

**RUTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS  
JAN. 13, 2009**

**School Board Members Present:**

Peter Mello  
Christopher Book  
Wayne Cooke  
Richard Courcelle  
Roberta Dress  
Peter Fagan  
Collin Fingon  
Peter Forshay  
Gina Fucci  
Karen Gartner  
Cindy Kilic-Murray  
Nicholas Ouelette

**Also Present:**

Superintendent Mary Moran  
Assistant Superintendent Rob Bliss  
Wil Cunningham  
John Rice  
Peter Amons  
Ellie McGarry  
Kristin Francoeur  
Bob Johnson  
Paula Albro  
Bill Olsen  
Jay Slenker  
Kristen Hubert  
Susanne Engels  
Lyle Jepson  
Andrea McQuade  
Glenn Olson  
Ted Guilmette  
Patricia Aigner

Motion by Gartner/Fagan to convene to executive session at 6:15 pm for the purpose of discussing personnel matters, the premature release of information regarding those subjects which would place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Unanimously passed by those in attendance.

**EXECUTIVE  
SESSION**

**PUBLIC  
SESSION**

The Board came out of executive session at 6:55 pm.

**ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Chair Mello noted all Commissioners were present.

**MOTIONS:  
MINUTES  
12/9/08  
MEETING  
&  
MINUTES  
12/16/08  
MEETING**

Motion by Gartner/Fagan to accept the minutes of the Dec. 9, 2008 regular school board meeting as written. Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**WRITTEN  
COMMUN-  
ICATION**

Written Communication - None

**ORAL  
COMMUN-  
ICATION**

Oral Communication - None

Recognition of Cathy Farman - National Board Certification - Ms. Moran said Cathy Farman is a teacher at RIS, specializing in technology. She has received National Board Certification as an elementary teacher. This is a rigorous, national process and it is an enormous accomplishment. Ms. Moran congratulated Ms. Farman on her achievement. Ms. Albro and Ms. Aigner praised Ms. Farman as a terrific resource to both students and teachers.

**RECOGNI-  
TION OF  
CATHY  
FARMAN**

FY10 Budget Deliberations - Mr. Amons said at the last meeting, the proposal showed a \$45,200,000 budget with a 4.9% increase over prior year. The proposal was level-service-funded with the difference being special services driven by new students and one new IT person. The state has now announced \$.85 as a tax rate although they might change that to \$.86. The \$45,200,000 represents a \$1.28 tax rate. Mr. Amons said revenues are up in FY10 based on three factors: 1) a carry forward of \$925,000 from FY08; 2) special education costs are up but so are revenues; and 3) in FY08, we underbilled sending towns to RHS and have now rebilled \$320,000. These total \$1,800,000. Mr. Amons explained the process to determine cost per pupil, the equalized tax rate and the final tax rate which will be on the tax bill.

Mr. Amons said these are based upon the assumption of an \$.85 tax rate which means a \$1.283 tax rate on the tax bill. He reviewed the cost or payback increment to Rutland City taxpayers of spending \$1 or cutting \$1. \$100,000 equals \$.0047 off the education tax rate. A \$100,000 budget cut, for example, will save \$7 off a house assessed at \$160,000. Mr. Amons said the \$45,200,000 proposal with an estimated FY10 tax rate of \$1.283 has a 2.97% percentage over the FY09 tax rate. He presented the amount in cuts it would take to get to a flat tax rate increase and different levels in between 00% and the 2.97%.

Mr. Mello said the Board asked the administration to prioritize levels of spending cuts. Ms. Moran said Rutland City's enrollment is not declining as it is in other communities. She said when looking at potential cuts, the administration's recommendations were put together to have as little impact in direct instruction as possible. They also tried to spread effects objectively and fairly across grade levels and they tried not to cut where there is revenue. They also wanted to have as little impact on staff as possible. She presented a five tier approach.

