

A Special Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, April 1, 2013 at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Interim Director of Finance/Operations John Turk; Board members Sophiezane Bartlett, George Bauer, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, Maryanne Van Aken and Pamela Zmek; Administrators and Directors Alice Jones, MaryLou Torre, Andrew O'Brien, Eric Bergeron, Kim Culkin, Jeff Turner, Bill Nemeck, Mike Molzon and Paul Ciotti; BoS/BoF representatives Len Assard, Bill Butterly, Dave Deakin, Deborah Fuller, Jerry Stomski, Stan Love, Richard Mastroianni, Charles Bartlett and Mike Devine; Mike Ayles and Paul Lisi of Antinozzi Associates; Brian Holmes from O&G Industries; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board members Gary Suslavich and John Swendsen

Audience members: two members of the press and about 10 members of the community

I. Call to Order

Mr. Bauer called the meeting to order at 6:39 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Building Committee Presentation

Mr. Bauer, Mr. Lisi, and Mr. Ayles each presented on different aspects of the proposed building project, which is centered around additions and improvements to Nonnewaug High School and has been planned around a June 11, 2013 referendum date. Rationale for the plans were reviewed, changes and additions identified, and costs discussed. Questions and comments were addressed.

Mr. Butterly asked for information about drainage for the raised field. He also asked whether cost comparisons between this plan and maintaining what we have were considered.

Mr. Love thought it looked like a terrific plan, and asked whether speculation about future plans to the other schools could be done to show tax consequences out to 2030-40.

Mr. Chapman agreed with the merit of "looking beyond our nose" and explained to Mr. Love that those future plans and utilization of those buildings will be tied to enrollment.

Ms. Fuller questioned the Board about flood plain issues, and was assured these are permitting issues that have and will be addressed when plans are submitted.

Mr. Bartlett asked for clarification of which improvements are tied to academic requirements, and also expressed concern about 28 months of work and how that would disrupt school. He was informed of the improvements relating to increased graduation requirements and of how work is done in stages, with swing spaces utilized and building work done largely during summer months, to minimize disruption to learning.

Mr. Devine had questions about prorating the mil increase and projecting that number out, and also questioned the board about its ability to sell this project in 30 days, along with a budget and upcoming board elections.

The question of sprinklers was discussed, whether fire marshals had been consulted and the cost of adding them. State reimbursement rates were also discussed and the likelihood that it would be lower if another year goes by without action. Mr. Holmes explained that the percentage showed on the cost estimates reflects the average of the various aspects of the project and their corresponding reimbursement rates, and are conservative.

On the topic of number of credits currently earned by high school students, it was noted that many who exceed the number required to graduate do not take those additional courses in areas that will be required in the future.

Mr. Bauer asked board members to reflect on the two options being considered – limited alterations or renovate as new – as well as the options for when to attempt a referendum – either June or later, possibly September.

Mr. Cosgriff prefers renovate as new as the best plan for the future and the one that endorses the educational system and best sells the town to potential home buyers who would settle here. He asked when conversations with fire marshals would be had and was told immediately.

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Ms. Zmek felt the package seemed like a good one; the project has been talked about for so long and is clearly necessary. She favors renovate as new.

Ms. Van Aken agreed that renovate as new is the best bang for the buck; the plan has been talked about since 2006 and it is time to go for it.

Ms. Bartlett also felt renovate as new is needed and it is now time to put it out to the community.

Mr. Chapman entered a *motion that the Board proceed to the voters with the renovate as new option for Nonnewaug High School, with a June 2013 referendum*. Seconded by Ms. Bartlett, the **motion carried 6-0**.

III. Budget Presentation to the BoS and BoF of Bethlehem and Woodbury

Mr. Goeler reviewed the budget presentation with the boards, emphasizing that the State has largely defined what we must do and highlighting the various drivers in next year's budget.

Mr. Turk highlighted categories with percentage change associated with them, school by school, and that 82% of the total budget goes to the "cost centers," the schools. Questions and comments were addressed.

Mr. Assard asked Mr. Turk how confident he is of the State numbers, to which he replied not very. An estimated \$765,000 in grant revenue could drop by 5%. He confirmed that additional funding for agriscience would result in revenue back to the towns.

