

**SHERMAN BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**SHERMAN, CONNECTICUT 06784**  
**REGULAR MEETING - MARCH 3, 2021**  
**MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM**  
**7:00 PM**

A regular meeting of the Sherman Board of Education was called to order by Mrs. Diotte at 7:03 PM on March 3, 2021 via Zoom.

**1. PRESENT:**

For the Board:	Mr. Berlandi, Mrs. Diotte, Mr. Laughlin, Mrs. Lenihan, Mr. Neunzig, Mrs. Seeger and Mr. Vogt
Administration:	Dr. Melendez, Mr. Dudics, Mr. Kalkreuth and Mrs. Snowden
Staff:	Ms. DePuy
Residents:	25 Residents

The Board and attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. CELEBRATIONS:**

**Board of Education Appreciation Month**

Dr. Melendez noted that March is Board of Education Appreciation month and gave a heartfelt thank you to the Board of Education for their service. He noted that the Board is a volunteer committee and the members do not receive any compensation for their time.

Mr. Carlone thanked the Board for all that they do, and for their support. He is grateful that the music program is running while keeping the students safe. He is aware that other Districts are not as fortunate and feels the Sherman students have been given an opportunity to shine. Mr. Carlone gave an overview of the Regional Auditions process. He proudly shared that Sherman is the smallest school participating, but are sending 45 unique auditions, which is the highest number of students from any school.

Mrs. Diotte extended her thanks to both Mr. Carlone and Mr. Trinchillo for the incredible program they run.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Rosemarie D'Ostilio suggested that the Board of Education present a plan to the Board of Selectmen so that both entities agree on a plan of action. She feels this will move the District forward to in an expeditious manner, while taking advantage of State funding. She supports a solution that addresses the many long standing issues with the school. Ms. D'Ostilio feels the Board of Education has done a great job gathering information, but a collective group is needed to move this forward. She noted the newly formed Capital Planning Committee and is hopeful it will move forward and requested that the parents be informed.

Kerry Merkle - 14 Locust Lane. Ms. Merkle acknowledged the years of work that has been done thus far by the BOE in conjunction with the BOS and Architects. In light of the recent rescindment of the Board recommendations, she would like to see aggressive efforts be made to get the District on track to meet deadlines that are approaching and lock into State funding

that the school is eligible for. She feels a unified front is needed between both Boards. Ms. Merkle noted some areas of the building are in poor condition and is hopeful the plan will include not just fixing the infrastructure of the KWing, but make academic improvements with the understanding that decades go between major projects. As the enrollment numbers shift, she noted that no parent wants to see their child learning in a portable classroom.

**4. ADDITIONS TO AGENDA**

Mr. Vogt moved and Mr. Berlandi seconded to add to the agenda 9.7 Recommendation of Capital Planning to extend further walk-throughs of the building to the public, and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

**5. CONSENT AGENDA:**

**5.1 Review of Minutes:**

Minutes - Monthly Meeting, February 3, 2021

Minutes - Policy Committee, February 25, 2021

**5.2 Personnel Actions**

**5.3 Monthly Enrollment Report**

**5.4 Monthly Budget Report 2020-2021 Budget by Function & Summary of Funds**

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mr. Vogt seconded the approval of the Monthly Meeting Minutes - February 3, 2021, Policy Committee Minutes - February 25, 2021, and Budget Reports, and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

**6. APPROVAL OF CURRENT BILLS:**

**6.1 2020-2021 Current Bills**

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mr. Neunzig seconded to approve the 2020-2021 current bills and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

**7. ORAL REPORTS:**

**7.1 SPTO Update**

Mrs. O'Neill shared the SPTO updates:

- Discussions regarding fundraising events and Spring activities
- Website e-commerce page has been completed for families to purchase items and have them shipped directly to their homes.
- Discussions regarding potential school supplies for Middle School students
- Next SPTO meeting - Wednesday, March 10, 2021 at 8:45 AM

**7.2 Sub-Committee**

Policy Committee

Mrs. Seeger shared that the Policy Committee met on February 25th. First and Second Readings are on the agenda. Templates and regulations that are being constructed which will be reviewed at a future Policy meeting.