Ms. Moran said the first tier shows \$404,000 savings. With one exception, it is all maintenance and repairs. The only staff is a 40% reduction of drama at RIS/RMS, which is enrollment driven and would have been recommended anyway. There is the elimination of the proposed new computer technician. The health insurance premiums have been announced and there will be no increase. This will save \$85,000 in premium reductions which had been written into the proposal and brings the tier one savings to \$489,000. Ms. Moran said the second tier shows another \$360,000 in savings. There are more significant impacts in this tier with cutting supplies, eliminating field trips and some staffing reductions. The third tier shows another \$586,000 in savings and eliminates a number of teachers, mentors, and sports teams. The fourth tier savings would be \$321,000 and include staffing at different levels. The fifth tier equals \$439,000 and includes administrative costs, some teachers, other staffing, sports expenses, and some bussing. All of the tiers combined equals \$2,100,000 but only reduces city taxes by \$477,000. Mr. Mello said the board's primary responsibility is to determine what they can support, as a board, keeping in mind the obligation to the students as well as the taxpayers. The budget will need to be adopted at the next meeting in two weeks.

Commissioner Fingon said his priority is to cut supplies and maintenance as opposed to cutting people. He recommended the tier one and two cuts with the health savings but adding back in the volunteer coordinator and teacher cuts from tier two. He said that would equal about \$721,000 in cuts and would keep the tax rate near 0%. Commissioner Courcelle said the carry forward of \$925,000 will impact future years. Mr. Amons said there will be an impact and called it "tax whiplash" for future years. Commissioner Book asked about the safety of cutting the fire

suppression as proposed in tier one. Mr. Rice said we are not required to replace them until we make a change so it would not yet be a compliance issue.

Mr. Fingon reviewed his proposal and said there may also be an opportunity to use funds in the \$250,000 contingency or fuel oil line items to do some of the maintenance that would be cut. The 0% uses the assumption of \$.85. Ms. Moran said there has been a bill introduced into the legislature to change the tax rate to \$.86. Commissioner Fagan said he is comfortable with Mr. Fingon's proposal. Commissioner Forshay said there would be impacts to the students. The proposal eliminates all field trips and some classroom supplies and he feels they have value to students and their educational experience. Commissioner Cooke said from the third tier, there might be some teaching reductions possible due to declining enrollments, in order to add back in field trips. Ms. Moran said the original plan was not to eliminate the teachers in the third tier but to use them at the high school for overloads during the couple of years when RMS enrollment is low. The RMS enrollment projections show a dip just for a year or two and then rising again. Commissioner Gartner said if we are looking at eliminating something, she would want to look at impacting the smallest group of students. Field trips affect all students. Ms. Moran said a one or two year hiatus on field trips might be easier than cutting staff. Commissioner Dress said she would not want to cut the crossing guards but would prefer to eliminate freshman sports.

Mr. Mello said he hears a board consensus of a comfort level of near zero or zero tax impact as a target. He would like the administration to bring back their recommendations with the least impact on students. Commissioner Kilic-Murray said if we can get close to 0%, she would like to keep some things from the second tier such as the field trips. Mr. Forshay said he would prefer to not see that level of reduction. He thinks in order to continue to provide the programs we provide, that a modest increase in the tax rate might be considered, perhaps in the 1% range. Commissioner Fucci said she thinks the Board jumped to the zero target and said even in the first and second tiers, every cut is an impact to students and the level of education we are giving them. The need of a new computer technician staff person, for example, did not go away. She does not want to cut field trips just to get to a zero target budget. She said we are presenting a reasonable budget and does not feel it is serving the voters or the students by just trying to bring in a zero increase budget. She said that letting go of maintenance items is not prudent.

Mr. Fingon said 0% today is not forever. This is a very difficult year. People at home are cutting back on their budgets and it is the duty of elected officials to come in with a 0% increase. It would be nice to have everything but in tough economic times, we need to cut back. Ms. Kilic-Murray said she agrees with Ms. Fucci – making \$721,000 in cuts will save a typical homeowner \$50 a year. She asked “is it worth it?”

