

**Farmington River Regional School District  
Otis/Sandisfield  
555 Main Road, Otis MA 01253  
School Committee Meeting #403  
Monday, August 2, 2021, 7:00PM  
via ZOOM**

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

**Guests Present:** Roger Brown, Barbara Cormier, Lisa LaGrant

Jennifer Hibbins asked Carol Lombardo if it would be possible to amend the agenda to add a topic. Jennifer would like to make a motion to discuss Carl Nett's proposal regarding fully funding the projects that the school needs in a way that is legal for both towns. Carol agreed to have the School Committee vote on amending the agenda. Roger Kohler seconded the motion. The School Committee voted not to amend the agenda. The vote was four in favor of NOT amending, and three in favor FOR amending the agenda. The agenda was not amended.

Carol Lombardo—No

Arlene Tolopko—No

Roger Kohler—Yes

Carl Nett—Yes

Jennifer Hibbins--Yes

Jess Drenga—No

Dep Fogel--No

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Carol Lombardo at 7:00 p.m.

1. **Approval of minutes #402.** The minutes were voted down. Teresa will revise the minutes for approval in next month's meeting.
2. **Discuss and vote on the acceptance of last month's meeting, including but not limited to all votes and minutes.**
3. **Principal/Superintendent updates.** Tom Nadolny started talking about our Summer School Program. This is the final week, and the program is running smoothly Enrollment is up throughout the school. Mrs. Martin's 1<sup>st</sup> grade class is now up to 22 students.

Due to manufacturing, there is a delay on the playground equipment. The company is waiting on the raw materials, which is delayed. They are hoping the playground will get shipped the week of August 12<sup>th</sup> and installed the same week or the following week.

4. **Discuss and vote on wearing masks for FY22.** Tom attended a Commissioner's call on Friday about masking. He stated the students in grades PK-6<sup>th</sup> grade need to wear their masks while in school, but do not need to wear their masks during recess or lunch. Adults that have been vaccinated have the option of wearing a mask in school or outside. Anyone coming into the building, such as vendors, need to be wearing a mask. Jennifer Hibbins had a question about the masking. She thought the CDC recommendation was to wear a mask indoors even if you were vaccinated. Jen thought that is what School Committee was going to discuss at this meeting. Possibly going back to the old policy. Jennifer thought it would be the safest approach since the children are not vaccinated. Jess Drenga stated that the CDC recommends that health professionals, public transportation, and federal buildings are the only ones that need to wear a mask right now. The only other population recommended to still wear masks are the immunocompromised or if someone has a health condition. Jess referred to the Association of Pediatrics, and that is the current recommendation. Jess also commented that the nursing office still needs to wear a mask for obvious reasons. Arlene wants to decide whether to switch back to the old policy in a few weeks. She feels we should wait to see what DESE and the CDC recommends. Most members agreed. The School Committee will follow up and watch for updates.

Carl Nett asked Carol Lombardo a question about Community participation. He thought the participation was at the beginning of the meeting. Carol apologized and stated Carl was correct. She said she was going to add the participation to the end of the agenda. Carl was fine with that.

5. **Discuss and vote on #6 of the School Committee Handbook. School Committee Members will channel requests for information/data via the Superintendent and/or the School Committee Chair.** Carl Nett asked if Carol could clarify the proposal of the request for information of data through the Superintendent or the School Committee Chair. Carol explained that in the handbook it states that anyone who would like information from a staff member, needs to go through the Superintendent or the School Committee Chair. Carl asked Carol if he could make one point, which he was granted. The point Carl was trying to explain was that Eric and Teresa are given different rights and are treated like they are members of the School Committee. They can voice their opinions during the body of a meeting, but others in the community are not allowed to do so. Carol explained the only reason they speak is because the chair allows them to speak. Otherwise, they do not have a voice. Carl understands, but the point being they are allowed while other members of the community cannot speak in the body of the meeting. Carol said the objective we are getting at is the information that the School Committee is requesting from staff directly needs to go through the Superintendent first. Carl stated that he understands, and it is clear now. Jess Drenga made a motion to channel request for information or data via Superintendent or School Committee Chair. Arlene Tolopko seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous for accepting the motion.

