

Approved Minutes
TOWN OF STRATTON SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Tuesday, November 11, 2020 at 6:00 PM

Present

Board:

Thomas Montemagni
Lorraine Weeks-Newell
Allison Young
Melissa Walker
Kellie D'Elia-Laskin

Administration:

Bill Anton (Superintendent)

Members of the Public:

Alyson Peterson
Marisa Powers
Jessica Marullo
Candie Bernard
Caroline Richards
Abbe Haber
Michael Culver
Stacie Chiodi

Beth Liller
Carol Steiner
Bart Richards
Colleen Palmer
Jessica Baron
Betsy Lahue
Kristine Koppe
Peter Barus (Recorder)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Modifications to agenda

Mr. Anton asked to add executive session on home study impact and residency
Other agenda items shifted for convenience of attendees.

Library:

Ms. Lillerpalmer announced a children's book giveaway for the holidays December 5 1-3 at the Library in Wardsboro (see Appendix for details)

Approve School Board Minutes

It was noted that the draft minutes for June 16 and July 7, and the approved minutes for July 9 and 22, were missing; that the minutes for August 20 had been approved, but not listed as approved.

Ms. Young moved to approve the minutes for June 2, 2020. Second by Ms. Walker. All in favor

The August 4, 2020 meeting had been cancelled for weather. A correction was made, as only Ms. Young and Ms. Weeks-Newell had been present.

Ms. Weeks-Newell moved to approve the minutes for August 4, 2020 as corrected. Second by Mr. Montemagni. All in favor.

Ms. Young moved to approve the minutes for August 5, 2020. Second by Mr. Montemagni. All in favor.

Ms. Young moved to approve the minutes for August 11, 2020. Second by Mr. Montemagni. All in favor.

Ms. Young moved to approve the minutes for September 1, 2020. Second by Mr. Montemagni. All in favor.

Ms. Walker moved to approve the minutes for October 6, 2020. second by Ms. D'Elia-Laskin. All in favor.

There was discussion, that minutes and orders will continue to be kept in binders in the Town Office.

Treasurer's report

Ms. Peterson will schedule a budget meeting December 15 or 17, after confirmation with Ms. Garland, and update the board.

There was discussion about phantom students for next year; SMS cap at 15, anticipating 57; currently at about \$100,000 in tuition account, this year about \$160,000 expected, total surplus about \$260,000; and about payroll information for December, clarification on homestead filing.

Review/Approve order

There was discussion of Northfield/Mt Herman; a SMS student bill, tuitions now at 15; about a reimbursement to a parent to be included on the Order, as Proctor Academy does not accept partial tuition, so the parent had to pay in full, and the amount of the state average was reimbursed to the parent.

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Sign Policies recently adopted.

Policy F13 (Residency) and F16 (Tuition) had been signed.

Report on SMS cap

Mr. Montemagni had met the Headmaster, thanked them for the cap noting the benefit to Stratton, above and beyond what is required; and expressed concerns, that if a legal problem arose about denying acceptance, as has happened before, could the cap be extended; they will discuss with their board; and Mr. Montemagni had expressed great satisfaction with the relationship over the years.

It was noted that the cap is at 15, 7 will graduate this year, leaving 8 open spaces; there was discussion.

Ms. Baron asked for confirmation that students had moved out of town. Ms. Peterson noted that 5 did move. Ms. Baron discussed the possibility of sending inquiries to schools in advance, requesting early notifications; that the time of year would be appropriate. Ms. Haber suggested letting them know what the town is looking at, so they can prepare what they need; a one-pager, showing what the town needs and when; and noted that November is a good time to ask about trends, etc.

Ms. Peterson noted the town had budgeted for 8 phantom students at the secondary rate, 3 at prek; that next year 57 were expected to return, and the potential for \$260,000 in tuition reserves.

Weighting Study

Ms. Baron discussed the Weighting Study, how it was analyzed, state representatives, annual tax on boards, etc.; and asked about impacts on districts, noting that the only other districts impacted negatively were Winhall and Windham; and suggested gathering data on the students and the town to be prepared in the event the Legislature moves it along. There was discussion of data collection methods; confidentiality; what questions to ask.

Mr. Anton commended the Committee for diligent attention to the matter; and had met with Tammy Colby and the superintendents about all these questions; and reported that all data is collected at the state level; the poverty rate is set by statute, derived from HHS; that a town is not able to argue with that by surveying FRL; that the Weighting Study will be a statewide implementation with the Agency of Human Services; that ELL and IEP are from a statewide census; that these are some of the reasons they engaged UVM to do the original study.