Mr. Mello said the administration needs to know the target to shoot for. Ms. Gartner said she thinks the Board needs to be mindful and protect what they have created over the years. The Board has never created anything frivolous. She recommended looking where there are reductions in numbers of students for the least impacts. She does not want to affect the school system at large but rather where we know there is dropping enrollment or lower numbers registering at the high school for certain classes. She said she does not agree with all the maintenance cuts because they will cost more in the future.

Mr. Cooke asked if there was a way, instead of eliminating all field trips, to keep a little at each

level. He suggested the same approach with supplies and computers – just cut a percentage from the line item. Ms. Moran said the proposal does that – it shows a 30% cut in classroom supplies or 50% in athletic supplies. Mr. Courcelle said the Board has to have a target. A good school system with integrity and quality drives economic development and will make people want to stay here, move here, or locate a business here. He said he is sensitive to the needs of the taxpayers but feels that a zero increase might be draconian. The proposal had an original increase of 3%. He recommended asking the administration to come back with 1.5%. Ms. Forshay said he supports Mr. Courcelle’s recommendation. Mr. Fucci asked if the 1.5% could be presented “ala carte.” Mr. Mello said the Board can perhaps give feedback on the list of maintenance items. They can be priorities from the different areas.

Mr. Fingon said he would rather have a target. He trusts the administration to come back with priorities. He said he would not pass anything over 1.5%. Ms. Gartner said many of the items, especially in maintenance, are guesstimate figures. She would rather give a certain number of dollars to maintenance and let them make the decisions on individual items. Mr. Cooke said if the Board pinpoints 1.5%, he feels they have made a decision. He said the administration could come back with another list and it could look different. He is not ready to make a decision yet. Mr. Courcelle said he thinks it is the responsibility of the governing board to provide a target. Nick Ouelette said he thinks the items in the first tier are relatively important. He said some of the cuts have a small amount of taxpayer savings. The proposed increased is lower than inflation.

Mr. Mello said the administration will come back to the next meeting with different information. He proposed a 1.5% target but the Board reserves the right to make changes to that. Ms. Moran said the administration will come back with a new proposal. She is happy with everyone’s input. There will be an affect if the legislature changes the tax rate. The budget must be ratified at the next meeting.

**MOTION:  
PERSONNEL  
MEMO #397**

Motion by Gartner/Fagan to approve the Licensed and Non-licensed section of the Personnel Memorandum No. 397 dated Jan. 9, 2009, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

The retirements and family/medical leaves were reviewed by Superintendent Moran. They are attached.

**BUSINESS  
REPORT**

Motion passed by all those in attendance.

**PERFOR-  
MANCE  
CONTRACT**

Performance Contract - Mr. Amons said we have been working with Johnson Controls for two years. Originally there was going to be state aid for this type of work but the state suspended aid for energy performance capital expenditures two years ago. After a review, it was determined there are still savings by entering into the energy contract. Mr. Rice reviewed the project summary. The total is about a \$1.431 million project. He reviewed the improvement measures at the buildings. Improvements have different payback periods with an average of a nine year payback. The proposed savings would be \$315,000 over 15 years.

Mr. Cooke said the building committee thinks the project makes sense and feels the work needs to be done. They support this conceptually but it is a +\$1 million project. This would be added as a separate Article to be voted on by the public. Ms. Moran said this is not an action item

tonight but if it is going forward, it would need to be approved at the next meeting.

Mr. Amons said Johnson Controls does not guarantee a dollar savings but they do guarantee savings in oil gallons and kw hours electricity. The proposals assume \$3/gallon oil price. The RMS windows are included and if they are not funded this way, they will have to come through an upcoming annual budget at a proposed cost of \$260,000. This proposal is not supposed to affect local tax rates. Besides the dollar savings, there is better air quality, etc. Mr. Fingon asked if there is a down payment and for the yearly payment. Mr. Amons said everything is financed so there is no down payment. There is about \$148,000 a year of debt payments and somewhat similar savings so there is no impact. Mr. Amons said if energy costs go up, the savings are larger. Also, if energy costs go down, the gallons we burn will cost less.

