

SLATE VALLEY UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Regular Meeting

June 22, 2020

Virtual Meeting

6:30 p.m.

Approved Minutes:

Name	Role/Term	Town Representing	In Attendance
Pati Beaumont	Board Member	Benson	X
Rebeckah St. Peter	Board Member	Benson	X
Vacant	Board Member	Benson	--
Toni Lobdell	Board Member	Castleton	X
Tim Smith	Board Chair	Castleton	X
Julie Finnegan	Board Member	Castleton	X
Vacant	Board Member	Hubbardton	-
Joshua Hardt	Board Member	Hubbardton	X
Vacant	Board Member	Hubbardton	-
Tanya Tolchin	Board Member	West Haven	X
Angela Charron	Board Member	West Haven	X
Vacant	Board Member	West Haven	-
Tara Buxton	Board Member - Clerk of Board	Fair Haven	-
Mike Bache	Board Member	Fair Haven	X
Rick Wilson	Board Member	Fair Haven	X
Peter Stone	Board Vice Chair	Orwell	X
Glen Cousineau	Board Member	Orwell	X
John Wurzbacher	Board Member	Orwell	X
Brooke Olsen Farrell	Superintendent	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Cheryl Scarzello	Director of Finance	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Chris Cole	Director of Operations	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Casey O'Meara	Director of Curriculum I&A	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Kris Benway	Director of Special Services	Slate Valley UUSD	X

Audience Attending: Amy Roy, Kate Leathe, Margaret Hayward, Patrick Walters, Kim Prehoda, Deb Infurna, Phil Hall, Castleton UB, Aidan Spears, Kim Lucci, Becky Spears, Melinda Hardt

Call to Order - 6:30 PM: Tim Smith, Board Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Approval of Agenda: Glen Cousineau made a motion to approve the agenda with the two additions Tim Smith mentioned under Other; this was seconded by Peter Stone, motion carried.

Approval of SVUUSD Minutes - June 8, 2020: John Wurzbacher made a motion to approved the minutes of June 8, 2020 with no corrections noted; this was seconded by Glen Cousineau; motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Correspondence: None

Committees:

- **Finance Committee:** This committee meeting was canceled prior to tonight's meeting.

Discussion Items/Topics from local Board Listening Tour Meetings:

Fair Haven Listening Tour

Mike Bache and Rick Wilson reported there were 5 members of public there, very vocal but a good cross representation of folks. Discussion items were centered around the following:

- Budget Discussions, moved in and out of this topic
- Recommended we cut more from our budget
- A good deal of concern that we totally lost public support over bond issue
- Lack of support for the Board in general
- Some feel we didn't do a good job getting the second vote out to voters
- Teacher Salary Concerns
- Don't understand why we haven't closed schools and consolidated given the declining enrollments
- Concerned about Slate Valley's identify vs. Local Board's identity
- Top heavy on Administrators
- Very frustrated with AOE's multiple unfunded mandates and upset that Board doesn't push back on or ignore these
- Upset with the last flyer that went out "A Dissatisfier," too many pictures, too expensive to print
- Taxpayers having trouble understanding how we went from a 5 or 6,000,000.00 budget to a 26,000,000.00 budget.
- Trust and credibility issues with the Board in general
- \$235,000.00 in cuts is not deep enough.
- PBL aspects of learning is not providing enough challenges; diminishes importance of class ranking

West Haven-Angela Charron met with 8 residents and had received several emails.

