

TRSU BOARD

Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 2, 2020

6:00 p.m.

Zoom Access

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Board: Paul Orzechowski, Joe Fromberger, Rick Alexander, Jeff Hance, Dan Buckley, Dave Venter

Staff: Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Lauren Fierman, Karen Trimboli, Michael Ripley, Jenn Harper, Mary Barton, Todd Parah, Mary Moeykens, Linda Waite, Craig Hutt Vater

Other Board Members: Wayne Wheelock (A)

Public: Shawn Cunningham, Devin Brown, Jenna Laslow, Eric Chatterjee, Amber Wilson (VTel)

Ms. Powden called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. She invited those present to introduce themselves.

II. REORGANIZING THE BOARD:

A. Elect Chair

Mr. Fromberger **nominated** Mr. Orzechowski as chair. There were no other nominations. Mr. Orzechowski was elected with no opposition.

B. Elect Vice Chair

Mr. Alexander **nominated** Mr. Fromberger as vice chair. There were no other nominations. Mr. Fromberger was elected with no opposition.

C. Elect Board Clerk

Mr. Fromberger advised that the GM board has a vacancy and Mr. Marin has not yet been appointed to the GM board. Mr. Fromberger **nominated** Mr. Buckley as the clerk. There were no other nominations. Mr. Buckley was elected with no opposition.

D. Adopt Code of Ethics Agreement

There was discussion about the Code of Ethics agreement having been included in the electronic packet. Mr. Fromberger **moved** that the members adopt the school board code of ethics. He noted that the members have adopted a similar code at meeting. Mr. Alexander seconded, and the motion carried without opposition.

III. APPROVE AGENDA:

Mr. Fromberger **moved** to approve the agenda with addition of discussion of fiscal year 21-22 budget year discussion under New Business. There was discussion about the executive session coming under Old Business, Superintendent Search under V.S.A Title 313 (a)(3). The motion to approve the agenda as amended carried unanimously.

IV. APPROVE MINUTES:

A. February 13, 2020 Regular Meeting

Mr. Fromberger **moved** to approve the minutes from the February 13, 2020 meeting. Mr. Alexander seconded. The motion carried with no opposition.

V. APPOINTMENTS:

A. Warrant Signer

Mr. Orzechowski discussed how the warrants had been signed up to now with remote access. Mr. Venter **moved** to appoint Mr. Orzechowski as the warrant signer and Mr. Buckley as the alternate. Ms. Hammond noted that she hopes that the electronic signature will be temporary, but it is on the agenda for discussion later in the meeting. There was discussion that this is a small board and operates under Roberts' Rules for Small Boards. The motion carried without opposition.

B. Set Regular Meeting Date, Time & Location

There was discussion about the meeting being held on the first Thursday of every month at 6:00 p.m. rotating between the schools. Mr. Fromberger noted that currently they are not physically meeting at a location. Mr. Fromberger **moved** to continue meeting on the first Thursday of the month at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom or other electronic means and defer the physical location portion until such time as the group can meet together physically. Mr. Alexander seconded the motion carried without opposition.

C. Recording Secretary

Mr. Hance **moved** to appoint Amber Wilson as the recording secretary. Mr. Alexander seconded and the motion carried without opposition.

VI. FINANCIAL:

A. Bank Selection

Ms. Hammond reported that the SU currently uses Community Bank and she recommends continuing with them. Mr. Alexander **moved** to continue using Community Bank as the bank for the SU. Mr. Buckley seconded and the motion carried with no opposition.

VII. NEWSPAPER OF RECORD:

Ms. Powden reported that the Vermont Journal is the newspaper of record currently. She noted that the GM board asked to revisit the quote from them since they offered the GM board a rate higher than the town of Chester (\$12 per column inch). The VT Journal agreed to do the same rate for the TRSU and the two school districts in the SU. Mr. Fromberger **moved** to appoint the Vermont Journal as the Newspaper of Record for \$12 per column inch. Mr. Venter seconded and the motion carried without opposition.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. Orzechowski noted that it was nice that there was so much participation in the meeting. He invited the public to speak if they wanted.

IX. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Ms. Powden reported that recently Governor Scott issued an executive order to secure child care of essential employees and continue to provide education and food for its students. She noted that all of the educators and support staff and administration have been working hard to launch this task successfully. She is proud of each and every employee and they have done their best toward this effort. They are providing food and education. They are working through the child care piece.

Ms. Powden advised that she has been researching the pandemic of the early 1900's and education didn't continue during that time. That is due to the technology and there is an expectation to provide distance education for all the students. It has been a significant change in how education is provided.

Ms. Powden advised that this period of time is a maintenance of education while the teachers and students become familiar with the technology and the different methods of delivering education. The goal is to keep the students at the level where they were before school closed. Soon there will be additional instruction under a continuity of learning plan, with the expectation that students will make academic gains. There are school counselors and school-based clinicians. She advised that the schools are continuing to provide all the services they need to for the students.

She recognized her senior management team for their work and invited questions of them. Mr. Venter noted that the parents are also having some challenges in keeping the kids at the computer to learn. Ms. Powden noted that some parents have lost their jobs and others are working from home and still others are out at work so this may be a challenge for the families. They are trying to be very mindful of the families and provide necessary supports.

