

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION  
280 ASBURY-WEST PORTAL ROAD  
ASBURY, NEW JERSEY 08802  
908-479-6336



**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**  
February 9, 2022 - 7:00 p.m.

For the Special Meeting of the  
Bethlehem Township Board of Education on Wednesday, February 9, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. in the  
Ethel Hoppock Middle School Multi-Purpose Room (#2)

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

President Harris called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

**II. PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE**

In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Law of New Jersey, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by sending notice to: The Hunterdon County Democrat, Bethlehem Township Clerk, email sent to school community and township residents, by posting on the bulletin boards in the Ethel Hoppock Middle School and Thomas B. Conley Schools and by posting notice on the Board of Education website at <http://btschools.org/>

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**IV. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Michael Hale - present   Ms. Judy Hnat - present   Ms. Rainie Roncoroni, Interim CSA- present  
Mr. Kyle Harris - present   Mr. Travis Roop- present   Mr. Brian Latzke, SBA/BS- present  
Ms. Jenny Holmes- present   Ms. Jennifer Seibert- present   Ms. Teresa Moore, Attorney- present

**V. Oath of Office of New Board Member**

Mr. Latzke administered the Oath of Office to appointed Board Member Ref: N.J.S.A. 18A: 12-2.1.  
● Jessica Romero - One-Year Unexpired Term

**VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION #1**

**MOTION** by Mr. Roop, seconded by Ms. Hnat.

**BE IT RESOLVED** pursuant to Section 7 of the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-12), that the Board enter into Closed Session at this time to discuss confidential matters pertaining to Personnel, including recommendations for appointments; termination of employment; terms and conditions of employment; evaluation of the performance of, promotion, or discipline of board employees or prospective employees; changes in salary; changes in assignment; and leaves of absence.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the matters discussed in Closed Session should be made public as soon as the need for confidentiality no longer exists, but it is not known at this time when that may be.

On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The motion carried. The Board entered closed session at 6:33 p.m.

**MOTION** by Ms. Seibert, seconded by Mr. Roop, to return to public session.

On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The motion carried. The Board reconvened in open session at 7:00 p.m.

## **VII. CORRESPONDENCE**

None

## **VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS - Agenda Items Only**

None

## **IX. PRESENTATION: Conley School Building Project**

**Ernie Turner, Project Manager**

**Patrick S. Seiwel, DRG Architects**

Mr. Turner presented information about the School Funding Reform Act and that State Aid the district would be receiving had been reduced by \$984,000 in 2018-2019 and has continued to be reduced by hundreds of thousands of dollars since then. Challenge of maintaining two buildings, the proposal of adding an addition to Conley would help in reducing redundancies. Mr. Turner recommended that finance of the addition would not be done through a referendum but through a combination of a ground lease and capital reserve funds. The cost savings of maintenance, utilities, and staffing of Hoppock School would offset the cost of the lease over the 5 years. Budget development should include a discussion of 2% cap and any available banked cap. The benefit to the program is that once the lease is complete, the district can use the funds to enhance other program areas. The additions to Conley School would include four classrooms, science lab, restrooms, small group instruction and associated hallways and locker room. Possible bid alternates include air conditioning in the current Conley building. This may be funded partially through ESSER grants.

- Ms. Seibert asked Mr. Turner to describe his roles with the District. He had been hired to help with the finances of the District and also the Treasurer of School Monies for a four month period, and currently is Project Manager for the Conley School Project.
- Mr. Harris asked about the cost to taxpayers in the proposal. Mr. Turner added that the District looks closely at taking 2% cap (on property tax levy) and available banked cap to offset the loss of State aid.
- Ms. Seibert asked about the financing of the lease and the contributions of the Board. Needs to make sure the community is receptive either through referendum or community discussion.
- Mr. Harris asked if the savings from the building consolidation would pay for the lease.
- Ms. Holmes asked for clarification on Mr. Turner's Treasurer position. He responded that he was the Treasurer prior to being hired as Project Manager.
- Mr. Harris discussed the project timeline, the regionalization study that the Board has joined with other school districts, and the need for all communities to be in favor of regionalization.
- Mr. Turner clarified that referendums are paid through debt service and lease payments are paid out of the operating costs of the building. Districts are allowed to go out for a five-year lease. At the end of the five-year period, the money is available in the operating budget.

Mr. Seiwel discussed the timeline and submission of a project application to the NJDOE on 12/14/21. District still needs to make a decision on what will happen with the Hoppock School.

95% of construction documents have been completed. The Department of Community Affairs will need to review the plans for code issues. Belief is the septic has a capacity for the number of the student projected to be at Conley, but the permit for the septic is set to expire and must be renewed with an extension. Discussed proposal from ARH to complete septic permit extension. Prices in construction continue to grow. Base bid is approximately 10,000 square feet. Alternates include extra classroom space and HVAC upgrades.

