

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING

Zoom Meeting Link

Meeting ID: 870 1259 9963

Password: 002139

May 1, 2020

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Parker, Chieda, Reed, Stinson, Hicks, Goldstein

Administration was not present.

Others: 9 members of the public and staff

Parker called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: APPROVE THE EASTON BOE CONTRACT NEGOTIATION COMMITTEE TO REACH OUT TO UNION LEADERSHIP FOR ALL BARGAINING UNITS TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE CHANGES IN CONTRACTS FOR NEXT YEAR

J. Parker explained that every committee needs a committee charge. The Negotiation Committee has been alive and well for decades, but J. Parker was unable to retrieve the charge from Central Office (due to reduced staff in light of COVID-19). The new charge was sent to all Board of Education members and is posted with the meeting agenda. This ad hoc committee will be composed of the board chair and two board members who are appointed by the chair. The charge was read in its entirety.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the committee charge as written and presented. Hicks, Stinson. Approved. Unanimous.

J. Stinson questioned the inclusion of Distance Learning in the charge. J. Parker stated that the Easton Board of Education is asking the Negotiating Committee to go to each bargaining unit, and he did not want the committee to go into these discussions without a charge. By making it an ad hoc committee, the committee does the work that needs to be done and once completed, it reports to the board, and then is dissolved. J. Chieda requested further clarification, suggesting the omission of the term Distance Learning from the charge because the purpose for going to the bargaining units to request opening up the contract is only due to the financial fall-out of COVID-19. Revisions were made to the charge eliminating the term "Distance Learning." The need on the part of the Board to initiate discussions would remain even if schools were to open before the end of this term.

The membership of the Negotiation Committee:

J. Parker as chair will likely appoint J. Stinson (as the probable chair, set to assume this role in June 2020) as well as R. Hicks, who has the most experience in negotiations. J. Stinson asked the membership if they

were comfortable with all male representation. J. Chieda agreed but requested participation in the administration contract negotiations in the fall.

J. Chieda shared her discomfort with the timing of this request, particularly given what the staff has done in terms of Distance Learning in the last several weeks. She feels it could be an insulting move at this time. R. Hicks shared that the board will not go in with pay cuts for teachers. He and J. Parker shared that it could be beneficial to teachers in the long run to accept a freeze now with the understanding that when times get better, the Boards will work to make up the difference. The result may also be to save a teaching position or two. Some teachers live in town and understand the financial challenges. Both acknowledge this is not an opportune time to ask, yet it is not inappropriate to ask. R. Hicks said that, financially, things are going to get worse before they get better. J. Chieda requested that the Negotiation Committee share real data and explain why this is being requested now as well as highlight the specific potential benefits to the teachers long term.

R. Hicks asked if Redding is doing the same. J. Parker stated that neither Region 9 nor Redding will request the opening of the contract; however, he added that the increase in the Redding budget was reduced from 3.25% to under 2%. Redding unemployment figures from April indicate that Redding is at 7%, while Easton is currently at 11% (3% prior to COVID-19). In addition, Easton has a smaller population. The chair of the Redding Board of Education, Chris Parkin, and J. Parker emailed the 167 Board chairs across the state to determine if they are opening contracts in order to provide financial relief. The response was a resounding no. R. Hicks and J. Parker reminded the board that the bargaining units can say, "no, thank you." J. Parker wants to be sure that all options are considered; however, he does not want to jeopardize positive relationships.

Teacher negotiations are scheduled to begin in August, a contract for the next three years that will begin in the 2021-2022 school year.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the Contract Negotiating Committee to reach out to all bargaining units to discuss possible changes in contracts for next year. Stinson, Goldstein. Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Chieda thanked the Board for the important conversation. K. Reed thanked J. Chieda for her probing questions. J. Stinson, R. Hicks, J. Parker, and J. Chieda appreciated the open discussion. R. Hicks asked about the return of funds from Region 9. J. Parker said they are still having conversations about how much will be returned. He would be satisfied to learn an approximate number.

J. Parker stated that the town wants the referendum on June 9th, but given state mandates, no one knows if this will be possible. There is lots of talk in Hartford; towns can have referendum votes when coordinated with the Health Department. If not, the Board of Finance has the power to make final decisions on the Town Budget as a whole. The vote need not happen by June 30th. It can happen later in the summer.

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education meeting be adjourned Hicks, Stinson.
Approved. Unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:52p.m.

Submitted by
Jenny Chieda, Easton Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by
Liz Rimkunas