

North Shore Schools
Board of Education
Special Meeting-Work Session
Minutes
March 10, 2022

The meeting was called to order by President David Ludmar at 7:30 p.m. in the North Shore High School Library. The meeting was simultaneously live-streamed. Present were Trustees Colacioppo, Galati, Jones, Macari, Mosca and Russo. Also present were Interim Superintendent Dr. Thomas Dolan and Assistant Superintendents Dr. Christopher Zublionis and Ms. Olivia Buatsi.

At 7:30 p.m. on motion of President Ludmar and seconded by Trustee Macari and all in favor, the Board convened an executive session in the High School Library to consider discussions regarding proposed, pending or current litigation and matters leading to the appointment of a particular person.

At 8:30 p.m. on motion of Trustee Russo and seconded by Trustee Mosca and all in favor, the Board came out of executive session and resumed the regular meeting in the library. There were 2 people in the audience.

Pledge of Allegiance

President Ludmar led the Board in the pledge of allegiance.

President Ludmar explained that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the budget. There will be no other discussions and no comments from the public.

Dr. Dolan explained he has two budgetary items to discuss and two goals to accomplish during this discussion, and before the adoption of the budget on March 24th. The first is the proposal of electric buses. Dr. Dolan said he is very proud of that proposal, and it is forward thinking. However there have been a number of questions, from the Board and from the community, and he wanted to get answers to those questions, as well as assurances of the rebates we have been promised. He explained that after meetings with the vendor and grant writer there are still questions about the funding and therefore it is his recommendation that we withdraw the electric bus proposal at this time, and the amount set aside for the charging station (\$350,000). Dr. Dolan further explained that the day is coming very soon when the switch to electric buses will happen, so he further proposes the District does not purchase a diesel bus this year (\$120,000). This will free up a total of \$470,000 in the budget. Further, Dr. Dolan proposed that after looking at last year's defeated referendum, and in speaking with Director of Athletics Don Lang, and Facilities Manager, John Hall, his recommendation is to put those funds towards a new gymnasium floor at the high school. The floor would cost approximately \$525,000, but he believes there will be additional state aid and/or revenue that might be used to offset the difference.

President Ludmar reiterated that this evening is for discussion only and no action will be taken. He opened the floor to Trustees for discussion of Dr. Dolan's recommendation.

Trustee Russo suggested the Board consider replacement of the turf field as an alternative project to the gym floor. She noted that the athletic community helped to get our budget passed last year and there has been a lot of discussion about the condition of the field. She further explained

that the turf field is ending its useful life per Landtek. The cost of replacing the field has been estimated at \$600,000. She feels it might be a more pressing issue than the gym floor, it may be a safety issue and may impact more students and community members.

Dr. Dolan noted that Mr. Lang and Mr. Hall considered the turf field as a second project, and he will get a current estimate on replacing the field.

Trustee Mosca asked if Mr. Lang ranked the gym floor as a higher priority. Dr. Dolan explained that Mr. Lang did rank the gym floor as higher in priority and also it is financially more beneficial.

Trustee Jones noted that the importance of the gym floor as it serves athletes and students during the day as well. She went on to say there are a tremendous number of needs, but they don't all have the same price tag. She expressed concern about the decision of not purchasing a diesel bus this year and the impact that may have on future budgets. She went on to say we have been replacing buses on a regular schedule to prevent a spike in the budget. Dr. Dolan explained that this would only mean delaying a replacement for one year. Next year the District may be compelled to pursue the electric bus option, but in the next budget cycle the amount for purchasing a bus can be put back in the budget.

Trustee Mosca asked if the possibility for legislative funding for the charging station still exists and how it would work if the funding came in after the Board made the decision not to go forward with electric buses. Dr. Dolan explained that if we did get a grant for the charging station, we can accept it and go forward with installing it. This would put us in a great position for next year.

Trustee Colacioppo supported the decision to wait on the electric buses until the funding is secured. She also agreed that putting those funds towards athletics should be a priority.

Trustee Galati supported the decision to put funds towards the actual need for something more valuable for our students and wait on the electric buses.

Trustee Macari said there are so many competing priorities, and it is difficult to prioritize projects for athletics, but she feels this is a great way for our athletes to get a fresh start after the pandemic.

President Ludmar said he appreciates all of the feedback. The Board wanted all of the details about the buses and as fiduciaries they can't take risks. He appreciates all of the engagement on this topic. He feels it is the right way to go to remove the buses at this point. He went on to say the question now is what project to go with, the gym floor or the turf field. He is not sure the turf field can be done for half a million dollars. The gym floor is not in good condition, and it is extremely utilized as evidenced by the great attendance at many sporting events there. Looking back at the Glenwood Landing gym floor, which was way beyond repair, that was able to be replaced because of a burst pipe and money from insurance. He went on to say there are infrastructure projects that will always be there. Trustee Jones added there are more than just these two projects, there is much prioritizing that happens in the construction steering committee.

Dr. Dolan then discussed his second topic which was regarding the revenue side of the budget. Dr. Dolan explained that a new tax cap has been released for the District and it is now set at 2.624%. He went on to explain that he is recommending we stay at the original tax cap presented to the community of 2.499% and not go all the way to the cap. In addition, Dr. Dolan is also recommending a change in estimated revenues. He recommends not taking money out of the ERS and TRS reserve funds, and instead utilizing the remainder of the Marcellino/Lavine grant thereby reducing the amount in unrestricted fund balance down to the 4%. He further explained that this is something the Commissioner recently advised we try and achieve, and this would accomplish that. Additionally, by leaving these funds in the ERS and TRS reserve, they may be available for use in a LIPA glidepath, if necessary.

Trustee Macari noted that the Marcellino/Lavine grant was originally designated for a LIPA glidepath but became a source of misinformation in the community. She said she is hopeful by taking Dr. Dolan's recommendation this will put an end to that conversation. President Ludmar added that these funds came from a grant and were never funds raised by the local taxpayer; Districts cannot hold taxpayers' money in excess of 4%. The Board wanted to be transparent about the funds which is why it was handled the way it was, but he agrees it will clean things up, has the same effect and we will still have a robust 4% fund balance. Trustee Jones added that it is important to note utilities are the wild card, they can be taken off the property tax rolls in the middle of October causing a tax shift.

Dr. Dolan explained that the information shared tonight could have been done in a memo to the Board, but that is not the way this Board expects work to be done. They insist these conversations be transparent. Finally, he said the administration will be in a position to deliver a final budget for adoption in the next two weeks.

Adjournment

At 9:40 p.m. on motion of Trustee Russo and seconded by Trustee Jones and all in favor, the meeting was adjourned.

Elizabeth Ciampi
District Clerk