Curriculum Committee

Mrs. Lenihan shared that the Curriculum Committee met prior to the Board meeting. Mrs. Snowden presented Unit Overviews to the committee. Mrs. Lenihan spoke highly of this new tool for parents, with an expected release date this Fall. The tool will provide an overview of the curriculum that will be covered throughout the school year for each grade level with hyperlinks. Mrs. Lenihan suggested that an introduction to the tool be rolled out at open house for parent edification.

Mrs. Diotte spoke highly of the new tool as well and looks forward to it going live. She expressed her thanks to Mrs. Snowden and the teachers for their efforts.

#### Maintenance

Mr. Laughlin shared the committee had a brief committee meeting for a secondary onsite review of the facility and mechanical systems. They discussed the capital list which parallels similar conversations as the Capital Planning Committee. The committee is awaiting clarity on a few items and Mr. Laughlin is hopeful to have new updates soon.

Mrs. Diotte questioned if Mr. Laughlin anticipates if the Capital request will be available in a reasonable time frame to fit into the BOS timeline for budget planning purposes.

Mr. Laughlin shared that his understanding based on the last budget conversation was there was a hold on the Capital list as a TBD for both the K Wing and Playground based on old figures. He noted new metrics may be needed to get to the level of specificity and express concern for the mid-March deadline. He anticipates the need for a Capital Planning meeting to discuss the next step and perhaps a special Board meeting to make a recommendation.

Mrs. Diotte suggested scheduling a Maintenance Committee meeting to keep the momentum in an effort to provide the Board of Selectmen with the school Capital Non-Recurring requests.

#### Negotiation

Mr. Berlandi noted the committee continues to have discussion with Region 12. He is hopeful to have a discussion for the full Board soon.

### **7.3 Chair Report**

### **7.4 Superintendent Update - Dr. Jeff Melendez**

#### Budget Update

Ms. DePuy provided a very detailed overview of the current budget and discussed each line with anticipated surpluses and the reason for the surplus. She also reviewed lines with expenses that exceeded the budgeted amount and provided the Board with the rationale as well. As reported last month, the CRF funds have offset technology purchases that were not anticipated, but necessary to the pandemic. Overall, Ms. DePuy anticipates a surplus, but cautioned there is still a lot of time left in the school year. In addition, Ms. DePuy noted she continually pursues all applicable grants that the school is eligible for.

#### Open Choice

Dr. Melendez provided a brief update on the Open Choice program that was discussed at the February Board meeting. He noted that it is currently in legislation and if it passes, the program will start in Danbury and adjacent Districts. At this point in time, it will not impact Sherman.

#### Strategic Plan Update

Mr. Kalkreuth provided an update to the Board on Action Steps:

- 11.1 Organize team building activities for faculty to participate in three times a year. Mr. Kalkreuth touched on the Scavenger Hunt that took place last month and shared the Steering Committee subcommittee is looking for similar experiences to reinforce camaraderie amongst faculty members.
- 12.2 Plan and organize special arrival and dismissal activities for the first and last days of school each year. A special committee has been formed to make the last day memorable. More details to follow.
- 12.4 Support social emotional learning and charter education through the creation of activities for students.
  - Zoom Morning Announcements has been launched to connect with remote learners as well as fill the void of isolation felt with social distancing within the building.
  - Middle School Day of Respite dedicated to Social Emotional Learning and team building activities.
  - Valentines for Vet which was an entire school event led by the 8th grade Student Council. The event was held virtually and included a Town Hall meeting. Mr. Kalkreuth noted how impressed he was with the creativity.

### Health Data

Dr. Melendez presented Health Data slides and noted Sherman is trending at a higher positivity rate as a community, but happy that this is not translating to the school level.

