

Cohasset Public Schools
143 Pond Street
Cohasset, MA 02025
Empower Students to Improve Communities
Cohasset Special School Committee Meeting

Special School Committee Minutes

Monday, July 10, 2023

4:00 PM

Virtual Meeting-Zoom/Facebook

In Attendance:

Ted Carr, Secretary
Lance Dial, Chairman
Paul Kearney
Jennifer Lesky
Craig MacLellan, Vice Chairman
Susan Owen, Director of Finance & Operations
Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent
Dr. Patrick Sullivan, Superintendent

Chairman Lance Dial called to order a special unscheduled school committee meeting on Monday, July 10, 2023 at 4:04 PM. This special school committee meeting was held virtually via Zoom and Facebook with all members of the Cohasset school committee present virtually. **Roll Call: Mr. Carr-Present; Ms. Lesky-Present; Mr. Kearney-Present; Vice Chair MacLellan-Present; Chairman Dial-Present.**

Discussion of Electrical School Bus – Mr. Dial announces some information and material changes to the implementation of the electric school bus. Given the school committee’s interest in this project with the school committee’s prior approvals, the chair wanted to make sure that all members came together to discuss next steps to where the district is going is consistent with the school committee’s wishes and desires.

Superintendent Patrick Sullivan states they had a couple of obstacles these past couple of weeks mainly regarding the school bus parking situation and also a level 3 charging station that is necessary for the electric school bus to make it workable for us.

Ms. Susan Owen explains the outlay to where this stands and that the school committee needs to decide on rules regarding this ongoing school bus parking situation. Basically, the rules that were laid out by ENEL were on the installation and at some point, the removal of this charging station. There are rules ENEL has regarding the leasing of the electric school bus.

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Discussion of Electrical School Bus – Ms. Owen says this discussion has been ongoing for the past two years and we've agreed to purchase an electric school bus and where it will be parked. Ultimately, the best solution was to place the electric school bus with all the other school buses. Unfortunately, our school buses don't have a permanent home and a question was raised about the leasing of a parking lot for all the school buses they have. Presently, we're leasing a parking lot month to month by choice from the administration and the electric school bus company doesn't want to put a level 3 charging station on this property knowing we don't have a yearly, or a five-year lease. Ms. Susan Owen spoke to the property owner and the property owner agreed to sign a five-year lease with CPS that locks in a price for the first 3 years. In years 4 & 5 the price would increase by two hundred dollars, \$200 which is very fair, and really a perfect parking spot for all the school buses.

ENEL's installation crew said installation of the level 3 charging station would be the easiest to install since there's already a pole and electricity there on the property. It was just a matter of laying down a pad for installing the level 3 charging station. ENEL said they would temporarily install a level 2 charging station until the electric school bus had a permanent home and CPS signed a five-year agreement with the property owner. If CPS decides to move the charging station or backs out from the lease with appropriate notice, ENEL said it would cost CPS \$50,000 to move the charging station.

We won't be able to work with a level 2 charging station, we'll need the level 3 charging station in order to meet the needs for school bus routes. ENEL already drilled holes over by Deer Hill and it will go before the Conservation Department sometime in September or October depending on what they find could cost CPS up to \$200,000 and if there's any drainage issues it would cost \$400,000 to \$500,000 to put the electric school bus in the parking lot at the Deer Hill School on top of \$50,000 moving the charging station, or place it there now.

The reason for this special school committee meeting is for members of the school committee to come to a decision and vote on this now because Cohasset Public Schools won't have this electric school bus come September and we need it with our fleet.

Dr. Sullivan says there really isn't time, nor a location to put a charging station, even if the solution of keeping a bus separate from the fleet which no one is comfortable with from an operational standpoint, even if there's no place to put this charging station. We need to decide if we're going to sign a five-year lease with the property owner or if the electric school bus does not seem to fit the picture right now. This would mean we need an additional school bus because we were counting on this electric bus making sure we had buses for everyone and also transporting our school athletic sports teams.

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Discussion of Electrical School Bus – The second piece is if we decide not to do a five-year lease at this particular location that we're in now, then we want to engage in a discussion regarding finding money for a diesel bus and moving forward with that. If we don't, we're going to be short of a bus!

Chairman Dial states in order for CPS to get the electric school bus we effectively have to determine to extend our relationship with Mr. Stasco, the property owner for a five-year lease, the terms are not unreasonable. If Mr. Stasco terminates, he would be willing to pay relocation costs. The other element is if we don't proceed with the electric bus on the grounds of parking, then we still have a need for an additional school bus and there are funding needs that come with that. Neither one of these decision points is optimal but given that the school committee has approved moving forward with the electric bus, Chairman Dial wanted to have the committee's discussion on how we proceed now with changes to these circumstances.

