

**WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
Special Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, February 11, 2020  
**Town Office Building, Lower Level Meeting Room**  
**7:00 p.m.**

Audio Recording: Yes

Notes Taken: Yes

**Members Present**

Michelle Doucette Cunningham

Elena Testa

Ann Grosjean

Tracey Anderson

Donna Cook

Liz Perry

**Members Absent**

Herb Arico

**Also Present**

Superintendent of Schools Phil Stevens

Business Manager Donna Latinsics

Members of the Public

**Meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.**

**Present to Speak**

Maureen L 41 Cosgrove Rd. - reference to last town meeting about forming a school committee. She reached out to CREC and facilities and buildings manager Doug Rogers, shared what Willington is interested in. He manages 20 facilities right now. He understands what Willington is experiencing. Doug mentioned to her at no cost that he'd be willing to work with the Board as liaison, give information. Presented package to the Board. Doug placed emphasis that grant is based on the number of students enrolled times the square footage of property. Doug recommended the committee would need to perform an environmental assessment. Anything not included in grant goes back on the taxpayers. Deadline is coming around June 30 if anything is submitted this year. With 20 years of experience in state grant writing, CREC can add value to consultation. Varies depending on what assistance a district may or may not need. CREC are

experts in efficiency and energy. Hard to get volunteers that are knowledgeable in capital projects and Doug manages budget in timely fashion and sensitive manner.

E. Testa - suggests giving info to the building committee when it is formed.

Stephanie Blais - 50 St. Moritz Circle. Speak on behalf of the arts in Willington schools. Started singing at 4 years old in church choir, all through elementary school was supported by the arts that Willington Schools provide. Led her to pursue the arts as a career. Attends a CREC art school. If we didn't have as much support in the arts at Willington schools, we wouldn't be here speaking and feeling as confident. Many high schools focus on sports, which are great, but the same thing goes for the arts as well. We have a saying at the arts academy: "academy is family" - same goes for all the arts. A way to bring people together. Important to be part of something and feel accepted.

Riley Quinn Village Street - goes to GHAA - wanted to say music is a part of her everyday life. HMS music program taught her to be confident, have stage presence, be herself, which is one of the best things she's learned to do. Willington hired some of the best people. Mr. Phillips was someone that she looked up to growing up and helped them grow so much. You don't realize how important an ensemble is until you're part of it. Heart and soul into the arts. Her way is performing because the feeling of people clapping for you after you've worked hard after months. When people appreciate you, it's the best feeling ever.

E. Testa - thanked girls, will pass along to Jason Phillips

### **Communications**

No communications.

### **Chairman's Report**

#### **A. Schedule Board of Education Retreat**

A retreat for the entire board needs to be scheduled, and one for new members with Mr. Stevens and the board chair. Length depends on what we do. Superintendent Stevens suggested he will propose some dates and check with the Board.

### **Superintendent Report**

#### **A. Center School: Dog Drive Project**

Molly Bean started a food drive because she wanted to help animals. She deeply cares about them and wanted to honor the memory of her dog who died. Collected supplies and toys and donated to Willington animal shelter. Supplies were donated by people at school. She

organized and promoted it and introduced her new dog. Superintendent Stevens shared that projects like this promote good in the school community and thanked Molly for sharing.

**B. CT General Children's Medical Hospital PJ Day for the Kids**

Participated on Friday December 13. Started to honor children at the hospital who wear their pajamas all the time. Willington donated over \$600 to the hospital. 150 towns are now involved. State raised over \$340,000 this year with this program. Gets to the point of doing good for your community.

**C. Center School: Look for the Good Project**

Featured on FOX 61 website showing a variety of students demonstrating how they look for the good, including a Gratitude Wall they created. 4 different spots in the hallways for students to stand saying what they are grateful for. Presentation in March to the Board.

**D. Center School Special Education resignation**

Received notification from Danielle Nash, leaving for a new position in Ellington. 6th year at Willington. Next week is last week. Huge loss to the district. She has done an outstanding job, with a humongous impact on kids. Will be interviewing for that position to fill for the rest of the year. Superintendent Stevens reminded the Board special education is a shortage area.

