

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2012

Approved 04.10.12

PRESENT:

Mr. Erik Dichter, Secretary
Ms Berta Erickson
Mr. Jim Frey, Chair
Mr. John Giger
Ms Leslie Lathrop
Ms Alison Manugian, Vice-chair
Mr. Jon Sjoberg

ADMINISTRATION:

Mr. Joseph Mastrocola, Superintendent
Mr. Gerald Martin, Director of Business and Finance

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE: Logan Caswell

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: C. Lindemer, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; J. Plausse, S. Plausse, Members of the ice hockey team and parents, M. McCaffrey, K. Snow, P. McGrath, F. Biron

I. Call to Order:

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by the chair, J. Frey.

II. Pledge of Allegiance (Middle School)

Eighth grader Jenna Plausse led the Pledge of Allegiance. Jenna plays travel basketball and plays club soccer for the Nashua World Cup. She is looking forward to high school next year.

III. Announcements

L. Lathrop announced the GDRHS Spring into the Arts is next Thursday.

IV. Approval of Minutes

J. SJOBERG MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 13, 2012 AS AMENDED. SECONDED BY B. ERICKSON

In Favor: J. Giger, L. Lathrop, J. Frey, E. Dichter, B. Erickson, J. Sjoberg

Abstention: A. Manugian

B. ERICKSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 14, 2012 SPECIAL PERSONNEL AND NEGOTIATIONS MEETING MINUTES. SECONDED BY J. SJOBERG

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

A. MANUGIAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 20, 2012 SPECIAL PERSONNEL AND NEGOTIATIONS MEETING MINUTES. AS AMENDED. SECONDED BY J. SJOBERG

In Favor: L. Lathrop, A. Manugian, J. Frey, B. Erickson, J. Sjoberg

Abstention: J. Giger, E. Dichter

V. Vote to Accept Warrant Articles

A. MANUGIAN MOVED TO ACCEPT ONE PAYROLL WARRANT FOR \$805,103.51 AND THREE VENDOR WARRANTS TOTALING \$907,737.93. SECONDED BY L. LATHROP

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

VI. Questions and Comments from the Public

Amy and John Kelly wrote a letter to school committee members and Mr. Mastrocola expressing concerns about the assignment of homework in the elementary grades and that teachers are required to follow a "homework mandate" set by the school committee. A. Kelly thanked members for reading it and for the responses. She has spoken with Mr. Mastrocola and she and Mr. Kelly are happy discussions will continue. She said this issue is important to many parents. J. Frey clarified there is no official homework policy at the school committee level. He said the Kelly's concerns will be referred to the Curriculum and Instruction subcommittee. A. Manugian commended Mr. and Mrs. Kelly for coming forward with their concerns and providing research materials. J. Sjoberg agreed this was brought up in a constructive way.

VII. Presentations

A. GDRSD Hockey Team Recognition - Athletic Director M. McCaffrey said the boys ice hockey team went 22-0-1 this season, captured the Central Mass District Championship with a victory over Worcester and followed that up with the State Championship win over South Hadley. This is the first ice hockey state championship at Groton-Dunstable and the first winter state championship.

M. McCaffrey said they want their athletic teams to get involved in the community. The ice hockey team has spent a lot of time raising funds for Toys for Tots, they volunteer at Loaves and Fishes and raised money for the Billy Woitowicz Scholarship Fund at a special event. The Captains presented the State Championship Division AAA trophy to J. Frey.

B. Erickson said she was a little dubious in the beginning of the season about all the fundraising the team was doing but after reading about what they do with the funds, she changed her mind and commended them for thinking of others.

B. High School Presentation - Gerrit Bolt - Postponed

C. Audited Financial Statements FY11 - Karen Snow, of Melanson and Heath, explained they were hired to provide an opinion as to whether the financial statements are in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices. The district received a clean opinion, as they have in the past, and they did not find any issues. She gave an overview of the FY11 financial statements. With respect to the balance sheet, she said there is new terminology for the fund balances - unreserved is now unassigned. The unassigned fund balance in FY11 was up about \$430,000 from the prior year and they have a solid balance in E&D. She said the district did a great job holding expenditures in line and they had a solid \$638,000 change in fund balance (also known as net income for the year).

The budget vs. actual statement was reviewed and K. Snow this is the most important statement in the report. Revenues were a little short because they budgeted to transfer in about \$770,000 from some of the special revenue funds but only half was transferred. They expended almost \$1.2M less than budgeted and came out with \$822,000 to the good.

J. Sjoberg asked for an explanation of "fixed charges" and K. Snow said this is insurances and retirement.

Management Letter - The district received 9 comments. These are not material weaknesses or significant weaknesses but are ways to improve internal controls. Four are repeats from last year as this is a work in progress and she noted they may be in the process of implementing a policy while the audit is being done as was the case with vendor and payroll warrant approval.

