

Newtown Public Schools
BOE CFF/CIP/Facilities/Finance Sub Committee Agenda
December 15, 2022, 6:00pm
BOE Conference Room

CALL TO ORDER

BUSINESS

Item 1 Approval of BOE CFF/CIP Minutes of November 10, 2022

NEW BUSINESS

- Review Sub-committee description
- Transportation Update
- Hawley HVAC Update
- Update on State HVAC Grant, status and timeline
- Lunch Program update and possible extension
- Facilities Update
- Financial Report and transfers
- Superintendent update

PUBLIC COMMENT

ADJOURNMENT

Newtown Board of Education
BOE CFF/CIP/Facilities/Finance Sub-Committee Minutes
November 10, 2022 6:00 p.m.

Call to Order: Mrs. Larkin called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Participants: Jennifer Larkin, Deborra Zukowski, Alison Plante, Bob Gerbert, Tanja Vadas, Chris Melillo, Superintendent, Lisa Kessler, Legislative Council, Steven Goodridge, Board of Finance, Ed Schierloh, Board of Selectman

Ms. Zukowski made a motion to add the agenda item "Review and Amend CFF's Responsibilities".
Mrs. Plante seconded.

All in favor, motion passes to approve adding the agenda item "Review and Amend CFF's Responsibilities".

Ms. Zukowski made a motion to add the agenda item "Discuss Middle Gate Playground"
Mrs. Larkin seconded.

All in favor, motion passes to approve adding the agenda item "Discuss Middle Gate Playground"

Item 1: Approval of BOE CFF/CIP Minutes of October 13, 2022

Mrs. Plante made a motion to approve the BOE CFF/CIP minutes of October 13, 2022.

Ms. Zukowski seconds the motion.

Two in favor (Zukowski, Plante) and one abstained (Larkin). Motion passes.

NEW BUSINESS

Hawley HVAC Update:

Mr. Gerbert presented an updated summary sheet from Downes of the overall project budget. This information is from the Building and Site Committee meeting in October. He reported that they have been minimizing changeover. A highlight has been their retention of a Commissioning Agent. The commissioning process is a "check out" of all of the installed equipment. The original budget in the project for this was \$30,000. The low bid was \$36,000 with a local company, CES. Through some back and forth and reducing the amount of meetings, we were able to get the price down to \$30,000 and they are now on board. As mentioned in our previous meeting, the switch gear and transformer are still long lead items. There were discussions about relocating the switch gear to other parts of the building, however, they decided to keep in the old boiler room of the 21 building but it will be built on a platform to keep dry from potential flooding.

He continued with stating that another milestone is two roof top units were installed so all the roof curbs are in on the 97 wing. Everything is remaining on time and on budget.

Mrs. Plante asked for an update on the timing for the switch gear and transformer.

Mr. Gerbert said they believe it is June. He does not have any other information to report on timing.

Ms. Zukowski asked if there was a flooding issue in the basement of the 21 building and if we have a subpump.

Mr. Gerbert answered that they do and there has only be one or two issues since he has been here.

Ms. Zukowski asked if there is a backup.

Mr. Gerbert said they are having conversations about obtaining a backup and battery backup.

Mrs. Larkin asked how much needs to be completed after the switch gear comes in.

Mr. Gerbert said it would only take a week of work once we receive the switch gear. It would become an issue if we did not receive the switch gear until late July because we need to start moving everyone back in before school.

Mr. Melillo spoke about the Hawley Moving Committee that was established. The plan now is to move everyone in three days. They would like to shield the students from the packing because it can be overwhelming. Some plans are in the works and will be communicated once the plan is finalized. We have an advantage because we are moving everyone back into an empty building.

Mr. Schierloh asked if they did an exploration of the structural steel in the attic to make sure it will work. Mr. Gerbert said they have a structural engineer and was vetted as much as they could to confirm it will be supported. They put in three beams in the multipurpose room.

Mrs. Larkin asked for Mr. Gerbert to discuss the state grant, Ed Specs.

Mr. Gerbert said it was approved at the previous Board meeting and sent to our new Grants Specialist, Judy, will be submitting the application by the 20th of November. Everything that needed to be approved was approved during the planning and hiring point of the project.

