

**SOUHEGAN SCHOOL BOARD  
FINAL MINUTES  
January 5, 2010**

Chairman Coughlan called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Present**

Souhegan School Board: Chairman Steve Coughlan, Vice Chair Jeanne Ludt, Mary Lou Mullens, Christine Janson, Pamela Coughlin, Dana Redmond, and Dan Foley.

Administrative Team: Dr. Mary Jennings, Jim Bosman, Elizabeth Shankel, Colleen Meaney, and Bob Thompson.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

Chairman Coughlan called for announcements and heard none.

Chairman Coughlan called for public comment and heard none.

**A. Charge for Community Council Security Committee**

Mr. Coughlan explained that he wrote up a draft charge for the Community Council Security Committee in order to start the conversation and Dr. Jennings also submitted a proposal to the Board.

Ms. Ludt noted that in that in 2006 there was a Safety Committee that included Community Council parents, the Dean of Students, the Chief of Police, and several community members. She noted that the goals then were to make recommendations regarding adjustments to the facilities and practices to increase student and staff safety.

Mr. Coughlan noted that he was trying to broaden the scope to include all the users of the building, not just the students and staff.

In response to a question from Mr. Redmond, Ms. Ludt explained that in 2006 a report was produced and items that did not cost money were addressed and a punch list of items still remained.

Ms. Coughlin stated that she wants to have the Community Council deal with not only security cameras but all security issues. Ms. Mullens agreed.

Mr. Redmond expressed concern regarding the number of incidents which were brought to the Board's attention during public time at the last meeting.

Mr. Thompson noted that there is some discrepancy between the school's

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**ATTENDANCE**

**I. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**II. PUBLIC TIME**

**III. ACTION ITEMS**

information and the police's information due to the way items are recorded.

Mr. Foley questioned whether the Board wanted to tell Community Council what their report should look like or whether they wanted Community Council members to bring a proposal back to the Board, for instance the Board could request a comparison to similar schools with security cameras and their crime rates. He also noted that he would like them to look at a whole security plan, for instance by noting how security cameras will change the process at the school and including cost, maintenance, responsibilities, and legal ramifications.

Mr. Coughlan noted that he would like to charge Community Council with a high level discussion and leave the details to the administration.

Ms. Ludt stated that she thinks it might be appropriate to give Community Council a list of questions that the Board would like to see answered and, Mr. Foley added, a list of items the Board does not expect them to task themselves with.

Ms. Mullens questioned whether the Board should first consider how the group is going to be organized and who is going to be on the committee.

Mr. Coughlan explained that he was planning on giving the charge to Community Council and letting them be responsible for how they want to make the group broad reaching. He further explained that he does not want to tell the Council how to do it but rather wants to give them a broad charge.

Dr. Jennings stated that this is a good opportunity to do a needs assessment and educate the public as to what the real issues are regarding safety and security and as to what systems are already in place.

In response to a question from Ms. Ludt, Mr. Thompson explained that the person who did the 2006 assessment has re-evaluated the facility based on the original report and has noted where progress has been made.

Mr. Bosman suggested that perhaps the Board could present a question to Community Council, such as in what ways can safety and security at the High School be improved, and let them decide how to grapple with the issue.

In response to a question from Mr. Coughlan, Mr. Bosman stated that the Board members that sit on the Council could inform the Board as to what items Community Council has decided to investigate and communication could continue via the Board's representatives. He also noted that he thinks it

is important to allow the Council to determine what they are willing and able to investigate in the realm of safety and security.

Mr. Redmond also suggested that liability could be included in the investigation, and Ms. Shankel suggested that Community Council could use the Local Government Center as a resource.

In response to Mr. Bosman's suggestion, Mr. Coughlan stated that he wants to have a more engaged conversation and he would like to have the Council talk to the Board.

Ms. Coughlin stated that she likes the idea of the essential question and thinks that the Board could add a few specifics and get a report once a month at night so that more of the public is exposed to it.

In response to a question from Mr. Foley as to whether the people doing the facility needs assessment could make security a priority in their schedule, Ms. Ludt stated that they are in the process of that assessment now and they have met and gotten concerns from the public which they are evaluating.

In response to a question from Ms. Ludt, Justin, from Community Council stated that the essential question is a good idea along with a list of questions and a brief overview of what the Board wants. He also noted that it would be easy to organize a committee for this issue.

Will, from Community Council, stated that most of the concerns can be divided into four categories and he suggested that the Council could divide up and send groups off to complete different tasks and come back to the larger group with reports and then they could draft a recommendation through the essential question.