Dr. Melendez shared that Governor Lamont has opened vaccinations for teachers and staff. He has partnered with Superintendent Consentino of New Fairfield and they sent a joint letter to all staff pertaining to vaccinations at the New Fairfield Senior Center. Dr. Melendez anticipates 40% of the Sherman faculty/staff will be vaccinated by March 6th. Dr. Melendez noted that the Administration has volunteered to be last on the vaccination list. He also noted that no one is obligated to be vaccinated. Once the faculty/staff have been vaccinated, the vendors working at the school will be next on the list (custodial staff, food services and transportation).

## **8. PRESENTATION**

### **8.1 Assessment Data Comparison**

Mrs. Snowden provided an Assessment Data Comparison presentation based on the STAR assessment results for students in grades 3 through 8. She presented slides showing both Reading and Math average scaled scores spanning the past three years. As the slides depicted, Mrs. Snowden was happy to report that COVID did not impact growth. Mrs. Snowden reported that the next round of STAR assessments will be administered March 8 through April 8th and will report additional results once complete.

Mrs. Diotte was pleased with the results.

Mrs. Seeger asked about the participation rate. Mrs. Snowden noted that very few students opt out of the STAR assessment. The Smarter Balance letter has not been sent, but she anticipates it will be around 95% participation rate. Mrs. Snowden also shared that the Smarter Balance and NGSS will be available online for remote students.

## **9. NEW BUSINESS**

### **9.1 Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2021-2022 School Calendar**

Dr. Melendez presented the draft 2021-2022 calendar and noted modifications may be needed due to COVID. He shared that there is no longer a regional calendar since it was not enforceable. Also, he shared that it is impossible to coordinate the same breaks with the four area high schools.

Mrs. Diotte tabled approval of the 2021-2022 Calendar for next month.

**9.2 Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2021-2022 Operational Budget**

Dr. Melendez presented the 2021-2022 Operational Budget. Dr. Melendez explained the budget development process is driven by the Strategic Plan and he shared a slide of the action steps that are specifically slated for the 21-22 budget. He also presented a slide outlining the contractual costs over the past five years which are the biggest drivers of the budget. The contractual expenses cover all salaries, high school tuition, medical benefits, transportation and custodial costs, representing over \$7.5M of the \$9.5M budget. In conjunction with the increasing contractual expenses, Dr. Melendez provided a historical perspective that although the contracts continually increase, the budget for the past four years has remained at a 0% increase. He noted the effort put forth to maintain a 0% increase and presented accomplishment over the past four years (ex. Full time counselor and band teachers, XP program, increased intramural program, full time armed safety officer, full time STEAM program, fully funded 4th grade DC trip, Math Interventionist, Universal PreK, 1:1 device, etc.). He noted all of the accomplishments were driven by the Strategic Plan, and the Board and Administration worked hard to implement while sustaining a 0% increase to the taxpayers.

Dr. Melendez shared that budget surpluses in the past have been returned to the Town and presented a slide of the past three years totaling \$1,185,437.00. He noted the Administration is not obligated to return the funds and could spend, but they feel returning funds is both ethical as well as transparent.

Dr. Melendez presented the anticipated enrollment for the 2021-22 school year, which included enrollment of teachers' children (12 students). Dr. Melendez noted the Board lifted the tuition policy (2019-2020) during the pandemic so that teachers could enroll their children in Sherman. He shared that this decision positively impacted the school's ability to remain open while benefiting the teacher's as well. Dr. Melendez pointed out that the 21-22 enrollment projection and classroom sections are prepared to follow a COVID environment and anticipates 262 students. He further shared that plans include potential combined co-teaching classrooms for both Kindergarten and 4th grade students. Mrs. Snowden explained the benefits of co-teaching and flexible teaching space (ex. more opportunity of social interaction, flexible grouping & differentiated instruction, flexibilities with enrollment changes opportunities). She noted that this will provide a pilot opportunity to explore the concept of co-teaching in the event that shifts will be necessary due to enrollment.

