

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
Tuesday, October 10, 2023
Virtual Meeting: Hybrid (in-person and online)
7:00 p.m.
Minutes
Zoom Recorded

Members Present

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Chair
Ann Grosjean - Vice-Chair
Donna Cook
Tracey Anderson
Dr. Laura Rodriguez
Briana Ross
Arthur Christensen

Also Present

Superintendent Phil Stevens
Director of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Erin Conley

1. Call to order

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Cunningham led the Pledge of Allegiance

3. Present to Speak

Carrie Rainville, Potter School Road, is the current president of the Willington PTA and would like to remind residents of upcoming events. She stated there is one week left of the Lyman pie and cookie dough fundraiser. She also stated on Friday, October 13th the PTA was hosting a Board of Education candidates forum. Friday, October 27th is the PTA's Trunk or Treat event. On Tuesday, November 7th they will hold their annual bake sale outside of the town office building.

4. Chairman's Report

Chair Cunningham stated that the CABA Conference registration has gone live. She stated some members are up for re-election and may not be able to participate this year. The dates of the event are November 17th and 18th in Mystic. Chair Cunningham also noted new laws that were passed this session by the Connecticut General Assembly including a change in the regulations for the Freedom of Information Act. This means Boards of Education will be required to post materials that go with the agenda on the website.

5. Communications

Chair Cunningham had no new communications.

6. Superintendent Report

Superintendent Stevens stated that Leilani Arnau, HMS library paraeducator had resigned; Olivia Rovalino transferred into that position from the World Language paraeducator. Candidates are currently being interviewed for the world language para educator position.

Carrie Rainville was hired as the CES Staff Support Specialist; Steve Nappi as the CES special education teacher, and Alexis Martin as an HMS paraprofessional.

a. 24-25 BOE budget priorities

Superintendent Stevens said that the administrative team is already working on the 24-25 budget. He asked that specific recommendations from Board members be emailed to him. Superintendent Stevens also voiced concerns with some of the expected increases, including in program 3, Special Education.

b. Roof grant

Superintendent Stevens stated he had sent out a communication to the Commissioner of the Department of Administrative Services last week so he could understand how roof projects were canceled in 2021. Superintendent Stevens said he asked for a meeting to discuss steps forward as their cancellation letter stated previously approved roof applications could be utilized if we didn't move forward with a new school or school renovation project.

c. HVAC grant

Superintendent Stevens said that he participated in an HVAC grant webinar last week and learned that the state is looking for projects for the 2024 grant, with applications due in December. Superintendent Stevens noted that he also learned that as part of Public Act 23-205, the state has another \$150,000,000 HVAC grant planned for 2025, with an expected December 2024 due date. He said he believes the town will be ready to apply for that grant.

d. HMS clubs

Superintendent Stevens noted that there was a tremendous response to club offerings at HMS this year. 93 students signed up for clubs. A portion of clubs is funded by the BOE budget and a portion is through the Title IV grant.

e. Reading waiver

Superintendent Stevens stated that the State finally signed a contract with Public Consulting Group (PCG), an external source to review the 80 reading waivers that they received last year. Each district that submitted a waiver will have the opportunity to meet with PCG for 25 minutes to present their waiver and state their case. PCG will not provide any decisions on waivers at that meeting and will be making recommendations to the commissioner of education. The meeting is supposed to take place this month, but a date has not been finalized.

f. Upcoming events

Superintendent Stevens noted the highly successful curriculum nights at both schools. He also noted that he was going to share PTA events, but Carrie did that earlier.

g. Other

Superintendent Stevens said that the school system has received money from a School Security Grant. P. Stevens also said that he had just learned of another Security Grant of \$27,500 that should be coming to the town's schools. He noted that this was also something that had already been done utilizing Board of Education funds.

D. Cook asked if a student wanted to start a club if it could be done relatively easily.

P. Stevens said that the student could run the idea through the school principal and if there is enough interest then it can be considered.

L. Rodriguez asked if the town was looking for a World Language teacher.

P. Stevens replied that that is not what is being looked for and that there is a large shortage out there.

L. Rodriguez asked what would happen if the reading waiver was not received.

P. Stevens replied that he believed if Willington did not get it, there would be a lot of towns that did not get it. He stated he believed that if many towns did not receive the waiver, there would be a lot of pushback against the state.