**E. HMS Boiler Update**

The new boiler is up and operational. Staff are noticing they have more heat in their rooms. Temps were fine, but it's making a difference within the building. Huge sigh of relief knowing the new boiler is in. Not able to save much from the old boiler as it was so corroded.

**F. School Based Health Services presentation at March meeting**

Marcia McGinley has been working to identify a solution to the number of students who need counseling services. Caseloads are huge. She found something that is free through a federal grant. The Community Health Center did a presentation for the administrative team. They provide all sorts of services including medical, dental, and behavioral support. If you provide a space for them, they will provide you 40 hours of behavioral support for your district. Would be split between the schools. 190 schools in the state are currently using this program. No out-of-pocket fees. Parents have to sign off, referral process through school, not just drop-in. Fantastic opportunity. Started the process to apply for the grant but the director will come in March to share the amazing things they can offer Willington and give the Board the opportunity to ask questions. Toxic stress is in our schools and if we can provide for our students to help them improve, we should do that. Encouraged Board members to go on their website. Not looking at medical, but the dental can come in for a couple of days for appointments. Ashford just applied. Supervised by a director for the area. Willington is not responsible for supervision.

G. Roof Patching

Rain has not cooperated and we have not been able to patch. Hoping the ice stays away with bitter cold. As soon as we get a day that's dry, they can start patching. Hope to start this next week for both schools and it will be about one building a day.

H. Budget Calendar

The Superintendent provided the Board a copy of the dates moving forward.

**Financial Report**

Very little has changed in the budget. Had a meeting about Program 3: Special Education and the shortfall on the budget shows \$77,000, but is more like \$225,000. Shortfall after excess cost grant, will be around \$166,000. Good news is D. Latinsics and P. Stevens both believe the entirety of that shortfall can be covered by Program 10 insurance funds because the anticipated increase last year came in lower than expected. If that wasn't in there, we would be going back to BOF. Still have a placeholder for insurance and the remainder is subs for district for the rest of the year. As of today, we are going to cover a huge deficit in special ed without having to go back and ask for money. Money in other accounts now will not have to be frozen. If something changes, P. Stevens will let the Board know. All other programs are pretty flat. Will have transfers next month. Will not do transfers from program 10 to cover special ed until closer to the end of the year.

**New Business**

A. Approve minutes of January 14, 2020 meeting.

M. Cuningham move to approve.

A. Grosjean second.

T. Anderson - comment that normally in the meetings the minutes would reflect what was in her memory. Left the meeting very confused about the outcome of some of the votes. Hope that we are all understanding what's being voted on and whether they pass or not. Felt very uncomfortable. E. Testa - we should raise our hand when we vote. T. Anderson - Last time we had a vote change. We just need to clarify the motion before we vote for clarity.

P. Stevens - That will be part of training so everyone knows more about Roberts' Rules so everyone understands where we are and how we are going to move forward.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x

M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa	x			
L. Perry	x			

Motion passes

B. Approve minutes of January 23, Special Meeting

M. Cunningham move to approve

T. Anderson second

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x
M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa	x			
L. Perry	x			

Motion passes

C. Review and approve 2020-2021 BOE Budget

P. Stevens- added the things the Board asked for last meeting and the increase is 3.39%.

M. Cunningham made a motion to approve.

T. Anderson second.

D. Cook - one of the difficulties is the budget versus the actuals. If there's an area we typically under budget and have to play catch up, but there are other areas we use as a buffer because we

know we under budgeted someplace else, to her it would make more sense to make them what they are realistically going to be, especially for insurance and special education.

P. Stevens- we don't know what the insurance line is going to be because we don't know which employees will come in and take insurance and we don't know the plan increase yet. The Board only has one placeholder in their budget for someone to take insurance.

Ann - also at this time last year when we built this budget, there could've been a 14% increase and we have to go with the higher number. With sped, you never know when someone is going to move into town that will need sped placement. Hard to budget accurately for those unforeseen things. Best you can do is balance it out as the year goes on.