Dr. Melendez recommended to the Board to continue allowing faculty children to attend Sherman tuition free for the upcoming school year. He presented a slide illustrating how no additional staffing would be required to accommodate the students. The Administration is working on the 2021-2022 Learning Plan and will have higher staffing levels in comparison to a "normal" teaching environment. The two scenarios are in preparation to accommodate for smaller classroom size due to social distancing, or to provide academic support and enrichment post pandemic.

Dr. Melendez shared slides detailing the breakdown of the budget in various categories and budget percentage costs: staffing, Special Education, high school tuition, transportation, maintenance and operation, technology, curriculum, etc. He also shared slides with anticipated high school enrollment as well as Special Education cost.

Mrs. Diotte thanked Dr. Melendez for the budget presentation and appreciates all of the hard work put forth by the Administration. She feels fortunate that the Board can believe in a budget that clearly supports the goals in the Strategic Plan. She feels the plan has kept the District in a very good position during this very difficult year.

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mrs. Lenihan seconded the approval of 2021-2022 operational budget in the amount of \$9,380,165, which is a \$425 reduction from the previous year's budget and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

### **9.3 Discussion and Possible Action on Capital Planning Committee Recommendation to Engage a Communication Consultant**

Mrs. Diotte recapped the focus of the newly formed Capital Planning Committee to be a more agile committee of the Board to investigate different options for the comprehensive building project and provide feedback to the Board. In order to allow the committee to move forward, it was necessary for the Board to rescind Option 3 of the building project.

Mr. Vogt noted that Dr. Melendez suggested a communication consultant to the committee in an effort to gauge opinions within the community.

Dr. Melendez added that very conflicting feedback has been received from the community. He proposed the professional consultancy service to the Board in October. The consultant could provide factual information in a cohesive manner to the entire Sherman community and receive their opinion. Dr. Melendez feels this step will help move forward in a positive way since the Board's endorsement was not supported by other community groups.

Mr. Vogt added the benefit of the survey will offer a broader base of opinions that have not been involved in the process thus far.

Mrs. Diotte expressed concern and feels the consultancy service is premature since there is no project at this point. She was under the assumption that the initial focus of the committee would be to meet with the Board of Selectmen to walk through the figures and answers questions and concerns that were expressed at the February 2nd meetings.

Mr. Vogt noted that the consultant may be beneficial to the process as it moves forward, but not an immediate step right now.

Mrs. Lenihan agreed that the service will be a good step later in the process. She added the public needs to be educated regarding the larger project in relation to capital planning and funding.

Mr. McLaughlin agreed and noted that clarity along with communication, consultation and surveys are all part of the process. He feels the communication piece will bring a

broad group of stakeholders and will be important as the Board looks at new options to accelerate the process.

Mr. Vogt tabled the discussion and noted as the committee moves along with the process, the consultancy could be a valuable tool.

**9.4 Discussion Regarding the Capital Planning Committee's Recommendation to Expand its Membership**

Mr. Vogt shared that since the Capital Planning Committee is a Special Committee, they have the ability to expand membership to local stakeholders and plan to engage as many as possible. They are requesting representatives from the following groups to join the committee: Board of Selectmen, SPTO, DTC, RTC and Sherman Education Association and requested Board approval.

Mrs. Diotte agreed that subcommittees can have different memberships and feels it will be incredibly helpful to do so, especially with Board of Selectmen representation. Mrs. Diotte looked to the Board for objections and no objections were stated.

Mr. Vogt will send a communication and invite representatives to the next Capital Planning Committee meeting.

Mrs. Diotte noted the Board will take action at the April meeting and official appoint the new members of the committee.

**9.5 First Reading Policy 6111 - School Calendar**

**9.6 First Reading Policy 9321 - Time, Place and Notification of Meetings**

**9.7 Recommendation of Capital Planning Committee to Extend further walk throughs of the building to the public**

Mr. Vogt noted that the Maintenance Committee warned a walk-through of the building and one member of the public joined. Mr. Vogt expressed how valuable it was to actual see the massive scope and interconnectivity of some of the problems. He is hopeful to organize several walkthrough for interested members of the public within the parameters of COVID restrictions.

