

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL0g3Z58Ars>

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: IN LIGHT OF COVID-19, AND PURSUANT TO EXECUTIVE ORDERS 7B and 9H, THE TOWN IS CONDUCTING THIS MEETING VIA WEBEX AND TAKING LIVE PUBLIC COMMENT VIA WEBEX DURING THE MEETING.

- ✓ Back-up documents relating to the agenda items can be found at www.fairfieldct.org/bof.

Special Board of Finance Meeting Final Minutes
Wednesday, December 16, 2020
7:00 pm

A Special Board of Finance meeting was held virtually on Wednesday, December 16, 2020 at 7:00 pm in Fairfield, Connecticut.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jim Brown-Chair, Lori Charlton, Christopher DeWitt-Vice Chair, Mary LeClerc-Secretary, Sheila Marmion, John Mitola, Jack Testani, James Walsh

MEMBERS ABSENT: Edward Bateson

ALSO PRESENT: Town Attorney Jim Baldwin, CFO Jared Schmitt, Superintendent of Schools Mike Cummings, FPS Director of Operations Angelus Papageorge, BOE Chair Christine Vitale, BOE Liaison Jeff Peterson, Executive Director Special Education and Student Services Robert Mancusi, FairTV

1. Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. To hear, consider and act upon a request from the Board of Selectmen for a Special Appropriation in the amount of \$5,123,928 for the costs of purchasing land and existing buildings to operate the Walter Fitzgerald High School campus, moving costs, improvements related thereto and authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance such appropriation (See attached bond resolution). (*requires BOF and RTM approval*) (*pending BOS approval on 12-14-20*)

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to approve Item 3. Mr. Mitola seconded the motion.

Mr. Papageorge opened the discussion and explained that the BOS had approved this appropriation and he is now before this Board to request funding for the purchase of 309 Bayberry Road in Southport. He said it is 11.74 acres with two existing structures. He said one structure was the former Giant Steps School and the other has been empty for 30 years. Mr. Papageorge said the intent for the purchase is to move the Walter Fitzgerald School from the existing building which is leased from the Diocese of Bridgeport into the building formerly used as Giant Steps for operation of the school. He said the cost includes moving and minor improvements.

Mr. Papageorge said \$14K was removed to move FF&E as that will be done through operating costs. He said there is a breakdown of carrying costs and a summary of carrying costs versus leasing costs that was sent to the Board.

Mr. Mitola asked if the warranties carryover if the property is purchased. Attorney Baldwin said he does believe that is the case, but he will confirm. Mr. Papageorge said the study of hazardous materials on the property is being done and will be finished before the closing. Mr. Mitola asked if the maximum enrollment in the program is 50 because of the program or because of the current facility. Mr. Mancusi said it is the program, but it could change. Mr. Mitola asked if the building is taxed in Fairfield. Attorney Baldwin replied that it was owned by the Bridgeport Archdiocese and was exempt until last year when the assessor sent a bill which is currently being disputed.

Mr. DeWitt asked if the program is limited to 50. Mr. Mancusi said it is not limited to 50, but he said that is the max for the current location. He said the BOE is looking to expand that maximum and looking into having other programs there. Mr. DeWitt said it was clear taking the tour that the building was well maintained and will be very useful to the Town. He said it is very encouraging after going through the current campus that more kids will want to go there. He said he will be voting for this.

Mr. Mancusi said there are no specific education specs for the Walter Fitzgerald program. He said the 50 max was established a few years ago based on student needs and space available. Ms. LeClerc asked if there was any chance for reimbursement for the costs. Mr. Papageorge said the renovations are only to bring the building up to code with the rest of the schools in town. Mr. Mancusi added this could also be an additional revenue generator from students who don't have an alternative high school in their district. Ms. Charlton asked about potential additional revenue at \$35,000 for Walter Fitzgerald and if it will go up in the new location. Mr. Mancusi said that is the base tuition for students who come with a 504 plan or an IEP. He said this is standard and it hasn't changed in a few years because there hasn't been additional students. Mr. Mancusi said it is considered a district program so the BOE wouldn't see an average tuition cost of \$70,000. He said if the students move into the Giant Steps building, there could be an increase. Ms. Charlton asked if \$35,000 was the market rate. Mr. Mancusi replied that once more is charged, there will be outplacement rates.

Mr. Walsh asked how much is paid in the current lease. Mr. Cummings said it is \$110,250 and there are also maintenance costs on top of that. He referred to the sheet that was sent on Monday and said everything was broken down by cost. Mr. Cummings then added that \$143,330.30 includes security and all utilities. Mr. Papageorge said the lease expires on June 30th after having a one year extension. Mr. Mancusi added that the intent is to allow tuition spending students. He said the current location is not inviting. Mr. Walsh stated that the Town is giving the BOE the former Giant Steps building, but wanted to know if everything else on the property would be Town property including the additional building. He said that according to the Town Charter, the RTM would decide who uses it. Mr. Baldwin said all Town bodies would decide and if it requires funding, the BOF would need to approve it. He said the idea as articulated by the First Selectwoman is to have all town bodies, commissions and committees decide what would be the best uses of the property. Mr. Walsh asked if the other building on the property would be a better teaching space since it is bigger. Mr. Papageorge said he wasn't sure if it would be better because it needs work and only has one bathroom. He said it also doesn't have an elevator so it isn't ADA compliant. Mr. Walsh asked if it was big enough to move Central Office to.