6. Carol would like to discuss making appointments with Tom or staff if they want to speak to them about issues or topics. Committee members were confused because when they stop in to sign warrants or see Tom during dismissals, are they not to talk to him. Tom explained with the start of school coming and when school is in session, it is much different than chatting in the summer. In the summer there is time to sit and chat. If you are stopping in to sign warrants and you have a quick question, that is one thing, but if your question is more complex, Tom may not have the information ready. This would waste the member's time and Tom's. If you make an appointment to discuss a topic, Tom can have information available for that member.

**Community participation:** Roger Brown spoke first. He is very concerned about a financial transaction that seems to be already executed which would take accounts that are potentially in excess and use that for unapproved items. He feels this is taking money due to the towns in terms of their assessments and use the money for other purposes. He would like the board to explain. Arlene asked if Roger could be more specific. Roger replied that there is half a million dollars of unspent money in FY21. That money should only be used for two purposes. To cure any appropriated deficits through year end transfers, or to go into the excess funds then returned to the towns. His understanding concerning the paving project is it is significantly over the hundred-thousand-dollar budget which was put in place for next year FY22 not FY21. There were a series of other items that accumulate to 346,000 dollars. The items were not approved, unbudgeted and not appropriated to be used from the potential excess in this account. Roger is very concerned about this because he believes it is against the MA regulations in multiple instances and against the community agreements that founded the Farmington River School District. One of the uses is for Capital Improvements and the money we are talking about was appropriated for Operating Expenses. The transactions are very problematic and puts the School District and the Board at risk to go forward with this transaction.

Susan Ebitz wanted to invite all Otis community members to a forum on Wednesday, August 25<sup>th</sup> at 7 P.M. up at the Town Hall to solicit input what type of library you would like if space was not a consideration. There are two representatives from MLBC coming. Otis library is one of three projects that may be chosen to be funded at 75% of the cost from the MLBC. One of the requirements is to have a public forum and to see what town residents would like to see in a library. Susan wanted to continue to discuss the topic of the diversity grant. Susan thinks the Art and Music program may receive one hundred dollars for those programs to spend on materials for multicultural and diversity education. PK through 1<sup>st</sup> Grade has three hundred dollars to spend on materials and books. Two hundred dollars was granted through the Diversity Otis Library Grant and one hundred dollars is coming from the Otis Cultural Council. The Otis Cultural Council was awarded 850 dollars in books. Susan would like to invite the teachers to send a list of materials they may need. The cost would be close to two thousand dollars for the school for diversity and multicultural education.

Carol addressed Roger Brown on his community participation. She did not want Roger to think that she nor the Committee was ignoring his concerns. Carol explained that there cannot be

discussion during Community participation. The topic needs to be on the agenda for discussion. Roger Kohler requested that the topic be added onto next month's agenda.

Barbara Cormier, resident of Sandisfield, brought up that Eric stated in previous meetings, that he did not need a vote on some items, that discussion was enough for him to proceed ahead with decisions concerning funding. Barbara went on to ask; as in other community meetings, doesn't a motion, discussion, and vote need to be done? Carol stated that Eric needed a consensus not a vote. Carl Nett expressed his concern about this topic. He said there was one time Eric asked for a consensus and another time he asked for guidance. But in both cases Eric stated he did not need a vote at this time. Carl believes that a municipal body's only mechanisms they use to make decisions is by a formal proper vote. Carol thought Eric only asked for the opinion of the School Committee and is still closing the year off. Therefore, he did not need a vote. Carl feels the only reason Eric is asking for guidance is his way of asking how the School Committee is going to vote in the future. Then Eric takes action consistent with the answers given. The Committee needs to do things differently moving forward to avoid confusion. That is why there needs to be a formal clearly stated motion, discussion, and a vote. We have not authorized anything. There have been times we did vote properly. There was no confusion. Carl feels the action of voting later and only asking for guidance is not correct based on the information he has forwarded to the School Committee from the MA DOR. He feels the Committee will get themselves in trouble if we continue to work in this way. Carol stated that in next month's meeting, she has invited a member of the MASC to discuss the rules and regulations of School Committee meetings. Carol wants to wait until next month for the answers to Carl's concerns. Carl brought up that when the School Committee was sworn into office, that oath of office said that we must be consistent to the bylaws of the towns and the laws of the Commonwealth of MA. Carl feels they are not following the laws of the Commonwealth of MA. He thinks this is something they all should be concerned with. This topic should be on the agenda and talk about it. Carl does not understand how the agenda is created. He stated that he never saw an email for this meeting asking the School Committee if they have any items for the agenda. Carol stopped Carl and stated that there was an email that Teresa sent out over a week or so ago asking if anyone had any items to be put on the agenda. If so, contact Carol. Carl agreed that he received that email asking for ideas for the agenda, but he was under the impression that before each meeting the School Committee would be solicited for input. In subsequent meetings that has not been the case. Carol said that can be done going forward, but Carol continued by saying, there is an understanding that if anyone has something to add, they need to contact the chair. Jess Drenga stated that this is how it always has been run. Specific topics are always on the agenda such as Superintendent updates and financial updates. Anything else, goes through the chair to be put on the agenda. Carl was fine with that process. Carl did ask if the email he sent to Carol on the DOR could be put on the agenda. Carol noted Carl's request.

