

1 **Southwest Vermont Unified Elementary School District (SVUESD)**

2 **Board of Directors Meeting Minutes: March 10, 2020**

3 Multi-Purpose Room, Woodford Elementary

4
5 *Members Present:* Cincy Brownell, Pownal; Tony D’Onofrio, Vice-Chair, Shaftsbury; Dick Frantz,
6 Woodford; Susan Hoag, Woodford; Christopher Murphy, Chair, Bennington Chaila Sekora, Bennington;
7 Tammy Sohl, Pownal.

8
9 *Members Absent:* Scott McEnaney, Clerk, Shaftsbury.

10
11 *Others Present:* Kate Abbott, SVSU Director of Early Education; Melissa Chancey, Woodford Teacher;
12 Jim Culkeen, SVSU Superintendent; Sandy Foster, Woodford Elementary Principal; Renee Gordon,
13 SVSU Director of Finance and Facilities; Gerry Prue, Facilities Director, Bennington Schools.

14
15 *CAT-TV:* This meeting was filmed and broadcast live by Josh Boucher.

16
17 *Recorder:* Richard Bump.

18
19 *NB. For revisions or corrections, if any, to these Minutes, please see the minutes for the meeting*
20 *currently scheduled for April 14, 2020. Note also that unless otherwise specified, all documents referred*
21 *to in these Minutes were posted to the SVSU/SVUESD website with the Agenda for this meeting.*

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23
24
25 **After board members toured the building starting at 6:15pm, Culkeen called the meeting to order**
26 **at 6:30pm and then led all present in the Pledge of Allegiance.**

27
28 1. Board Reorganization and Committee Appointments:

- 29 a. *Board reorganization:* Noting that this is the first board meeting after the annual meeting,
30 Culkeen called for nominations for board Chairperson. In response, **Sekora nominated**
31 **Murphy as Chair, seconded by D’Onofrio, and after Frantz moved and Sekora seconded**
32 **that the nominations be closed, Murphy was elected Chair of the SVUESD Board by**
33 **unanimous vote.** After thanking the board for their support and welcoming Sohl as the newest
34 member to the board, Murphy called for nominations for board Vice-chair and in response,
35 **Frantz nominated D’Onofrio as Vice chair, seconded by Sekora, and** hearing no further
36 nominations, **the motion passed unanimously.** In response to Murphy’s call for nominations
37 for board Clerk, **Brownell moved and Sekora seconded a motion to nominate McEnaney**
38 **as Clerk,** and hearing no further nominations, **the motion passed unanimously.**

- 39 b. *Committee Appointments:* In a series of actions regarding appointment to the SVSU board
40 **Frantz moved and Brownell seconded a motion to appoint Sekora**
41 **D’Onofrio moved and Sekora seconded a motion to appoint Frantz**
42 **Sekora moved and D’Onofrio seconded a motion to appoint McEnaney**
43 **as representatives to the SVSU board, whereupon Frantz moved and D’Onofrio seconded**
44 **a motion to appoint all three members as motioned, and the motion passed unanimously.**

45 After a brief discussion, Murphy announced committee assignments as follows

46 Facilities: D’Onofrio

47 Finance: Brownell

48 Personnel: Hoag

49 Policy: Murphy

50 Technology: McEnaney

51 ESP Negotiations: tba

52 Teachers Negotiations: McEnaney

53 Administrator Negotiations: will not meet this year.

54 Murphy also asked that any board member(s) interested in serving on the ESP committee let
55 him know as soon as possible.