- Answered questions from Ms. Holmes and Mr. Harris about rejection of bids that come in over budget.
- Ms. Seibert questioned the construction being completed while students are in session. Mr. Seiwel clarified that the majority of the addition takes place away from the student classroom. Asked for clarification on Level III versus Level II in the application to the NJDOE. Mr. Seiwel added that all Level I are projects that affect health and safety, Level II are for projects such as parking lots and gymnasiums, Level III is reserved for additions. The levels tie to the funding amount districts receive from the state for projects through referendum which is a maximum of 40%. Mr. Seiwel clarified that the energy efficiency is considered in the design, but that a LEED certification is not being sought.

#### **X. FINANCE -**

**MOTION** by Mr. Hale, seconded by Mr. Roop to approve items A - D.

##### **A. Acceptance and Approval of Board Secretary's Report for the month of September 2021 - Att #1 (TABLED)**

**BE IT RESOLVED** that upon review of the Board Secretary's Report for the month of September 2021 in consultation with appropriate district officials, the Board of Education certifies that no fund had been over expended in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(b); and the Board of Education further certifies, based on the Board Secretary's certification, that the total of encumbrances for each line item account does not exceed the line item appropriation in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(a).

##### **B. Acceptance and Approval of Treasurer's Report for the month of September 2021 - Att #1 (TABLED)**

**BE IT RESOLVED** that upon review of the Treasurer's Report for the month of September 2021 in consultation with appropriate district officials, the Board of Education certifies that no fund had been over expended in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(b); and the Board Secretary further certifies, based on the Board Treasurer's Report, that the total of encumbrances for each line item account does not exceed the line item appropriation in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(a).

##### **C. Acceptance and Approval of Board Secretary's Report for the month of October 2021 - Att #2 (TABLED)**

**BE IT RESOLVED** that upon review of the Board Secretary's Report for the month of October 2021 in consultation with appropriate district officials, the Board of Education certifies that no fund had been over expended in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(b); and the Board of Education further certifies, based on the Board Secretary's certification, that the total of encumbrances for each line item account does not exceed the line item appropriation in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(a).

##### **D. Acceptance and Approval of Treasurer's Report for the month of October 2021 - Att #2 (TABLED)**

**BE IT RESOLVED** that upon review of the Treasurer's Report for the month of October 2021 in consultation with appropriate district officials, the Board of Education certifies that no fund had been over expended in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(b); and the Board Secretary further

certifies, based on the Board Treasurer's Report, that the total of encumbrances for each line item account does not exceed the line item appropriation in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(a).

**The Board Secretary certifies, pursuant to NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(c)(3), that the total of encumbrances for each line item account does not exceed the line item appropriation in violation of NJAC 6A:23A-16:10(a).**

**Discussion:** Ms. Seibert questioned the signing of the reports by Mr. Turner, previous Treasurer. Mr. Turner's resignation of the position of Treasurer stated he would complete reports through the October 2021 month closing. Recommended that current Treasurer, Jennifer Mooney, review the reports in completing future reports with her appointment in November prior to approving the September and October reports.

MOTION by Mr. Harris, seconded by Ms. Seibert to table items A-D.  
On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The motion carried.

## **XI. PERSONNEL**

MOTION by Mr. Roop, seconded by Ms. Holmes

### **A. Acceptance of Letter of Resignation**

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board upon recommendation of the Interim Chief School Administrator, accept a letter of resignation from Ms. Grissel Travieso-Dipini (HOP-TCH-SPAN-1), Spanish Teacher. Effective April 1, 2022.

**Vote:** On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The motion carried.

## **XII PUBLIC COMMENT**

Barbara Cochran - Questioned reduction of state aid and whether it is proportional to the reduction of students. Hoppock is an unsustainable structure for the future. Need to inform the public about the use of school funds for construction, communication about the project, and need for referendum.

Suzanne Wilder - Commended Ms. Seibert on her questions about finances of the district. Concerned about the construction and past construction issues at Conley. Need to take a serious look at regionalization.

Noah Rothman - Support of Governor's plan to sunset the mask mandate. Impacts of masking on students.

Bruce Johnson - Questioned the need for an addition when the district additions in the 1990's made the capacity of the two schools in excess of the current enrollment.

Johannen Belon - Discussed mask policy and asked the Board to consider ending the mask policy.

Phil Greofnale - Asked Board to consider costs of Hoppock if it becomes unoccupied. Asked questions about the regionalization study and how it would benefit students.

Adrian Crate - Asked if the Board has made a decision on the mask mandate.