Barbra Cormier wanted to bring up her seconded item of concern. She asked if any of the Otis members have taken the training by the MASC that they are supposed to do within the one year of joining. Barbara called the Sandisfield Town Clerk, and all three member's results are on

file. Barbara also called the Otis Town Clerk, and she did not have any results. Carol stated that she will investigate this.

Lisa LaGrant, an Otis resident, wanted to state that the CDC did change their recommendation to vaccinated people wearing their masks due to the outbreak in Mass. She wants the School Committee to understand that the positivity rate is increasing in MA. The 7-day average is 6 to 7 cases a day. She stated that the CDC said that the new delta variant is as contagious as chicken pox. Her concern is that if the school cannot prevent the common cold, how can it prevent this variant? She wanted to know what the School Committee is going to do in the Fall.

Arlene mentioned an email that she received from an attorney who is a resident of Sandisfield. She was wondering if anyone else on the Committee has received the same email. No other member, not even the chair received the information. A complaint was filed with the Attorney General stating that the ZOOM link to the June 2021 and July 2021 was not on the agenda, so she could not attend. Therefore, the contents of both meetings were illegal. Jess Drenga spoke up and stated how concerned she is with how meetings are now held. They are not about the children anymore. She finds this upsetting. Roger Kohler agreed with Jess about how the ZOOM meetings are not posted, is not right. Jess corrected Roger and stated that not posting the meeting correctly is not her concern. She is upset with the fact that someone would file a complaint with the Attorney General without going to the School Committee first for answers. The meetings are posted the same way as usual. Carl stated that the meetings have not been posted the same way. The June and July meetings were missing the ZOOM link for public participation. He disagreed with Jess in the fact that the meetings were not posted the same way. Jess stated that it was an obvious oversight, and anyone could have called the school for further information on the link. Carol asked Teresa DellaGiustina to explain what had happened. Teresa verified that indeed links were sent to both Town Halls. She visibly showed the emails that were sent to be posted. The emails had dates and times on them which were on time and legal for posting. Teresa also added that every month she still posts the agenda on the front door of the school building. She has not stopped doing that, even though we meet via ZOOM. Not realizing at the time that the links were not posted, Teresa attempted to call the Attorney General on this but has not received a call or email back yet. She did contact the Otis Town Clerk who did contact the Attorney General. There were a few times this has happened in Otis. The Attorney General stated that this has been common across the state, so vote on the contents of the meeting that the ZOOM links were missed in the following month's meeting. Teresa also read the email that was sent to her by the Attorney General's office back in June of 2019, stating that the official site of posting is the Farmington River School's website. It is a courtesy not a requirement to send copies to both Town Halls. That information was submitted back in 2019 to both Towns. Arlene wanted to express how she was stunned. She could not believe that a letter from the Attorney General came to the School Committee. This has never happened in all the time she has been on the Committee. It seems to Arlene that all we are finding is criticism of everything School Committee is doing. All the focus is on is protocol, which Arlene does not think should be ignored, but we are not focusing on the students and their education. There is too much in fighting. To receive a letter from the Attorney General when someone could have called the school to ask why the link was not put on? Arlene does not

understand what is going on. Everyone is trying their best to do things right for the children. She would like an explanation. Roger asked if we could use the same ZOOM link for each meeting? Carol reminded Roger that starting in September the meetings will be in person. Jennifer asked if we could make links to the recordings of the meetings without ZOOM links accessible to the public.

Carol stated that the meeting in September will be in person. The minutes will be sent in a timelier manner and the ZOOM links will be added to the agenda from now on. This should take care of everyone's concerns.

- 7. Adjournment.** Carol asked for a motion to adjourn. Arlene Tolopko motioned to adjourn. Jess Drenga seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to adjourn the meeting at 7:47 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted:

Teresa DellaGiustina

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