

SHERMAN BOARD OF EDUCATION
SHERMAN, CONNECTICUT 06784
REGULAR MEETING - APRIL 7, 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 7:02 PM on April 7, 2021 via Zoom.

1. PRESENT:

For the Board:	Mr. Berlandi (7:30), Mrs. Diotte, Mr. Laughlin, Mrs. Lenihan, Mr. Neunzig, Mrs. Seeger and Mr. Vogt
Administration:	Dr. Melendez, Mr. Dudics, Mr. Kalkreuth and Mrs. Snowden
Staff:	Mrs. Azzolini, Dr. Badger, Mrs. Buffa, Ms. DePuy, Mr. McGuire, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Seiden and Mrs. Vermilyea
Town Officials:	Selectman Don Lowe and Treasurer Eric Holub
SPTO:	Mrs. O'Neill
Residents:	18 Residents
Students	4 Students

The Board and attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. CELEBRATIONS:

2.1 Western Regional's Band/Chorus/Jazz Festival Results.

Dr. Melendez proudly shared that Sherman had the largest ever representation and winning auditions at the Western Regional Festival. Dr. Melendez noted the tremendous honor and complemented Mr. Trinchillo and Mr. Carlone. He is thrilled for the students and music program.

Mrs. Diotte agreed and congratulated the students and teachers.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT:

4. ADDITIONS TO AGENDA

5. CONSENT AGENDA:

- 5.1** Review of Minutes:
- Minutes - Special Meeting, April 27, 2020
 - Minutes - Budget Workshop, December 14, 2020
 - Minutes - Budget Workshop, January 13, 2021
 - Minutes - Special Meeting with BOE and BOS, February 2, 2021
 - Minutes - Curriculum Committee Meeting, March 3, 2021
 - Minutes - Executive Session, March 3, 2021
 - Minutes - Executive Session B, March 3, 2021
 - Minutes - Monthly Board of Education Meeting, March 3, 2021
 - Minutes - Policy Committee Meeting, March 31, 2021

5.2 Personnel Actions

New Hire - Stephen Clark, Director of Technology, Effective April 12, 2021
Resignation - James Luchsinger, Director of Technology, April 2, 2021

5.3 Monthly Enrollment Report

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

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mr. Neunzig seconded the approval of the following minutes Board Retreat - 3/7/20, Special Meeting - 4/27/20, Executive Session - 11/4/20, Maintenance Committee Meeting - 11/17/20, Maintenance Committee Meeting - 11/30/20, Budget Workshop - 12/14/20, Maintenance Committee Meeting - 1/4/21, Special Committee on Capital Planning - 1/4/21, Maintenance Committee Meeting - 1/13/21, Budget Workshop - 1/13/21, Special Committee on Capital Planning - 1/22/21, Special Meeting with BOE and BOS - 2/2/21, Special Committee on Capital Planning - 2/23/21, Curriculum Committee Meeting - 3/3/21, Executive Session - 3/3/21, Executive Session B - 3/3/21, Monthly Board of Education Meeting - 3/3/21, Policy Committee Meeting - 3/31/21, Personnel Actions, Enrollment Reports and Budget Reports.

Mrs. Seeger requested that the following minutes be removed from the consent agenda and cited potential errors, as well as limited time to review: Board Retreat - March 7, 2020, Executive Session - November 4, 2020, Maintenance Committee Meeting - November 17, 2020, Maintenance Committee Meeting - November 30, 2020, Maintenance Committee Meeting - January 4, 2021, Special Committee on Capital Planning - January 4, 2021, Maintenance Committee Meeting - January 13, 2021, Special Committee on Capital Planning - January 22, 2021 and Special Committee on Capital Planning - February 23, 2021.

The consent agenda passed with the removal of minutes in questions, 4-2. (In favor: Mrs. Diotte, Mrs. Lenihan, Mrs. Seeger and Mr. Vogt. Opposed: Mr. Laughlin and Mr. Neunzig).

The minutes in questions were moved to Agenda Item 9.5 for Discussion and Possible Action to approve.

6. APPROVAL OF CURRENT BILLS:

6.1 2020-2021 Current Bills

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mrs. Seeger seconded to approve the 2020-2021 current bills and the motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

7. ORAL REPORTS:

7.1 SPTO Update

Mrs. O'Neill provided a brief update:

- Susan Spanger Floral Design fundraiser was held in March. The SPTO plans to offer another design class for parents and children on May 6th.
- In-person Book Fair will run from April 28th - 30th and will be held outside.
- Color Fun Run will take place on May 22nd, featuring a 5K for adults and kids only run.

