 for plumbing fit out. Mr. Purcaro made the suggestion to also include additional pricing to undercoat the vehicle in order to extend the life of the cargo van.

School security network needs to be upgrade. Over the last three years we have updated servers to make sure the security network was completely separate from the school network. We have purchased a visitor management platform called Raptor that we are in the process of rolling out this school year beginning with the High School. This will not eliminate the need for staff to have personal badges to gain access into the buildings. This new security system will need an additional set up in each building called a man trap. You will be able to enter into the first door but will not be able to get past the second door without using the visitor management system. Varied levels of security would need to be established based on type of event and if the event is during the school day or after school hours. The questions was raised as to whether the security cameras could be used not for streaming purposes in the classroom but could be used if needed in a security situation. The cost to add cameras in each and every classroom could cost approximately \$3,000 per camera and also an additional cost for servers to manage those cameras.

Replacement of residential folding table in the classroom to modern classroom furniture that is flexible to help students when collaborating that will withstand the use of students from year to year. The focus of our efforts in replacing these tables at this time would be at the High School and Middle School level.

Next year is our computer replacement cycle. Normally the cost would be \$285,000 but we also need to look at our AV equipment which would include smart boards, projectors and TVs. An extra \$100,000 will be added for these items that will be built into the town lease for a 4 year cycle.

Air conditioning program is to condition the big community spaces within the schools. We want to make sure these conditioning units remain an item that continue to be

upgraded as the schools have been used in the past for shelters and also summer school programs.

Roof Replacement continues to be monitored at the other schools as they are also coming up on the 20 – 25 years since they were last upgraded. We want to make sure we are keeping these projects on the radar as they will probably need upgrading within the next 5 years.

Mr. Greenleaf responded to the question regarding Rebecca Gonzalez's position and where we were in the process of getting a new Director. He responded by saying the position was posted 2 days after receiving notification and he was surprised with the number of candidates. The applications will be reviewed and the interview process will begin soon with the hope of getting a new Director by January 1, 2021. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that they have staff that can cover the day to day operations and outside vendors if needed at this time.

Motion: To recommend the 5 year Capital Improvement Plan as presented by Mr. Greenleaf tonight and amended.

1st Mr. Purcaro 2nd Ms. Nord Vote: Unanimous/Passed

3. *2021-2022 Budget*

Mr. Greenleaf presented and reviewed the budget calendar and asked if it could be added as an action item to the Board of Education meeting on Wednesday. It was reiterated that there will be a collaborative meeting with Administrators and staff this year prior to presenting budgets to the Superintendent. The proposed budget will need to be submitted to the town by February 15, 2021. Mr. Greenleaf also mentioned to that committee that the district will still need to budget or COVID- 19 as we are unsure of state or federal aid at this time. Mr. Purcaro raised the question as to who receives the salary information. The salary information is given to the Administrators with guidance as to the preparation of budgets.

Motion: To recommend the approval of the 21-22 Budget Guidelines.

1st Mrs. Nord

2nd Mr. Purcaro

Vote: Unanimous/Passed

Motion: Recommend the approval of the 21-22 Budget Calendar as amended.

1st Mrs. Nord

2nd Mrs. Socha

Vote: Unanimous/Passed

The meeting adjourned at 6:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Liz Nord, Finance Committee, Chair

Mrs. Kerry Socha, Operations Committee, Chair