

**THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Tuesday, November 7, 2017**  
**Oxbow High School**

**APPROVED MINUTES**

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 7:20 p.m.. The following were present: Julie Acker, Shannon Darrah, Kristen Downey, Scott MacPhee, School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES Principal; Melanie Elliott (OESU business office/human resources)

**PUBLIC PRESENT:** None

**AGENDA REVIEW:** Agenda approved with amendments.

**MINUTES REVIEW:** MOTION: (Downey/Acker) moved/seconded to approve the minutes of the October 24, 2017 Board meeting (MacPhee abstained; unanimous approval).

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS:** MOTION: (Acker/Darrah) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable order #6243 and payroll warrant #6216 (unanimous approval).

**PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE:**

Teaching intern email inquiry forwarded from Darrah to Petrone. Petrone received an email inquiring about a health/PE internship, he forwarded it to Chaput.

**PRINCIPAL'S REPORT (Kevin Petrone):** Hike for Hunger took place last Friday. Great weather. 250 students and staff all made the round trip on Mimi's Trail, they had a picnic at the top. This year Vermont Adaptive was used to assist a student, they provided a person and a hand cranked mountain bike. Food drive has been successful, delivered a pick up truck load of food donations. This Friday there is no school for parent conference day. Teachers will be at school for conferences, after first trimester ends to check in with parents. Report cards to go home on November 21. Monday 11/13 will be Veterans Day celebration. Local veterans are invited to attend. MacPhee stated it is one of the best Veteran's Day programs he has ever attended. Used to be every other year but because of such positive feedback it is now annual. Wednesday, 11/15 is the annual TES talent show – one during the day for all school and another in the evening for the community.

The special education team has been discussing the need for a room in the building to be available for students who need a break from class and where they can get ready to re-enter the classroom. About 10% of population could benefit from such a space. Teachers had a brainstorming meeting held with the entire staff. There are "take a break" chairs in each classroom as a first step, as well as buddy classrooms, where if a student needs a break they can enter another classroom. Teachers suggested making change of space a proactive response when the student appears to need a break as opposed to reacting. Right now the option is to go and visit Petrone, who

is not always available. Also have a “crisis team” for emergency situations that can be called, but it is inconsistent in its use and depends on the staff member involved. Petrone would like it to be a universal response across the school so students know what to expect.

**REVIEW OF BUDGET WORKSHEET:** Melanie Elliott: CLA, equalized pupil or excess spending numbers are not available, so the budget worksheet has been drafted using last years numbers. The 8% state based homestead tax rate is also an estimate, but it could be high as 10%. 8% is probably what it’s going to be. Elliot predicts the CLA is going to go down, which is not good. Elementary enrollment is about the same as last year, down 4 students at TES. Petrone not sure about preschool numbers, it probably will not be much different.

Rough budget based on teachers as negotiated with benefits, but support staff numbers are assumed because that hasn’t been negotiated yet. If join another district that district could already have an LEA in place, but that would not be available to TTSD for another two years, and the need is immediate. Health insurance recapture amounts are included.

The big take away is that the first look at the worksheet - with no changes to the budget and without all the information from the state - the district is facing a 7.6% tax rate increase.

The first look includes current staffing levels but no capital or maintenance needs. This is lower than the state 8%, but with LEA position added, it may be at 8%. The CLA is probably going to go down, house sales and house values over the past 3 years inform this. CLA is not fixed. CLA out early January per Elliott. Darrah usually gets a letter in December and will pass it on to Elliott. Equalized pupil data is expected by mid-November. Excess spending will come with equalized spending. State based tax rate is not set in stone either per Elliott. When the ADM changes, that can have a big impact. Discussion followed. It takes about \$50,000 in budget cuts to lower the tax rate by 0.5%. There are no wish list items in the budget per Petrone. What are immediate facilities needs, that if they are delayed even more cost will be incurred. Petrone will review with Thompson. And this budget has no tuition increase for TA, as uses same student count at TA as 2017.

Downey said that support staff negotiations are upcoming, but no meetings have been schedule yet. Downey asked about combined classes for next year. Petrone responded that is being looked at, but would not be enough savings to level fund the budget. Darrah asked what should she communicate to TA? Acker stated we are not the only sending district who has this problem. Discussion followed re: possibilities for TA changes in tuition. Need to have a joint meeting with the TA board during budget season. Darrah stated it would be helpful to get an idea what TA is thinking about enrollment from TES. There are also Thetford homeschool students incoming not coming from TES, so additional numbers there. Acker: There is a video by VSBA about how education funding works in Vermont, maybe good idea to share with TA Board at the upcoming joint meeting.

Downey asked about what happens if a budget is voted down? The district would operate on the existing budget and try to revise for a revote. There are 30 days to adjust and go to a re-vote. Discussion followed. Some districts are facing double digit increases in tax rate. Thompson asked, is it acceptable to work on a first draft that has no more than a 5% increase? Yes, reasonable per Board. Good starting point while harder numbers are available. Downey suggested how about looking at what a 2% and 5% increase would be? Thompson and Petrone will work on that. Downey asked if the teachers understand why we are at this point ~8%? Petrone suggested maybe Darrah could attend a staff meeting to explain why we are at this point. Downey thinks it would be helpful to put together some talking points to explain why we are at this point now with the budget. Darrah will pursue this information from the VSBA and is happy to attend a TES staff meeting in the very near future. Discussion followed. Class sizes, staff to student ratios, and para educator staffing will need to be looked at.