7.2 Sub-Committee

Special Committee on Capital Planning

Mr. Vogt shared the committee is working with Dr. Melendez on a capital request list of ten items. The committee plans to move the work to the Maintenance Committee. He anticipates RFPs will be required which Dr. Melendez and Mr. Lombardozzi will assist in developing.

Policy Committee

Mrs. Seeger provided highlights from their last meeting. The committee discussed Policy 6111 regarding graduation gowns, which was recorded including public comment. The committee also discussed forms related to Policy 9330 which have been updated on the school's online policy manual. David Dudics, Special Education developed new regulations to accompany Policy 5145 in compliance with the CAFE audit which the committee reviewed. The new regulation will also be included in the policy manual.

Maintenance

Mr. Laughlin shared in coordination with the Special Committee on Capital Planning, the Maintenance Committee is reviewing projects and options with many paths forward. They are also refining lists, one specifically relating to fire doors and safety for which the committee is working with fire officials.

7.3 Chair Report

7.4 Superintendent Update - Dr. Jeff Melendez

Budget Update

Mrs. DePuy noted that the projected budget surplus will be under \$70,000.00 which is less than anticipated. Special Education savings were had which impacted the reimbursement of the excess cost grant. Also, the school purchased Chrombooks for grades 6 - 8 in an effort to avoid potential shortages. Ms. DePuy anticipates a third round of ESSR funds and will update the Board once expected estimates are finalized.

Strategic Plan Update

Dr. Melendez noted that much progress has been made to the Strategic Plan, but no additional tasks have been completed this month.

Health Data

Dr. Melendez presented two slides with COVID health data. Unfortunately, the community is progressing with higher positivity cases with the leading indicator at 5%. Dr. Melendez referenced a letter that he sent to families and staff reminding them of CDC Travel recommendations to keep in mind during potential travel over Spring Break to insure a conservative return to school for both families and staff.

Mr. Vogt asked clarifying questions regarding vaccination and transmission from student to student.

Dr. Melendez noted that all staff were offered the opportunity to be vaccinated, but it is not mandatory. He touched on topics discussed at the weekly Superintendent's call with the DPH and STE. He credits the use of masks to minimize the transmission of spread.

He further explained the cohorting process and how each positive case is handled individually in consultation with Dr. Hack and Mr. Tim Simpkins.

Mr. Laughlin questioned CDC recommendations regarding 3 FT vs 6 FT.

Dr. Melendez noted that the school will continue to follow 6 FT spacing for the remainder of the year.

Award Ceremony Dates & Planning

Dr. Melendez announced that the Award Ceremony will be held on June 10th and Graduation on June 11th. The state will be releasing guidance after the April break. The school will form a special committee with parents and teachers to make Graduation as special as possible.

8. PRESENTATION

8.1 Review of Special Committee on Capital Planning Progress

Mr. Laughlin presented several slides detailing the work of the Special Committee on Capital Planning Progress. Please see the attachment presentation at the end of this document for a full review of the presentation. The slides include:

- Progress to Date
- Organizational Designees
- Existing Conditions
- Recommended Capital Planning Goals
- Statutory Mandates & Constraints
- State Reimbursement Options & Timing
- Architectural, Engineering and Estimation Services Options
- Recommended Additional Architectural & Estimation Services
- Project Option #1 - #3
- Initial Tax Impact and Bonding Scenarios
- Playground Scenario
- Next Step

9. NEW BUSINESS Expressed Concern

9.1 Discussion and Possible Appointment of Additional Members to the Special Committee on Capital Planning

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mr. Vogt seconded to appoint First Selectman Lowe, Mr. Silvay, Mr. Bonner, Kerry Merkel and Tim McGuire to serve as additional members of Capital Planning, and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

9.2 Discussion and Possible Approval of Special Committee on Capital Planning's Recommendation to Adopt Goals

Mrs. Diotte stated that she will not support the recommendation of the Special Committee on Capital Planning for a variety of reasons. She was hopeful that the committee would have spent more time taking feedback supplied by the Board of Selectmen and engaging them to review the Friar report and tour the building to gain a better understanding of the complexities involved, and noted time will be needed for the majority of the public to also understand the issues. Mrs. Diotte expressed concern regarding the request for funds from the BOE operating budget being to be used for

architectural services/cost estimates and noted it is not an appropriate use of funds and should be requested from the Town. Mrs. Diotte feels the reconsideration of the site plans/playground location is a direct contradiction of the last action the Board took in October to approve the playground design to serve all students in the District. Furthermore, the BOS approved funding for the playground. Mrs. Diotte also expressed concern regarding the recommendation which includes a request to further extend a submission deadline to the State and questioned what it means for the immediate repairs that need to be done to the building. Mrs. Diotte closed her comments by stating that she is fearful if this moves forward in this manner, then the Board will lose credibility with the public.