There was discussion about the help that VTel is providing to the TRSU to get internet to students who don't have internet service currently, and they are able to reach over 70% of those students. Ms. Baker advised that VTel is partnering with TRSU to provide the internet services to the TRSU not the individuals, an important distinction. There is a large backorder of hotspots and she signed up TRSU as a donor of the digital wish project. This will get them 10 hotspots that hope to help get the areas that are unserved connected. This program is being provided by Mobile Beacon, which is an educational broadband service. There was discussion about how the devices would be deployed and what the SU would be responsible for. Ms. Baker discussed the deployment of devices for the k-6 students and how the staff worked very hard to get the devices ready in under 24 hours. She noted that most of the curriculum is cloud based. Mr. Alexander questioned if VTel was providing the internet at a reduced cost. Ms. Wilson advised that VTel is providing the internet service at no charge through the remainder of the current school year, however the devices necessary for the service are on loan, meaning that there is some exposure to the SU if the devices are not returned in good cosmetic and working order as required. There was discussion about how deployment would work. Ms. Wilson advised that she and Ms. Baker are working out the finer details on this. Ms. Baker advised that she is also working on a technology agreement for the students and families to sign for this deployment.

Mr. Hance questioned why buses are running. Ms. Powden advised that they are delivering food where needed on the bus routes.

Ms. Powden noted that they are still preparing for services next year and Ms. Barton has been leading a search for a special educator for the autism program and an SLP. She also welcomed Ms. Fierman as the superintendent finalist. She invited her to speak. Ms. Fierman noted that she was thrilled to be a finalist for this position. She noted that she has been hear a little less than two years but is very excited to be a member of this community. She is proud of the work that everyone has done.

X. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Superintendent Search

Mr. Buckley reported how the search committee worked through the 13 resumes and whittled it down to 4 and then interviewed all 4 in person. They then whittled that down to 3 and conducted zoom interviews and came to the conclusion that Ms. Fierman was the candidate to recommend to the board for interview.

XI. NEW BUSINESS:

A. School Dismissal Updates

Ms. Powden noted that her updates were given under the superintendent report. Mr. Buckley questioned how the individual districts are going to come out with their graduation. Ms.

Powden noted that they have to work within state guidelines. There was discussion about the seniors being consulted about how they wanted graduation to be handled when it can be, and they and their parents are appreciative of that consideration. There was discussion about how spring break will be handled and can the students still go to school. Ms. Powden advised that the break is very necessary, because all of the employees have been very stressed. She is asking the employees to be “all in” and give their all to the school, so they need that break. There was discussion about how many school days they will have to complete and they will work with the AOE on these guidelines. Food service will continue to be provided during that time. There was discussion about the maintenance crew normally working over April break and the majority of them wanting to continue with business as usual.

B. Authorization of Electronic Warrant Approval

Ms. Hammond noted that she had spoken with the auditor regarding electronic warrant approval. They had said it was ok as long as there was a policy. That had taken a back burner up to now. She asked for temporary approval of electronic approval for the warrants. Mr. Buckley noted that with the central office closed the only other way would be for someone to leave the warrants on the porch at the SU and that isn't the best practice. Mr. Fromberger supported the practice. Mr. Fromberger **moved** to approve the authorization of electronic warrant approval. Mr. Buckley seconded and the motion carried without opposition.

C. Fiscal Year 21-22 Discussion

Mr. Venter noted that there may be a shortfall with the state and the inability to collect taxes currently. He noted his concern with the schools having funding. Ms. Hammond noted that she is currently coding certain expenses differently so that if there is any reimbursement available, they will be able to quickly find the information. Ms. Hammond acknowledged the concern and noted that she is watching it. There was discussion about how the school receives its money from the state, typically through three payments per year.

Ms. Powden advised that she was discussing this with Dan French this afternoon at their weekly superintendent meeting. She is hopeful that the money that will come into the state from the feds will cover these expenses. Mr. Fromberger noted that the education fund will be short by about \$60million based on the most recent reports. Mr. Alexander noted that this is why it is important to start thinking about this for next year. They have started at his work dropping 30% of the budget right now. He suggested that they will likely need to begin starting this process soon with the school districts. There was also discussion about this being a problem for the next budget as well. Mr. Venter noted that many people will have difficulty paying their taxes and the towns will have issues with submitting taxes to the school in that case.

XII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Title I VSA § 313 (a)(3)

Mr. Orzechowski **moved** to enter executive session at 7:02 pm. for the purpose of interviewing the finalist for the Superintendent's position and subsequent conversation regarding the appointment of a public employee inviting Ms. Fierman, Ms. Hammond and Ms. Powden under the provisions of Title I, § 313 (a)(3) Appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee. Mr. Venter seconded. Mr. Orzechowski noted that they are able to stay in the same Zoom link and lock the meeting. Mr. Cunningham noted that the best practice is to leave the public meeting open and then join a second zoom meeting and then return to this one for the open meeting portion. Ms. Fierman suggested creating a waiting room and moving everyone not in the executive session to the waiting room. The motion carried without opposition.

The board returned from executive session at 8:15 p.m. Mr. Orzechowski **moved** to offer Lauren Fierman the position of Superintendent for the Two Rivers Supervisory Union with a 2-year contract with a starting salary of \$127,000, contingent upon Ms. Fierman satisfactorily completing a criminal record and abuse registry checks as required by State law. In addition to the satisfactory completion of criminal record and abuse registry checks, Secretary French of the Agency of Education must approve Ms. Fierman's appointment as the next Superintendent for the Two Rivers Supervisory Union before a contract can be offered. The motion carried without opposition.

XIV. NEXT MEETING:

The next special meeting will be Tuesday, May 7, 2020 at 6:00 p.m., via Zoom.

XV. ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Alexander **moved** to adjourn at 8:45 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary