

**THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Tuesday, January 2, 2017**  
**Oxbow High School**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 7:17 p.m. The following were present: Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey, Shannon Darrah, Kristen Downey, Scott MacPhee, School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES principal (arrived 7:36 pm); Melanie Elliott, OESU HR/business office; Sandra Stanley, Interim OESU Superintendent

**PUBLIC PRESENT:** Camden Elliott

**AGENDA REVIEW:** Agenda approved with amendments.

**MINUTES REVIEW:** MOTION: (Acker/MacPhee) moved/seconded to approve the minutes of the December 19, 2017 Board meeting (unanimous approval; Buttrey abstained).

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS:** MOTION: (Acker/MacPhee) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable order # 6291 (unanimous approval).

**PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE:** Acker received an email from a TES parent, with questions about meetings and how to make corrections or comments to the minutes. Acker responded to her with information about open meeting law and directed her to the website. Darrah received a question about why the Board meets at Oxbow. Darrah responded that one meeting per month is combined with OESU meetings for convenience and so that central office administration can be present.

**FY19 BUDGET DISCUSSION:** Elliott presented the financial report for Quarter 2. In general everything is under budget with the exception of Pre-K tuition. The Tech Center is severely under budgeted due to twenty enrolled students but budgeting for eight. There will be a relative decrease in TA tuition owed for those students. The FY17 deficit was \$171,961. The audited fund balance is therefore \$299,812. The \$171,961 can be paid over three years with permission from the voters. By law, \$131,461 of the \$299,812 has to be paid in this year's budget, and one-third of the \$171,961 also has to be paid this year. The draft budget was distributed. As directed by the Board, Petrone has done a lot of work on the budget to arrive at a tax increase at or below 3%. Petrone stated that this draft budget did not meet that goal. The draft homestead tax increase (based on a 1.08% state tax rate) is 9.4%. This includes the following reductions at TES: elimination of one classroom teacher; elimination of one paraeducator; reducing the librarian/tech position from 100% to 60%; reducing the school nurse from 100% to 80%; eliminating the Spanish program entirely; and eliminating the school psychologist completely. Neither an additional special educator nor the LEA position, both requested by Petrone earlier, are included. Petrone and Elliott realigned how paraeducators are funded relative to special education funding.

The teacher is being cut by extending the multiage classroom model into the third and fourth grades. Current classrooms include: 1 kindergarten; 1 kindergarten/first grade combination; 3 first/second grade combinations, 2 third grades; 1 fourth grade; 2 fifth grades; and 2 sixth grades. The proposed classrooms include: 2 kindergartens; 3 first/second grade combinations; 3 third/fourth grade combinations; 1 fifth grade; and 2 sixth grades. The average class size next year will be 17-20 students. Darrah asked, why is it with all these cuts there is only a 0.8% change in the budget? Elliott stated there is a 6.6% increase in special education, and a 38% increase in debt service. Eliminating debt service, it is a 1.5% decrease in the budget. \$50,000 of cuts equates to a 0.7% tax decrease.

Elliott presented the tax worksheet. The proposed TA tuition and projected enrollment provided by TA is \$18,896 and 196 students. Acker stated these cuts are not acceptable, especially completely losing Spanish. Darrah requested the itemized TES cuts to share with the TA resource committee, which is meeting on January 5. The full TA board meets on January 11. Elliott calculated that the cuts equal \$186,000 in elementary instruction alone, plus \$130,000 for guidance and library. Equalized pupil spending is going down 5.1%. The CLA also went down 4%. The property yield went down. The deficit bond is a big factor. There is \$200,000 of debt instead of \$86,000. It would have helped if the CLA had stayed flat. The draft budget, including the aforementioned cuts at TES and TA's tuition rate, is significantly impacted by the state's base homestead tax rate. Each percent decrease in the state tax rate translates to a 1% decrease in the local homestead tax rate (1.08% = 9.4%; 1.07% = 8.4%; 1.06% = 7.4%). Discussion followed regarding the tax formula. The state tax rate is not set yet. There is a deficit in the state education fund. The legislature is back in session this week.

Elliott reported the current special education revenue calculation is probably as accurate as it is going to be. Elliott suspects this information was not available at this time during last year's budget process. Some of the cause for the current deficit may result from not having enough information early enough in the budgeting process to be able to anticipate revenues appropriately for the entire budget. Discussion followed regarding the debt service amount, and why this was not accounted for last year. Perhaps lack of information from the former auditor. When creating the budget, the Board needs to know whether to build in a surplus or a deficit. The \$131,461 owed in this year's budget is the result of anticipating a surplus in the 16/17 budget instead of a deficit. Now TTSD has to pay the 15/16 deficit by the end of 18/19. It was not paid before as an attempt to keep the tax rate low.

