

THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Wednesday, January 25, 2017
Thetford Elementary School Art Room

APPROVED MINUTES

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 6:31 p.m.. The following were present: Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey, Shannon Darrah, Kristen Downey (arrived 6:35 p.m.), Scott MacPhee, School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES Principal; Keith Thompson, OESU Assistant Superintendent; Beth Cobb, OESU Superintendent

PUBLIC PRESENT: Keith Merrick (present 6:57 - 8:11), Tim Briglin (present 7:02 - 8:11)

AGENDA REVIEW: Agenda approved with amendments.

MINUTES REVIEW: MOTION: (Buttrey/MacPhee) moved/seconded to approve the minutes of the January 10, 2017 Board meeting (unanimous approval).

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS: MOTION: (Acker/MacPhee) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable orders # 5821 and 5809 (unanimous approval).

PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE: Darrah acknowledged that Cobb is leaving OESU to be the superintendent of the newly combined district of Essex and Westford Unified School Districts. Darrah thanked Cobb for all her hard work on behalf of TTSD and Thetford students.

4th GRADERS' CHICKEN HOUSE PROPOSAL: Students from Sarah Atherton's and Bren Bennett's 4th grade classes presented a debate about whether TES should get chickens. There are many fruits and vegetables grown at TES, but no protein source. Eggs would be very useful for breakfast. The research the students have accomplished to investigate this topic exemplifies project based learning. Each student wrote a persuasive letter to the school board using their research to support whether or not TES should get chickens. Tonight's student representatives previously read all the letters and presented the arguments and highlights from the letters. School board members asked 4th graders questions. Discussion followed. 4th graders will do some more research and report back to the Board. Cobb added that Bradford temporarily had chickens. Newbury has chickens. Buttrey would like to know why Bradford no longer has chickens.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT (Kevin Petrone): There have been four school day cancellations so far this year, moving the last day of school to Tuesday, June 20, barring any additional snow days. 175 is the minimum student days. TTSD has 177 days on the school calendar. There is teacher contract language regarding the number of instructional days. There have been several interviews for the social work/guidance position. Petrone wants to watch candidates interact with the students during the second round of interviews. Name badges with photos are now required for TES staff. This was the result of a crisis planning meeting, in case there is a crisis during which law enforcement may need to identify staff quickly. The student council has been brainstorming ways to promote TES. They decided distributing stickers to every student and

teacher was a fun and easy way to do so. Additional stickers are being sold for \$1 to pay for the stickers and to raise money for student council. TES has changed how the compost is being handled. Teachers have been volunteering after school to manage it, going forward this will be a classroom responsibility. The 6th graders take the compost out daily to the outside bins. There is a compost recipe they follow, with ingredients from local sources depending on the time of year (manure and leaves). Once or twice per month 4th and 5th graders turn the compost. There is another ski Friday this week. This week's staff workshops will be presented by Sara Bailey related to working on challenging student behavior, and by Jacqueline Porter regarding the responsive classroom. The primary teachers met earlier this week regarding class configurations and multi-age classrooms. Teachers are considering adding a 1-2 classroom. Depending on Kindergarten enrollment numbers, the preliminary plan is to have one Kindergarten, one K-1, (the current kindergartners in the K-1 will loop with the same teacher for 1st grade), and a 1-2. Petrone stated he is pleased that these discussions are growing from the teachers themselves and so far in advance.

Thompson reported the fuel tank on the boiler has had trouble over the years. Filters have been added. He arranged to have the tank and supply and return lines cleaned. The return line was filled with sludge. The manifold/piping to the tank needs to be simplified, and two companies have said it is feasible to do so. Once it is cleaned, and with maintenance, it should be ok. The cost for cleaning is \$2,500. Thompson is going to collate all the bills and then discuss with the Board if this expense should be moved from the facilities line item to a capital fund. Acker asked if the boiler problems pose any safety issues. Thompson assured her there are no safety issues. There are carbon monoxide detectors.

TA REPORT: Most of the last meeting took place in executive session. The Board voted on a new tuition figure, \$18,628. There was brief discussion about recruitment for next year. The numbers are looking good, but are lower than this year. Darrah cautioned the TA Board about expecting large savings from consolidating bus routes. There will be a benefit from reducing the carbon footprint and a positive effect on teenagers from starting school later. Cobb and Darrah confirmed there is a provision in the Butler bus contract for combining routes.

ACT 46 UPDATE: Downey reported the alternative structure group met on January 20 and interviewed two possible Act 46 consultants. They could not take any action because the meeting was not warned properly, but the group decided to hire one of the consultants. The group is meeting again on February 9 to vote for said person. Darrah has asked Cobb to find out what documentation TTSD needs to submit to the State by July 1.

