

THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Tuesday, May 24, 2016
Thetford Elementary School Art Room

APPROVED MINUTES

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 6:03 p.m.. The following were present: Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey, Shannon Darrah, Kristen Downey, School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES Principal; Beth Cobb, OESU Superintendent;

PUBLIC PRESENT: Jeff Solsaa, Glenn Wylie, Erik Goodling, Hilary Linehan, Strafford School Board (all departed 6:56 p.m.); Denise Cote (departed 6:56 p.m.), Ben Williams (departed 7:39 p.m.), Scott MacPhee (arrived 7:40 p.m.), Stuart Rogers (arrived 7:12 p.m.)

AGENDA REVIEW: Agenda approved with amendments.

MINUTES REVIEW: MOTION: (Acker/Buttrey) moved/seconded to approve the minutes of the May 10, 2016 Board meeting as amended (unanimous approval).

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS: MOTION: (Acker/Buttrey) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable order # 5337 and payroll warrant # 5335 (unanimous approval).

PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE: None

JOINT MEETING WITH STRAFFORD SCHOOL BOARD - DISCUSS ACT 46, ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURE Darrah welcomed the members of the Strafford School Board. Buttrey reminded the group that the alternative structure study group is meeting on Thursday. All the included school districts, except TTSD, have voted to be part of the \$5,000 study grant. Stockbridge will be an ancillary party. Linehan added that Hartland and TTSD were invited to participate. Buttrey stated he is concerned that a lot of time has been spent over the past months, and at some point decisions have to be made. He is concerned this study group could be another exercise in futility with more spinning of wheels. He is hoping the study group will prove to be beneficial. Buttrey reported he approached Hartland, and he has the impression that Strafford is less inclined to include Hartland. Hartland needs to decide soon if they will go with Windsor. Linehan stated she is not speaking for the Strafford Board: she does not feel urgency to make a decision because they have until 2018 to decide. Strafford is not interested in remaining with WRSU given the way it is currently set up. Goodling stated the Strafford Board voted to postpone the vote to join the 706b study grant with WRSU, pending the Tunbridge vote about the WRSU study grant. Linehan stated that once the study committee does its work, what is necessary and what is advisable will be determined. Buttrey suggested to the Strafford Board that they could be a K-8 and part of WRSU with

designation. TTSD could do the same with the newly configured OESU. Acker stated there are no other districts like TTSD in the region, the others are in Southern VT, some of which designate to schools in New York. Strafford is the only K-8 designated district in Vermont. Goodling stated that if neither school district creates an alternative structure, both towns would float free in their respective SU's. This would cause difficulty for the two towns. Goodling asked, why couldn't the two districts still work together? The difference is only two grade levels. Maybe the two boards can petition it. Acker explained that the two options that included Strafford got the highest votes from the forum straw poll and the online survey. It makes sense for the two towns to work together. Acker stated she can't imagine that Thetford citizens would not vote to be with Strafford. Right now the alternative structure seems to be the only scenario that involves Strafford. Options with Rivendell have fizzled out. Buttrey proposed Strafford and TTSD becoming one school district despite K-6 vs. K-8. Acker stated the law implies that all students from a district will be accepted at a designated school, and in turn the district would agree to send all its students to that designated school. Goodling added, except for the waiver. Buttrey added that if at some point other options don't work, Strafford and Thetford could try to work something out. Linehan replied she is not opposed to that, but Strafford would lose something. She doesn't see a scenario that is a compromise with the waiver process. Buttrey respectfully disagreed. Acker suggested this is a topic a study group could research. Alternatively, both districts could have full choice. Buttrey doesn't think Thetford residents would support that option. Goodling would like to see other legislation for a non-merging agreement if the alternative structure fails, although he believes an alternative structure is the best option for the two towns. Tunbridge is a better fit than Hartland, even though high school patterns fit Hartland better. Goodling stated that Tunbridge has geographical benefits for educational communities to get people together to focus on a K-8 structure. Goodling acknowledged that Buttrey doesn't agree. Buttrey stated he believes Hartland is keen on keeping choice, but Windsor does not want choice because that would put their high school in jeopardy. Linehan stated that Strafford does not do much with their current SU because they don't send students to those high schools. Acker added that TTSD's SU works well now despite TTSD not being geographically close to the other schools. Linehan stated the WRSU 706b committee is going to happen regardless of what Strafford does. Their board still needs to vote, but it seems that Strafford is not interested in joining that 706. Strafford would still probably have the chance to join that group later.