Elliott stated that \$425,000 more in cuts are needed to result in a 3.4% homestead tax rate increase. Buttrey pointed out that the bus contract is \$155,498, which if cut would decrease any tax increase by 2.1%. Discussion followed regarding attending the January 11 TA board meeting. The TA budget affects TES's programming. Other school districts are facing the same tax rate increases. TA's tuition rate affects other sending towns as well. Darrah posed, what is the alternative scenario if the budget is voted down, what would be cut next? For example, elimination of transportation would not effect education. One scenario is proposing funding for busing or Spanish with a separate article. Buttrey stated the Board needs to take a position about

how far they will go to cut the budget. One strategy is to start with the minimum education requirements and then add optional items. Petrone explained that every class gets each special (music, art, Spanish, etc.) once per week. PE is offered twice per week. With this proposed budget, all specials are at 60% with the exception of PE, which is proposed to remain at full time. Spanish is technically an elective that TTSD does not have to offer. Petrone stated that no retirements are planned. The retirement incentive deadline has passed, but that could perhaps be amended. Elliott could offer comments on this in executive session. Elliott offered to attend January 11 TA board meeting. Elliott continues to work with Keith Merrick on the budget. All data points that impact the budget are fixed except for the state tax rate. The state tax rate will not be voted on until June, which is after the TTSD budget has been voted upon. Buttrey encouraged Board members to call state representatives. Petrone has tried to be transparent with the TES staff about programming and staff changes. There are feelings of uncertainty at TES. Darrah offered to talk to the TES staff again. She recently talked with the TA staff regarding the tax worksheet and how the TA budget affects the TTSD budget.

**PRINCIPAL'S REPORT:** Petrone reported there was a school cancellation today. The first day back from holiday vacation will be January 3. The ski program was scheduled to begin January 5 but has been postponed due to expected extreme temperatures. The six week ski program allows afternoon time for professional development. Teachers plan to review project based learning and the responsive classroom. An occupational therapist is coming for the day to talk about how to incorporate OT into daily programs. Marla Ianello and Roberta Kaplo are coming to talk about autism. Teachers will also have time to prepare their own curricula. There are 110 kids skiing and 80-90 in an alternative program. The Montshire is coming on Fridays for hands on learning for the children who are not skiing.

**ACT 46 DISCUSS MEETING WITH NORWICH:** Darrah and Downey met with the Norwich group and gave them their wish list. The Hanover Superintendent, a Hanover representative, and TA Head of School, Bill Bugg, attended. This may be a separate relationship outside of TTSD. The Principal of Marion Cross listed choice to TA as a wish. Choice may have to be opened to Hanover students because of the Dresden compact. The group did not spend a lot of time discussing this. They discussed saving language classes at Hanover, like Latin and German, by adding TA students. There is also interest in the TA outdoor education program for Hanover students. On the elementary level, there was conversation about professional development collaboration. The group discussed possibilities around sharing staff, like an ELL teacher, band, or a school psychologist. Before legalities are examined, a plan needs to be decided on first. Norwich receives their SU services from Dresden, and even though they are their own district, they are strongly tied to Dresden. The two groups agreed to continue conversations but no future meeting is scheduled. Petrone should attend the next meeting. If choice of high school is something that is a priority, the Board would need to discuss this with the community. Choice is a district decision. Increasing educational offerings for kids is possible without choice. The Hanover superintendent recently toured TA.

**COMMUNITY FORUM:** Buttrey stated that during the OESU meeting tonight, Oxbow shared they are planning a community forum with their state representatives present to discuss the larger picture of the education fund and the tax formula. Buttrey stated it is a good idea to proactively plan a similar meeting, perhaps on a Saturday morning with Representatives Tim Briglin and Jim Masland present, and a pancake breakfast. Perhaps representatives from VSBA can attend. Buttrey is concerned that while the taxpayers may understand that the tax increase is beyond the Board’s control that does not mean they are going to pass the budget. The earlier the conversation is had, the less shocking the school report will be. Planning discussion followed.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** Darrah stated that per Tracy Borst, the warning should be signed between January 26 and February 2. The Board agreed to sign the warning on January 30.

**ADJOURNMENT:** MOTION: (Downey/Acker) moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. (unanimous approval).

**FUTURE MEETINGS:**

01/16/18 Thetford Town School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.
01/30/18 Thetford Town School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.
02/06/18 Thetford Town School District Meeting (Oxbow High School)	6:00 p.m.
02/06/18 OESU Meeting	7:15 p.m.
02/20/18 Thetford Town School District Meeting – tentative	6:30 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

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Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

*These minutes are not official until approved by the School Board.*