Dr. Jennings also suggested that Community Council post their meetings.

Will questioned whether there was a way to post on the SAU Board and stated that room 126 and 127 are not great locations for public meetings and suggested that another location may want to be considered.

Marilyn Peterman questioned if the Council could engage the communities of Amherst and Mont Vernon and suggested holding a public hearing on the issue, near the end of the process, so the general public can participate in the discussion.

Ms. Ludt noted that Community Council currently holds one evening

meeting a month.

Ms. Coughlin suggested that a Mont Vernon Police representative be added to the list of invited committee members.

Mr. Coughlan noted that the only reason he did not include a Mont Vernon Police representative originally is because Amherst has jurisdiction over anything that happens at the school.

Ms. Janson stated that this is a good opportunity to show the community what Community Council is and to let them shine.

Ms. Ludt noted that the outcome may not be different this time than it was last time.

Mr. Coughlan stated that if the process is open and everyone is involved then he will be happy with the outcome no matter what it is.

In response to a question from Ms. Coughlin, Will stated that the proposed deadline of April 10th is good.

In response to a question from Mr. Foley, Mr. Coughlan confirmed that parents from both Amherst and Mont Vernon should be involved in the process.

## **B. FY11 Proposed Budget**

### **1. Proposals: Communications/Grant Writer**

Ms. Ludt submitted a proposal to hire a communication coordinator to the Board and explained that originally she had proposed a grant writer also but she thought it would be cleaner to suggest just a communications coordinator. She submitted a job description to the Board that included hours, salary, and qualifications and noted that her thought is to have the bus transportation fee offset the cost so there is no budgetary impact.

Ms. Coughlin stated that she cannot support the proposal as she would rather keep teachers if there are extra funds, but in the future she may be able to support the proposal.

Mr. Coughlan noted that the offsetting revenue would make no effect on the tax rate but would increase the budget.

Ms. Ludt stated that she thinks that this position could give the community clarity as to what goes on at the school and might help the Board gain

support for the budget.

Mr. Coughlan stated that he agrees with the concept of better communication but he is having trouble at this point with cost, however he noted that doing it the way they have been, the free way, is not working for the school.

Mr. Foley stated that he agreed with the concept but he is not sure it is the right time to implement a new position.

Mr. Redmond stated that he feels the need to increase communication but noted that there may be other ways to accomplish this. He stated that the Board needs to be creative in approaching the issue and adding a person right now would not be appropriate.

Mr. Coughlan stated that perhaps the solution is next year to look at doing this as a stipend position in the current stipend structure which would be less expensive. He further explained that the Board may not get all the hours as originally proposed but they may be able to get a dedicated person doing good work which may give the Board a basis as to whether it is an effective idea.

Ms. Janson stated that she liked the idea of having the position but thinks it may not be the right time to pay someone. She stated that she does not think the district does a good job communicating and thinks it may be possible to find a volunteer public relations person for the immediate future.

Ms. Peterman stated that she agrees with the need to communicate better but questioned what other schools are doing including who they have hired, whether it is a staff position, and how much they are getting paid. She also agreed that the district may be able to find a volunteer right now.

Ms. Ludt stated that she agrees that the district needs to see what other schools do but she also thinks that part of the problem is that Souhegan is unique in that it is a member of the Coalition for Essential Schools and has a philosophy that is unique. She further explained that since the community doesn't always understand the philosophy it is important to get that information out; other schools may not have that need to explain their philosophy, but there is a little more pressure on Souhegan to communicate than at other schools.

Ms. Silva noted that there is a book written about the school and she feels that it should be given to all 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents as it documents the

philosophies of the school. She further noted that it is in the district's best interest to use that document in a more efficient way.

A member of the Finance Committee stated that she likes the idea of the communication position but she wondered if the district is missing a resource by not using the alumni of the school.

Ms. Mullens stated that she liked the idea but she thinks that if the Board wanted to make communication a priority they could use the resources they already have better and more creatively, for instance through Community Council.

Mary, from the Finance Committee agreed with Ms. Silva, explaining that she has a copy of the book about Souhegan and she has shared it with everyone and she thinks giving it to every 8<sup>th</sup> grade parent would be wonderful.

Mr. Foley agreed that it would be great to hear from the alumni.

Seeing that the majority of the Board was not in favor of the position Chairman Coughlan closed the discussion.