Cote asked, what happens if each school does nothing and stands alone. Will there be a penalty for not merging? Linehan replied that Strafford may lose its small schools grant (\$93,000). However, since Strafford is considered an isolated district, they might be able to keep it. Cote asked, will Strafford or Thetford be treated differently if they don't partner up? Buttrey speculated the new OESU would welcome TTSD because they would contribute more money into the SU. Goodling stated he is troubled that Waits River no longer has a partner. Cobb confirmed Waits River was not invited to join the 706 study. Cobb recently spoke with Secretary Holcombe regarding Waits River. Holcombe can tell the other districts, Orange and Washington, to speak with Waits River. Washington and

Orange have a lot of work to do to before bringing in a third party. Cobb stated that Holcombe understood TTSD, Strafford and Waits River could be each be left on their own, and she is open to other ideas. Holcombe agreed that Thetford and Strafford are well matched. Goodling is concerned the three districts could be forced into one unit. Wylie asked if OESU is sorry that TTSD is leaving. Strafford has been told WRSU is going to be unhappy if they leave. Darrah has not gotten that feeling from the remaining OESU districts. Buttrey stated the other districts recognize there have been issues with their relationship with TTSD, and he doesn't know anything about the districts north of OESU that will be part of the newly reconfigured OESU. Darrah stated that because of community feedback, TTSD needs to investigate the alternative structure. Something positive could come out of those discussions. Asking the AOE for a special plan may be better received if all the possibilities have been investigated. Downey is looking forward to studying the alternative structure. Darrah stated she likes Hartland, but she thinks they could go either way and could try something radically different before coming to Thetford. Acker hopes all the members of the study committee will have fresh eyes, no agendas, and no preconceived notions. Thetford should enter the study group with what is non-negotiable for TTSD. The WRSU will own the study committee grant. Discussion followed. Linehan has forwarded some questions to the interim chair, such as staffing costs of new SU and cost per pupil. Darrah added that this group will have a focus on financials; the governing structure is not going to change. The focus of this exploratory committee will be: is this affordable? Goodling recognized there will be upfront costs related to setting up a new SU. Act 46 says if an alternative structure is formed, your tax rate can't go up more than 5%. Recently the legislature amended this to avoid the building of new school, for example, and then being bound to keep the tax increase under 5%. Perhaps this clause could apply to start up costs of a new SU. Linehan stated she would like to know who is serious and who is not. Buttrey stated there are some towns that are much further along than others in the process in educating their communities and getting feedback. Linehan added that some towns are investigating all the options even though they may not be serious about pursuing it. Buttrey stated that at some point we will need to determine what is financially feasible. It is highly unlikely a financially neutral option will be found. Cote asked if there will be opportunity to investigate other SUs. Can administrative costs be cut through sharing jobs? Cobb reported her new SU is figuring the financials for a four district merger. She offered to share that information.

MOTION: (Downey/Buttrey) moved/seconded to join the exploratory committee with Stockbridge, Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge (unanimous approval).

Linehan stated the key to the committee's success will be a focus on action items. Acker agreed. Goodling stated he prefers not to use Wayne Gersen or Steve Dale as consultants because they may be biased toward the directions they have worked on in other groups. A fresh look would be better. Wylie asked if there are any third parties who could review the list of possible consultants to identify biases and experience with finances. Discussion followed.

MOTION: (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded to designate Downey as the representative to the study group (unanimous approval).

Linehan suggested that the principals should communicate. She has already requested this of TA for continuity for their 7th and 8th graders. Petrone stated he gets along well with Newton School Principal, Greg Bagnato. They talk frequently. Petrone visited Newton school to observe their multi-aged classrooms. Wylie added that if the Thetford/Strafford relationship moves forward, education should be discussed, but it is a good starting point for the principals to collaborate.

The Strafford School Board and Denise Cote departed at 6:56 p.m.

Preschool contracts were presented by Cobb. Cobb reviewed that every time we learn of a preschool child going to a preschool, there needs to be a contract signed between the preschool and TTSD.

MOTION: (Buttrey/Downey) moved/seconded to approve the publically funded Pre-kindergarten Partnership Agreement (July 2016 - June 30, 2017) with the following schools (unanimous approval):

- The Child Care Center in Norwich
- Maple Leaf Children's Center
- Little Feet Children's Center
- Creative Spirit Children's Center
- Creative Preschool Program in Strafford
- Caring Community Preschool

MOTION: (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded to authorize the Board Chair to sign the staff contracts that were provided (unanimous approval).

