

# Green Mountain Unified School District Board

## Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 12, 2019

CTES Multipurpose Room

6:00 p.m.

### I. ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER:

**Board:** Wayne Wheelock, Joe Fromberger, Doug McBride, Michael Studin, Rick Alexander, Kate Lamphere, Jeff Hance, Lois Perlah

**Staff:** Lauren Fierman, Deb Beaupre, Katherine Fogg, Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Todd Parah

**Student Reps:**

**Public:** Shawn Cunningham, Sharon Huntley, Sandra Russo, Susan McNealy, John White, Margo Caulfield, Betty McEnaney, Wendy Rieger, Abraham Gross

Mr. Fromberger called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

### II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Mr. Alexander **moved** to approve the agenda with the addition of an administration recommendation of RN Hire during the administrator's report. Mr. Perlah seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

### III. MINUTES:

#### A. November 21, 2019 Regular Meeting

Mr. Studin **moved** to approve the minutes of November 21, 2019 meeting. Mr. Alexander seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

### IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

### V. COMMUNICATIONS:

#### A. Student Representatives

Ms. Fierman advised that the students were not available for this meeting.

#### B. Board Comments

Mr. Studin asked to respond to the comments made at the TRSU meeting earlier this week. He read aloud a statement addressing the notion that this board is not interested in working collaboratively with the other board in the SU. He felt that the GM board, and all school boards are doing what is best for their students, staff, school and community. He acknowledged that the administration's role is to do what is best for the students and school, but this board's responsibilities can affect a family's ability to stay in this community or even move into the community. He felt that the administration is looking to do more of what it has in the past which is to introduce new positions requiring more money. The finance committee was presented with a proposal to hire 5 new positions at a cost of approximately \$400,000. These are not teacher positions, or boots on the ground positions, but rather SU director/coordinator positions.

He noted that 2 of the goals of Act 46 were to save money and provide more educational opportunities. He felt that these 5 positions did not accomplish either goal. He felt that it is

disingenuous for the superintendent to lecture this board because they are not supporting her initiatives. He felt that the administration's role is to act on the priorities of the board, not the other way around. He felt that the superintendent should spend her time better managing her more than adequate resources to address the needs of the district. Instead of bringing on more positions and spending more money, he would like the SU to get creative and use those resources more effectively and efficiently. He felt that the reality is that the taxpayers of these small towns cannot afford the path that the SU is on and he felt that it is time the administration realized this and changed the way they do business.

He asked for the SU to address the needs more effectively and efficiently.

Mr. McBride felt that the future years will cause more issues, including Act 173 and the cost of special education. He felt that the idea is that the board can get creative and spend less money. This doesn't have anything to do with this board or the superintendent. He also noted that as enrollment declines, the cost per student will increase if they leave the staffing the same. He suggested that this board needs to be creative in their budgeting and staffing. They need to get the costs under control and watch every position that is added, look for ways to consolidate positions, and look for ways to get ahead of the problem.

Ms. Lamphere shared concerns that this board is not collaborating. She is very proud of the work that this board has been doing and grappling with many difficult issues. The board talked about trust and their values include integrity and trust. She is concerned that that conversation was not had with this board. If the assumption is that this board is not collaborating, she would have welcomed a conversation to address this concern. Mr. Alexander echoed what Ms. Lamphere said. He felt that they should not have been quickly blindsided by 4 positions that the administration wanted to add at a 60% cost to this board without notice, while the SU was aware of the priorities of this board. He felt that this board is very collaborative, but they will lose tax payer votes unless they keep close to the per pupil spending. He noted that there are other town tax issues that will affect the tax payers.

Mr. McBride noted that one of the items passed in a motion at a prior meeting that safety lights would be installed outside the library. He questioned the status of the light installation. Ms. Powden advised that she understood that Mr. Beamon was taking care of this. Ms. Beaupre will follow up with that.