Middle Gate Playground Update:

Mr. Gerbert provided an update on obtaining a new playground for Middle Gate Elementary School. He stated that while looking at other schools, Middle Gate actually has quite a bit more equipment in comparison to other schools.

Mrs. Larkin stated that there is a lot of equipment but it is not rated for the younger kids. It shouldn't be compared the other playground because the younger students can't go on it and only compare playgrounds rated for K-2. Mr. Gerbert agrees that the equipment is old and needs to be replaced.

Mr. Gerbert said that space is also an issue and the design that was shared with the Middle Gate PTA is the best that can be done. He is hoping that he can buy the equipment as a sale item which would be 25% less expensive. The vendor stated that it is likely there will be a sale in January/February.

Ms. Zukowski stated that the original price that was quoted was \$85,000. Ms. Zukowski's concern is making sure the schools are equitable. Unfortunately, the field at Middle Gate is not ADA compliant and cannot be used during recess. That causes a different experience for recess. Ms. Zukowski wonders if the high price can be justified given the circumstances that Middle Gate is one of the larger schools and does not have a field for recess.

Mr. Gerbert doesn't know if it is fair to compare each school because the space is different.

Mr. Melillo reminded the committee that they have to look at this purchase as safety first. If it is not safe then it can be a liability. He does not want students to be unsafe.

Mrs. Plante agrees being equitable is important, however, she believes the safety is the number one priority.

Ms. Zukowski asked who is responsible of paying for a new playground.

Mr. Gerbert answered that is a combination. PTAs hold fundraisers and typically have money left over to purchase additional things for their school's playground. It would be a hybrid approach where the Board

would come up with a set amount and the PTA would need to make up the difference. The discount can be up to \$15,000-\$20,000.

Mrs. Plante asked how much money was in the budget for Middle Gate.

Mr. Gerbert answered that they have \$20,000. There is some flexibility around that number because it is in their projects line item.

Mrs. Larkin asked what ground work would need to happen.

Mr. Gerbert said the vendor is responsible for the equipment, installation and the resurfacing. We are responsible for the demo. It just on our time and we can get assistance from Parks and Rec.

Mrs. Larkin asked what happens if we need more money.

Mr. Melillo said there are two options. He can put it in next year's budget or we can see how this year's budget holds up and use money towards the end of the year.

Ms. Gerbert reminded the committee that the sale for the playscape would only be available in January/February.

Mrs. Vadas said that the money could possibly come from the non-lapsing account.

Mrs. Plante recommends revisiting this at the next meeting (January).

The committee agreed.

Financial Report and Transfers

Mrs. Vadas presented the October financial report. She stated that it was a busy month and a more realistic look at our Budget. The adjustments that were made over the prior month have produced a projected year-end balance of \$411,346 with the majority of adjustments being made in other purchased services, primarily transportation and out-of-district tuition, to adjust for the excess cost grant.

The energy account needs to be analyzed. Mrs. Vadas reminded the committee that she lost someone in her department who was forecasting this. She anticipates some savings, whoever natural gas prices are rising.

Mrs. Vadas reported that there are still about 10-12 open positions for non-certified staff. There are also open positions for Behavior Therapists, although we are using a contracted service, it is very costly. As of date, there is \$180,000 worth of encumbrances in. The good news is that some of it will be offset by grants.

Mrs. Larkin wonders why no one is applying to be behavioral therapists and asked what the rate of pay is.

Mrs. Vadas answered that it can range from \$21-\$36/hr depending on their step.

Mrs. Larkin does not believe that it is a Covid issue.

Mr. Melillo agrees and believes it is a workforce issue.

Mrs. Kessler asked if the \$180,000 encumbrance for the contracted company was for all of the schools.

Mrs. Vadas said there are currently 5 open positions but the services are charging \$60/hr.

Ms. Zukowski asked if they are union.

Mrs. Vadas answered that BTs are non-union and Paraeducators are union.