56

- 1 2. Public Comments: In response to Hoag's question about why each of the four towns in the SVUESD
2 has a different education tax rate, Murphy noted that the way in which the tax rate is calculated, state
3 mandated, is in part based on
4 - the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA), which differs town by town
5 - the "blending" of the SVUESD rate with the MAU rate, which then proportioned out based
6 on the number of Equalized Pupils in each of the four towns
7 and that's mostly why the tax rate differs town by town. In response to Hoag and Brownell's
8 statements that Woodford's tax rate jumped 12% and Pownal's rate increased 10%, Gordon further
9 explained that, although the actual SVUESD budget increased only 1.2%, there was a decrease of
10 60 students in the districtwide which explains why there was a larger increase in the tax rate than in
11 the actual budget. Members and staff further noted that
12 - the SVUESD board reviewed, discussed and approved the FY21 budget and
13 recommended approval by member towns
14 - the merger of the four former elementary districts into the merged district occurred after the
15 deadline for receiving merger-related tax break incentives from the state.

- 17 3. Consent Agenda: **Frantz moved and Sekora seconded a motion to approve the Consent**
18 **Agenda as presented, and the motion passed unanimously.** The Consent Agenda as presented
19 and approved, included

- 20 - the Minutes of the 1/14/20 SVUESD Meeting
21 - amendments to the payroll warrant coversheets (although the cover sheet amounts need
22 amending, all amounts and transactions were correctly included in the warrant documents
23 themselves) for the following meetings:

24 8/13/19:

25 #PR001PY in the amount of \$7,226.13 (for a total of \$10,707.76)

26 #PR001 in the amount of \$21,374.32 (for a total of \$39,925.38)

27 #PR002PY in the amount of \$1,446.05 (for a total of \$1,904.54)

28 #PR002 in the amount of \$45,692.69 (for a total of \$212,773.45)

29 #PR003 in the amount of \$66,578.47 (for a total of \$239,935.95)

30 9/10/19:

31 #PR004 in the amount of \$56,632.36 (for a total of \$88,086.30)

32 #PR005 in the amount of \$192,657.01 (for a total of \$550,136.94)

33 10/8/19

34 #PR006 in the amount of \$213,145.05 (for a total of \$308,727.29)

35 #PR007 in the amount of \$216,760.60 (for a total of \$495,671.25)

36 11/12/19

37 #PR008 in the amount of \$219,307.63 (for a total of \$320,425.27)

38 #PR009 in the amount of \$220,253.07 (for a total of \$638,642.32)

39 #PR010 in the amount of \$223,178.90 (for a total of \$338,638.66)

- 40 - Payroll Warrant #PR015 in the amount \$362,386.03
41 - Payroll Warrant #PR016 in the amount \$505,618.95
42 - Payroll Warrant #PR017 in the amount \$481,235.49
43 - Payroll Warrant #PR018 in the amount \$466,684.52
44 - Accounts Payable Warrant #021120 in the amount \$222,852.14
45 - Accounts Payable Warrant #031020 in the amount \$145,317.20
46 - Retirements: None
47 - Leave of Absence: None
48 - Resignations: Lisa Loomis, Nurse, Shaftsbury
49 - Nominations: Anne Rockwell, 2nd Grade Teacher, Pownal
50 - Field Trips: None

51 Somewhat later in the meeting, **Frantz moved and D'Onofrio seconded a motion to accept the**
52 **Minutes of the Annual Floor Meeting 3/2/20 and the motion passed unanimously.** A copy of
53 said Minutes was distributed at the beginning of the meeting.