#### **C. RVTC Update**

Ms. Perlah advised that the RVTC board met last Wednesday and they have been talking about the health insurance increases. They are also looking into a Pathways grant to help with the VTVLC online learning. There will be a computer giveaway at the upcoming summit. This event is sponsored by BRIC. The RVTC hosted a legislative breakfast in their café. The students prepare the food and serve the food at the café. She advised that the board has been talking about many town employers having difficulty finding workers for their businesses, and they are looking at ways to develop programs to help in this area.

#### **D. TRSU Update**

Mr. Fromberger noted that the general budget discussion has been a "trying" issue for him. He recognized that there are needs that they need to address, but they come at a substantial cost. He advised that they need to be aware that if they proposed a budget that is too high, it will not pass. He advised that this is an annual struggle. He advised that the board members from this board serving on that board will be as cooperative and creative as possible.

Mr. Hance noted that there was very little public participation at the recent meeting at BRHS. He also advised that there seemed to not be much LMH support of the administration's recommendations for new TRSU coordinator positions. There was one member that felt that they needed to do more. He advised that they were in support of the transportation initiatives, but there was discussion about their board being in support of that because it would be a significant cost to them if the costs weren't shared at the SU level. There was discussion about the town of Ludlow no longer providing transportation for the Ludlow students now that BRHS is closing.

## **VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **A. Facilities Committee**

Mr. Alexander noted that the energy audit will begin in the next couple of weeks while school is out. They will be putting electrical meters in the school and will be monitoring all the energy systems and equipment. This will run for 3 months. Mr. McBride thanked the facilities committee for getting this work done for free. Mr. Alexander advised that EEI's intent is that they hope to be the lowest cost bidder, but there is nothing in writing that requires the school to go with them for the energy upgrades.

## **VII. OLD BUSINESS:**

### **A. CTES Library**

Mr. Fromberger advised that several board members toured the CTES library this evening ahead of this meeting. He wanted to be sure that the library board is involved in whatever manner this board employs to be sure that the students are safe. He advised that the administration is still working with the library board to do so collaboratively.

There was discussion about tonight's library board meeting. Mr. McBride noted that he wanted to be sure that everyone on this board understands this library. First the building was built by community funds, not by the town and not by the school. The history is very elaborate. The library used to be down the road, but the community decided to build a new library for the town, but one that the students had easy access to. He noted that the CTES students are there because of these community members. The students will be there if this board allows and their board allows. He advised their mission has always been to have children and adults in the same space safely. He advised that this board needs to ask the library board, not demand. He also noted that when the Act 46 negotiations happened, the school entered into a 99-year lease to the library trust for the land. He advised that the building and the books belong to the library. He advised that their costs are about \$100,000 per year, but this school district is committing about \$2000 to the library. He asked the board to keep that in mind when they ask the library to exclude the public for a portion of the day, it would not be unreasonable for the library board to ask that CTES pay more for that ability. He suggested that they need to be aware that if they ask for things of the library, they may be asked for more back. Ms. Lamphere noted that if it costs this board money for the safety of the students, she is prepared to make that commitment. She advised that these are terrifying times and she is raising children in a time when people are entering schools and murdering children. She felt that this board's obligation is to safeguard the children.

Ms. Russo advised that she sees the students outside playing all the time and felt that the children are vulnerable at those times. She felt that the library will try to make the students safe, but there are other times when the students are vulnerable, not just in the library. She advised that the library is willing to do what it can for the children's safety. Ms. Lamphere agreed that this is a valid point, but children still need to go outside to play. Ms. McNealy advised that the library is one of the least accessible points of entry to the school. There are

many other points that are not manned. Ms. Lamphere noted that there are many ways to get past a human. She felt concern that the library has a key to the school and there are many ways to harden an entry. She advised that she is not advocating for changes, rather just for a partnership to ensure safety and provide enrichment for students.

