

Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional District School Committee
Minutes of Special Meeting
February 15, 2024

A special meeting of the Capital Planning Subcommittee with the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional District School Committee was held in the school cafeteria. The following members, staff and others were present:

Joseph M. Hall of Bellingham, Chair/Zoom	Dr. Michael F. Fitzpatrick, Superintendent-Director
Joseph A. Broderick of Blackstone	Anthony E. Steele, Asst. Superintendent/Principal
Mark J. Potter of Douglas	Nicole M. Ferguson, Business Manager
Edward D. Cray, III of Mendon	Elise Bogdan, Recording Secretary
Chester P. Hanratty, Jr. of Millbury	Patrick Morris of Sutton
Gerald M. Finn of Millville, Vice Chair	Joseph Laydon of Upton
Jeff T. Koopman of Northbridge	
Tyler D. Bartlett of Upton	
James H. Ebbeling of Uxbridge	

Members Absent:

Anthony M. Yitts of Grafton
Mitchell A. Intinarelli of Hopedale
Paul J. Braza of Milford
James M. Mitchell of Sutton

Item 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by the Chair, Mr. Hall, who was attending the meeting via Zoom. Dr. Fitzpatrick was notified in advance that Mr. Yitts, Mr. Intinarelli, Mr. Braza, and Mr. Mitchell would not be able to attend.

Mr. Hall asked Dr. Fitzpatrick to elaborate on the statement of interest for the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Roof Repair Project. Dr. Fitzpatrick stated that the Committee was aware that the MSBA Board of Directors voted to reopen its Accelerated Repair Program (ARP) in January (2024) after a temporary pause in 2023. The reopening in 2024 is for replacing roofs, windows, and doors with a Statement of Interest (SOI) deadline of March 1, 2024, for school districts interested in participating in the ARP. Dr. Fitzpatrick suggested that the Committee move expeditiously to protect our towns by creating every opportunity to benefit from reimbursement through the ARP process and is aware that other schools are filling statements of interest. The March deadline is for those who want to participate in the repair program. There is a later date for those who want to build a new school. Five of the regional vocational-technical schools have successfully convinced their citizens to support 300 million or more new school projects. BVT has recognized that our communities have limited resources and, therefore, have not gone for a major bond for a new school and instead continue to make improvements to our school to repair and protect our 65-year-old facility. Dr. Fitzpatrick indicated that we made our towns aware of a possible bond through FY24 budget presentations that we approved unanimously. After receiving feedback from across the District from finance committees and others, we limited the SOI to the roof, and the HVAC units that mount on the roof be the maximum borrowing authorization we ask and are limited to that while we do have

other needs that were identified through the master plan and or with our Capital Planning Subcommittee. The estimates for the roof are on the approximately 60,000 square feet that we have yet to be able to address through our self-financing, which was used to address the other portions. Dr. Fitzpatrick asked if there were other questions about the statement of interest.

Mr. Hanratty asked what was taken out or removed from the estimated 40 million in renovations. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that the higher estimated dollar amount surfaced during needed Capital Planning Committee discussions. Those deliberations were building upon or complementing the school's master plan. A discussion ensued on the recommendations to pare down the SOI, and focus upon the roof and HVAC mounts at this time, which has been prepared but has yet to be submitted to address on the two previously identified and most critically needed items. The Superintendent encouraged all to view the bond as a step forward. He acknowledged that the step was not as large as some would prefer.

Mr. Cray asked when the District would address the athletic fields. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that the District continues to take a conservative approach by making small, cost-effective improvements to be sensitive to the very different fiscal environments in our towns. Mr. Cray asked if Mr. Steele would continue to work on improving the fields. Dr. Fitzpatrick said Principal Steele is an example of a staff member willing to use his skillset above and beyond his day job to make cost-effective enhancements using our resources and trying to do things in the best interest of our thirteen town communities without asking them for taxpayer money. Mr. Cray asked if this was a sustainable approach. Dr. Fitzpatrick shared that fiscal policymakers from the Town of Mendon, where Mr. Cray is based, just voiced appreciation for the District's conservative approach. It is not the District's practice to spend money that it can't secure. Mr. Hall agreed with Dr. Fitzpatrick and the District's approach to doing business.

As a Budget Subcommittee member, Mr. Finn addressed the need for the identified SOI items. In protecting the taxpayer's investment, the roof and HVAC units were identified as the primary items the District could secure without burying the towns in debt. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that the SOI-focused approach positions the District with the greatest chance of getting approval/reimbursement from the state for its towns.

Mr. Cray asked when the District would address the athletic fields. Dr. Fitzpatrick and Mr. Hall also reminded the Committee that additional needed items like the athletic fields go back to the Capital Planning Committee for strategy, planning, and input from the community. The need has not disappeared. Plans need to continue to be devised and developed. Mr. Hall voiced the need to move forward with the items on the agenda.

Mr. Morris of Sutton, who had an SOI question, asked Dr. Fitzpatrick to clarify the District's plan for the MSBA reimbursement if approved if it would be used to pay down the debt. Dr. Fitzpatrick clarified that, if approved, the MSBA reimbursement, when received, would be a major lump sum used to reduce and pay down the 20-year bond. The money is not discretionary. When and if the District receives the reimbursement it would be used to reduce exposure the towns receive, yes. Dr. Fitzpatrick asked Mr. Morris if he viewed that as good news

as he had been an advocate of the roof at a previous meeting. Mr. Morris said that he was one member of a nine-member committee in only one of the thirteen towns and only has one vote. “But I have said publicly that I am for supporting needs, not wants. If the roof is leaking, I want it fixed. Artificial fields are a want. The roof and the HVAC are needs. But all towns are hurting. Three towns are looking at overrides.” Dr. Fitzpatrick then asked Mr. Morris, recognizing that you, speaking as an individual, do you support fixing the roof and this MSBA endeavor? Mr. Morris declared his support with a “yes” response. The Superintendent thanked him for his endorsement.

Item 2. Statement of Interest for the MSBA Roof Repair Project (Vote)

On a motion made by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Broderick, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the submission of the statement of interest for the MSBA roof repair project. The suggested motion read as follows: I, **Mr. Hanratty**, hereby make a motion that having convened in an open meeting on **February 15, 2024** prior to the SOI submission closing date, the School Committee of Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School District, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated **February 16, 2024** for the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School located at 65 Pleasant Street, Upton, MA 01568 which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future under priority #5, for the replacement or modernization of school facility systems; such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in the school facility; and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Item 3. Roof repair/HVAC roof units and related capital expense (Vote)

Mr. Hall introduced the motion. Before the vote for authorization, Dr. Fitzpatrick clarified that the scope of borrowing is limited.

Mr. Morris asked Dr. Fitzpatrick to clarify when this work would start. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that the borrowing will not take place until FY26, it positions the District to get in with the tight MSBA borrowing window. Mr. Morris asked Dr. Fitzpatrick assuming you have an authorizing vote tonight, what is the communication plan to inform the 13 town District, will you send a memorandum of some kind to all towns at the same time or wait to our individual meetings. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that a communication will go to 13 towns tomorrow providing them with the warrant language depending on the actions here tonight. Mr. Morris thanked Dr. Fitzpatrick for letting him ask the questions. There were no other questions.

On a motion made by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Koopman, the Committee voted unanimously to approve/authorize debt limited to roof repair/HVAC roof units and related

capital expense. The suggested motion read as follows: I, **Mr. Hanratty**, hereby move to approve borrowing of no more than \$10 million for the purpose of a roof repair project of the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School, located at 65 Pleasant Street, Upton, MA, for the replacement or modernization of school facility systems; such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in the school facility.

Item 4. Meeting Closure

4.1. The meeting was closed as declared by the Chair, Mr. Hall.

4.2. On a motion by Mr. Broderick, seconded by Mr. Koopman, it was voted to close the meeting 6:31 p.m. The meeting was declared adjourned by the Chair, Mr. Hall.

Listing of materials used in the meeting:

Item 2. Suggested Motion: MSBA 2024 SOI

Item 3. Suggested Motion” Authorizing Debt – Roof Repair

Respectfully submitted by,

Anthony M. Yitts, Secretary