- 1 4. Finance:
- 2 a. *Treasurer's Report:* **Frantz moved and Sekora seconded a motion to accept the**
- 3 **Treasurer's Account Balance and Cash Flow Report for January 31,2020 and the motion**
- 4 **passed unanimously.** That report detailed a closing cash balance for the period of
- 5 \$7,771,665.07.
- 6 b. *Off Cycle Warrants Signing Authority:* **Frantz moved and Brownell seconded a motion to**
- 7 **authorize the Board Chair or Vicechair to sign warrants off cycle to board meetings and**
- 8 **the motion passed unanimously**
- 9 c. *Authorization for Execution of Contracts:* After Murphy read aloud a proposal to *authorize the*
- 10 *Superintendent or his/her designee to execute on behalf of the School District: purchase orders,*
- 11 *agreements for consulting services, grant agreements, and other contracts arising affecting the*
- 12 *routine operation of the School District; the Superintendent or designee shall not execute any*
- 13 *contracts resulting from a public bid process, any employment agreements, and any long-term*
- 14 *contracts without express authority from the Board, Frantz moved and D'Onofrio seconded a*
- 15 **motion to authorize the approval as presented and the motion passed unanimously.**
- 16 d. *Monument Elementary Roof Request for Proposal (RFP):* After Gordon noted that
- 17 - the Request for Proposals for work to be done on the roof of the Monument
- 18 Elementary school has been drafted and is ready for release
- 19 - proposals for that work should be received in time for review and action in the May
- 20 board meeting, such that all work needing to be done could be completed by the end
- 21 of the summer
- 22 **Frantz moved and Brownell seconded a motion to release the Request for Proposal as**
- 23 **described, and the motion passed unanimously.**
- 24 e. *Nature's Classroom Donations:* Murphy detailed three new donations to help fund the Nature's
- 25 Classroom field trips for the Bennington Schools, all of which were in addition to the three
- 26 Nature's classroom donations already on the agenda. After a brief discussion wherein
- 27 members and staff noted that
- 28 - these donations are in response to Parent-Teacher groups in the Bennington schools
- 29 who reached out in a variety of Nature's Classroom fund-raising activities to
- 30 supplement money already included in the budget for that event
- 31 - some school budgets fully financed the activity, whereas others only partially funded
- 32 or did not fund it at all, choosing instead other field trips/activities
- 33 - specific field trips and other educational activities are based on individual school
- 34 choice
- 35 **Frantz moved and D'Onofrio seconded a motion to accept, with thanks, the following**
- 36 **donations in support of the Nature's Classroom activity**
- 37 - **\$1,000 for each of the three Bennington Schools from the Alliance for**
- 38 **Community Transformations (ACT) and as detailed in three separate letters, one**
- 39 **to each school, dated 2/14/20**
- 40 - **\$500 from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, to Molly Stark**
- 41 - **\$500 from the Women's American Legion, to Molly Stark**
- 42 - **\$400 from the Men's American Legion, to Molly Stark.**
- 43
- 44 5. Policies: After Murphy noted that the three policies presented for adoption were all warned 12/3/19
- 45 and all were reviewed by legal counsel
- 46 - **Sekora moved and Frantz seconded a motion to adopt *Policy #5050 – Discipline,***
- 47 ***Suspension or Expulsion of Students* and the motion passed unanimously**
- 48 - **Brownell moved and Frantz seconded a motion to adopt *Policy #5065 –***
- 49 ***Verbal/Physical Assault of an Employee* and the motion passed unanimously.**
- 50 - **Frantz moved and Sekora seconded a motion to adopt *Policy #5400 – Student Safety***
- 51 **and the motion passed unanimously.**
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1 6. Educational Matters:

- 2 a. *Principal Foster's Report:* After welcoming the board to Woodford Elementary, the "oldest
3 continuously operating school in the country still in its original location", Foster noted that
4 - Woodford students have significant opportunity for off-site learning and, upon entering
5 the MAU school, feel "comfortable and ask lots of questions"
6 - "everyone here knows what to do, and how to do it"
7 - Frantz is our local "Rock Star" who comes in weekly and works with students
8 - staff in Woodford is "involved and engaged" with a wide variety of experience and
9 interests
10 - Woodford students have participated in Nature's Classroom for over 15 years; "kids
11 grow in this amazing program"
12 - the school is ready and willing to loan out surplus equipment on hand, like musical
13 instruments, to other schools which might have need
14 - recent results from lead testing in water require replacement of one water fountain, a
15 project already moving forward
16 - "we love to have kids and adults visit: please come!"
17 b. *Reports of Other SVUESD Principals:* Members noted that the reports of the other five SVUESD
18 principals were included in the agenda packet/linked to the website.
19