FINANCIAL REPORT - FY18 BUDGET FINALIZATION: Thompson distributed two budget proposals: with and without \$50,000 for capital improvement. Thompson referenced the tax sheets: the tax rate is -0.7% without, and 0.6% with, the additional \$50,000. Discussion followed with Merrick regarding calculations of the tax rate. Merrick accounted for the current TES staff and added 3%. Each teacher was given a step on the current grid. Merrick did not include the one teacher retirement and retirement benefits. The phone system upgrade was included in the facilities budget. The full amount of the deficit bond was added because it is in its last year. Buttrey commented a tax rate of -0.7% would be great, but in the long term it would save tax payers money by putting aside the \$50,000. If \$22,500 is added for capital

improvements, there would be a 0% change in tax rate. Buttrey expressed concern about the roof. Thompson stated the newer roof on the upper wing may cost \$20,000 to \$30,000 to repair. The roof on the lower wing would cost even more. Thompson estimates \$500,000 to insulate the lower wing. A separate bond would be needed. Buttrey suggested warning a separate article for the capital improvement fund. Darrah stated that if money is put aside, the Board needs to address the facilities issues as soon as possible. It is not a rainy day fund. Acker suggested that a separate warned article could be specific, such as designated for energy improvements in the building. Thompson added that Efficiency Vermont may have some programs. Darrah stated she would be in favor of a separate warned article for \$50,000. Downey agreed it is a good idea to separate the budget from the capital improvements, and asked how the Board could educate townspeople about why they should vote for the warned article. A list of upgrades needing funding could be listed. Thompson will generate a list of improvements for town meeting presentation. Darrah stated the Board needs to sign a warning next week for the budget and the separate warned article. Acker clarified that the transportation line item as listed on the budget still includes four bus runs, not the updated plan for two. Thompson confirmed two bus runs will be in the budget, and there will be little savings.

SCHOOL REPORT PLANNING DISCUSS TOPICS FOR TOWN MEETING AND PRE-SCHOOL MEETING: Acker and Downey shared a draft of their progress creating the TTSD annual report. Downey has reached out to TA for information. Cobb has the requirements for what has to be included. Discussion followed. Reports need to be mailed by February 20.

BOARD RESPONSE TO GOVERNOR SCOTT'S PROPOSAL: Buttrey would like the Board to make a formal response to Governor Scott. Buttrey has already written him a letter. Merrick confirmed TTSD's budget has increased, but there will be no tax increase. There are other districts that will not be able to develop a budget resulting in a level tax rate. Acker commented on the poor timing for this initiative requiring so much change at the end of budget season. Downey stated she has mixed feelings. Using resources wisely is a good goal. Instead of writing to Governor Scott about opposition, what are some solutions to suggest?

BRIGLIN: Legislators learned about the Governor's proposal as it was rolled out to the public. Scott is asking for level funding by May 23 with the end results of property taxes going down. There are many legislators who have experience serving on school boards, and there is a lot of understanding about what goes into the budget development process. Many legislators are concerned. The House education committee met with the Agency of Education to try to better understand the Governor's proposal. Buttrey asked, how is the Governor going to hold school boards accountable? Briglin does not think there is much support for Scott's proposal and advised the TTSD Board to continue developing their budget as planned. Briglin doubts the legislature would pass this within the next month, but acknowledged that there is a funding and spending issue across the State. Acker pointed out the poor timing; if a May 23 budget fails there is not much time to rework it and re-present it for a vote by July 1.

Briglin asked for an Act 46 update. Cobb gave an update about OESU. Darrah explained TTSD has asked to share the central office tasks with the new Blue Mountain/OESU. Cobb stated that Secretary Holcombe is very aware of the work Thetford has done investigating merger options. Darrah summarized that TTSD exhausted the study group with Rivendell, as well as the

Strafford/Norwich group, which has evolved into the alternative structure with Strafford, Tunbridge, and Sharon. Downey continued, saying this alternative structure group has been meeting regularly and are planning to hire a consultant to help decide if this alternative structure is a good idea. All the districts voted to self fund the study consultant. Chelsea and Tunbridge are talking about merging. It is too soon to know how this could affect the alternative structure possibility. Briglin reported he is working on a bill that is intended to make more allowances for an alternative structure, and to emphasize to the AOE what an alternative structure means. It would give districts one more year to form an alternative structure, as well as lowering the required student enrollment, which is currently 900. This new bill proposes enrollment of 500 students.

TEACHER NEGOTIATION UPDATE: Buttrey and Downey had a lengthy conversation about health benefits with the teachers. They meet with the teachers on February 13. Teachers want a HRA instead of HSAs. An HRA is a shared fund. The first year TTSD would have to budget the full amount. Financially, it makes no difference to TTSD.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (Student Matter): MOTION: (Buttrey/MacPhee) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 8:47 p.m. to discuss a student matter, which is protected by law. Out of executive session at 9:01 p.m. No action taken.

ADJOURNMENT: MOTION: (Buttrey/MacPhee) moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 p.m. (unanimous approval).

FUTURE MEETINGS:

01/31/17	Thetford Town School District Meeting	7:00 p.m.
02/07/17	OESU Act 46 Meeting - Oxbow	5:30 p.m.
02/13/17	Thetford Town School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.
02/28/17	Pre-Town School Meeting	7:00 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:
Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Julie Acker, Board Clerk