Acker asked, why is TTSD an outlier from the special education provided by OESU? Cobb replied that TTSD got a waiver and there are different salary scales and benefits. Employees can't be paid out of the same entity and at the same time be offered different benefits.

Rogers gave Darrah an updated right of way agreement for her signature because VTrans changed some of the wording. Darrah will get it notarized and bring it to the Town Hall. The Town is interviewing for Recreation Director. There are good candidates who have experience.

INTERVIEW SCOTT MACPHEE AND BEN WILLIAMS FOR OPEN SCHOOL

BOARD POSITION: Darrah welcomed Williams and explained she had previously sent his letter of interest and resume to the Board. The position requires a lot of time, especially due to Act 46. Darrah invited Williams to tell the Board why he is interested in serving. Williams stated, because he is part of the community and has a rising 4th grader and an incoming kindergartner. He grew up in a small town and recognizes the school is

the heart of the community. He wants to pitch in and ensure the success of the school. He is impressed with the school and the Board. He does not have an agenda; there is nothing he wants to change. Fiscal responsibility and transparency are obviously Board values. Williams stated he works with numbers as part of his job at DHMC. He likes to relate the numbers to the story behind the numbers, and enjoys interpreting numbers for people. He recognizes communication with the community is important. Further, he has interest in the relationship with TA, the wider community, designation, and changing demographics. It is important to consider that Act 46 decisions will impact Thetford for decades. He is interested in being part of those discussions. It will be a learning process for him; he is not an educator, although he does teach graduate classes at the engineering and medical schools. He acknowledged this level of teaching is very different from teaching at the elementary school level. During high school and college he taught sailing to kids as young as 4 years old. Buttrey stated the school board is a time commitment. Williams stated he and his wife understand the commitment, and the time is worth it because they are part of this community. Williams had expressed interest in the past, but was looking for the right opportunity. He had been interested in the 3 year position, but when he learned Downey was interested, given they have a lot of parallels, he was glad for the Board to have her. Darrah invited questions from Williams. Discussion followed about logistics such as timing of meetings and committees. Acker asked Williams how he handles disagreement within a group. Williams stated he emphasizes communication and the importance of equal access to the facts. Darrah stated the Board will discuss his candidacy and contact him with a decision. Williams departed at 7:40 p.m..

Darrah welcomed Scott MacPhee (arrived 7:40 p.m.) and explained she forwarded his information to the Board for review prior to the meeting. Darrah clarified the term runs until the March election, and then he could run for the remainder of that term. Darrah asked MacPhee to tell the Board about himself and why he wants to join the Board. MacPhee stated he comes from a family of service - including the military and education fields. He is no longer coaching and now has more time. As a teacher, education and kids are his passion. A school board is critical to a learning environment: Making sure teachers get the education they need and kids get what they need. A school board needs to have good communication with the Principal and the Superintendent, as well as interacting with the public with transparency. A school board is critical to the development of the kids in that community. Buttrey asked if MacPhee has had dealings with the school board in Enfield. MacPhee answered yes, he has been there for 20 years. The Board members are very active in that community, they are there the first day the teachers are back at school, showing support. He has always felt supported by his school board. He stated that negotiations are critical and it is important that all parties feel equally represented. Buttrey asked if MacPhee will be able to separate his teacher hat from your school board hat. MacPhee answered, yes. He feels his background as a teacher would give an advantage, not just to understand where the teachers are coming from, but to be able to have a conversation with the teachers that he has been in their shoes. He has never served on the union's negotiating team. He was in the military for 31 years and gained a lot of negotiating experience during that time. Darrah explained the time commitment.

MacPhee stated he has the time now. Darrah invited questions. MacPhee asked, what has been the most difficult challenge as a group and how did that turn out? Acker responded that the Board is in the midst of a challenge now regarding responding to Act 46. As a whole, this Board has been attacking that problem with functionality. Darrah agreed that some of the most challenging conversations have been around Act 46. A challenge for Acker when she first joined the Board, was that she knew nothing about the budget. There was a budget issue and the Board needed to figure out how to lower taxes. That was hard. Buttrey stated the Board works cordially and collaboratively, and agree to disagree. MacPhee stated his single goal is the students of this community. He has no personal agenda. He lives here but teaches elsewhere, and sometimes feels badly he is not at his school's events as often as he would like. As a Board member, it is important that the community knows who you are, and Board members should make themselves visible. Buttrey stated the Board respects the community, and for the most part the community respects the Board. MacPhee stated he would like to be part of the Board. He could bring his different hats to the table and contribute. Darrah stated the Board will discuss his candidacy and contact him with a decision.