A. Christensen asked about the HVAC grant and if it would limit the possibility of a roof grant.

P. Stevens said that one would not affect the other.

Chair Cunningham said the risk would be that the roof grant would not be approved if they were not high enough on the priority list.

P. Stevens stated it was a grant that could be applied for monthly. He stated that the challenge is that there is a lot of information in the 2021 roof grant approval and that the costs have gone up for the town.

A. Grosjean asked if it would make sense to hold off on the roof grant so that the roof and HVAC grant could be done together.

P. Stevens said that there is \$1 million that is approved for General Projects and there is a question of whether or not that is going to be enough money to cover both roof projects. He also noted that there is currently a backlog to get materials which may result in projects happening around the same time.

Chair Cunningham asked if there was an update on the school's health status regarding the flu and COVID-19.

P. Stevens responded that he and the nurses were getting a little nervous at the beginning of the school year, but illness concerns had settled back down.

7. Financial Report

a. October 2023 financial report

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens said that they have started to apply some grants as they've come in. He noted that they have not applied Title 1 yet to programs 1 or 2. P. Stevens also noted that they have encumbered budget estimates for substitutes in program 10. He noted that there were still some adjustments that would come out of program 10, particularly with health insurance.

b. 2022-2023 final financial report

Attachment #2

Superintendent Stevens shared the final 22-23 budget report and that \$278,000 would be returned to the town, mainly from savings from staffing and insurance. He noted that the first page of the attachment shows where each program ended the year with explanations as to why there was a shortfall or savings. He noted that the second page has the transfers recommended by the business manager to balance each of the programs. P. Stevens added that the last page shows the adjustment to each program after making those transfers. He noted that the Board must act on the transfers to balance the program budgets.

Chair Cunningham moved to transfer \$113,718 from fringe benefits/substitute teachers to Program 1, CES Elementary School and that \$2,460 be transferred from fringe benefits/ substitutes to Program 2, HMS Middle School, and that \$14,245 from fringe benefits/ substitutes to Program 6, curriculum and staff developments, and that \$18,995 be transferred from fringe benefits/ substitutes to Program 7, utilities.

D. Cook seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

c. Non-lapsing fund request

Attachment #3

Superintendent Stevens said that based on the amount the Board is returning to the town from the 22-23 budget, he recommended members request the Board of Finance maximize the non-lapsing account to help offset the two additional unbudgeted special education outplacements. He noted that the maximum that can be in that account is \$274,544. He noted that the third row of the chart of Attachment 3 shows what was in the account, \$258,732, and what was spent, leaving the balance at \$111,132 currently. When that is subtracted from that amount from the maximum \$274,544 that can be in that account, you have a request for \$163,412. He suggested that the full amount be requested because of the unbudgeted special education costs.

A. Grosjean moved that the BOE request a transfer of \$163,412 from the FY22-23 from the Board of Education operating budget to the Board of Education nonlapsing fund.

A. Christensen seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

d. Student Activity Account

Attachment #4

Superintendent Stevens stated that the student activity account for each school was reviewed by the business office. He noted that this account is separate from the BOE budget as allowed by general statute 10-237 School activity funds. P. Stevens explained that the balance of the CES account is \$22,147.10. He noted that they have received charitable contributions, funds from the PTA for field trips and enrichment activities, and the library has brought in funds from the book fair. P. Stevens said that he expected several of these lines to be much lower next year.

A. Christensen asked about outstanding funds for recess equipment and if the information was incorporated with what was being shown in the budget.

P. Stevens answered by saying that they bought a small fixed climbing wall station so the funds from this student activity side will be the balance of the installment. He said he believed the amount was for \$3,700.

A. Christensen then asked about the extended opportunities.

P. Stevens said that they had met with the group that came last year, NESS, to see what their offerings were and that they are looking to see what it would look like if they came out about five times. P. Stevens said that they are seeing what their options are.

L. Rodriguez asked where the money came from for the deposits.

P. Stevens answered by saying that money that comes from the PTA for field trips goes directly into an account and then the parents could potentially be charged less for the field trip based on what is given to them for funds.

D. Cook asked about the 6th and 7th graders at HMS not taking field trips last year.

P. Stevens answered by saying he did not know off the top of his head, but they might not have. He did note that if they did not take field trips the money would follow them. So fifth-grade money that is unused would be transferred to the sixth grade the next year so that a group of kids would not miss out on an opportunity.