M. Cunningham - D. Harding always held 2 placeholders. Feels assumptions are on conservative side.

P. Stevens- Other districts create contingency plans in their budget by adding money for multiple placeholders for insurance, unplanned out-of-district special education placements, and planning for new hires to be at the top step of the contract. Willington doesn't do any of those things. The Board has created a reasonable contingency with the long term sub line but it was added because we've needed to cover it through other accounts for several years now.

M. Cunningham - best practice in budgeting is to have a contingency. We have no contingency in here.

E. Testa - The state said they are going to cut the ECS budget for Willington. How reliable is that info?

P. Stevens- this projection has been out for a while and seems reliable. The Education Cost Sharing Grant is going to be cut by \$38,000, but it doesn't come off your budget. Town looks at revenues coming in and that's how they create the total budget. Auditors want the General Fund Balance between 8-12%. They've used some of that money to bring total costs down so the mil rate hasn't gone up. Jim Bulick and the BOF was really good at balancing those out. Doesn't come off of the BOE budget. BOF just looks at the lump sum and determines how much money to apply from the General Fund Balance.

M. Cunningham- timing important because this is the governor's proposal, which is totally reworked by legislature. It's not final until the state budget is passed at the end of April.

E. Testa - not a lot of flexibility on the budget because it's contractual. Little bits here and there unless cutting globally. Personally would support not increasing by \$11,000 and suggest instead

of \$1,000, keep it at \$600. Go along with the first budget proposed by Superintendent. Lots of projects on CIP.

M. Cunningham - putting actual numbers in there was that \$11,000. Up to us to give to BOF a budget of what it's actually going to cost. That's our job. We should give them the best numbers of what we actually need.

T. Anderson - 0.14%. \$12,000. Over the past 2 years, we have had people need long term subs, so we are giving an actual number. If we didn't have the situation with insurance being less, we'd have already gone back to BOF already this year to cover special education costs. The budget is as lean as it can get. Would prefer to keep payment for long term subs over video.

P. Stevens- Erika has videoing in her budget as well. Talking about mounting a camera in this room well beyond what we were talking about.

T. Anderson - if BOF says we need to cut, then we cut. We are supposed to tell them what we need. This is what we need. BOE budget passes every year. Put it to the BOF and let the townspeople speak.

Ann - I support the budget as it stands. Accurate picture of what it costs to run our schools. Maybe even lean.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x
M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa		x		
L. Perry	x			

Motion passes.

#### D. Review Transportation Policy

Superintendent Stevens - chance for you to discuss the policy. Discussion was held on BOE responsibilities, Superintendent responsibilities and parent/guardian responsibilities. Reason

this came up was talking about the potential for moving to a shared contract with Region 19 with potential for significant savings. Would make bus routes for pre k-8 students together instead of 2 routes in morning and afternoon. Fits policy, nothing would have to be changed. Add regulations that say you're in elementary school, you should sit here, etc. No-one walks even close to ¼ or ½ mile for their age groups. 14 group stops in the morning for Center, 17 for Hall. Every question received from a parent was handled. Eliminated some stops because parents were uncomfortable. Called all parents personally and made those adjustments.

E. Testa - shared her concern about the group stop by her house which she thought had limited visibility and poison ivy. Would prefer to cancel and pick up everyone at their home, but not proposing anything right now. Safety of children is the greatest priority. Teach them good, but safety over everything.

P. Stevens- adjusted every time a parent was concerned. If they called me today we could consider the adjustment. If you eliminate all the group stops you would need to reroute everyone. Safety is my number one priority and we spent a lot of time researching all stops. All stops I'm comfortable with as a parent. We were stopping every 30 feet which doesn't follow policy. If we have lots of snow endangering walking, not doing group stops.

D. Cook - Does our Board have any impact over grade 9-12?

P. Stevens- no

E. Testa - when do we come back to this question?

P. Stevens- summer. We will have a transportation committee. Going to make new routes, but especially if making a prek-8 pickup.

L. Perry - I understand the dangers you're talking about. Maybe parents could take turns standing at the bus stop with the children if they are concerned. We don't want to put kids in compromising situations. Understands wanting to save gas.