- Heard much of what was listed above, taxpayers want a 0% increase
- The biggest cut they would like to see is in terms of salaries; with so many people out of work or losing their jobs we are out of touch with the struggles of our communities.
- Communication is a waste
- Still not equitable, West Haven cannot have a late bus but other schools run them all the time.
- Why are we sending a bus with 1 student on it to a sporting event when most others drive their own cars.
- Want to see actual budget mailed to them instead of the flyers
- Want to know what are the ramifications if we don't follow the state unfunded mandates
- The attendees at this meeting do not have kids in the school system, primarily retirees
- Recommend an August vote instead of a July vote; majority again will vote no

Benson Village School-Pati Beaumont and Rebeckah St. Peter with 1 Resident attending, was overall supportive

- Timing with Pandemic is poor
- Disappointed with glossy Slate Valley Newsletter; felt as though, appeared to cost a lot of money but didn't speak to the vote enough
- This person talked a lot about the BVS/OVS connection and the state of the buildings. We need to ensure that we all have safe buildings and learning environments for our students. Does not recommend a revote too soon, unsure about the effects of the Pandemic, fear a similar outcome.
- Unhappy with how much information is being mailed home;

Orwell - John W and Glen C with 6 residents (4 retirees and 2 with children in school)

John broke down the concerns into 3 main categories, Education, Communication and Infrastructure concerns.

- What is the overall vision for Slate valley?
- What do we in Slate Valley want to be known for?

- What are we doing in terms of trades/College Readiness?
- Unanimously they wanted to see kids challenged more with academics
- Want more opportunities for AP classes at the HS level
- Concerns with Foreign language being offered
- Why aren't we checking in 5-10 years after graduation to see if our students felt well prepared for life
- Concerned about how many students we are losing to other schools
- What are we doing to promote entrepreneurial skills?
- Slate Valley relies too heavily on electronic information, tone down the glossy production
- At meetings they come to they feel talked down at
- Expressed concern about presenters at the Board or the board not looking at audience, not facing them
- Budget information in previous years had significant budget information included into town reports
- Some got mailings on FB pages
- If you look at the people that voted, they do not have FB pages
- Physically display this information, look into purchase of sandwich boards and display in the community
- Orwell has 4 different post offices; many residents did not get the mailings -
- Robo calls only hit residents with students in school and they don't seem to be out voting.
- Don't push the same budget on us again, feel we will keep putting out same budget until it passes.

Glen C mentioned the following:

- Color schemes on the glossy prints are hard for older eyes to read
- Think we need to print entire budget and get out to voters in their mailboxes
- Would like listing of individual teacher salaries
- Communication is a big problem
- Nothing was posted in Buxton's regarding last vote
- Residents felt the Board should be pushing back against Montpelier
- Feel we need to keep Valedictorian awards, to keep challenging students.
- Insulted by putting out same budget again
- If you mention cutting football, thousands will show up to vote
- Very few places in Orwell to put signs.
- Wanted to know if there was any money in our maintenance budget to paint the outside of the Orwell Town Hall, if not is it possible for a group to fund raise and paint it themselves?

Hubbardton - Josh Hardt - 5 folks - 2 hour meeting

- Many of the above mentioned concerns were shared
- Expressed that they were really appreciative for the opportunity at their own town level to be able to talk face to face.
- Not anti Education
- Covid has us all scared
- Residual anger over Bond Issue
- Disconnect between AOE and local communities
- We need to better communicate the trajectory of modern education; unaware of why schools are taking so many things on
- Absentee ballots - hard to hand in ballots many of smaller towns offices are not open
- It is "hogwash" how tax rates are calculated; people can't understand how equalized per pupil costs are determined.
- Where is the accountability, budgets need to go home to taxpayers to view
- There is a perception that we are being "hoodwinked", there is an overall perception of mistrust in the board; they want to see a breakdown of the major budget expenditures.

Castleton - Toni Lobdell - Julie Finnegan and Tim Smith - 13 people attended

- Feel we at Slate Valley are top heavy with Administration
- Process for closing schools needs to be reiterated to taxpayers
- They want to see full budget & comparisons from year to year
- Please do not cut SRO's from our buildings
- Worried if we cut too much, kids programs will suffer
- Want a comparison of our district to other local districts in terms of Admin and Teachers

- We are one of the lowest spending districts in the area.
- People tanked us for our efforts
- Brooke noted we are the lowest spending district in the area per pupil costs etc
- Most voted for the budget, but will not in the future if we don't make significant cuts
- Most are in favor of the budgets going home to each home owner.