8. New Business

Chair Cunningham moved to amend the agenda to include approving the meeting minutes for the September 27th Committee meeting.

A. Christensen seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

a. Approve Regular Meeting Minutes of September 2023

Attachment #5

T. Anderson moved to approve the minutes of September 2023.

B. Ross seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain
M. Doucette Cunningham	x		
A. Grosjean	x		
D. Cook			x
T. Anderson	x		
L. Rodriguez	x		
B. Ross	x		
A. Christensen	x		

Motion Passes

b. Ad hoc facilities committee meeting minutes, September 12 2023 Attachment #6
L Rodriguez moved to approve the curriculum meeting minutes of September 12, 2023.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Added- Ad hoc facilities committee meeting minutes, September 27, 2023

L Rodriguez moved to approve the curriculum meeting minutes of September 27, 2023.

A. Christensen seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

c. CES chimney issue

P. Stevens said that there is an issue with the CES chimney that recently has gotten worse. He stated that water appears to be getting into the chimney which is impacting one of our classrooms. P. Stevens said that the town had requested several masons come out to evaluate the issue at the end of the last school year, but it is such a small job compared to what they usually do, that we had to pay someone to give us a formal proposal. P. Stevens said that the two proposals we have are for \$24,850 and \$68,887, and he says he doesn't believe the two quotes call for the same level of repair. He noted that they could insert this into our CIP plan, but work wouldn't be able to be done until July 1 2025 because a vendor could not be booked in time for the summer of 2024. P. Stevens noted that another option is to pay for it out of non-lapsing, and another option is to request it out of the million dollars that was put forward.

D. Cook voiced concerns about the issues the chimney would cause for kids who may have allergies or asthma and possible debris that could be falling from the chimney. She asked if there was a company that could come in to do some remediation.

Chair Cunningham said she believed there were two questions before them, the first being should money be set aside for remediation, how much, and from where. The second is do they set aside money for a repair, how much, and from where.

A. Christensen asked that since it is not known where the water is coming from, what if a company comes in and seals the wrong spot? He said he thinks the chimney should be taken down and rebuilt by a professional.

L. Rodriguez agreed saying that something needed to be done to fix this, but something also has to be done right now. She said that she thinks using the non-lapsing fund would be the best way to get it fixed.

D. Cook asked if there was a risk of fire due to there being holes in the mortar.

Chair Cunningham said she believed there was less risk of a fire than crumbling and falling.

P. Stevens said that he could find the information out, however, he did not get an impression from contractors that fire was a risk.

Chair Cunningham said that they could remediate what is on the inside right now, but they could not do work on the roof and the mortar during the winter. She said that she wanted to know how much money out of the non-lapsing fund it would take to remediate this problem as soon as possible

P. Stevens said he thought it was time that the school bought its own commercial dehumidifier. He said that they should have one in the district and they are probably about \$3,000.

Chair Cunningham said that they could lump a dehumidifier cost in with the remediation cost.

P. Stevens said that if they purchase a commercial dehumidifier it has to be sized to the room. He also noted that it would be eight months until they can do a full repair. He said it is very hard to get these kinds of quotes. He said the biggest unknown is what the temporary fix is.

Chair Cunningham said that she could see everyone wanted the problem remediated right away so she suggested taking the issue in multiple votes. One on the dehumidifier to come out of the non-lapsing fund. The second on the remediation and having a certain amount of money to have a contractor come out and see what they can do to get the issue temporarily fixed through the winter out of the million dollars, but they would have to go to town meeting for that.

A. Grosjean asked if the \$24,000 fix could serve as a temporary fix.

P. Stevens said that it could be an option but he does not know what the temporary fix would be.

A. Grosjean asked if the non-lapsing fund was needed for special ed.

P. Stevens said that he did not see a big buffer being there but 70 percent of the money comes back after you spend approximately \$90,000.

D. Cook said her concern about buying a large dehumidifier would be to make sure that there is somewhere where it vents or how it works.

P. Stevens said that the dehumidifiers are hosed to a sink.

A. Grosjean asked if they knew there wasn't lead in the paint.

P. Stevens said that based on the color of the paint, he did not think that lead paint would be an issue.

Chair Cunningham moved that the Board allocate up to \$4,000 for an adequately sized commercial dehumidifier to be used in the school systems from the non-lapsing fund.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

A. Christensen asked if the motion should be amended to specify that it be used to

operate in the largest room in the building so you don't get one that will operate in the classroom but can't operate in the library.