## 2. Revenues: Bus Fees

Mr. Coughlan explained that at the last meeting Ms. Shankel made a proposal regarding bus fees and documentation was included in the Board's packets.

**A MOTION was made by Mr. Redmond and SECONDED by Mr. Foley to approve the implementation of a bus user fee.**

In response to a question from Ms. Ludt, Ms. Shankel explained that if the bus pass system were implemented there wouldn't be students on the bus who do not belong there as only Souhegan students will be able to get on the bus. She noted that non Souhegan students have gotten on the bus in the past.

Dr. Jennings noted that the administration would also know, in the case of an emergency, who was on the bus.

Ms. Shankel stated that the administration does know that information with the elementary and Middle School busses.

In response to a question from Ms. Coughlin, Ms. Shankel explained that almost half of the student population (400 students) never step foot on the

bus.

Ms. Mullens expressed concern that students will miss school because of transportation issues and also that there will be an issue because they are only charging High School students.

In response to a question from Ms. Mullens, Ms. Shankel explained that the optimization was done and that one bus was removed but the busses are still routed to pick up 400 students that never ride the bus. She stated that if the Board is concerned about the fee perhaps they could lower the parking fee by \$25 and the difference would still allow the district to save money in future years. She explained that she thinks that if they offer a lower bus fee then everyone will buy a bus pass and the administration will not be able to optimize the routes as well.

Mr. Redmond stated that the Board needs to understand that transportation is a large contract within the district that they have been trying to get a handle on for years and this is a way to get the data that is necessary to make it an efficient contract. He stated that he believes that the district is paying way too much for transportation at the High School level.

In response to a question from Ms. Ludt, Ms. Shankel explained that there would be a cutoff date during July for every year after the first year. She explained that the first year the cutoff would not be necessary but the district will not see the full optimization until year two of the bus passes.

Ms. Janson stated that she feels like she gets nickeled and dimed, as a parent, with multiple fees.

Ms. Mullens stated that she feels good about reducing the parking fee but she is still concerned about not allowing students who do not have a pass on the bus because things come up and they don't always have a ride to school. She stated that she is not comfortable with kids missing school due to transportation issues.

Ms. Meaney suggested offering a less expensive emergency pass.

In response to a question from Mr. Thompson, Ms. Shankel stated that the administration will need to make a contingency plan for students whose parking privileges have been revoked.

Mr. Coughlan explained that every family is going to need a contingency

plan and if the family's contingency plan is the bus then they will buy the pass but if the bus is not a contingency plan then they will not buy a pass.

Mary stated that she thinks that since people do not know that bus service is not mandatory the fee will not be palatable.

In response to a question from Mr. Foley, Ms. Shankel stated that a survey would not solve the issue but it is possible that the district offer free bus passes.

Peter, from the Finance Committee, stated that if the pass is free it will lose its value.

Mr. Foley asked that the Board vote on the motion but other members still wanted to debate the issue.

Ms. Coughlin stated that she needs more information.

Ms. Peterman stated that the Finance Committee voted 5 to 1 in favor of implementing the bus passes with the reduction of the parking fees.

**A MOTION was made by Ms. Ludt and SECONDED by Mr. Foley to amend the motion to include a reduction to the parking fees of \$25.**

Mr. Redmond stated that the Board needs to find a way to get the data without the user fee.

**Voting: 1 ayes; motion on the amendment failed.**

**Voting: the original motion failed unanimously.**

### 3. Other

In response to a question from Ms. Ludt, Ms. Shankel stated that the Facilities Expendable Trust Fund has between \$30,000 and \$35,000 in it.

**A MOTION was made by Ms. Coughlin to not hire a new Dean of Faculty but rather put two teachers back into the budget. The motion was NOT SECONDED.**

**A MOTION was made by Mr. Redmond and SECONDED by Ms. Mullens to present the budget, including articles 1 through 5, as proposed at the public hearing.**

**Voting: 7 ayes; motion carried unanimously.**

**A. Preparation for the Public Hearing**

The Board reviewed their presentation for the public hearing.

Mr. Coughlan noted that the public hearing is at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday January 13<sup>th</sup> and will be followed, after a short recess, by a meeting to act on the final budget to be presented. He also noted that there will be no meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

**A MOTION was made by Mr. Redmond and SECONDED by Ms. Coughlin to adjourn the meeting.**

**Voting: 7 ayes; motion carried unanimously.**

Chairman Coughlan declared the meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

**IV. DISCUSSION**

**V. REVIEW OF MEETING/ ADJOURN**