Mr. White, a trustee of the library board, felt that they were just as concerned with the students as this board is. Up until that time, several teachers have a key to the library. There are many other points of entry to the school. Ms. Caulfield suggested that they shouldn't talk about these various points of vulnerability on TV. Mr. Fromberger advised that this is a public building and they need to be sure that it is open safely to the public, while addressing the vulnerability of the school. He noted that Mr. Beamon has been paying attention to those points of vulnerability. Mr. White advised that in 1990 when money was being raised for the library, people mortgaged their houses to support this library. Ms. McEnaney advised that she was one of the early people who helped to put this together. She suggested that the board should not lose sight of matching adults with children in the community. One of their goals is to build joint relationships. Ms. Caulfield noted that the school has always been the heart and soul of the community, but now there isn't a vote here, this isn't the town shelter, there are no longer adult programs in the evening. All of these things in favor of safety tends to lose the sense of community. Ms. Rieger clarified that this issue was not an active shooter, but it was a community member who wasn't thinking properly who came in after hours. This was effectively a warning about how to deal with this. She noted that there are no signs out front explaining that this is a smoke free environment and a gun-free environment. She felt that signage would have helped in this situation since Vermont is a state where guns can be carried publicly. Ms. Beaupre noted that the librarian is securing signage. Mr. Fromberger suggested that the administration ensure that the signage is in place. Mr. Gross noted that the stresses of physical security and the psychological security are concerning. He felt that if a person has a particular psychosis and wants to target the school, it is a combination of mental illness, and psychosis and the school becoming a focus. He is concerned about a wide swath of the community for whom the school wasn't a pleasant experience, this environment will be even less pleasant and will make this building a bigger focus. He noted that there is a psychological weight to checking into a prison so it is a balance to limit risks while making the school a pleasant place to come. Mr. Fromberger advised that he felt that the administration will work with the library board on these matters. Ms. Lamphere advised that people with psychosis are much more likely to be a victim of a violent crime than the perpetrator of a violent crime. She felt that violence should be treated as violence. She suggested turning the grassroots efforts toward safety and community orientation. Mr. Fromberger noted that the one unthinking act of a community member has caused a lot of hardship for the community. Ms. Powden advised that this situation was not based on one incident but a culmination of 4 situations.

Ms. Powden noted that there have been 4 people of concern on the premises—a gentleman who carries a machete who has accessed the library, and 2 other gentlemen who she was advised that was picking up his children who was aware of a person of concern outside the library and the school building. She noted that this was not about the library, but about keeping the children safe.

## **VIII. ADMINISTRATORS' REPORTS:**

### **A. Superintendent's Report**

Ms. Powden advised that Dave Melnick spoke with school personnel about working with children who have been traumatized. This year there are many students who are taking a graduate class with Mr. Melnick. They presented to the administrative council on working

with traumatized children. They will be offering additional training to the teachers. They discussed secondary trauma, which is the teachers who have been working with the traumatized children and hearing their troubles become traumatized themselves. They are fortunate to have a dedicated staff who will help them improve their practice and support the staff going forward.

She also advised that the administration has a quarterly meeting with the Chester town officials and suggested doing the same in Cavendish. They meet with the Town Clerk, Rec Director, Police Chief, Fire Chief and others. It is a collaborative and informative, though informal meeting. One of the topics discussed is school safety. They have recently been discussing the CRAS training—Citizens Response to Active Shooter.

Ms. Powden noted that the board received Emma Lombard's application for the school nurse (RN) position. She gave some background information on her. Ms. Beaupre advised that she was a CTES student, and is organized, sensible, compassionate and a problem solver. Ms. Powden recommended that the board approve her hire. Mr. McBride questioned if the LPN position has been vacated. Ms. Powden advised that it was. This person would begin on Monday if approved at 20 hours per week. If the budget passes, the plan is to increase the position to 30 hours per week.

Mr. Studin **moved** to approve the superintendent's recommendation to hire Emma Lombard as the RN at CTES pending appropriate reference and background checks. Mr. Alexander seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Powden advised that teacher negotiations have begun with the next meeting on 12/18. They have just recently received information from the arbitrator which will change the budgeting process. Ms. Hammond will address that at the next finance meeting. She also reported that they are in compliance with the AOE's recommendations and federal and state laws. There have also been no community parent concerns brought to her. Ms. Powden reminded the board of the early literacy priority and STEAM priority. At the last finance meeting the finance committee requested that the administration make cuts to the budget while protecting their priorities. She suggested that this might not be the right time while they are looking to build up the STEAM program.

