

Thetford School District
Tuesday February 22, 2011
Thetford Elementary School

Elise Tillinghast convened the meeting at 7:10 p.m. in the cafeteria. The following were present: Shannon Darrah, Charlie Buttrey, Lisa Swett, Howard Sussman, School Board; Keith Thompson; Principal; Faith Alexandre, Thetford Academy Trustee; Keith Merrick, Thetford Academy Business Manager; David McGinn, Head of Thetford Academy; Mark McMahon, School Moderator; Tig Tillinghast, Thetford Selectboard Chairman and one member of the public. Curtis Richardson, Thetford Academy Trustee, arrived at 7:20 p.m.

This was a pre-Town Meeting information session for the public.

Elise gave a summary of the Board's focus for the past year. She said the Board has been looking at several long-term issues, including the policy handbook, the business management provided by OESU and the question of governance.

The Board has been updating the policy handbook. In the spring board members will begin looking at and revising non-mandatory policies, including those dealing with student recruitment, tuition waivers and food service debts.

Elise said the most problematic issue the Board has been dealing with is the business management provided by the OESU. She said the Board is hopeful that the current superintendent, Don Johnson, can turn things around, but the Board is not comfortable assuming that this will happen. Consequently, the Board made the "painful decision" to include \$50,000 in the new budget to hire additional accounting help if necessary. Faith Alexandre asked how many hours of accounting assistance \$50,000 could buy. Elise explained that the salary of the OESU business manager is about \$80,000, so \$50,000 would cover a substantial portion of a full-time outside person. Elise also said that the Board chose to have audits done yearly, instead of every three years to insure that mistakes are not missed.

The Board has also been considering various options for changing the governance structure. Elise said the state is pushing for consolidation of districts. She discussed the risks associated with forming a Regional

Education District (RED), including the possible closure of schools after 4 years. She added that in 2012 superintendents will have greater power, which would most likely mean a loss of local control. The Board hired education consultant, Ray Proulx, to study the various options and board members will be looking closely at his report this spring.

The last long-term issue, said Elise, is the strategic plan for TES. She said the Strategic Planning Committee has held a couple of public forums and expects to submit a report to the Board in late April/May.

Other issues the Board has worked on include negotiating a teacher contract, after withdrawing from the negotiation process with OESU. This is the second year of a three-year contract.

Elise said TES, the Town of Thetford and TA were able to get an oil procurement deal together. This joint bid contributed to saving TES about \$7,000.

TES Highlights: Elise described the Katie Woodray writing program that is being implemented in grades kindergarten through second. Students are writing their own books, many of which are display in the classrooms.

She said there is an effort underway to improve the NECAP science scores at TES; an outside consultant has been hired to work on that.

TES will be going to 100 percent composting this year and the Outdoor Space Committee is working on a trail system.

Thetford Academy: David McGinn said the school is in the second year of the TAGS initiative. He said students are taking more course work, and there are fewer kids in Study Centers during the day.

David applauded the students and staff of TA for surviving a year of construction.

TA has hired a coordinator for the International Student Program. The goal is to have 6 to 8 foreign students enrolled for next year and for students to come for 2 to 3 years, instead of just one.

David said TA is expanding its recruitment base, branching out into a larger geographical region, including Hartland and Brownsville.

TES Budget: Elise said the Board worked very hard to make small cuts whenever possible.

She explained some of the figures in new budget, including the way SPED costs not compensated by revenue are listed, the way psychological services are being purchased and the effort to improve the technology at TES. Elise said the school will no longer be purchasing (computer) equipment, but will be leasing it. Fifth-graders will get IPADs to use in the classroom and each teacher will have a laptop to use. The Board included an additional \$20,000 in the budget to improve technology.

There was a reduction of \$65,000 in the FY12 budget for negotiation services, since staff contracts are currently in place.

There was a discussion about the risk of not listing expenses covered by Medicaid funds, since the expenses would remain even if the funding was lost. Elise said the OESU business manager directed them to not include it in the budget, but said Curtis Richardson brought up a valid point that it could prove to be problematic. She said this is why the Board is keen on getting outside advice on accounting matters.

Elise explained that the drop in the food service line item was a reflection of a debt being paid off. She said the Board is exploring other transportation contracts.

TA Budget: Faith Alexandre explained that TA is in the first year of a two-year administration-transition plan. She said that by next July a new head of school will be hired.

She said the TA budget for FY12 is up by 1.5 percent over the current year's budget. Faith said the new construction debt service will remain the same until 2015. The biggest increase for the FY12 budget was related to fuel costs. She said the number of full-time employees is down, but this was accomplished without a loss of programs.

The Thetford School district assessment for secondary education is up 3.52 percent. The increase is a reflection of Thetford having an (anticipated) larger portion of the total TA student enrollment next year.

The building project is complete. Faith said TA will raise 30 percent of the \$8,562,000 costs through private funding. One million of that will come from the endowment. \$994,000 has been raised so far.

Articles 5 & 6: Elise explained the Board is requesting that voters set aside money in a Future Expense Reserve fund and reallocation Unanticipated Tuition Reserve Fund money to the Capital Reserve Fund. She said the Board is worried about the volatility of the tax rate and what the financial picture will be next year. She said this year's budget included some benefits that will not be available next year: unexpected federal funds and unused TA tuition funds. The board would like some of that surplus set aside.

Faith asked whether the Board would need voter approval to spend that money. Elise said it would not. If voters do not approve the articles, those funds will be applied to the FY12 budget.

There was a brief discussion about creating a chart or some other visual representation of the current reserve funds and board's proposal under Articles IV and V.

There was a discussion about the NECAP standardized tests and how to motivate students to be invested in doing well.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

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