Mr. Laughlin disagreed with Mrs. Diotte and feels the committee has done a great job at comprehensively having a conversation. He shared that both the Maintenance and Special Committee on Capital Planning committees have presented a variety of options that were reviewed by outside stakeholders. He further noted that the committees are working to fix the issues with the school and delays and actions are not a reflection of the work of both committees.

Mrs. Seeger agreed with Mrs. Diotte and also expressed concern regarding transparency related to minutes and meetings being warned with limited notice for the public to attend. She noted it is difficult to follow actions of a committee and motion recommendations if there is no backup (minutes) to review. She also noted a discrepancy within the slides of committee members opposing/abstaining and Special Committee members not fully supporting the committee's recommendation.

Mr. Laughlin addressed the concern and noted it was a cut/paste error on his part. He clarified that there were two recommendations with a 6-1 vote with one member opposing, and a third recommendation with one member abstaining. He noted the importance of transparency and shared the committee is creating a new format. He added that there have been a variety of different publicly available meetings and have discussed at length various projects, concerns and proposals.

Mr. Neunzig reflected on the initial process and noted it was a failure in relation to how the community did not accept it. He reviewed the process of engaging stakeholders and the myriad of meetings, interviews and vetting/hiring firms. He noted that the Board had to rescind their plans not because it wasn't the best option, but so that they could move forward with a different option. Both committees are moving forward analyzing various options and making decisions. He noted any need related to health and safety is being addressed. He feels the Special Committee on Capital Planning has a broad representation of diverse stakeholders and feels the process should move forward. Mrs. Lenihan noted that she feels that all members of the Board agree the Capital Plan is the best option to move forward, but questioned how successful it will be without a partnership from key Town officials. Mrs. Lenihan also expressed concern regarding funds applied from the operating budget, when it should come from the Town as it has in the past. She also addressed the current state of the playground and feels it should move forward as the Board planned when they voted in October.

Mr. Vogt reflected on the charge of the Capital Planning Committee and noted planning and community engagement will go hand in hand. He feels that the community has not

been informed which is evident in their lack of understanding. A plan must be developed with corresponding numbers for a better understanding of the school's needs in an effort for all stakeholders to be on the same page. Mr. Vogt also noted that the committee is addressing interim repairs in tandem with the big picture so that taxpayer's funds are not wasted. He reflected on the playground and acknowledged the plans and equipment, but feels the plan was predicated on previous decisions and feels it's worth engaging the committee given recent changes over the past few months and feels there is a path forward to get that done in the summer.

Mr. Berlandi appreciates the incredible work of the committee and fully supports the recommendations.

Mr. Laughlin moved and Mr. Vogt seconded to approve the Recommendation #1 stated by the committee, and the motion passed 4-3 (In favor: Mr. Berlandi, Mr. Laughlin, Mr. Neunzig and Mr. Vogt. Opposed: Mrs. Diotte, Mrs. Lenihan and Mrs. Seeger).

9.3 Discussion and Possible Approval of Capital Planning Committee's Recommendation to Approve Additional Architectural and Cost Estimation Services

Mr. Laughlin noted the committee had a discussion of where funds would come from and made a recommendation to use surplus funds from the current operating budget for this fiscal year.

Mr. Vogt moved and Mr. Laughlin second to approve the Recommendation #2, and the motion passed 4-3 (In favor: Mr. Berlandi, Mr. Laughlin, Mr. Neunzig and Mr. Vogt. Opposed: Mrs. Diotte, Mrs. Lenihan and Mrs. Seeger).

9.4 Discussion and Possible Action to Affirm Special Committee on Capital Planning's Recommendation of Designated Architectural Liaisons

Mr. Vogt noted that the committee designated Kerry Merkel and Tim Laughlin to deal with Tecton directly.

Mrs. Lenihan questioned if the Board would have to rescind their original endorsement of the playground and questioned if a vote is legal without rescinding the previous vote. She noted that she doesn't have a problem with Tim Laughlin and Kerry Merkel as liaisons, but not for redesigning the playground.

Mr. Vogt is unsure if the vote would have to be rescinded and feels the project has been paused.

Mrs. Diotte feels that the playground endorsement will have to be rescinded in order to engage an architecture firm as it presents a conflict.