Barbara Cochran - Demographic study data is outdated. The addition does not make sense if the school district is looking at regionalization. Commented on fees paid to DRG architects in regards to the Conley addition.

Lauren Greene - Asked for transparency about the construction project and whether there is a need based on enrollment.

MOTION to close public comment by Mr. Roop, seconded by Mr. Hale.

On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The motion carried.

### **XIII. OLD BUSINESS**

**MOTION** by Ms. Seibert, seconded by Ms. Hnat

A Suspend the Conley School Project

B Terminate the contract for Construction Manager with Ernie Turner.

C No further communication between DRG and the NJDOE

Discussion - Mr. Roop commented that in 2020 he became informed about the building project Recognized that there are opportunities for the Board to communicate about the project with the community. We are committing to continuing the investigation. We need to do our due diligence and evaluate all options including the regionalization study. He still has questions about the future of Hoppock.

Ms. Seibert is concerned that there are costs that are incurred from the firms. Mr. Roop added that there is not room at Conley for the 7th and 8th, but the costs of running two buildings is problematic. Ms. Hnat added that DRG has completed 95% of the construction documents. Mr. Harris added that the district still needs to know what the status of the bids are so that if construction is not possible. Ms. Hnat inquired about the need for a construction manager. Mr. Harris added that construction projects typically have an employee on site to oversee the project.

Ms. Seibert added her concern for moving forward with the project given that we do not have a complete audit or up-to-date financial reports at this time. Mr. Turner added that he would be willing to waive the 30 day notice.

Motion was amended to the following.

**MOTION** Ms. Seibert, seconded by Ms. Hnat to terminate the contract with Ernie Turner, Construction Manager of Summit Management, effective immediately.

On a roll call vote, the results were 3 Ayes, 3 Nays, and 1 abstention

Ayes - Holmes, Hnat, Seibert

Nays - Hale, Harris, Roop

Abstentions - Romero

The motion failed.

**MOTION** by Roop, seconded by Harris to update the DOE submission dates.

On a roll call vote, all present were in favor, except Ms. Romero, who abstained.

Mr. Harris discussed the open committee seats and all remaining committee seats were filled.

Building and Grounds - Seibert, Harris, and Hale

Finance - Roop, Holmes, and Seibert

Policy - Roop, Hale, Seibert

Curriculum and Activities - Hnat, Holmes, Romero

Transportation and Community Relations - Hnat, Harris, Romero

Personnel and Negotiations - Roop, Harris, Romero

Ms. Seibert brought up the status of the audit and concerns about conflicts of interest. Believes that the district needs a forensic audit of the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years to ensure the business office is in good shape and has a clean slate.

**MOTION** by Ms. Seibert, seconded by Hnat to complete an RFP for a forensic audit of the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years and alternate of 2018-2019.

Mr. Harris commented that he would like to see the FY21 audit before beginning a forensic audit. Mr. Roop clarified that the BOE would review the proposals prior to entering a contract.

On a roll call vote, all present were in favor. Motion carried.

#### **XIV. NEW BUSINESS**

Ms. Seibert discussed the budget process and planning for the current program and the future of the district and suggested beginning with a zero increase budget.

Ms. Roncoroni announced that Bethlehem Township will allow for parental and personal choice for wearing masks beginning on March 7th. Updated information about protocols will be shared as the March 7th date approaches.

Both boys and girls basketball teams will be playing in the tournament semifinals.

#### **XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION - #2**

**BE IT RESOLVED** pursuant to Section 7 of the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-12), that the Board enter into Closed Session at this time to discuss confidential matters pertaining to: Board Candidates and to discuss confidential matters pertaining to Personnel.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the matters discussed in Closed Session should be made public as soon as the need for confidentiality no longer exists, but it is not known at this time when that may be.

**MOTION** by Ms. Holmes, seconded by Ms. Hnat to enter into closed session.

On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The Board entered closed session at 9:55 p.m.

The Board reconvened in public session at 10:45 p.m.

#### **XV. NOTEWORTHY DATES**

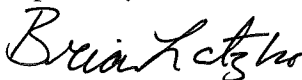
- 1). **February 23, 2022** - Board of Education Meeting - Hoppock School Multi-Purpose Room - Executive Session. Meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. and the Regular Public Meeting begins at 7:00 p.m.
- 2). **March 23, 2022** - Board of Education Meeting - Hoppock School Multi-Purpose Room - Executive Session. Meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. and the Regular Public Meeting begins at 7:00 p.m.

#### **XVI. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION TO ADJOURN** by Mr. Roop, seconded by Mr. Hale.

On a voice vote, all present were in favor. The Board adjourned at 10:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brian Latzke

School Business Administrator/Board Secretary