

**Farmington River Regional School District
Otis/Sandisfield
555 Main Road, Otis MA 01253
School Committee Meeting #402
Monday, July 12, 2021, 7:00PM, via ZOOM**

Community Participation: Susan Ebitz was present to discuss a grant that the Otis Library received that offers to get books and materials for teachers through grade six. Susan will be working with Meaghan Martin to make the process of requesting the appropriate materials easy to order. Susan also was happy that the staff came together as a group to read a text about multicultural diversity. She feels this is a wonderful way to support and teach our kids to become empathetic and diverse learners. The library will be doing a forum a week from Thursday at 7pm at the Otis Library, in which Susan will be sending a flyer to Carol. The forum will be a discussion not a debate and see how the library and other institutions can help in the learning of diversity. All voices are welcome. There is a wonderful summer reading program. The children's librarian is focusing on local authors. Steven Otfinoski, Mary Pope Osborne, Jan Bratt, and Ty Jackson are a few of the authors who have participated in the program.

Members Present: Carol Lombardo, Jennifer Hibbins, Deb Fogel, Jess Drenga, Arlene Tolopko, Roger Kohler, and Carl Nett

Absent: None

Meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM by Carol Lombardo

Before the meeting started, Carol informed the Committee that from now on a show of hands is not accepted. From now on members must state their name and state the way they are voting.

1. **Vote to accept minutes #401.** Arlene Tolopko motioned to accept minutes #401 as submitted. Jessica Drenga second the motion. The motion to accept minutes #401 was unanimously passed as submitted.
2. **Principal/Superintendent updates.** Tom Nadolny started by saying summer school is up and running. There were a few bumps in the road the first couple of days, but they are smoothed out. Teachers are doing a fantastic job and the students seem to be eager to learn and they are having a fun time. This would not have been possible without the great work done without the job done by Jeff Gray and his cleaning crew. In just a month, the crew has cleaned the downstairs and made it ready to go for summer school. They have done a phenomenal job.

New from Department of Education stated that they will use the 2019 rankings, which is the most recent status information due to COVID. This will be on hold for another year. Carl Nett asked how the testing was limited this year compared on how it was conducted in the past. Tom explained that normally 3-6th grades would take double sessions of Mathematics and ELA. Grades 3 and 5 take double sessions of Science. This year it was one abbreviated session of Mathematics and ELA for 3-6th grades, and one abbreviated session of Science for 5th grade. Testing was cut in half. This is why they are not using the data for ranking.

Pre-School playground structure was bought and removed with no expense on our end. The new equipment and slide for the back playground is scheduled to arrive on the last week of July, first week of August.

Tom is in the process of hiring 2 ParaProfessionals and one SPED/Reading Teacher. One ParaProfessional is retiring in September and one ParaProfessional is on medical leave and not returning this year. All job ads are posted.

3. **Discuss and Vote on the Mask Policy.** Tom would like to update the mask policy. DESE stated that if you are vaccinated you do not have to wear a mask to school. Our staff is roughly 98% vaccinated. Our policy states that all staff and students need to wear masks unless the School Committee revokes the policy. As of right now, DESE recommends but does not mandate that during the summer a mask must be worn. Come fall, masks are not required to be worn by staff nor students. Some teachers and staff were asked to give their opinions on having the option of wearing their masks during summer programming. Some prefer to wear them, some do not want to wear masks, but overall, they all agreed on making mask wearing optional if vaccinated. Jess Drenga motioned to revoke the policy and change the wording, so the policy states it is optional for any students and teachers who are vaccinated have the option of wearing or not wearing their masks. Deb Fogel second the motion. The vote was unanimously passed to approve the amendment to the mask policy.
4. **Financial update.** The State did release the budgets for FY22. One big note that came out of the Conference Committee was that Esser 2 funding cannot be used to offset the towns' minimum contribution. It still needs to go in front of the Governor for signing.