She also followed up on the comments at the TRSU board. She intended to talk to this board about those comments. At a prior TRSU board meeting it was determined that she would bring her concerns to the TRSU board first. She acknowledged that she had brought those concerns to the TRSU board that they had lost the spirit of collaboration. She felt that the co-chairs would meet together and share knowledge about the whole SU. She was lamenting that loss. She did not intend to say that this board does not collaborate, but rather that she missed the collaboration between the two boards. She discussed the budgeting plan, noting the positions recommended: Early Literacy Coordinator, Health Educator, STEAM Coordinator, SU Transportation Director, SU Food Service Director. She felt that these positions were not administrator positions, but rather positions that will help address issues system wide. She welcomed the collaboration, but it is important that she speak with the TRSU board first about her concerns since they are her employer.

Mr. Wheelock noted that Ms. DesLauriers and Mr. Herbst had a lot of experience and historical knowledge and that will be tough to overcome their loss. Ms. Powden advised that they can get back there, it just requires the will and collaboration. Mr. McBride noted that those were special people and this board has the ability to get back there. Ms. Powden

wondered if that format was more effective. The SU work was more valued. Mr. Fromberger noted that when Mr. Herbst and Ms. DesLauriers were co-chairs, there were 36 members of the SU board. They had an executive committee of about 10 members, so co-chairs were somewhat necessary. With the Act 46 merger, there are only 6 SU board members, so co-chairs may no longer be necessary. Mr. McBride noted that new people may not have the historical knowledge, but they bring new life, energy and ideas to the board. Ms. Lamphere felt that there is some work to do. She noted that they identified trust as an issue, but it feels that the trust is getting worse. She questioned what the board is going to do to improve the working relationship. Ms. Powden welcomed the opportunity to have someone facilitate a conversation between the board and the administration. Ms. Lamphere suggested someone who hasn't worked with the SU before.

Ms. Powden noted that after the administration gave their wish list to the TRSU board, the board asked the administration to set their priorities. Their priorities are the early literacy coordinator. Mr. McBride questioned if there is an organizational chart of the proposed positions. Ms. Powden advised that there is an organization chart of the current staff. There was discussion about the proposed position not being administrative because they won't be expected to have an administrative license. This person would be coaching and teaching. She advised that there has been some turnover in the early grades, therefore when the teachers are new, they aren't necessarily as effective in teaching literacy.

Ms. Hammond noted that they received a letter from Ms. Ceglowski regarding health insurance. She advised that the biggest change is that everyone will have an HRA, rather than an HSA. She described the differences between the plans. With the new plan, the district is responsible for the first dollar. Currently the employee has to pay the first \$400, \$800, \$1200 of the out of pocket expenses. With the new plan, the district will pay the first \$4200. Part of the reason to go to the high deductible plans was to have the employee be selective with their health care. That means that the exposure is \$296,700 under the health insurance for the current employees (as opposed to approximately \$77,000 currently). This was decided between the state board and the NEA by an arbitrator. Ms. Hammond advised that the employees' contribution will stay at 86/14 split this next year, moving 2% shift per year to 80/20. Ms. Hammond advised that this means that they should add more to the Health Reserve. She felt that they would have to build to it. She noted that she budgets 65% because not everyone will max out. However, with this change from the arbitrator, she feels that she should budget more. This change will begin January 1, 2021, so it will begin halfway through the budget they are currently proposing.

Ms. Huntley clarified how much she is planning to put in the budget. Ms. Hammond advised that she plans to put in 75% of the exposure since it will likely get used more. Mr. McBride noted that when they negotiate, they generally talk about salary, but not about the health insurance costs. Sometimes if a teacher gets a 2% salary raise, there is actually a 12% increase when health insurance is taken into account. He asked if there is a way to include this in the negotiations process. Ms. Powden advised that this is called the "total compensation package" and it is discussed in negotiations. She advised that Mr. Leopold has also brought this discussion up regarding negotiations.