Mr. Forshay asked when we start paying if this is approved in March. Mr. Amons said it just becomes a cost savings. We would move money from the energy line item to debt service. Mr. Forshay said this should appear on our books, for example, the lunch program does not cost us anything but we show it. Mr. Amons said it will be shown. Ms. Moran said this entire project was presented by the building committee two years ago and while in the middle of it, the state put a moratorium on state aid for educational construction projects. All the analysis and work was already done.

Mr. Mello said the Board needs to decide if this is put on the ballot or not. It would be a separate question from the budget. Ms. Moran said the administration proposed the language for the Article and then informs the public on the benefits of the project. Ms. Fucci asked when this could be on the ballot if it was not on this March. It would postpone the question for another year until next March. Ms. Gartner said she sees this as a prudent way to save tax dollars. Mr. Cooke said there will have to be a lot of education to the public. Mr. Mello asked for a straw poll to see how many Board members want this brought to the voters in March and the majority said they would like to see it proceed at this time. Mr. Amons explained the reasons why this has to go to the voters and Ms. Moran said this was bid competitively several years ago and Johnson Controls was awarded the contract.

- Nick Ouelette said he was accepted early action in the Honors Program at Boston College. Nick was congratulated. He has not made a decision yet.
- At Northwest, January 23 is Spirit Day and students will dress as their favorite person.
- At Northeast, Spirit Day will be January 16 with “mismatch day.”
- The RMS students and staff will be studying the second principle of the REAL (Responsibility, Excellence, Acceptance, and Leadership) program. Classes will consider what the pursuit of excellence means.
- RHS Encore's Talent Show will be January 16th at 7:00 pm.
- The following students graduated from the Howe Center Campus on January 9: Kayla Cooper, Shawn Duarte, Shanna Fish, Samantha Keefe, Meagan Hier, Nate Robillard, Amanda Sulham
- RHS 2001 graduate Josh Lind was recognized today in the Rutland Herald. He has won a \$25K prize and is in the running for a \$1 million prize. He attributed his art success to Rutland teachers.
- Ms. Moran will be traveling to Washington DC later this week for a National Superintendent’s Association meeting. She will meet with all of Vermont’s delegates to

PERFORM-  
ANCE  
CONTRACT,  
cont.

SUPERIN-  
TENDENT’S  
REPORT

ANNOUNCE-  
MENTS

discuss education, funding special education and Medicaid and education in the economic stimulus package.

**COMM.  
REPORTS**

Information Task Force - Ms. Fucci said the Budget Buddies are having a meeting this week to review scheduled events. There are upcoming informational ward meetings scheduled at different locations.

**INFORMA-  
TION TASK  
FORCE**

Building Committee - Mr. Cooke said besides the energy performance contract, the committee talked about Stafford and their outbuildings and facilities. Ms. Moran said Mr. Cooke is the new liaison to STC. She will be working with our legislators on the outbuildings and reworking of the shops. We were prepared to move forward before the state aid construction moratorium was put in place. She would like to see the work at STC in the Rutland County economic stimulus package. The total is about \$7 million and she will be discussing this with the VT delegation in DC. All the plans are set and we are “shovel-ready”.

**BUILDING  
COMM.**

Policy Committee - Mr. Book will be getting out information to committee members.

**POLICY  
COMM.**

Field Turf Committee - Ms. Fucci said all three Three Tomatoes Restaurants are donating \$1 to the field turf fund for every meal served tomorrow.

**FIELD TURF  
COMM.**

School Board Elections - Ms. Fucci said there will be open seats and asked the community to consider volunteering.

**SCHOOL  
BOARD  
ELECTIONS**

New Business - None

**NEW  
BUSINESS**

Old Business - None

**OLD  
BUSINESS**

Mr. Mello commended the Board for budget deliberations tonight. He said everyone is interested in serving the students while keeping a watchful eye on the finances. He said there was a good tone of discussion.

**ADJOURN**

Motion by Gartner/Fucci to adjourn at 9:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted

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Janet Mondlak  
Recording Secretary