#### **REVIEW BUS SURVEY:** Postponed

**ACT 46 SELF STUDY TEMPLATE DISCUSSION:** Darrah brought copies of the draft Waits River self study. Darrah discussed with Sandra Stanley and it is not clear if TTSD can get a self study in by 12/31. Every district is required to do one. It's a lot of work. Acker spoke briefly tonight with Joe Nolan on the Waits River Board. They are doing their self study now, and next step is alternative structure plan. TTSD is not proposing alternative structure but the self study alone is a lot of work. Darrah reported that Stanley spoke with Steve Sanborn from the State – the word is the State is thinking now they want to put TTSD in the White River Valley SU. This is not final. It is a large SU – Sharon, Chelsea, Tunbridge, Bethel, Stockbridge, Rochester, Stratford and more. There is some geographical sense to it. The State also would entertain an argument that TTSD should go somewhere else as well. If TTSD is pulled out of OESU, the financials for the SU would not be sustainable. Darrah speculated that such shuffling would only work if another district, like Blue Mountain, is pulled into OESU. In thinking about the possibility of TTSD in White River SU, the administrative costs would be spread over a lot of districts which could result in some cost savings. Such a move would theoretically pull TA along with TTSD. It would not change our governance structure, just the central office. It also does not change designation to TA, but would complicate things for special educators who work for OESU now. That would be a major complication. This may not be a decision for TTSD to make; it may be a State decision. Also need to look at, would there be more educational opportunities because interaction with other districts that are geographically more accessible. Darrah was considering contacting Holcombe to suggest a conversation.

What about TA's tech students? All the kids would be at one tech center in Hartford, not two as currently. Would there be savings for TA from just one bus to the tech center. Darrah is considering, what could the cost savings be. She worries about OESU, if Waits River does leave OESU, the remaining districts will absorb a lot more expense and if TTSD stays in OESU, it will be expensive. MacPhee stated he has two priorities related to Act 46: What is best for the students, and then what is fiscally best for Thetford. Discussion followed. Darrah – the only thing TTSD has control over is our governance structure, but not necessarily what SU TTSD is placed in. TTSD

can voice an opinion with supporting arguments. Costs are high in OESU and will get higher if other districts leave. Theoretically one would think costs would be less in a larger SU because costs are shared by more, but Darrah has not looked at White River's financials. Many unanswered questions, like could the special educators come with TTSD. Melanie Elliott stated probably current special educators would have to reapply for their positions in a new SU if TTSD moves to a new SU. Darrah has always thought that maybe down the road there could be opportunities with Strafford and Sharon. No decisions need to be made now, but Board should consider if they want to make an argument either way for which SU to belong to.

Darrah spoke with Norwich's Tom Candon earlier in the day and summarized their discussion. Candon said the lawyer would have to know more about what the two districts wanted to do in order to give advice. This started because Norwich is researching more options for its high schoolers, but Candon indicated perhaps something collaboration on the elementary school level could work. Darrah responded that a merger would not be happening but perhaps a partnership or alliance is worth discussing. They decided they need more people involved in the discussion. Maybe there are 2 partnerships – one on high school level and one on the elementary school level. Many logistical details. Would it have to be the entire school day, perhaps some Thetford students accessing classes they can't get at TA, and Hanover students accessing the half day TA outdoor program. But neither district losing a student. The focus is how to increase educational opportunities for students. TA would have to be included in the conversations. Tuition rates are very similar between Dresden and TA. They did agree they need some TA reps to continue the conversation, maybe Holcombe as well. They also agreed this can not cost money. Acker – would it make sense to form a committee with various Board members to identify which ideas to pass on to a lawyer? Separate partnerships between TTSD and Norwich, and a second one with TA and Dresden. Keep it small to get the legal issues worked out. Darrah has not yet discussed with Cudhea. Compelled to look at all the options. Downey: Is a merger with Marion Cross really not up for discussion? Darrah responded that Thetford residents are wary of such a merger because of taxes increasing, and Dresden has a large influence on taxes. Downey – we have to be ready for these questions to come up, re: merging with Norwich. Darrah feels Thetford residents are not in favor of such a merger. Downey said that does not take into account all factors, primarily what is best for students. Acker reminded that we've already looked at this with Norwich in previous study groups. A lot of data has gathered, and the complexity with merging with an interstate district. Darrah said that Norwich is so intertwined with Dresden it is hard to see exact costs of Norwich as they are administered by Dresden. Acker feels that a merger is not where we want to start, but it is not necessarily off the table, more of a starting with a partnership. Darrah sees the possibilities easily with 7-12, she doesn't see what the vision would be with an elementary school partnership, possibly sharing professional development and extracurricular activities. Some sharing of personnel may be possible, per Darrah. Act 46 has prompted conversations between school districts, MacPhee sees that some good is coming out of it. Downey volunteered to join Darrah in these conversations. Maybe meet again early December. Darrah will reach out to Holcombe re: self study.

**ADJOURNMENT:** MOTION: (Downey/Acker) moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m. (unanimous approval).

**FUTURE MEETINGS:**

11/21/17	Thetford Town School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.
12/05/17	Thetford Town School District Meeting (Oxbow)	6:00 p.m.
12/05/17	OESU Meeting	7:15 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:  
Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

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Julie Acker, Board Clerk