Mr. Laughlin noted that the RFP/Q for the playground has been a standing item on the agenda and has not been finalized. The committee is discussing alternatives to the playground design and selected equipment, as well as a smaller footprint. They are also reviewing options for the age 2 to 5 population.

Mrs. Diotte noted timing for the Town's referendum to secure funding of the BOE's initial playground replacement and noted if the Board moves in a different direction, then the playground will likely not happen this summer.

Mr. Laughlin disagreed and noted if a capital request was valued at a lower amount than originally requested, then it would potentially be supported at a Town meeting.

Mr. Laughlin moved and Mr. Berlandi seconded to approve the recommendation as stated and all of the implications that come with it, and the motion passed 4-3 (In favor: Mr. Berlandi, Mr. Laughlin, Mr. Neunzig and Mr. Vogt. Opposed: Mrs. Diotte, Mrs. Lenihan and Mrs. Seeger).

9.5 Tabled Meeting Meetings from Agenda

Mrs. Diotte recommend that Mrs. Seeger communicate directly with the committee chairs and the tabled minutes will be up for approval on the May agenda.

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

10.1 Discussion and Possible Approval of the 2021-2022 School Calendar

Dr. Melendez pointed out minor changes made to the proposed calendar in comparison to the draft presented last month. He also noted that Sherman and New Milford High School have the same Spring Break.

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mr. Vogt seconded the approval of the 2021-2022 School Calendar as recommended by the Superintendent and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

10.2 Second Reading Policy 6111 - School Calendar

Mrs. Seeger provided a background on the Administration's recommendation to move to a single-color graduation gown. Mrs. Seeger recapped the last policy meeting that was attended by Sherman School clinical specialists, Dr. Badger, Ms. Ficca and Mrs. Vermilyea who provided information as to why the policy should be changed. Mrs. Seeger also referenced Executive Order, CT State guidance and discrimination laws that the Board must follow.

Mrs. Diotte reviewed the new language of the proposed policy and shared her viewpoint and noted she supports the policy change. She anticipates the Administration and teachers will work with the students determine what is appropriate for the students, which is not a decision to be made by the Board.

Board members shared their viewpoint, feedback received from parents and students, communication and how the process was carried out. Dr. Melendez did have a timeline to present which dated back to November 2019 when initial discussions took place. In the interest of time, the slide was not presented but Dr. Melendez noted the policy process and confirmed it was the appropriate channel to bring this change to everyone's attention, but noted timing was not favorable.

Dr. Badger and Ms. Ficca provided a brief presentation on their roles, function and responsibilities as clinicians for the social and emotional health of every student in the

school. Mrs. Vermilyea also spoke as an advocate for all students and shared her viewpoint on the topic of fostering an inclusive climate for all students.

Mr. Laughlin moved and Mr. Berlandi seconded the motion to amend the recommendation to be effective December 31, 2021 and that within that time from approval the administration should form a working group Task Force committee comprised of educators, administrators, parents, teachers and members of the community to figure out a way forward on what exactly the graduation celebrations and gown should look like conforming with the policy change which is effective for next December, and the motion passed 5-2. (In favor: Mr. Berlandi, Mr. Laughlin, Mrs. Lenihan, Mr. Neunzig and Mr. Vogt. Opposed: Mrs. Diotte and Mrs. Seeger).

Public Comment on Policy 6111

Student Isabella DiNatale shared that the topic sparked a lot of conversation within her class. She noted the tradition of wearing the gowns and reflected on the presentation on student choice and feels it would offer a compromise for all sides.

Ryan Hatcher agreed with Isabella and felt student choice was the best option. He noted 26 out of 33 students signed the petition sent to the Administrations supporting student choice.

Bryce Vore added that the decision to move to a singular color was made too late as the students had already purchased their gowns.

Michael Clancy agreed with Bryce Vore. The funds were due and then the color was changed which seemed like a strange approach.

Molly Garcia, 22 Church Road. Mrs. Garcia referenced Dr. Melendez's email citing that all students would wear a blue gown which was not an approved policy. Mrs. Garcia shared that a neutral color should have been selected as opposed to female students having to conform and wear blue gowns which has traditionally been for male students.

Sara Fishcher, 48 55 West - Mrs. Fishcher shared children should have a choice and to delay it is problematic and systemic of another problem. The time for change is now and the children should decide.