Mr. Papageorge said he thought it could be, but didn't know the exact space. Mr. Baldwin said it could certainly be something the Town could look into. Mr. Walsh asked if the Town was under contract for the purchase. Mr. Baldwin said there is a letter of understanding, but no deposit has been made yet. He said the goal for all involved is to close before the end of the year and the seller is motivated by the Town to close sooner.

Mr. DeWitt said when the Town bought the Hoyden's Hill property, there was no intended purpose, but the BOF put the intended use in the bond. He said this bond doesn't say anything about the use of the land. He said he is concerned that the remaining land could turn into open space by the RTM. Mr. Mitola asked if the BOE will have control of the whole property or just the school and asked how much land was around the building. Mr. Baldwin said the BOE will only have control over the school and a fence is going up around the facility to separate it from the rest of the property.

Ms. Marmion wondered if the Town would have liability for the abandoned building and if the Town would need to spend money to keep it safe from people going into the building. Mr. Baldwin said no prices have been set. Ms. Marmion asked if there had been discussions about demolishing the building or if it will be used if it is intact. Mr. Baldwin said the roof has issues, but the rest of the building is in good shape. Ms. Marmion asked what the process was to look at the best use. Mr. Baldwin replied that as he said earlier, all town bodies will decide what the best use is after structural studies are complete. He said the main thing is to move ahead with the BOE needs. Ms. Marmion asked if there is any way to monitor access to the empty building. Mr. Baldwin said it would be wise, but hasn't been vetted. He said the Risk Manager is looking into insurance costs which could add \$1,250-\$2,500 to ongoing costs.

Ms. LeClerc said the bond doesn't mention other potential uses and asked if other town uses could be added. Attorney Baldwin said he will ask Bond Counsel. Mr. Mitola said the BOS already voted on what is written in the bond. Mr. Walsh said looked at the Charter, but couldn't find anything about the RTM. He said he did find article 35-12 that seems to suggest the RTM has the right to designate use of property. Mr. Baldwin said he is looking into it. He said the Town is buying the parcel and even though it is leasing part of it to the BOE, it is up to the RTM. He said how it gets to the RTM and how it reads is up to the town bodies. Mr. Walsh said if it is not designated, it will go to open space. Mr. Baldwin said it is a fair point to put it in the bond resolution. BOE Chair Christine Vitale said she appreciated the conversation, but the BOE is just looking at the property for the Walter Fitzgerald campus. She said discussions about the other building and future land use will go before town bodies. She said she hopes this conversation doesn't stop this project. Ms. Vitale said the BOE needs this location for the students who are most at risk. She said there many opportunities for the Town in the future here. Mr. Walsh agreed that it is the perfect building and after going through the current school he said he was embarrassed. He said it is in bad condition and understands looking for another location because the students deserve to be in a respectful place. He said he doesn't want to add another expense, but it will get the students out of a bad situation and into good space.

Ms. Marmion said she noticed in Ms. Vitale's memo that the BOE also targeted an early literacy program. She asked if that would eliminate outplacng district kids who were in that program already. She also asked if the BOE planned on bringing kids from out of district and will save money by not placing kids outside of district. Mr. Cummings said it would reduce the current outplacement and support kids who need literacy at an early age.

He said it will be more of a cost avoidance than an income generator and could be a significant savings. Mr. Mancusi said he didn't have the figure, but there are many kids who have significant literacy deficits to out of district placement. He said this will be significant cost avoidance. Ms. Marmion asked Mr. Mancusi to get the Board the costs for the last few years.

The motion carried unanimously.

4. To hear, consider and act upon a request from the Purchasing Policy Committee to transfer \$20,000.00 from the General Fund Contingency (01002010-58010) to the Board of Finance- Fees and Professional Services budget (01003130-53200) for the creation of a new Purchasing Policy.

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to approve Item 4. Mr. Mitola seconded the motion.

Mr. DeWitt talked about the current town purchasing policy. He said he and Ms. Charlton asked Joseph Centofanti to write a new purchasing policy for the Town. Mr. DeWitt said he had an informal meeting with Purchasing Director Gerald Foley and CFO Jared Schmitt. He said Mr. Foley delivered a very comprehensive policy which was much improved from the original. He said the document is substantially closer to where the Town needs to be. Mr. DeWitt suggested changing Mr. Centofanti's role from creator to helper and said he would like to move the vote to the January 5 meeting. Ms. Charlton concurred with Mr. DeWitt and said the document is fairly well organized. She said she hopes to still use Mr. Centofanti and agreed that he can go from creator to reviewer. She said Mr. Foley has a great starting point that needs a few more tweaks. She said Mr. Centofanti can give the Board a revised amount to his fees for the January 5th meeting. Mr. DeWitt said Mr. Foley was revising a Procedural Manual for the department and it is 86 pages of good substantial data. Ms. Charlton said she and Mr. DeWitt knew a procedural manual was coming out, but the policy piece was incorporated in this. She said Mr. Foley's team did a nice job, but will still need Mr. Centofanti to look at it.

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to postpone Item 4 to a date certain of the January 5, 2021 meeting. Ms. Charlton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

5. To Hear, Consider and Approve the 2021 Meeting Schedule

Ms. Charlton made a motion to approve Item 5. Mr. Testani seconded the motion.

Mr. Brown made a friendly amendment to make the February 2nd meeting a regular meeting and the February 16th meeting a quarterly review meeting.

The motion carried unanimously.

6. To Hear, Consider and Act Upon Any Communications - None

7. Adjourn

Ms. Charlton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 pm. Ms. Marmion seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Pru O'Brien, Recording Secretary