Budget FY 21: Cheryl and Brooke noted that we need direction from the Board tonight about how to proceed with the Budget and the re-vote. Peter Stone made a motion to hold the revote on the FY 21 budget on August 11, 2020; this was seconded by Toni Lobdell.

Brooke noted that if school's don't have an approved budget, the legislature has considered legislation that would mandate a budget that is more than the last 2 failed budgets. Regarding the Listening Tours there were roughly 30 participants that gave feedback in the whole School District. Discussion ensued and the general consensus is that we should do another round of discussions to answer or address the many concerns brought forward. We are planning to address this on July 9, 2020. Tim Smith asked Cheryl if there was a way to skinny down the budget to send home the budget to taxpayers from its current 40 + pages. The recommendation came to take out the couple of budget pages from the town report to get those out to taxpayers.

Cheryl and Brooke mentioned that to achieve a 0% increase in education spending per equalized pupil we must cut an additional \$635,000.00 Discussion ensued that to achieve this we are talking about either eliminating transportation, or Provision II, sports or extra curricular activities altogether. Other discussion needs to be had regarding the FY 22 budget as we will need to talk about the structure of our schools and how to change this to achieve some efficiencies and still comply with the Articles of Agreement.

After significant discussion the board opted to cut the budget by \$213,000.00 which reduces from a 2.99% increase to a 1.99% increase in education spending per equalized. Peter Stone made the motion to cut \$213,000 from the budget and this was seconded by John Wurzbacher. Majority approved this though there were three nay votes, Rick Wilson, Mike Bache and Angela Charron. The Finance Committee has and will continue to make the recommendations on the cuts. Brooke will send out the Tier 1 list of cuts and the tier 2 cuts should more have to be cut. Per Brooke at this time due to contracts having been issued in February we are not able to make administrative cuts or for teachers as they are under contract.. Brooke will work on a comparison chart to compare our districts to others in the surrounding area. Brooke will prepare this but also noted that due to our teacher salaries not being as competitive as neighboring schools and the fact we don't offer the same benefits we have the highest turnover rate of teachers in the state as they are leaving to go to neighboring district where they are receiving \$18,000 to \$25,000.00 more than we pay at Slate Valley when then get into the mid-range of the salary schedule.

Line of Credit FY21 - Action: Glen Cousineau made a motion to approve Cheryl going forward to obtain a Line of Credit for fiscal year 2021 in the amount of \$2,500,000.00 from People's United Bank with an interest rate of 1.75%. This was seconded by Peter Stone. Motion was carried by the full Board. Discussion ensued about the line of credit compared to the tax anticipation note that the district has obtained in the past. Cheryl also asked the Board to take action giving Tim Smith, Board Chair to sign the LOC on behalf of the full Board in light of Covid and not being able to meet in person. Julie Finnegan made a motion to allow Tim Smith, Board Chair to sign the LOC in the amount of \$2,500,000.00, this was seconded by Toni Lobdell; motion carried.

Julie Finnegan said that we need to provide a full court press in mailing out postcards and such about the next vote to get our community members out to vote. Including our staff and parents.

Warrants:

Glen Cousineau made a motion to approve total payments in the amount of \$2,782,467.89, this was seconded by Julie Finnegan. Glen Cousineau made a motion to approve payment of the food service warrant in the amount of \$80.65, this was seconded by Julie Finnegan. Glen Cousinean made a motion to approve the grant warrants in the amount of \$23,519.55, this was seconded by Julie Finnegan. Motions all carried by the full Board.

COVID Update: At this point guidance has been released and is ever changing day to day and week to week. We have been given the go ahead to plan for the re-opening of our schools. Brooke will continue to offer updates as we receive them.

Benson Board Seat: Brooke noted that Becky Spears was in the audience tonight and that Becky submitted a letter of interest in being appointed to the open Benson Seat Board opening. Becky Spears spoke for a few minutes about her reasoning for wanting to join the Board. Becky has lived in the community for 2 years or so, has children at all different levels in our school system and feels that they as all children deserve to see the school board positions filled. Casey O’Meara also spoke about how committed Becky is and the support she has shown to helping students with organization in the community and around her business. Juie Finnegan made a motion to appoint Becky Spears to the open Benson seat for the remainder of this term; this was seconded by Mike Bache and Peter Stonel; Motion carried by the full Board. Tim Smith, Board Chair, welcomes Becky to the Board as did Pati Beaumont.