Crystal Hancock, 12 Glenview Drive. Mrs. Hancock expressed concern regarding the gown fee due date, but the next day a letter was sent informing about the move to gowns of singular color. She feels if inclusion was a goal, then students should have been included in the decision and a committee should have been formed in September. Mike Hatcher, 1 Farm Road. Mr. Hatcher appreciates the time and effort of the Board. Mr. Hatcher recapped previous questions that he received answers to. He further added that if the policy does not conflict with the State mandate, he questioned why the policy would have to change. Mr. Hatcher also touched on the difference between distinguish and discrimination and the importance of teaching children the difference.

Marie Hatcher, 1 Farm Road. Mrs. Hatcher commented that the Executive Order was signed on March 8th, but the money was due before that date which she questioned. She also thanked Mrs. Lenihan for her apology and feels the process was pushed

through and the students recognize that.

Mrs. Karrie Buffa - Mrs. Buffa thanked the Board for reading the emails and siding with the students.

10.3 Second Reading Policy 9321 - Time, Place and Notification of Meeting

The Board discussed the proposed policy revisions regarding meetings being recorded/videotaped, delinquent minutes and BOE clerk transcribing minutes.

Mrs. Diotte recommended the Policy Committee review feedback and make appropriate revisions for the Board's review.

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

Based on action 9.3 and 9.4, Mrs. Diotte does not see how this moves forward. No motion at this time.

11. COMMUNICATION

Mrs. Diotte received a formal communication regarding violation of Fire Doors and Fire Safety issues via certified mail. She is aware that Dr. Melendez received the same communication.

Dr. Melendez noted that they received a 30-day extension as requested.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Molly Garcia - 22 Church Road. Mrs. Garcia noted the move from 6 FT to 3 Ft and questioned if students are spaced 6 feet apart? Dr. Melendez confirmed yes, for the most part.

Mrs. Garcia noted that her children, in Grade 8 and Grade 6 are not spaced 6 feet apart. She questioned how comfortable the teachers are with students less than 6 feet apart.

Eric Holub, Town Treasure stated that he is disappointed in the majority vote to spend money, which was appropriated for the education of our children, on another architecture study. In the past these expenses have been brought to the Town, and the town has approved them. He noted that when the voters approved the schools budget last year, there was no line item for architectural studies and votes were cast for what they thought was a bona fide education budget. He stated the optics do not look good and feels the public perception will be that the budget is not bare bones after years of surpluses.

Mr. Holub further questioned the funds that were set aside in the amount of \$350,000 that were marked to be transferred from the general fund balance to cover the playground. Based on the votes, he concluded that the Board is not ready for the project and stated funds should be removed from the capital project list for the 21-22 fiscal year.

Sarah Fischer, 48 55 West - Ms. Fischer agreed with Mr. Holub regarding how money was allocated by the Board and noted money given for education should go to education. She understands the school needs maintenance, but the Board should go to the Town for funds. She commented positively on meetings via zoom.

Jenn Fried, 61 Church Road - Ms. Fried spoke of the value of zoom calls and the benefit that it provides to the Town and encouraged the Board to continue when things go back to normal.

She also encouraged them to keep the chat on.

13. BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENTS

Mrs. Lenihan noted the Board is doing their best to have a tight budget. She doesn't think Mr. Holub's comment is accurate because some expenses have fallen in the school's favor which has been documented.

Mr. Laughlin added that he understands Mr. Holub's frustration, but recognized the Board of education has proposed a zero percent increase and returned unspent funds to the town equating to approximately \$1.7 million over the past 6 years. He agreed with Mrs. Lenihan's comment and noted that surplus funds have been returned to the Town is a very public, transparent process. Mr. Laughlin acknowledged the need for a town meeting, but feels the BOE also has to balance the need to move forward to ensure that the building remains operable. He feels robust discussions are occurring and feels all can work together to reach a moderated reasonable result.

Mrs. Diotte referenced many discussions about moving forward with the building project, but noted that it is just one component of the many responsibilities of the Board of Education. She feels how the Board does something is more important than what is actually done. She expressed concern if the Board loses trust with the public and town leadership, then not only will it be detrimental to a building project, but to furthering the goals overall of the District.

14. FUTURE MEETINGS AND TOPICS

- 14.1 Board of Education Meeting, May 5, 2021 at 7:00 PM
- 14.2 Executive Session, May 5, 2021 at 6 PM
- 14.3 Special Committee on Capital Planning, April 19th at 7:00 PM
- 14.4 Policy Committee Meeting, April 21 at 11:00 AM

15. ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Diotte moved and Mrs. Lenihan seconded that the Board adjourn at 10:20 PM and the motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

James Neunzig
Vice Chair, Sherman Board of Education

Prepared by Recording Secretary: Nancy Winkler