Mrs. Vadas reported on the sub accounts. The certified salary account is still producing a negative balance and that is mostly due to our large budgeted turnover account. A transfer was requested this month of \$1.1 million to adjust the teach re-assignments. Non-Certified positions have seen a lot of turnover but the balance is \$81,000. The overall salary counts have a positive balance of \$500,000. It is less than last month but they have been tightening up the accounts.

Mrs. Vadas stated that the pension account has some stress because the run rate is \$24,000/month for this account. It is difficult to budget because it is unknown when employees will retire or resign and be replaced by whom.

There are a lot of changes in the other purchase services account. Contracted Services currently displays a negative balance of -\$126,431. The majority of this balance is due to the inclusion of an outside service that provides behavioral therapists for our students. These students require this service as outlined in their I.E.P. We are currently contracting anywhere from 5-7 therapists as the needs do vary. The two encumbrances that are currently active total \$180,000. However, we will be reallocating a portion of this cost towards our ARP IDEA grant fund. It is still early to provide an accurate projection; although, it appears we may have approximately \$140,000 to use towards this service.

Transportation currently displays a positive balance of \$210,000. We are still in the process of analyzing our out-of-district accounts as well as a portion of the excess cost grant that is associated with these costs. Expect a change in this balance next month as the out-of- district costs will require adjustments.

Mrs. Kessler asked if anyone was keeping track of the bus runs that are not happening and keep track of the reimbursement.

Mrs. Larkin asked Mrs. Vadas how much the reimbursement is if a bus does not run.

Mrs. Vadas said it would be \$180.

Mrs. Larkin asked the status of drivers.

Mr. Melillo said they anticipate a full roster with three back up drivers in December.

Mrs. Vadas said that Brookfield is fully staffed but they pay less. They are on a three tier which is more attractive.

Mrs. Larkin asked if the sports teams are using the buses again.

Mrs. Vadas said there are some but again, we do not have the drivers. All of the drivers that we do have are busy doing school runs.

Mrs. Vadas reported that the District has used the majority of the sports transportation budget for the year because of the price of coach buses.

Mrs. Larkin encourages the District to keep the account in check at All Star.

To go hand in hand with transportation, Mrs. Vadas is noticing a surplus in the fuel accounts because we are not using as much. A bid will be prepared in December while trying to watch the market.

Mrs. Vadas told the committee that they will receive the transfers in their packet.

Review and Amend CFF's Responsibilities

Ms. Zukowski reminded the committee that it is not their purview to actually vote and make the amendment. It is our purview to make the recommendation to the full Board.

In the past, whenever there has been a CIP project, there has been an ad-hoc that was assigned to the project. Ms. Zukowski recommended adding “provide oversight to BOE Capital Improvement Projects working with the Director of Facilities, and as needed, the Town public building and site and other Town commissions.” This committee will be responsible for following up on the work. This amendment will be brought to the Board in December.

Ms. Zukowski continued by recommending amending the financial responsibilities of the committee. Mrs. Vadas said that she brings all of the contracts to the committee. She mentioned that the District now has a new purchasing agent that can handle the RFPs.

Mrs. Larkin recommends bringing the RFPs to the committee on the larger bids.

Mrs. Vadas said the next big bid is propane.

Mrs. Plante does not believe they should be in the service of reviewing every RFP.

Ms. Zukowski stated that she and Mr. Melillo will put together language for the committee to review.

Mrs. Kessler noticed in the minutes that were related to the Food Service and there was a \$700,000 surplus.

Mrs. Vadas said it is a fund outside of the general fund. It is money that can only be used towards food service. Most districts all have large surpluses because of Covid.

Mrs. Larkin reminded the committee that while we were still receiving the free lunches, students were still purchasing other lunches and became revenue.

Superintendent Report

Mr. Melillo reported that Veteran’s Day is the following day and he will be having breakfast at Newtown Middle School, going to the parade at Sandy Hook and the assembly at Newtown High School. He is excited about the day.

Mr. Melillo will confirm that the high school announces Veteran’s Day ceremonies during morning announcements.

Public Participation

None

Adjournment

Mrs. Plante made a motion to resign to adjourn.

Ms. Zukowski seconds the motion. All in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 7:27 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sarah Connell

THESE ARE DRAFT MINUTES AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE BOE CFF/CIP SUB COMMITTEE.