Principal’s Report:

Slate Valley Principals’ Report
June 22, 2020

Professional development for leaders in Slate Valley has always been a priority. Over the course of the past couple of years and with this coming school year, all principals in our district will have completed professional development specifically geared toward leadership. These opportunities include the Margaret Waddington Leadership Initiative for School Leaders and the Instructional Leadership Academy with the University of Washington. This report will focus on the Waddington Initiative and the next Principal's Report will focus on the Instructional Leadership Academy

Margaret Waddington was a pioneering neurologist and resident of Ruland. She was transformed by the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL) flagship Leadership Development Program. She became a strong financial supporter of CCL and upon her passing in 2016, she entrusted the CCL with a multimillion dollar estate gift to ensure ongoing access to leadership development for women, men and the young people of Vermont. Dr. Waddington's sizable endowment allows CCL, in partnership with Vermont Principals' Association, to provide a nine-month leadership training program for K-12 principals. This program was launched in February 2017 and features a mix of face-to-face and virtual learning, including classroom and online sessions, and follow-up coaching.

Slate Valley principals who have participated in this initiative have all agreed it has been one of the most, if not the most, transformative professional development experiences in our educational careers. The program focuses on who we are as leaders. It encourages deep thought about leadership styles, strengths, areas for growth and commitment to that growth. In addition, our learning helped us to embrace change, build strong teams and overcome challenges. This initiative seeks feedback from students, staff and colleagues in an effort to produce a full picture of who we are as a leader. Feedback also comes in the form of coaching and applying our learning to real life school situations. At the end of this opportunity, the knowledge gained, specifically about ourselves as leaders, was significant. What an amazing opportunity given to us by Dr. Waddington!

Respectfully submitted,

- Amy Roy * Benson Village School
- Kim Prehoda * Castleton Elementary School
- Phil Hall * Castleton Village School
- Deb Infurna * Fair Haven Grade School
- Jason Rasco * Fair Haven Union High School
- Patrick Walters * Orwell Village School

Other Business: Tim Smith wanted to add the following two topics to the agenda this evening.

- Discussion of Coach Issue that was brought forward to Mike Bache at the FHGS Listening Tour; During the FH Listening Tour someone mentioned being upset that we did not pay Spring Coaches.. Brooke mentioned that all Southwestern VT Superintendents determined since these coaches were not performing any work during the COVID closure that they would not be paid and we followed suit. They were not like other employees that were under contract and were assigned additional duties on a day to day basis. Discussion ensued and the Board decided to table this and not take action. Tim Smith thanked Mike B for bringing the concern forward.
- Opening of School - Tim Smith asked since the guidance is now that we will reopen our schools and can have more than 25 people in a group he was advocating for the return of in-person school board meetings with compliance with the guidelines. Brooke mentioned that even though schools are slated to reopen we still can not have outside community into our schools. Discussion came up about exploring other venues, perhaps the pavilion at Castleton University. Brooke will look into other options. Some board members are concerned about coming together due to their own health concerns.
- Brooke asked Board for permission to move forward with the hiring of a new school nurse. Peter Stone made a motion to allow Brooke to move forward with this hiring due to Covid Concerns and the multiple guideline schools will be forced to implement as we reopen. This was seconded by John Wurzbacher/Pati Beaumont. Motion carried by the full Board. .

Executive Session - If Needed: Not needed.

Agenda Building:

1. Budget FY 21
2. Second Discussion Items from Local Community Q & A's on July 9, 2020

Adjournment: Mike Bache made a motion to adjourn at 9:15 p.m, this was seconded by Peter Stone, motion carried.

SVUUSD Special Board Meeting - July 20, 2020 - Virtual Meeting - 6:30 p.m.