On the topic of school security, Mr. Stomski commented that he had been working with the schools on security and feels School Resource Officers (SRO) are the best bang for the buck; the best security is a deterrent; and there is also a mental health aspect to their work as positive relationships with students are cultivated. He confirmed they would be armed but would not function as security guards at the front door, but rather float within the buildings.

Mr. Chapman identified special education as a major cost driver at which the board is looking closely; the proposed consultant will look at our processes and likely save us money on both regular and special education.

Ms. Fuller questioned the justification for increases as related to State standards. CT standards affect all schools, yet other districts are showing budgets decreasing. Coupled with the building project, she said, it would help to sell that if the budget were a more modest one.

Mr. Goeler pointed out the average increase for Region 14 over the past years has been 1%. The districts showing lower budget increases already have in place many of the personnel and services Region 14 has been doing without.

Ms. Van Aken added that we have experienced 5 years of cutting to the bone and are seeing the effects of that.

Mr. Love asked what anticipated costs or savings the district anticipates for the following budget year.

Ms. Van Aken expects one million dollars saved in special education. Mr. Chapman added that the discretionary dollars in the budget are very small and this is the biggest dilemma facing the board. If the district is to progress, this budget is what is needed. One percent a year gets us mediocre, he said.

Ms. Zmek emphasized the need for technology upgrades, as there is not even wi-fi at NHS and we are way behind in technology.

Mr. Bartlett asked about the pre-school and out-placed students on the special ed page of the budget and was told they represent a subset of the total population.

Hearing no further questions or comments from the boards, Mr. Bauer opened the floor for privilege of the floor.

IV. Privilege of the Floor

Art McNally questioned the budgeted number for security, although he understands the need for added security. He saw 2 SROs in the budget last week and now 4. Mr. Devine explained that the ad hoc safety committee had recommended 4 total and the board had responded by adding 2 more back into the budget. Mr. McNally continued by stating that the economy is not recovering and homes are selling for less than they are worth or than what is owed on them.

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Social worker Amy Williams, accompanied by social worker Doriene Wester, read a prepared statement about the value of school social workers and the services they provide students and families.

Jim Uberti commended the building committee, felt the scope of the project is impressive, and agreed that focusing on the high school was a great step. He believes it to be a worthy project and hopes it will be sold well to the community. He also felt the detail in the budget was great. He asked that the historical context of it be taken into consideration. He asked people to understand what cuts mean when they kick the budget back to the board and say it is too high. Instead of naming an arbitrary number that we must hit, he asked people to think about what the cuts mean.

Tom Arras believes that a 6:30 pm start time for the public hearing on the budget excludes people who cannot be there at that time. He respectfully asked that the time be changed to 7:30 pm. He also contended that when the preschool was outsourced to CAST, the district said this was done as a cost saver. Now, the program is in-house and more expensive and he asked for justification for this.

Jim Crocker congratulated Mr. Turk on his cost-center-focused numbers. He believes the district is at a turning point and should ask itself what the priorities are because there is a litany of things to catch up on. A budget capped at 1% doesn't cut it, he said. Salaries have gone up more than 1%, as has special education, so the money has to be coming from somewhere, and he supposes it's coming from regular ed and infrastructure. If we are not appropriating money correctly, we should fix that. He has tired of hearing about State mandates; as far as he is concerned, if the mandates are not funded, they are just suggestions. He said we should figure out what is important and fund that. For towns of our size, CT Magazine rated Woodbury 9th, but he felt we would have been 4th if not for our educational system, and fixing education improves home values, he said. He named his two priorities: safety and academic performance, adding that if improvements in performance include no goals and are not measured, there is no reason to expect them. He urged fixing what we care most about.

Mr. McNally agreed that the people would support ignoring unfunded mandates.

V. School Calendar/Graduation Date

Ms. Zmek entered a *motion to waive Board policy, for this year only, which requires 181 student days, and to reduce that number to 180 student days, still satisfying State guidelines.*

Seconded by Ms. Van Aken, the **motion carried 6-0.**

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to set Nonnewaug High School's graduation date as Saturday, June 22, 2013,* seconded by Mr. Chapman. After discussion about hardships to various seniors if the date was 6/22 or 6/29, the **motion carried 6-0.**

VI. Adjournment

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to adjourn,* seconded by Mr. Chapman. The **motion carried 6-0.**

The meeting of the Board of Education adjourned at 10:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sophiezone Bartlett, Secretary
Regional School District #14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 4/2/13