E. BOE Representation on School Building Committee

2 people interested in being on the committee. Letter from Ann Grosjean. Letter from Herb Arico. Both are interested in being on the building committee. One position available.

M. Cuninghame move to appoint A. Grosjean

T. Anderson second.

T. Anderson stated that in the letter, Ann's experiences in her opinion makes her qualified for the committee. Not only 35 years experience in schools and still working weekly in schools and



with CT advisory council advising on programs and laws. She understands 21st century education and is highly qualified.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x
M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook		x		
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa		x		
L. Perry		x		

Motion fails

D. Cook motion to appoint H. Arico

L. Perry seconded.

E. Testa - mentioned that Herb has tremendous experience with building committees. 7 building committees. Lots of experience. No-one can beat the experience of being on 7 committees.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x
M. Cunningham		x		
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson		x		
A. Grosjean		x		
E. Testa	x			
L. Perry	x			

Motion fails

P. Stevens- if anything comes back to Board as far as ed specs if they decide to renovate or build, it's everyone, not just the one person.

A. Grosjean- one person would go to weekly meetings and represent the Board, report back to the Board.

E. Testa - Can't resolve tonight. Find out when we need to put a candidate forward.

M. Cunningham moved to recommend that the BOS appoint them both as BOE representatives.

L. Perry seconds.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x
M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa	x			
L. Perry	x			

Motion passes

#### F. Review BOE Committee Assignments

The Board discussed particulars and availability of each committee. Assignments were discussed and the Board agreed to vote on committees when H. Arico returns. Superintendent Stevens requested the Board approve the policy committee so they can start their work.

M. Cunningham motion to approve the policy committee

D. Cook second.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x

M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa	x			
L. Perry	x			

Motion passes

### **Present to Speak**

Elaine N (shared a note with E. Testa) - the transportation of students to Region 19 should be raised at Region 19 Board by our Board members.

Todd Bissonnette 41 Cosgrove Rd. question in reference to the school building committee. Don't understand the rules and policy of BOE. I thought you were not allowed to vote for yourself. Herb put a lot of stuff on his plate. What's taking him away from this meeting? Shouldn't there be an absentee vote? Nothing personal. Is the vote legitimate? Nice to see positive interactions transpiring.

E. Testa - reviewed voting policies and that you are allowed to vote for yourself.

Jan Castle - 18 Pinney Hill Rd. Didn't make it to budget forums. Thank you for your time in doing the budget meetings as a staff member and resident. Reassuring to put forward a budget that, lean as it is, is not cutting what we already have, which isn't much. Have great staff members who care so much about schools, tons of time nurturing students. Staff does a great job, nice to have the support of the Board and that you're putting forth what has been determined that we need and to support the children. Thanks P. Stevens for putting good things on the agenda. Tonight there is an arts award night, so hopefully you will hear about that as the next meeting. Thank you for bringing to the Board's attention. Thanked D. Cook for coming to the concert at Center School.

### **Board Comments**

T. Anderson Thanked everyone who came to present and speak. Appreciate the children who came to share their experiences and projects so the Board can see children who are connected to those experiences. Appreciate the respectful and collaborative process the Board has gone through. Good way to start term with the Board.

D. Cook thanked the young people who came to share. Hope they aren't under the impression the Board is trying to cut music/arts programs. To my knowledge it isn't on the chopping block in any way.

M. Cunningham loved having the students here. Excited to hear more about school-based health services. Thanked P. Stevens for moving that along. I do a lot of work on social emotional learning in my day job and the stresses students face.

A. Grosjean thanked Mrs. Nash for 6 years of service. Great to see high school magnet students.

L. Perry thanked each Board member for shepherding her through this process as she has never served on a Board before. Clarified purpose of the retreat.

E. Testa moves to adjourn 9:00pm

A. Grosjean second.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico				x
M. Cunningham	x			
D. Cook	x			
T. Anderson	x			
A. Grosjean	x			
E. Testa	x			
L. Perry	x			

Motion passes