Mr. Carr asks about logistics if potentially the electric school bus was somewhere other than the rest of the fleet. For instance, there are daily checks on bus drivers and things like that. What are the barriers to keeping the electric bus somewhere else? Mr. Carr understands the vendor wants site control for this expensive piece of machinery, and Mr. Carr likes the idea of finding another home for this.

Dr. Sullivan says we have a lot of ground to cover with the community before we're able to go ahead and put anything in regard to a bus slot on our property. In order to have a workable electric school bus we do have to have some stability where we're putting the charging station.

Ms. Lesky asks if the \$50,000 move involves takes care of both the removal and new installation. Also, what happens in year 6, moving our vision a little bit further along. It seems having 5 years in one place was ideal with this lease company. What happens in year 6, and we need to move the charging station? That could also provide a really nice long-term window for planning for a permanent bus lot, getting it built, getting it funded, and possibly syncing it with any renovations being done at the middle high school. Thinking a little beyond that five-year point and whether or not that allays the moving of the charging station in year six.

Ms. Owen says her recommendation ideally would be to go with Mr. Stasco for 5 years and take time to get the parking lot ready working at Deer Hill. We've had small discussions, and we've already had neighbors commenting about their needs and wants to not have it there.

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Discussion of Electrical School Bus - ENEL is telling us if they install this level 3 charger, CPS needs to sign a five-year lease.

Mr. MacLellan's perspective generally speaking on anything with the town, where there's a will, there's a way, to the exception to this one! He's fairly committed to this because he knows how much work Ms. Bodell has put into this and it's been a long road and he would hate to see us be defeated by the jaws of victory here. It doesn't seem to be economically, or logistically, a feasible thing for us to do right now. In other words, the juice wouldn't be worth a squeeze. We would have to fashion some really creative, fairly financially burdensome solutions in order to make this happen, and it's not something that we absolutely need right now. There are some costs associated with that additional bus and don't like the idea of leasing that property. Don't like the idea of leasing it on a monthly basis and don't like the fact that we have to do that. Mr. MacLellan agrees with Mr. Carr that it should be a priority to find a permanent parking solution for our buses and we need to do that. We need to fight that battle and win it before we move forward with the electric school bus program, even the power program of these recent issues.

Chairman Dial looks at this less about an electric bus versus a diesel bus. An electric school bus is the supporting character and is the question before this school committee is we're now for reasons that relate to the electric bus forced to accelerate our decision making at least for the medium term about school bus parking. School bus parking has been a problem since Mr. Dial joined the school committee 2 years ago, and we're looking for solutions just for that. The solutions are not going to be done in the Fall, and they're probably not going to be done next year! What we're being asked to give up is the optionality effectively to a cost-free move to a Deer Hill solution or some other solution within the next 5 years. We need to solve the parking solution for the school buses for the next five years. Now, fortunately, we are presented with a potential solution that has been economically okay with the district for the past 2 years and that is parking at Mr. Stasco's lot. Mr. Stasco has proven to be an effective landlord in this regard, and he's made some certain improvements for our school buses. From an operational perspective the feedback Mr. Dial has heard over the term has been that it's been a very positive development. Do we extend the lease with Mr. Stasco for five years?

Mr. Kearney has no comments.

Vice Chair MacLellan says this should be the town's responsibility. This is a public school system, and we need to find a place for the school buses. Mr. MacLellan does not want to sign a five-year lease with someone locking the school district into a quarter million-dollar expense for parking our school buses on a dirt lot.

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Discussion of Electrical School Bus – Vice Chair MacLellan understands we don't have an alternative in front of us, and he too is against it! Mr. MacLellan knows that people know that we're under duress and it would be a decision that is a very, very expensive decision made under duress, and he refuses to do it. There are places in this town and we're going to have to figure out where to put these school buses and Mr. MacLellan is not going to be cornered into that.

Ms. Owen says Mr. Stasco does not require us to sign a five-year lease, it's ENEL. What if we tell ENEL we're going to do a three-year lease with Mr. Stasco? We're paying \$48,000 to rent this land on his property for the school buses. If we decide to move the level 3 charging station, the money that we save from not paying him in the next year is almost the same amount of money as is to move the charging station. \$48,000 versus \$50,000 and we don't have to commit to 5 years!

Dr. Sullivan and Ms. Owen have a meeting with ENEL tomorrow and they can go back to them and say, "we're not comfortable moving forward with a five-year lease." We can do a shorter-term lease, a three-year lease, but we don't want to pay for the installation. If ENEL says no, it's over! Then, we're going to have to come back to the school committee and ask for another solution to get an additional bus.

Chairman Dial would like to bring this to a conclusion with things that he's been hearing that will have consensus on the school committee. One, we would do a five-year lease as long as there's a termination right where we can terminate it, as to Mr. MacLellan's point notwithstanding if it's acceptable to us and in fact it doesn't necessarily change too much day by day. There are advantages to doing this and that is locking in a price for 3 to 5 years that lets us explore that good stewardship anyway to see if we can get this locked in for a period of time. If that meets ENEL needs, all the better! A five-year lease with a termination right and we'll have to understand what that termination right is, it would be short notice only, not a penalty, that's one thing.