TA REPORT: There was an outdoor initiative presentation during the joint meeting with the TTSD Board. The remainder of the meeting was in executive session regarding the Head of School review. Food service, contract negotiations, and projections for next year were also discussed. TA is considering a social worker position.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT (Kevin Petrone): This weekend there was a crew (Bruce Avery, Stephanie Daniels, Rori Kelleher, Mike Wells, Tim Schall, Tim Hebb, and Joette) who gave 16 hours of work over the weekend to install the foundation for the 8 foot high climbing wall. Installation will be completed over the summer. Doug Moody A'Ness is working on a mural.

Kindergarten registration welcomed 20 children and included visits with Ms. Porter, Mrs. Rogers, and Mrs. Nunez, and a speech and language assessment. The straight K and K-1 configurations were well received by the parents. Petrone received a letter from SHAPE-VT, Society of Health and Physical Educators. They would like to use TES as a hub for a storage container for fitness equipment that would be lent out to other schools in the state. The structure has to be mobile because it is a 3 year program and it may be relocated. TES could access the equipment. It would be managed by Phil Chaput, who is excited about it. Petrone is aware of a lot of other things happening on the playground soon. The benefit would be TES kids can use the equipment whenever they would like. Questions do remain about the appearance and size of the storage container. Darrah stated she is generally supportive, but needs more information about the aesthetics and location. Buttrey agreed. Petrone will research these questions. Petrone is still in the hiring process for social worker position. There are a couple of candidates. Petrone has decided about a music teacher, and is waiting for a decision from Cobb. The Rt. 113 work is causing traffic outside the school and buses are running late. Cars have been seen dangerously turning around in the circle going the opposite direction. Work should not be happening during the last week and day of school.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (STUDENT MATTER): MOTION: (Acker/Buttrey) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 7:58 p.m. to discuss a student matter. Out of executive session at 8:26 p.m. (No action taken).

DISCUSS SCHEDULING RETREAT TO FORMULATE WORK PLAN/PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR: Postponed until new Board member joins.

OTHER BUSINESS: Buttrey reported he notified the teachers that the Board wants to begin negotiations now. Discussion followed regarding the legalities of conducting the negotiations during open meeting or executive session. Darrah reminded the Board that if three Board members are on the committee and they are all present, that is a quorum and it needs to be warned. Darrah has received advice that negotiations should be as transparent as possible. Buttrey will follow up to get the answer. Downey stated an open meeting would benefit both parties in the context of the relationship with the public. Acker agreed that as much discussion as possible in open session is ideal.

Acker gave a playground update. She joined the playground committee before she became a school board member, and as a result she became the liaison to the playground committee. She asked the Board for confirmation that she can continue serving in this capacity. The Board agreed. There is a lot of work that is slated to happen this summer. After hearing about these plans, some people are concerned about losing the fields. Acker stressed that the fields will be staying. The playground committee asked to attend the next recreation advisory meeting, and were told the committee had not met in in some time. However, they agreed to schedule a meeting with the playground committee to make sure all the needs are met and responsibilities are clear to keep the playground safe. For example, who maintains the baseball backstops and soccer goals?

The Board discussed appointing a new member to serve the remainder of Sterner's term. The two candidates are very different and qualified, which results in a difficult decision. The Board decided to delay a vote and call the candidates' references. A final decision will be made at the June 7 meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (STUDENT MATTER): MOTION: (Buttrey/Downey) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 9:05 p.m. to discuss a student matter. Out of executive session at 9:12 p.m. (No action taken).

EXECUTIVE SESSION (PERSONNEL MATTER): MOTION: (Buttrey/Downey) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 9:13p.m. to discuss a personnel matter. Out of executive session at 9:15 p.m. (No action taken).

ADJOURNMENT: MOTION: (Acker/Buttrey) moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:16pm. (unanimous approval).

FUTURE MEETINGS:

6/7/16 OESU Board Meeting (Oxbow)	6:00 p.m.
6/7/16 Thetford Town School District Meeting (Oxbow)	7:15 p.m.
6/21/16 Thetford Town School District Meeting	7:00 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:
Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Julie Acker, Board Clerk