Other comments include:

Improving controls over vendor disbursements - There should be segregation between the finance office and the treasurer. The finance office should not be in charge of signing checks and the treasurer would be the only one with access to his signature. Procurement information should be attached to the invoice.

Reconciling student activity fund checking account - Funds in excess of the maximum balance allowed, as voted by the school committee, need to be reconciled and excess funds would be held in a savings account.

Periodic internal audit of departmental receipts - The accounting department should try to visit departments that collect money offsite. This allows them to get feedback on how they are doing and lets them know someone is watching over them to make sure they are in compliance with district policy.

Improving documentation for retiree and COBRA health and dental insurance premium payments - The information that they are receiving payment from retirees and people who owe money for their insurance needs to be consolidated.

Record transfers as budgeted - This goes back to the \$335,000 negative variance on the budget vs. actual where they had budgeted to transfer a lot of money from School Choice and the Early Learning Center revolving accounts but only transferred half of the money. The transfer should be made as budgeted. Otherwise, they will technically have an unbalanced budget.

Charging program related expenditures directly to the Early Learning Center Revolving Fund -

Revolving funds are designed so the fees charged for the programs cover the costs of the programs and in the past, money has been transferred to the general fund as opposed to charging expenditures to the fund.

K. Snow said she would encourage them to directly charge the expenditures associated with the program to the revolving fund so they can see that the fees being charged are being used to support the expenses.

J. Frey said the committee had requested that all program expenses be included in the primary budget they approve so they can see the total cost of operating the district.

Establishing a plan to fund the deficit in the athletic revolving fund - There was a deficit of about \$56,000 at the end of FY11 which increased by about \$22,000 from the prior year. K. Snow said program fees are suppose to be covering the expenditures and any deficit, by default, would have to eventually be funded by the general fund if it cannot be made up by the revenues in the revolving funds. She acknowledged this is being worked on by the Athletic Director, Business Manager and Superintendent.

To eliminate the deficit, J. Giger said they could increase the fees until the debt is paid, underwrite the deficit from the general fund or do a combination of the two. He asked if there are any other ways to eliminate it.

K. Snow said they either have to increase the revenues or decrease the expenses or charge some of the expenses to the general fund. A reason they were given for the deficit was because the teams were doing so great and going to all the championships and the transportation costs were more than anticipated. A certain amount of money could be appropriated from the general fund to transfer into the revolving fund or they could appropriate money for athletics and charge some of those costs that are being charged to the revolving fund to the appropriation line in the general fund.

J. Frey said they need to see if these are episodic problems or chronic under funding. L. Lathrop said they need to see if it is a particular sport that is causing this. A. Manugian said next month Budget and Finance plans to get back to the accounts that are on the periphery.

J. Giger said the \$55,000 deficit in the athletic revolving account was created without anyone coming back to the school committee or the budget holders to say they needed to overspend and he thinks this needs to get fixed as it creates a long-term debt.

Improving controls over student activity funds - Issues include a \$22,000 deficit being carried from the old high school activity fund that was closed out when a new one was opened but the deficit is still there and needs to be funded. There are a couple of deficits in individual accounts at the high school and Swallow Union. K. Snow said an activity should not be spending money it does not have. This is in the student activity funds policies and procedures. She said this is perfectly normal and student activity funds are an area where control needs to continually be maintained. Balances sitting in undistributed accounts need to be distributed to the activity they belong to.

K. Snow thanked everyone for being supportive and always willing to answer their questions and get the information they need.

VIII. Reports

A. Subcommittees

Personnel & Negotiations - J. Sjoberg reported they met to develop questions they will use to interview the 3 to 5 candidates for the position of Interim Superintendent. Attorney Greenspan has advised the full school committee may not review resumes in executive session. It was agreed members will review the resumes at their April 22nd meeting and J. Mitchell will advise the candidates their names will be public information. The questions will also be reviewed at that meeting.

The PEC (Public Employees Committee) was created to span all the bargaining units when the district moved into the GIC healthcare plan. J. Frey reported it is expected each bargaining unit will vote next week on the current points that are on the table and there may be some closure in sight. He noted this is the first time they have had to go through a renewal.

Budget & Finance Subcommittee - A. Manugian reported they will meet on Thursday at 8:00 a.m. at MSS. The meeting is dually posted. With respect to the having a stabilization fund, each town has to have a town meeting warrant article to approve the creation of the fund. She met with the Groton selectmen and FinCom last night and they have not decided whether they will support it. She and J. Frey are meeting with the Dunstable FinCom next Monday but they are not in support of the fund. Both towns must approve creating the fund. A. Manugian said having a stabilization fund improves their bond rating.