On the charter location, Mr. Dial hears Mr. Carr's point which is a very good one. It's not going to be that expensive. If ENEL really wants this to happen, let's push it back and tell ENEL we understand it's not going to be that expensive and let ENEL pay for it. If we can solve this 5-year lease problem, let ENEL pay for the relocation. They knew right from the beginning that we didn't have a parking lot for the electric bus. They continued to pursue this down the road knowing we didn't have a place for it, this is not a new problem.

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Discussion of Electrical School Bus

Chairman Dial says ENEL should be willing to take this since we're giving them what they need as far as certainty on the lease, and they give us what we need as far as financial certainty on the relocation.

Motion made by Mr. MacLellan to authorize, but not require, the district's ability to enter into a five-year lease, subject to the conditions as discussed herein with Mr. Stasco for the same price paying \$4,000 per month with \$4,200 per month for years 4 and 5. A reasonable termination period with no penalty, and a notice of no longer than 3 months for our termination. In the event of Mr. Stasco's termination, Mr. Stasco would pay for any costs incurred relocating the charging station, seconded by Mr. Carr. Roll Call Vote: Mr. Carr-Aye; Ms. Lesky-Aye; Mr. MacLellan-Aye; Mr. Kearney-Abstain; Mr. Dial-Aye.

The conditions described by Ms. Owen are \$4,000 per month for the first 3 years, \$4,200 for years 4 and 5 with a right of termination with a reasonable notice period but no penalty. If Mr. Stasco terminates us, then he will pay for any costs associated with the relocation of the charging station. This is an unanticipated cost of \$50,000 that is not tenable and we're not accepting any costs in that regard in terms of relocating this charging station.

Motion made by Mr. Carr to adjourn the special school committee meeting at 5:13 PM on July 10, 2023, seconded by Mr. MacLellan. Roll Call Vote: Mr. Carr-Aye; Ms. Lesky-Aye; Mr. MacLellan-Aye; Mr. Kearney-Aye; Mr. Dial-Aye.

Chairman Dial recalled to session the special school committee meeting virtually for July 10, 2023 at 5:09 PM. Roll Call: Mr. Carr-Present; Ms. Lesky-Present; Mr. Kearney-Present; Mr. Dial-Present; Mr. MacLellan -Not Present.

2023-2024 School Calendar – The way that Federal holidays works in general is that if the holiday falls on the calendar on a Saturday, then that holiday is observed on that Saturday. If that holiday falls on the calendar on a Sunday, then that holiday is observed on the following Monday, officially. Veteran's Day is, and always will be observed on November 11th, and this calendar year Veteran's Day falls on the calendar on a Saturday. There is no obligation to observe Veteran's Day on Friday, November 10, 2023. However, there is the ability to observe Friday, November 10th as the holiday. The reason Dr. Sullivan is bringing this forward is that there are many school districts around the area that are taking that pathway, he believes Scituate isn't and Cohasset so far isn't.

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2023-2024 School Calendar

Boston Public Schools will have no school Friday, November 10, 2023. If this school committee recognizes Friday, November 10, 2023 to be observed as Veteran's Day with no school on Friday, November 10, 2023 that would now push the last day of school to Wednesday, June 12, 2024 which is a half-day of school, opposed to Tuesday, June 11, 2024.

Chairman Dial notes for the record that Vice Chair MacLellan has rejoined into session virtually at 5:13 PM and is once again present.

Vice Chair MacLellan says Veteran's Day is one of those very solemn days on the United States calendar, and it's very important that we share that sacrosanct nature of that day with each generation. For that reason, it's of the utmost importance that we celebrate Veteran's Day with a day off from school to honor our Veterans and those who have served in the United States Military.

Motion made by Mr. Carr to amend the 2023-2024 school district calendar as the school committee previously approved to include Friday, November 10, 2023 as a holiday for observing Veteran's Day, and adjusting the end of the school year accordingly to the obligation to the number of school days, seconded by Vice Chair MacLellan. Roll Call Vote: Mr. Carr-Aye; Ms. Lesky-Aye; Mr. Kearney-Aye; Vice Chair MacLellan-Aye; Chairman Dial-Aye.

Motion made by Mr. Carr to adjourn the Special School Committee meeting for July 10, 2023 at 5:15 p.m., seconded by Ms. Lesky. Final Roll Call: Mr. Carr-Aye; Ms. Lesky-Aye; Mr. Kearney-Aye; Vice Chair MacLellan-Aye; Chairman Dial-Aye.

The Special School Committee Meeting Adjourned at 5:15 PM

Respectfully Submitted by:
Kathleen Bock