

Fairfield Board of Education
Ad Hoc Committee on Operational Effectiveness
Thursday, October 12, 2017

Minutes (Draft)

The initial meeting was called to order at 7:03pm by temporary chair Philip Dwyer. The committee members introduced themselves and stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendance: Chris Dewitt, Caroline Donnelly, Philip Dwyer, William Gerber, Zach McKay, Trisha Pytko, Frank Sahagian, Carolyn Trabuco. Absent were: Nick Aysseh, Steven Giglio, Kevin Kiley

Review Committee Commission Statement: The Board of Education approved the commission statement at their September 26, 2017 meeting. BoE chair Philip Dwyer highlighted aspects of the statement including:

- The Ad Hoc Committee will report its findings, including recommendations to the full BoE. The Ad Hoc Committee is charged with collating factual information to inform and assist the BoE with decision making. They are free to issue specific recommendations or to provide information that will form the basis for discussing the pros and cons of an issue.
- Although the BoE goal is listed under facilities in the 2017-18 District Priorities, the Ad Hoc Committee can look at issues related to staffing, financing, facility utilization and program services.
- The BoE anticipates the Ad Hoc Committee may present information in three phases including ideas to impact the 2018-19 budget; ideas to be implemented in the 2019-21 period and finally ideas that may be implemented after 2021 due to the length of time required to take action.
- The committee is dissolved upon issuing a final report.

Freedom of Information Act: The Ad Hoc Committee is governed under the rules of the FOIA. Chairman Dwyer highlighted some and encouraged members to get further information if they required.

- Meetings must be noticed at least 24 hours in advance to the Town Clerk but the BoE generally follows the practice of posting the meeting five (5) days in advance
- Minutes must be taken and posted on the BoE web site and with the Town Clerk. The BoE Chair will issue the first set of minutes, the BoE Secretary will issue the October 24th Joint meeting minutes. Thereafter, the committee will have to issue minutes in a form acceptable to Roberts Rules of Order and the committee.
- Emails are subject to public disclosure and primary documents reviewed by the Committee will be posted to the BoE website.
- All business must be done in public. Committee members may not caucus or communicate outside of meetings on committee topics. Conversations can be held with a minority of members, but not a majority of members.

Milone and MacBroom Scope of Work: The Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Toni Jones, distributed a sheet describing the scope of work of this consulting group. It is expected they will present a report at the joint meeting on October 24th. As further described on the handout, they have three tasks: Provide 10 year enrollment projections; Provide analysis related to Facility Utilization and Examine options of reconfiguration. The committee asked:

- Will this include an analysis of the feeder pattern from elementary to middle and high school. Dr. Jones said not specifically.
- Can the report take a “look back” as past trends in our school district
- Will they report on class size policy. No, that is a local decision and the Ad Hoc Committee is free to discuss and comment on class size.

Brainstorming topics for future consideration: The BoE Chair encouraged members to brainstorm topics for future consideration and invited Frank Sahagian to lead off the discussion. Committee members followed with their own ideas. The topics presented included:

1. Mr. Sahagian presented a handout with appendixes with the proposed topics including:
 - a. Consolidating facilities to provide for 10 elementary schools, 3 middle schools and one high school.
 - b. Grade re-configuration, with perhaps moving the 6th grade back to elementary schools
 - c. Revert back to curriculum coordinators or Department Heads and eliminate central office curriculum leaders.
 - d. Eliminate liaison positions (Mr. Sahagian noted he holds one such position)
 - e. Dramatically simplify the evaluation system for teachers
 - f. Restructure special education to separate compliance functions from delivery of services
 - g. Eliminate the House Plan at the high schools.
 - h. Eliminate as many textbooks as possible and replace with Chrome Books.
 - i. Take more advantage of technology (Ms. Donnelly supported this idea)
 - j. Review the various technology licenses that are held to see if they are still being used
 - k. Go to Pay for Play for extra-curricular activities. Encourage formation of Booster Clubs.
 - l. Engage in more centralized purchasing
 - m. Use more in house expertise for Professional Development. Ms. Donnelly supported the idea that time spent in meetings is time teachers cannot work with students.
2. Mr. Dewitt suggested:
 - a. Look for common attributes between town and BoE to consolidate administrative tasks
3. Ms. Trabuco suggested:
 - a. Review of Town debt service policies to see what capital costs can realistically be considered today to achieve any long term operational savings.
 - b. Look at the train schedule to see what future impact that will make on town population and enrollment projections.
 - c. Explore the “arbitrage” value of home prices between Fairfield and Westport

- d. Recognize that the credit risks that created the most recent recession has only happened three times and thus this current economic cycle may not repeat itself.
 - e. Recognize that it costs more to educate a high school student than an elementary school student and that any cost savings we achieve at the lower levels due to enrollment declines will likely be used in supporting the current “bulge” in middle and high school populations.
 - f. Look at state rules and mandates for those that have higher cost than benefit. Mr. Gerber also agreed with this idea of looking at state issues and pushing back on certain mandates.
4. Mr. Gerber suggested:
- a. We should consider the history of closing schools in Fairfield due to short term enrollment declines that only resulted in costly re-opening of schools within a relatively short time period.
 - b. Do any metrics exist for the efficiency and effectiveness of schools of various sizes? What is standard deviation for elementary schools of 1,000 vs. the Fairfield target which has been a 504 enrollment building capacity?
 - c. He hoped the committee would establish benchmarks against which decisions will be made.
 - d. He encouraged the committee to bring facts and research to the meetings, not just anecdotal information.
 - e. He encouraged the group not to take too much time debating long standing policies about class size or other topics and to focus on realistic new ideas.
5. Ms. Donnelly suggested:
- a. Studying one high school is an option, but given school security concerns she questioned the ability to supervise such a large open campus.
 - b. Suggested being able to receive school credit for out of school activities such as school sports which should count for physical education credits.
 - c. Two other suggestions which were noted above.
6. Ms. Pytko suggested:
- a. The committee should initially focus on the first task and that is ideas that may help in forming the 2018-19 budget.

The Committee and the BoE will continue surfacing topics to be studied at the joint BoE/Ad Hoc Committee meeting on October 24th. They should review all ideas suggested and then agree on those areas to be focused on at their November meeting. However, the committee is free to explore any additional ideas if they are surfaced at a later date.

Meeting schedule and membership: Chairman Dwyer indicated that some groups did not want to suggest committee members until after the November election. For the same reason the BoE members were appointed to ensure the committee could start but that they should expect some changes in BoE members following the November election. At large members, up to maximum committee of 15

members, may be added after a review of their credentials. The Committee will be chaired by one of the three permanent BoE members and that vote will take place in November.

Written communication: Chairman Dwyer reminded the group that the committee is required to do its business in public but is not required to take public comment in any specific form. The committee is a working group and thus may want to consider whether public comment is taken in written form, public comment periods at each meeting or public comment on the report prior to its adoption. The committee should consider how they wished to accomplish public input at their November meeting.

Good of the order: The chair asked for any final comments.

Adjournment: With no further business the committee adjourned at 8:52pm

Respectfully submitted

Philip Dwyer

Temporary Chair and Secretary