20 7. Superintendent's Report:

- 21 a. *Intra-School Choice:* Culkeen distributed and then reviewed three documents, all related to
22 school choice amongst the schools within the SVUESD:
23 - the first, detailing the school choice process and policies including date by which the
24 number of spaces available in each school is announced; resident students have
25 priority placement within schools in their home town; a lottery drawing will determine
26 admission if there are more requests than there are places; preference is given to
27 having siblings in the same school; once admitted, a student can remain at that school
28 for the remainder of elementary education; transportation not provided; application
29 forms available on website/Central Office
30 - the second, identical to the first except it includes language giving priority to students
31 whose parent/guardian is employed at a school outside the 'home' school of the
32 student, and the request is to have that student move to the place of parent
33 employment
34 - the third, the Application form itself.

35 In subsequent discussion, members and staff variously noted that,

- 36 - dates specified in the application process could be modified
37 - classroom capacity is considered 20 or less, grades K-2, and 25 or less grades 3-6
38 - legal counsel has reviewed the documents and has expressed concern about giving
39 one group priority over another group
40 - school choice for 6th grade students is complicated in that only Bennington 6th graders
41 attend the MAU middle school; this is being reviewed
42 - giving school choice to children of teachers/staff might be more appropriately
43 addressed through negotiated contracts
44 - school choice would be in effect starting with the upcoming 20-21 school year
45 - no additional personnel would be hired as part of this process; this option is entirely
46 dependent upon capacity at each grade level at each school
47 - tax impact would vary depending on the student's home town.

48 After members also noted that

- 49 - the program should move forward on a trial basis
50 - in the event that the school-choice option is ended, any student placement made
51 before that closure would be honored for the duration of that student's time in the
52 district

53 **Sekora moved and Frantz seconded a motion to provide school choice to students**
54 **within the SVUESD and the motion passed unanimously.** Members then focused on the
55 option included in the second document granting priority to a request for placement of a student
56 in the same school in which his/her parent/guardian is employed and which is not in the home

1 town of the student, and after a brief discussion, **Sekora moved and Frantz seconded a**
2 **motion to implement a pilot program to provide school choice to students within the**
3 **district as detailed in the first document** (as described above) **and** after members noted that

- 4 - the placement of a student who was moved to the school in which the parent is
- 5 employed becomes problematic if/when then that parent subsequently is
- 6 employed/reassigned to another school
- 7 - the student with the employed parent/guardian in another school retains the option to
- 8 request the change in placement under “option 1”, and would become part of the
- 9 lottery if there are more applicants than seats available at the desired location
- 10 - “option 2” would apply to employees of the SVUESD and not the MAU or the SVSU
- 11 - it would be best to start as simply as possible, get feedback, and then modify the
- 12 program in subsequent years, if so desired
- 13 - the first lottery, if needed, will be in June

14 **the motion passed unanimously.**

15 b. *School Attendance Zones*: Culkeen reported that

- 16 - currently, there are 33 incoming Kindergarten students scheduled at Monument
- 17 - complicated efforts to redistrict the attendance zone for Monument resulted in a
- 18 reduction of 6 of those students (that small reduction was mostly due to siblings
- 19 already enrolled at Monument)
- 20 - a working group is now considering further reductions in Monument's attendance zone
- 21 as well as the possibility that siblings may not be able to attend the same school
- 22 - investigations are also underway about installation of a portable classroom at
- 23 Monument (at \$35K/year for two years, plus installation costs), but this may run up
- 24 against zoning issues
- 25 - if a portable classroom is allowed, the current library would probably shift to that
- 26 location thereby opening up another classroom inside the building
- 27 - there are 24 students in Monument's current kindergarten class
- 28 - a special meeting of this board might be needed to address this situation.