Dr. Melendez does not see an issue with organizing within the COVID restrictions.

Mrs. Diotte noted that if a quorum of the Capital Planning committee attends the walkthroughs, then they must be warned, and the public has to be invited without restricted access and it will be necessary to Zoom the walkthrough also. She suggested not having a quorum and have both the Maintenance & Capital Planning Committee hold separate walkthroughs.

Mr. Vogt will work with Dr. Melendez to organize.

**10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**10.1 Second Reading Policy 9330 Board/School Records**

Mrs. Seeger moved and Mrs. Lenihan seconded to pass Policy 9330 Board/School Records, and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

**10.2 Second Reading Policy 9240 Board Member Development**

Mrs. Seeger moved and Mrs. Lenihan seconded to pass Policy 9240 Board Member Development, and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

**10.3 Review and Possible Approval of RFQ/P for Playground Site Work and Installation**

Dr. Melendez noted that the septic analysis has been delayed due to the weather, but confirmed that a vendor has been lined up.

Mrs. Diotte would like to move the RFQ/P forward and will hold a special meeting to approve the RFQ/P if the analysis results do not align with April Board of Education meeting.

The approval was tabled.

**11. COMMUNICATION**

Mrs. Diotte shared an email was received from a student requesting a follow up on the changes with the lunch program. Mrs. Diotte will forward to fellow Board members.

Mr. Neunzig reflected on all of the food services plans and upgrades that were slated for this past Fall, but put on hold due to COVID. He expects the new plan and upgrades to be implemented in the Fall 2021. He noted that both he and Mrs. Lenihan can have a Zoom meeting with the student to share the plans and answer any questions.

**12. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Amanda O'Neill - 7 Big Trail - Mrs. O'Neill questioned in light of the Board's decision to rescind the renovation/addition plan, if there is a secondary plan to move forward with? She noted cost have increased since the Friar report, as well as additional necessary facility repairs.

Mrs. Diotte noted several options were presented by Tecton, plus the Maintenance over-time option. Mrs. Diotte acknowledges the tremendous amount of work and time that has been invested thus far, but timing of the project/design will depend on the community.

Michael Carpenzano - 9 Locust Lane. Mr. Carpenzano shared his professional experience in the construction industry. He attended the last Maintenance Committee meeting and toured the building on the walk through. He noted that he was skeptical regarding the proposed building project and cost because the school appears to be in good condition, but his opinion changed when he toured the bowels of the building and feels a comprehensive activity must take place. He also commented that renovating portions of the building is not the best answer. He suggested that anyone who wants to be part of the conversation in a constructive way, should tour the building.

**13. BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENTS**

Mrs. Lenihan commented that she appreciates the public for attending the meeting and sharing their opinions. She suggested that they also share views of the Capital Improvements with the Board of Selectmen as well. Mrs. Lenihan also suggested that if there are any logistical issues with offering public walkthroughs of the building, that perhaps Mr. Lombardozzi can be filmed giving a walkthrough of the building. She also thanked the Admin team for all of their work on the budget.

Selectman Don Lowe commented positively on the meeting and looks forward to working with



everyone. He also commented positively on the budget.

**14. FUTURE MEETINGS AND TOPICS**

- 14.1 Board of Education Meeting, April 7, 2021 at 7:00 PM
- 14.2 Capital Planning, March 16, 2021 at 6:00 PM
- 14.3 Policy Committee Meeting - March 31, 2021 at 10:30 AM

**15. ADJOURNMENT**

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mr. Neunzig seconded that the Board move into Executive Session at 9:21 PM and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

James Neunzig  
Vice Chair, Sherman Board of Education

Prepared by Recording Secretary: Nancy Winkler