Chair Cunningham said that she accepted the amendment.

P. Stevens said that they would get something appropriately sized.

Chair Cunningham clarified that this would be something that they would use for both schools.

Motion passed unanimously.

P. Stevens said that they would need to get a quote on a temporary fix of the chimney.

A. Grosjean moved for P. Stevens to contact a restoration company to make recommendations to look for a temporary fix and set aside up to \$25,000 out of the non-lapsing fund.

B. Ross seconded the motion.

Chair Cunningham said that if a permanent fix was possible at this time they could have a special meeting and approve it.

B. Ross asked if the problem was being checked daily and being monitored.

P. Stevens said that the problem is monitored and looked at every day. He also noted that the teacher of the classroom effectively communicates any issues.

Motion passes unanimously.

A. Grosjean asked if the children would need to move to a different room during repairs.

P. Stevens said he did not know, but he did have plans if that was the case.

L. Rodriguez asked that if there is a motion made to do a full repair and they can do it in November, can they go to a town meeting and transfer money from the \$1 million fund for the repair.

Chair Cunningham responded by saying that there are multiple options on how they can pay for the project.

A. Christensen wanted to clarify that the next motion would be for the full repair.

Chair Cunningham moved that the Board set aside up to \$70,000 for the full repair of the chimney, as soon as the repair can happen, from the non-lapsing fund.

D. Cook seconded the motion.

A. Christensen suggested the motion be amended to \$80,000.

B. Ross pointed out that when you get a quote from someone, they are assuming

everything is going to go right, she asked what happens if it is more expensive.

Chair Cunningham responded saying that there would be a special meeting and a much bigger conversation if that was the case.

A. Christensen asked that from the particular company that the quote was from if there was an amount of time that the repairs would take.

P. Stevens said he would have to go back to look at it, but the company in question works on historic buildings.

B. Ross asked if it would be appropriate to send a letter to students in the classroom outlining the plan.

P. Stevens said that it was a possibility.

Motion passes unanimously.

d. CIP plumbing request (CIP funds)

P. Stevens said that there is \$20,000 in plumbing funds in each building in the current CIP. He noted that to access the money they must request the funds through the BOF and then through a town meeting. Hall School would like to request \$20,000 for 4 projects: Project #1 would replace the isolation valves under the boiler room stairs. Project #2 would replace the hot water domestic circulators. Project #3 would replace the plumbing and cabinetry in the nurse's office. Project #4 would utilize the balance to repair classroom pipes, starting with the classroom that flooded.

Chair Cunningham moved that \$20,000 is requested from the Board of Finance for plumbing projects at Hall Memorial School out of the CIP fund.

A. Christensen seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

e. Facilities Study Response

P. Stevens said that the subcommittee interviewed QA+M on September 27th and then had a public meeting to discuss the interview. QA+M was the only proposal received from the RFP, and they had a bid for \$32,500. He noted if it is decided to move forward with QA+M, you need to request the Board of Finance for the cost of the study out of the \$1,000,000 BOE CIP project funds set aside, which would go to a town meeting.

Chair Cunningham said it was worth noting that the committee did discuss this in great detail. She said the reason they had the conversation with QA+M was because they sensed a disconnect at first in terms of what the project was. She noted that this was not to accept the bid as is, but to create a contract to get needed work done.

A. Christensen said he had reservations about it because there was only one quote and no comparison, but he did feel more comfortable with it after conversations.

D. Cook said it was important to take into consideration how long the current

infrastructure would last. She said that QA+M had a good sense of bundling projects to make things more productive.

Chair Cunningham said that they were satisfied that as an architecture firm that only does education facilities they have experts that can give quotes and conditions on multiple problems.

Chair Cunningham moved that they request from the Board of Finance \$32,500 to pay for a facilities assessment study out of the million-dollar CIP projects fund.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

A. Christensen asked if there was any way that they could get the money from the money being returned from the School Building Committee.

P. Stevens said that the money would be going back into the same pot. The Board of Finance would ultimately decide where the money came from. The decision would come from the Board of Finance and then go to town meeting.

Chair Cunningham amended the motion to take out where the money was coming from.