The principals' reports were emailed to the board. Mr. McBride questioned the berm on the edge of the sidewalk and road. He felt it is a safety issue for the parents and students. Either the parent needs to let their child out on the driveway or climb the snow berm. He approached the town manager who directed him to Ms. Beaupre's team. He asked if she could help find the right person to address that issue. Ms. Beaupre noted that the staff has discussed this. As

such she decided that she is going to hire a plow service because the town is not willing to do that. The service will have the area plowed by 6:15 a.m. Mr. Beamon will take care of salting the sidewalk that the town plows. She advised that the school has a snowblower, not a plow. She advised Mr. Beamon is busy salting and sanding the entire parking and play lots each morning after the snow. She also advised that each teacher has their own bucket of sand outside their doors. Mr. McBride felt that Ms. Beaupre doesn't have the right people or tools to take care of this safety issue. He felt that she should have the support to take care of this issue. Mr. Fromberger asked the administration to deal with this issue. Ms. Beaupre advised that this is the only school in the district without a plow. Mr. Fromberger thanked the principals for their reports.

Ms. Beaupre noted that at the last finance committee meeting, when they had been discussing the parking lot and the go-bags, she went to a crowd funding source page and asked for the go-bag supplies. The bill came to \$828. The Cavendish Volunteer Fire Department will be paying for the whole thing. The board thanked the fire department.

## **IX. NEW BUSINESS:**

### **A. Ludlow Electric Department Transformer**

Ms. Hammond reported that the transformer cost \$18,850 to replace. She took that expense out of the capital reserve fund. The electrician was paid out of the general fund. She thanked Ludlow Electric for their work. The transformer would have taken 10-12 weeks to get here but they were able to use one that they had on hand. Mr. Cook worked on this from 8:30-2:30am. If they had to wait for the generator, it would have cost \$14,000 per week for the generator. Mr. Fromberger thanked Mr. Parah and Mr. Alexander for their work on securing the additional transformer and ensuring that they didn't miss any school. Ms. Fierman noted that most of the staff is unaware of this work. She advised that many people would have stopped after the first few calls in order to get the problem fixed at an incredible savings. She noted that this was above and beyond normal work. Mr. Parah noted that he and Mr. Alexander had talked with Ludlow Electric and it was a collaborative effort that they were able to coordinate between GMP and arrive at a timely manner. There was no insurance that covers this transformer. There was discussion about the old transformers containing PCB's, but this one did not.

### **B. Health Education Requirements**

Ms. Powden noted that this topic came up at the finance committee meeting. She advised that Act 1 includes the state wide approach to prevent child sexual abuse. Their role is to provide health education to provide children with strategies to stay safe. They provide this education K-12. Their goal is to provide it consistently through all schools. Sometimes it is guidance counselors and other times it is classroom teachers teaching it.

### **C. Transportation Initiative**

Ms. Powden advised that they are no longer working toward an SU-wide transportation coordinator at this time. LMH is going to provide their own transportation coordinator.

## **X. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Mr. Cunningham questioned today's AOE announcement about Lexile Scores and what is the impact on the TRSU. Ms. Powden advised that the Lexile is an important measurement, but she will have to address this and research it further. Mr. Cunningham noted that he spoke with Tom Bock and suggested that they take a moratorium on education initiatives. He noted that they are advising that

the Lexile change should not cost the schools money. Ms. Fierman advised that they will have to research it further before making comment.

**XI. NEXT MEETING AND AGENDA ITEMS:**

The next meeting will be Thursday, January 16, 2020 at GMUHS at 6:00 p.m. There was discussion about whether this would be the drop-dead on the budget. Ms. Powden advised that the booklets should go out to the publisher on January 20.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Alexander **moved** to adjourn at 7:42 p.m. Mr. Studin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson  
Board Recording Secretary