29 c. *Lead-Water Testing*: Culkeen and staff also reported that

- 30 - test results for lead in drinking water have come in for all schools and Shaftsbury is
- 31 the only building without problems
- 32 - given that most lead is in the faucets/fixtures themselves, replacement of those
- 33 faucets in all buildings testing positive has been completed or will be soon
- 34 - although the first drawdown of water in the morning tested higher than accepted limits,
- 35 the second drawdown was lower and within the acceptable range
- 36 - there is some funding available for this project, albeit minimal.

37 d. *Covid-19*: Following the announcement from the Southern Vermont Medical Center that a
38 patient at that location has been diagnosed with the coronavirus Covid-19, Culkeen reported
39 that

- 40 - all protocols and advisories at the state and national level are being followed
- 41 throughout the SVSU districts and schools
- 42 - he met with all principals and developed a list of all upcoming field trips, activities, and
- 43 events to review timelines, cancellation penalties if any, etc, with the realization that
- 44 some events, such as the New England Coral Competition, have already been
- 45 cancelled
- 46 - he will post daily notices to the SVSU website to keep the entire SVSU community
- 47 aware of on-going issues, concerns and actions.

48 e. *Orchard Road Environmental Assessment – Phase 1*: Culkeen further reported that all testing at
49 this location has been completed, results evaluated (included in a 300-page report), and there
50 appears to be no further testing needed, albeit continued monitoring of the location is
51 recommended. After a brief discussion, **Frantz moved and Sekora seconded a motion to**
52 **move forward on this project and to continue meeting with the Town of Bennington, and**
53 **the motion passed unanimously.**

54 f. *2020-2021 School Calendar*: Culkeen distributed copies of the recently completed calendar for
55 the 20-21 school year, noting that the SVSU calendar has to coordinate with the calendars of all
56 towns within the Career Development Center's regional membership.

- 1 8. Chair's Report: After Murphy
2 - thanked the voters for approving the FY21 budget as part of the annual meeting cycle
3 - asked board members interested in serving on the ESP Negotiations Team to contact him
4 as soon as possible
5 - and noted that he was moved by realizing that, during the tour of the Woodford school
6 before this meeting began, he was actually standing in the original schoolroom of the
7 oldest on-site school location in the country, built in 1809
8 He then returned to a discussion initiated during the January meeting of the board regarding the
9 District's participation in a solar net metering project, and as specifically presented by the Alternative
10 Energy Development Group (see Minutes for the 1/14/20 Meeting, page 2, line 16-53), noting that in
11 order to move forward on the project, the District would need to issue a Request for Proposal to
12 obtain responses from as many companies as possible who offer/manage net-metering projects. In
13 subsequent discussion, D'Onofrio noted that
14 - he spoke with someone in the field who cautioned him (and the District) about the
15 projected savings increase included in the AEDG proposal (it may be based on an "older
16 model")
17 - but regardless that caution, he is still "all for it. We just need to be careful."
18 And after others noted that
19 - the District needs to ensure that it works with a company which has projects already in
20 place
21 - locking into an agreement that spans 20 years is "concerning" (Brownell) although a 20-
22 year term is "pretty standard" for utility companies (Murphy)
23 **D'Onofrio moved and Brownell seconded a motion to move forward with the net-metering**
24 **project as discussed and the motion passed unanimously.**
25
26 9. FYI: Members noted without comment the following items
27 - *SVSU Student Enrollment – March 2020*
28 - *Budget Status Report for Accounting Period 9/20, printed 3/6/20*
29 - *Williams College Award to Pownal*
30 - *Vanguard Group Donation to Bennington Elementary*
31 - *Leave of Absence: Michael Carrano, SPED Teacher, Pownal Elementary*
32
33 10. Next Meeting: 4/14/20; 6:30pm, Bennington Elementary.
34
35 At 7:55pm, **Sekora moved and Brownell seconded a motion to adjourn, and the motion passed**
36 **unanimously.**