Motion passes unanimously.

f. Capital Improvement Project Review

Attachment #7

P. Stevens said that he emailed a rough draft of the Board of Education CIP plan which gets submitted in December. P. Stevens said he would like to target years 1 and 2 tonight to make sure there are quotes for the correct projects. The HVAC grant requires the town to demonstrate funding as part of the application. To be able to apply for the grant in December 2024, they would need to update this document to reflect that cost for both schools, but there won't be a cost until an HVAC evaluation to identify the proper solutions for each school is complete. P. Stevens said he would anticipate the majority of the million already in CIP will be for the roof projects so additional funds will need to be set aside.

D. Cook said she thought that the facilities study was going to cover much of this cost.

P. Stevens said that this is going to be more in-depth.

Chair Cunningham explained that they were going to take the information from the facilities study and go much much deeper to look at every single classroom. She noted that in order to write the grant an exact amount and plan would be needed.

D. Cook asked if the facility study would need to be done first.

P. Stevens answered saying it was not necessary and that this is a different thing, and this needs to be done for the HVAC grant.

Chair Cunningham asked if there was anything anyone else felt Phil should be focusing for year 1.

A. Grosjean questioned some items that had been moved.

P. Stevens said that some things were moved due to work that needs to be done, along with the costs of projects and grants that are available.

B. Ross asked how sure they were of getting an HVAC grant.

P. Stevens responded by saying that the schools without ventilation are at the top of the list, and that is the condition the school is in. P. Stevens also noted that he could not make a guarantee. He also asked that any feedback on what is shared to please be communicated to him.

g. Minimum wage: Food Services impact

Attachment #8

P. Stevens said that the Governor announced an increase to the minimum wage again on January 1, 2024. At this time, the Food Services group is the only group impacted. P. Stevens said he worked with the business office and we ran two scenarios, first to give everyone a flat \$0.69 increase which is what the increase is from \$15. He stated that he also determined the percentage of the increase and then applied it to all staff. P. Stevens recommended all food service staff get a 4.6% increase in their hourly rate starting January 1, 2024.

A. Grosjean moved that the BOE grant a 4.6% increase to the food staff starting January 1, 2024.

T. Anderson seconded the motion.

A. Grosjean said that she thinks it is well deserved for these employees.

Motion passes unanimously.

9. Old Business

a. Math curriculum

P. Stevens said he did not receive any questions so he assumes the Board was satisfied with the curriculum draft.

Many BOE members thanked Dr. E. Conley for her work on the curriculum.

Dr. E. Conley joined and said she had gotten good feedback from parents about the curriculum and that some great student progress had been made.

T. Anderson moved that the BOE approve the math curriculum as written.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

A. Christensen noted that he did not get through the whole curriculum yet, but he will not hold up the process. He said he would not be able to vote for it just due to the fact he has not had time to go through the entire thing.

P. Stevens noted that if something is noticed in the future, it could still be brought up and discussed.

Chair Cunningham noted that curriculums are often changing, and this is approving what is on paper at this time, but things could be added or changed later.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain
M. Doucette Cunningham	x		
A. Grosjean	x		
D. Cook			x
T. Anderson	x		
L. Rodriguez	x		
B. Ross	x		
A. Christensen			x

Motion Passes

10. Present to Speak

There was no one who wanted to make comments.

11. Board Comments

A. Christensen welcomed new hires and recommended that residents go to the town Trunk or Treat on October 27th and that more trunks and volunteers are needed.

T. Anderson also welcomed new employees. She thanked Phil for an in-depth tour of the buildings and she got more information looking at the facilities in a way that she had not been able to in the past. She also thanked everyone for approving the math curriculum.

D. Cook stated that her time serving as a Board of Ed member is coming to an end but her heart for service for children and residents of Willington will remain. She stated that she hoped that the next Board would be able to take the necessary steps to restore the schools back to their Blue Ribbon status. She also thanked parents who shared concerns with her.

L. Rodriguez welcomed new Board of Education members coming on board and wished the folks leaving well. She also thanked everyone for their hard work.

A. Grosjean stated she thought it was exciting that clubs were starting back up and thanked those who had made it happen.

B. Ross stated that no matter what someone's role is within the school faculty and staff, that they are important and they make a difference. She also noted that she enjoyed curriculum night.

Chair Cunningham thanked the Board Members for their volunteer time to make the schools a better place.

12. Adjournment

Chair Cunningham motioned to adjourn the meeting.

D. Cook seconded

The motion passed unanimously, meeting adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

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WILLINGTON, CT.

2024 JAN 22 P 1:05


TOWN CLERK