Ms. Young asked about the accuracy of the Weighting Study's data. Mr. Anton suggested that the data is not likely to be flawed; that the state had to agree in advance on what to collect. Ms. Haber asked about data sources. Mr. Anton explained that the Study is thoroughly footnoted; that AHS knows how many families are provided assistance; that population density is about how many parcels have people living on them; that it is universal data. Ms. Young noted that the Committee had done what was asked, and wanted the voters to understand it; that the point of the Committee was to find out this information. Mr. Anton noted that he would have done exactly the same, not expecting to find out it was in statute; and cautioned that an alternative approach might be to organize four or five other non-operating districts in similar situations, and focus on the political aspect, as questioning the data in a highly professional study conducted by UVM specialists would probably require expensive expertise, with little chance of success.

Ms. Baron noted that there were other districts that would have a big tax rate increase, but not necessarily a match, being larger, or operating. Ms. Young asked about next steps. Ms. Haber suggested that the board should provide direction on this, that the data probably wouldn't be useful.

Mr. Anton explained that he had learned about this at noon; and suggested that the board direct him to consult Rep. Pajala, and return to the board, the committee, or both. Ms. Peterson suggested finding other communities beyond Windham and Winhall. Mr. Culver asked if the data set (not the data) could be questioned. Mr. Anton suggested that this would be an uphill battle against an esteemed author and Boston, Harvard and Stanford Universities; that in 2017 the thorough undertaking was a huge part of the process; that towns would have to hire an equivalent researcher to challenge the WS. There was discussion about the scope of the Weighting Study, the weights, the impacts, the amount of tax increase involved.

It was decided that Mr. Anton should conduct consultations and the board should continue to talk; that Legislative action is likely in January, and the town should be part of the conversation.

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There was discussion of other states; the weights created in act 60; that the WS included a nationwide survey on weighting; on the possibility of questioning the authors; on how much the town would have to pay to avoid paying more.

Ms. Young will forward communications from Mr. Anton to the Weighting Study Committee.

Review correspondences

- Email from Ms. Peterson;
- Weighting Study correspondence;
- An Inquiry from a lister re: residents not filing homesteads; they are called, all filed, one didn't, one filed in the wrong town accidentally;
- questions to be addressed in Executive Session.

Any other business that may legally come before the board

There was discussion of why the homestead question would require Executive Session. Mr. Anton explained that the board would be receiving legal advice. Concerns were expressed, that the session was held at the end of the meeting; that any business afterwards would be secret until the minutes was available. Mr. Anton explained that legal advice could not be shared; that the attorney's information had come at 7AM, when the agenda was already published.

Ms. Peterson noted that tuition was being withheld from one family pending the outcome, that the school needed to know if they should expect the check or not. Mr. Montemagni explained that this would be known after the Executive Session, and to return to the videoconference at 7:45 to await readmission to the public part of the meeting.

Ms. Powers noted that 18 land lots were sold, and 25 condos.

Executive Session

It was moved and seconded to enter Executive Session at 7:32 PM. All in favor.
The board returned to regular session at 7:53 PM.

The board directed the superintendent to assist in an issue regarding residency and residency policy about homestead declaration; and that the superintendent was authorized to work with the town attorney and some town staff.

Mr. Anton arranged with Ms. Bernard to address the homestead matter in his office Thursday and was so directed and authorized by the Chair.

Adjournment

Ms. Weeks-Newell moved to Adjourn. Second by Ms. Young.
The meeting was Adjourned at 7:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Peter Barus, Recorder, November 13, 2020

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Appendix

Wardsboro Public Library
Children's Holiday Book Giveaway

When: December 5th from 1-3pm

Where: Wardsboro Public Library

Who: Elementary School aged children who reside in either Wardsboro or Stratton

Stop by the Wardsboro Public Library for a walk-thru visit on December 5th from 1-3pm to pick up free goodie bags filled with books to enjoy throughout the winter months! Bags will be organized and designed by approximate grade reading level. There are a limited number of bags, and it will be first come first serve.

Safety: Access to the library will be monitored and controlled to one family at a time. Masks must be worn to enter the building. Anyone who would still like a bag, but chooses not to enter the building will certainly be accommodated.

Additional questions, please reach out to Beth Liller, Wardsboro Public Library Director at wpldirector.bethliller@gmail.com

Coral Steiner