

In Board Briefs, we summarize key agenda items and discussion topics from previous Board of Education meetings. Full meeting minutes are usually not available until approved by the Board at a subsequent meeting. The community is encouraged to attend each meeting, and the Board welcomes questions and comments. Previous Board Briefs can be found on the district website [here](#).

### **January 25, 2017 Board of Education Meeting**

After a meeting of the audit committee, followed by an executive session, the regular Board meeting was called to order and the minutes from the December 19, 2016, January 9, 2017 and January 19, 2017 meetings were approved. The Treasurer's report was delivered and approved.

#### *The Superintendent's Monthly Report and Other Items*

- Superintendent of Schools Dr. Tom Rogers announced that Syosset has been named the "16<sup>th</sup> Best School District in the Nation" by Niche.com, which provides information and rankings of K-12 schools, colleges and neighborhoods based on comprehensive U.S. Department of Education Data and online survey responses.
- Dr. Rogers announced that Moody's has given the Syosset CSD an Aa1 bond rating based on the district's healthy financial position and low level of debt.
- After visiting with the district's 11 PTA units to share information regarding proposed facilities repairs identified in the district's Building Condition Survey and the borrowing that would be necessary to partly pay for these projects, Dr. Rogers reported that parents were generally supportive of the work and agreed with the strategy of prioritizing projects addressing health and safety. Parent questions are being collected to develop a comprehensive Q&A on the projects.
- Following an extensive Board discussion regarding the facilities projects and possible bond propositions that took place later in the meeting, Dr. Rogers proposed an approach to break the work into two phases. The first phase would address \$7.7 million in health and safety projects through the capital reserve fund. This would enable the district to use existing funds (set aside for projects such as these) while providing more time to communicate details of the other needed projects and the process of borrowing money to partly pay for them. This also enables the district to essentially preserve its timetable for the work, provided that they receive State Education Department approval within customary timeframes.
- The Board accepted Dr. Rogers' two-phase proposal and therefore tabled multiple resolutions that would have advanced all the work as a single project. A resolution will be drafted for approval at an upcoming meeting to propose expending monies in the capital reserve to address the first round of priority projects consistent with the two-phase approach. Capital reserve use is subject to voter approval, so a public vote would appear on the May 2017 ballot should the Board approve the resolution.
- Dr. Rogers also provided an update on his meetings with district instructional staff and local veterans' organizations in regards to the adoption of the 2017-18 school district calendar. These meetings pertained to the Veteran's Day holiday and draft calendar which identified a staff development day on Nov. 10, the date in which the holiday is observed on the school calendar. The Veterans groups were not opposed

to the planned staff development day (however, they requested that the district identify ways to bring the student and veteran communities together. After seeking feedback from District staff, many of whom were veterans or family members of veterans, the district decided to keep Nov. 10 as a day of appreciation and observance for veterans without any staff obligations. Dr. Rogers also indicated that he would look for opportunities to bring veterans into the schools more regularly.

- As a result of this decision, three consecutive days of staff development were scheduled for the last week of August 2017. A trustee inquired about the effectiveness of holding these days in succession prior to the school year. Deputy Superintendent Adele Bovard said this schedule presents a great opportunity for K-12 faculty to spend more time sharing ideas in advance of the school year. Board President Michael Cohen thanked the veterans and the staff for their meaningful input into the calendar approval process. Later in the meeting, the Board approved the 2017-18 district calendar, which includes the addition of Lunar New Year, Diwali, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr as recognized school holidays.

Citizens Advisory Committee for Finance Update: a member of the committee reported on discussions at the November and December 2016 meetings: Discussions included a review of facilities projects and associated bond propositions, as well as the Woodbury property sale which were all being considered at the time; an increase to the capital reserve to address future facility projects; the replenishment of employee retirement, unemployment and workers compensation reserves used in the previous fiscal year; additional BOCES aid and lower tuitions for BOCES students and students with disabilities; retirement of previous debt; utility savings due to last year's mild winter; savings from lower teacher replacements and new staffing patterns; a decrease in contractor services; changes in employee health insurance costs; lower debt service based on favorable interest rates; and potential enrollment changes for the future, among other topics.

#### *Audience to the Public*

- Prior to the session, President Cohen announced that the school district's legal counsel negotiated an agreement with developer Basser Kaufman to terminate the sale of the 2.4 acre parcel of property at 456 Woodbury Road. The agreement calls for the district to pay Basser Kaufman \$125,000 to terminate the contract.
- Some residents defended the Board's communication regarding the property sale, alluding to discussions dating back five years.
- Multiple residents expressed gratitude for the Board's decision. One resident suggested creating an Ad Hoc committee to explore alternate uses for the Woodbury property.
- Several trustees read statements explaining that their votes in favor of the termination agreement were necessary to protect the best interest of the district by avoiding any legal action from the developer.
- Dr. Cohen responded for the Board, recognizing individual speakers and addressing each of their points – that the Board would never intentionally overlook the senior citizens, that the Board would consider involving the whole Community (not just one part) in future discussions about the property, that safety remains a priority of the

Board's, and while the Board's process was more open than what the law requires, in the future sparsely attended public meetings would be interpreted as an opportunity to redouble communication, rather than an indication of disinterest.

#### *Additional Discussion Items*

- The Board announced a resolution opposing the appointment of Betsy DeVos as U.S. Secretary of Education, citing her support for charter schools and voucher systems that redirect funds away from public schools, among other concerns. That resolution was later approved. After corresponding with local lawmakers, a trustee encouraged residents opposed to the confirmation of DeVos to express their sentiments to their government representatives in a timely fashion.
- A trustee recommended more comprehensive information be posted on the district website to assist residents with student registration. He also asked about the district's progress on bringing the website into ADA compliance.
- Dr. Rogers said the district is currently reviewing the three-year-old website, including ways to enhance voter registration information and measures to bring the site into ADA compliance. The district has met with a vendor who can address the latter concern.

#### *New Business*

- Various resolutions were approved including coaching, and staff service appointments, adjustments of reserves, acceptance of the audit report and various unrelated contracts, student club charters, committee recommendations, policy readings, change orders and a preliminary Smart School Investment Plan.
- The Board approved the agreement with Basser Kaufman to terminate the sale.

#### *Next Meeting*

- The next meeting of the Board of Education is Monday, February 13, 2017 at 8 p.m. at South Woods Middle School. A public budget information meeting will commence at 7:45 p.m., prior to the regular meeting,