Policy Subcommittee - L. Lathrop reported their next meeting is April 4th at 6:00 p.m. at MSS. The committee will be voting on the Concussion Policy later this evening.

Curriculum and Instruction - A. Manugian reported they met at Prescott on March 19th and discussed three major topics. A volunteer report card committee has been meeting with the intent of moving the district forward to a standards-based report card that will align more closely with the AEL's. Their goal is to provide a template in June that can be used to start to educate parents and teachers about what the differences would be and how they would move forward. As a result of the NEASC review, they discussed the need to focus on curriculum, particularly vertically from the middle school to the high school. There have been multiple meetings over the past months between middle school curriculum coordinators and high school academic coordinators. The district has received over 40 resumes for the Director of Teaching, Learning and Accountability position and they are in the process of being reviewed.

J. Sjoberg said he would like the committee to be educated on a standards-based report card. A. Manugian said there will be more information when the template is approved but it would be set up with the format for each semester and parents will be able to see which skills from the AEL's are pertinent and it will give a variety of "marks" that would reflect work habits and such.

The committee will meet in April, the date to be determined.

B. Superintendent

1. College Acceptances (Info) - Members received a list of college acceptances. It was noted it is an impressive and diverse list. It will be posted on the website.

2. Purple Up! - For Military Kids (Info) - April marks the nation's "Month of the Military Child", a time to honor youth impacted by deployment. There are two military students in the district and everyone is encouraged to wear purple, which symbolizes all branches of the military, on April 13th. J. Mastrocola said they plan to have purple poppies available.

3. Spring into the Arts at GDRHS! (Info) - This fundraiser is hosted by the GD Art Boosters, a parent-led nonprofit founded in 2010 to support GDRHS arts programs. On April 5th, from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m., attendees

will enjoy art exhibits, music performances and theatrical vignettes at the high school. There will be a silent auction and a live auction.

4. MASC (Info) - J. Mastrocola distributed a packet of various forms from MASC.

C. Director of Business and Finance - G. Martin reported MSBA accepted the MSS roof project into the program and will do their cost analysis. They will know by June or July if it will be funded. The boiler at the Union Building was not accepted. This project can be resubmitted.

They are moving forward with the UniFund software for the accounting. They have met with UniFund and established a schedule and the accounting will be done this summer, followed by human resources in late summer and payroll in December/January.

D. Advisory Committees

Prescott Advisory Committee -

B. Erickson reported they are waiting on the various hearings about the fire station. There will be a public hearing at Prescott on April 10th at 7:00 p.m. The architect will be present to discuss proposed uses. A walk-through of Prescott will take place at 6:00 p.m. J. Frey noted April 10th is the same night as the school committee meeting.

E. Chair

Day on the Hill - J. Frey reported he and Ms Lathrop attended the MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Committees) Day on the Hill today and it mainly consisted of getting updates from key legislators involved with educational type activities. State Auditor Bump talked about unfunded mandates. MASC keeps pressing for relief from regulatory overhead that is required. A district has about 108 different filing requirements that must be met on an annual basis. The current state fiscal outlook is a bit more optimistic but state funding will not likely increase substantially. Chapter 70 and regional transportation are expected to remain stable.

L. Lathrop went to a briefing on the new regulations coming out on teacher evaluations and the state expects districts to complete adoption of the new instrument by September 1st. It is a rigorous process.

J. Mastrocola said he and the Leadership Team have been ready since last June. Many districts have moved toward the state recommended form and the model instrument is available on the MASC website.

L. Lathrop noted the vocational high schools prepared and served an excellent lunch.

IX. Discussions

A. Concussion Policy - First and Second Readings

The policy is the same as the policy that was approved on December 11, 2011 but the committee did not do the first and second readings at that time. L. Lathrop advised the policy must be submitted to the state by the end of March. She has spoken with the athletic director and he is happy with the policy and it is working well. The nurses are also satisfied with the policy.

L. LATHROP MOVED THEY WAIVE THE NORMAL FIRST READING AND APPROVE THE SECOND READING TO ADOPT THE CONCUSSION POLICY WITH THE MINOR CHANGE THAT THE LAST THREE PAGES WILL BE EXHIBITS 1, 2 AND 3. SECONDED BY J. SJOBERG

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

X. New Business

Logan said the Student Council is working on the cultural fair and the Leadership Team is working on various projects. His subcommittee is trying to get three bids to work on some landscaping projects since they feel

the high school is lacking cosmetic appeal, mainly in the front. B. Erickson asked if they were looking at using volunteer landscapers and Logan said yes.

XI. Adjournment

L. LATHROP MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 8:55 P.M. SECONDED BY A. MANUGIAN

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary