

GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL FINANCE/FACILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 1, 2021 @ 6:00 P.M.
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 5

Members Present: Jay Weitlauf, Liz Porter, Dean Antipas

Also Present: Susan Austin, Ken Knight, Sam Kilpatrick, Laurie LePine, Clint Kennedy, Ernie Koschmieder, Andrea Ackerman

Chairman Weitlauf called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

1. Review October 12, 2021, Meeting Minutes: Dean Antipas made the motion to accept the meeting minutes, Liz Porter seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
2. Minimum Wage Increase Proposal: Ms. LePine presented a Minimum Wage Classification Analysis and Proposal 2021 document. Groton is short on workers in key areas such as paraprofessionals. We are currently down 25%. Groton is significantly low in pay for workers in comparison to other districts. Some area districts have significantly raised their pay rates for workers ahead of the new minimum wage increases. Ms. LePine and Mr. Knight created a proposal to rectify this disparity as soon as possible. Discussion regarding these new rates and their impacts on the budget followed. The concern was raised regarding the balance between new staff and veteran staff. The question was raised about if these proposed increases would be enough to retain our workforce. This issue will be sent to the full board for further discussion.
3. Staffing Review at MRM and TRM: TABLED
4. Review End User Device Proposal: Clint Kennedy presented a draft proposal for Technology Device Upgrade for Instructional Staff. A lengthy discussion ensued over several issues including but not limited to the age of the hardware currently being used by staff. One of the primary concerns is the protection against the rise in malware and ransomware. Security of GPS data during this time is essential and it was noted that school systems are vulnerable as seen in the case of the attack on the Stonington School System. Also, a technology upgrade to bring equity across all schools as well as a two-factor authentication were discussed. The proposal was to refresh all devices and then create a 3 – 4-year cycle to upgrade devices. This would be accomplished by leasing the devices instead of outright purchasing them. Mr. Antipas asked if there is a technology replacement fund and Mr. Weitlauf responded no, but the district has DoD funds. He then asked if the network was in good shape. Mr. Kennedy responded that yes, it was as the maintenance has been kept up and will be good for the next few years. The discussion continued with a review of the timing to implement this proposal as well as a sample of the quantity and funding necessary to complete the first phase of this project. Ms. Austin reminded us that there is an issue with supply and demand for all electronic devices. The sooner a course of action is decided upon, the quicker orders can be submitted and hopefully in place as soon as possible. Mr. Knight stated that this proposal needs to go to the full board. Mr. Weitlauf requested that a solid proposal with real numbers be drawn up and then submitted at a COW meeting. Ms. Austin stated that a formal proposal will be submitted.

5. Update re: Food Service Finances & Preparing for the Discontinuation of No-cost Meals for All Students in 2022: Mr. Koschmieder presented his concerns that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. He told us that Groton has moved off of the National Food Program and Breakfast Program. The new platform is being used due to the pandemic. The reimbursement rate is higher than that in previous years as indicated by the numbers he reported. For example, in 2020, reimbursement for lunch was \$3.41, whereas now it is \$4.31, and the breakfast reimbursement is higher as well. Mr. Koschmieder also reported that we are facing shortages in food as well as consumables such as straws, foil and saran wrap. The orders for food and consumables are usually placed a year in advance. Those contracts have been cancelled due to nationwide shortages. He has been trying to buy in the public sector however this causes issues such as difficulties to find low sodium products as well as food items that are clean (no biproducts, fillers, chemicals.) Another area of note is that there is a marked increase in students with allergies as well as diabetes. Mr. Koschmieder has been working with families directly to help create menus for these students that is comparable to nondiabetic students. Staffing is also an issue as we are currently down four positions.

Of primary concern is the fact that until June 2022, the food program is free for all but what happens after this program runs out? Every year, GPS must assume the cost of all unpaid meal plans. This amount had been increasing each year by an average of approximately \$10K until the pandemic hit. This amount has the potential of reaching \$40 – 50K which is a substantial budget issue.

Mr. Koschmieder stated that he has applied to the Community Eligibility Program through the State of Connecticut for the entire district which would provide free breakfast/lunches for all students. This is a 4 – 6-month process. He will report back to us on the status of this application.

6. Update re: Buses: TABLED
7. Update re: Treehouse Finances: TABLED
8. Review the Town's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR): TABLED
9. Update re: Facilities: Mr. Kilpatrick presented a list of items to be submitted Monday night/Tuesday morning to the Town for CIP's. This list included the following:

FHS – Culinary upgrade design fee	\$ 70,000
Culinary upgrade (next year)	\$600,000
Recrowning and Irrigation of the Football Field	\$250,000
HVAC maintenance and repair	\$ 31,000
CB – Roof replacement (delayed from last year)	\$950,000
Upgrade the HVAC system	\$ 17,000

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.