The paving started and all the pavement is gone. If weather permits, they plan on laying the first base layer down while staff is not present. They did run into issues. In the staff parking lot, a river of water presented itself while grating. They suggested a drain system to be installed. The water is coming down from the mountains and woods behind the school and flows under the pavement. If we decide not to install a drainage system, the paving company will not guarantee their work because the water will compromise the work they put into paving. Eric does not have a quote yet, but the estimated cost is \$25,000. Eric did call the Inspector General's Office because he wanted to know the correct process with adding on work to the existing project. The Inspector General stated that if we are under 20 percent of the job's cost, we do not have to go out to bid. We do fall way under that percentage. Carl Nett suggested to cross check the quote with another company. Eric is nervous that the existing company will not guarantee the work with another company coming in to correct the drainage. Jennifer Hibbins

suggested we ask Sandisfield and Otis Highway Departments if \$25,000 is a good price. Eric will reach out to both towns for assistance. Terrie Gould asked if Eric trusts the contractor hired to do the work. Eric does trust the construction company. Eric has been assisted by Jeff Gray, Head of Maintenance, because Jeff used to pave for years in Pittsfield. Jeff is impressed at the work that this company has completed so far. Carl asked what warrantee is the contractor providing? Eric indicated he wasn't sure but would find out and get back to the Committee. Carl emphasized the importance of this, as he felt the drainage ditch may not have the desired impact on the water flow.

Eric shared the FY21 budget at this point in time. The numbers are still the same except the June's numbers are in, but they are still not complete because Eric is waiting for late invoices for FY21 that need to be applied. It looks like we will have a surplus of \$475,000. This is before the Street Lighting project, the stair treads, and the paving project invoices. Everything is ordered. The encumbrances are set for the projects listed, due to the agreement from the School Committee in last month's meeting to go ahead and start the processes. The van is the only expense that was not agreed upon in last month's meeting. A vote is not needed but Eric would like a consensus. If all the of the projects and the van are encumbered, that would leave a surplus of \$129,000. Our E&D limit is \$232,000 based on next year's budget. Our current balance in E&D is \$198,000. This leaves \$34,000 that can go into E&D. Jennifer Hibbins asked if Eric can put together a schedule for van maintenance? Eric stated that he already has a schedule of maintenance on the vans. The reason Eric would like a van is based on the mileage. The mileage is over 100,000. The vans routes are on the roughest roads in both towns. The other 3 vans are in great shape.

Carl Nett wanted to clarify some topics. Carl thought the Committee did vote on accepting the \$273 thousand dollar paving project bid but was going to discuss where the money is going to come from in the following month's meeting. Jennifer Hibbins and Roger Kohler agreed with Carl. Eric was under the impression that the vote was taken to have the money come out of FY21 Funds and \$100,000 was going to come out of FY22's budget to take care of the gym ceiling and repair the doors throughout the school. Arlene Tolopko read the minutes of last month and it stated that there was a vote to take the money out of the FY21 budget. Car disagreed that a proper vote was taken. Eric stated that a vote does not have to be taken, he just wanted guidance moving forward as to how to pay for the paving. Jennifer asked if we do go ahead and use FY21 money, are we going to account the money from the Capitol Improvements budget, and are we going to follow the Regional Agreement as to how much each town will need to pay. Eric reached out to someone to find this question out. He is looking into how to make the payment back to Sandisfield from Otis. Paying back money is different than figuring out the initial assessments. Eric feels he does not have the proper tools at this point to figure create this payback.

Jess Drenga spoke to the Committee and asked why the focus is solely on giving the towns back money. For years the school has not had enough money to pay for maintenance on the building and grounds. The focus should be the safety of the school and the children as well as after school programming, not giving money back to the towns. Jennifer and Roger agree with what Jess stated, but they feel if there is money left over it would be nice to give back to the towns to maintain their trust. It is hard to tell the town we didn't use 10% of the budget after standing up in front of the town stating this is the leanest budget that the committee can come up with. Jennifer said she understands that COVID is the reason why we have money left over, but she

feels money after projects should go back to the towns. Arlene stated that she agrees with Jess about focusing on the students' safety and education. The is supposed to be the students. Plus, what if the school runs into another kink with the paving or bigger expense. We will not have the money to pay the expenses. Carl agrees with Jennifer. This is a trust and credibility issue with the town. They told the town this is the leanest budget they could come up with, but they did not use over 10% of the budget. The next time they stand if front of the town, the town will laugh at them. Carl wanted everyone to know that they (Sandisfield members) are not opposed to getting the projects done, and he feels that it was not decided on where the money was supposed to come from. He is asking if we could have better clarity on motions and formal voting. Carl also wanted to explain the difference between the operating budget's assessments and capital budget's assessments. The operating budget is strictly based on enrollment. The capital budget is based on enrollment and equalized valuation. So, the point Jennifer was trying to make, was that we need to be clear how to assess the payments according to the Regional Agreement. Eric stated that he does not need a vote, but he needs to have a consensus on purchasing the van and where to take the money for the paving from. He is trying to close out FY21 and he needs the answers to do so. Carol went around the table and asked each member their opinion. Deb Fogel and Arlene Tolopko both would like to purchase the van and to pay the paving out of FY21 monies. Roger Kohler said no to purchasing the van but did not say anything on where to take the money for the paving. Jennifer Hibbins said yes to purchasing a van but did not state her opinion on where to take the money for paving. Jess Drenga and Carol Lombardo says yes to both the purchase of the van and using FY21 funds. Carl Nett is not in favor of purchasing a new van, nor taking the money out of FY21 budget to pay for the paving project. He proposes that we use left over money from FY21 to pay for everything except the van. The exception would be paying \$243,000 for paving out of the FY21 money and using \$50,000 from the \$100,000 allocated for the FY22 capital budget. The other \$50,000 out of the capital account in FY22 budget can go towards the ceiling. This will leave \$200,000 in E&D, so the remainder of the money can go back to the towns. Six School Committee were in favor of using the FY21 left over funds to cover a new van one member was not in favor of a new van. Four members were in favor of using FY21 surplus for the paving project; three members are not in favor of using FY21 funds for the paving project.

Eric went over an amendment he would like to make to the FY22 budget. He would need a vote from the School Committee to make the changes to the approved budget. The changes that Eric would like to adjust is the transfer of the \$303,000 into Regional Transportation Revolving and applying it to next year's budget, so that would reduce the assessments to both towns. Otis's reduction would be \$38,500. Sandisfield's reduction would be \$28,500. Eric feels this could help with the trust with the towns. He can do this because of all the grant money that keeps coming into the school. Carl Nett motioned to accept the amended FY22 budget as presented. Deb Fogel second the motion. The vote was unanimously passed to accept the amended FY22 amended budget.

Eric followed up on the topic of vocational schooling. Eric was unaware that the School Committee can vote and create a policy, M.G.L.c.74, to designate a school of preference. The District can direct students to apply to the preferred school before applying to any other vocational school. This does not stop a student from applying to the non-preferred school, they must go in a specific order. But, if the school of preference does not have the program that the student wants or needs, or if the student does not get into the school of preference, the student can go to another school. The policy would state that if the school of preference has the

program the student wants, the student would have to go to that school. If the Superintendent denies an alternative school, the student can go to The Department of Education and the Department of Ed has the final decision. Carl stated that between Westfield Vocational and Smith Vocational, almost all programs are offered. Some schools do give parents a deadline for letting the District know if their child will be attending a vocational school. This gives the District time to figure in the expenses for the budget. Tom will do an analysis on the two vocational schools.

5. **Adjournment.** Deb Fogel motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 PM, Arlene Tolopko seconded the motion. All members voted to adjourn School Committee meeting at 8:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Teresa DellaGiustina
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