

Thompson Public Schools Combined Meeting

Thompson Board of Education Thompson Board of Finance Thompson Board of Selectmen

Thursday, March 23, 2017
Thompson Public Library Meeting Room
5:30 P.M.

Special Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order

Chairman William Witkowski called the meeting to order at 5:35pm.

Members Present BOE:

Thomas Angelo
Shawn Brissette
Joseph Lindley
Linda Jarmolowicz
William Witkowski

Members Present BOF:

Raymond Faucher
Susanne Witkowski
Rhonda Rooney
Larry Groh, Jr.
Orla McKiernan-Raftery

Members Present BOS:

Kenneth Beausoleil
Steve Herbert
Shayna Smith

II. Discussion

A. *School Bus Operations*

William Witkowski opened the meeting stating that after great deliberation, the Thompson Board of Education, at this time, is uncertain as to whether it desires to pursue the privatization of our school bus service. The difficulty with this position, however, is the safety of our children. We have an aging fleet that has no permanent long-term plan for replenishment. This has been a serious issue for our town for decades. This problem was exacerbated approximately ten years ago when the State of CT stopped issuance of town subsidies for school buses, forcing most towns in CT to privatize their school transportation services. Thompson remains among the very few Towns (5) who have not moved in the direction of privatization.

The BOE feels, however, that in order to keep the bus service under town management, contractual and legally binding assurances from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance are needed. They include:

1. A bus replacement strategy that includes the purchase of three new buses per year for the next for the next five years. These buses shall be equipped with state of the art GPS, digital radio, and camera systems.
2. The town immediately agrees to replace the current antiquated analog radio system with a digital radio system.
3. The town immediately adds a .5 mechanic to the staff.
4. The town immediately institutes additional training for its drivers, supervisors and mechanics to match the training level currently offered by the private bus companies.

Much discussion was held regarding the safety of the current buses, leasing of buses, long-term effects, and student safety.

William Witkowski asked the First Selectman if he can come up with ideas for alternative ways to handle the bus situation.

Ken Beausoleil stated that the Board of Selectmen will meet to come up with pros and cons regarding taking on the buses entirely and if it is doable. The Board of Education chairman would like Board of Education members to come up with their consensus as well. The contract with DATTCO will need to be extended beyond the March 30th deadline.

III. Citizens' Comments

Christine Campbell would like the RFP's shared with the public. She also stated that the bid numbers seem to change every time there is a meeting.

Wayne O'Brien stated he would like to see the buses stay in house.

Michael Krogul agrees with Ms. Campbell that the numbers are all over the place. He also believes that there is no need to purchase 3 buses per year. Mr. Krogul stated that field trips will cost more for parents to afford and that is not fair.

Robert Mann stated that having local bus drivers is best for the district regarding costs. He also stated that there should be an emergency plan in place.

Steve Houghton would like the town to make the decision to privatize as this effects a large population of students, including St. Joseph students, and would not vote for either budget until the citizens get involved.

Deb Spinelli would like to know what to do when the sports costs goes over budget. Ms. Spinelli stated that Plainfield is already \$40,000 over budget regarding sport and field trips.

Yvan Cody would like to see the buses stay in-house and if there is a bus in the budget then something else should be eliminated.

Pat Dumas also agreed on the cost of field trips. Parents will have to pay more for their kids to go on trips and that is a burden to parents who cannot afford them already.

Donald Dunning stated that current drivers for Thompson are the professionals who have the training and knowledge of the town, routes, and students.

IV. Adjournment

Motion by Joseph Lindley, seconded by Shawn Brissette to adjourn the meeting at 7:01pm.

Motion – Passes. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Danielle M. Pederson
Recording Secretary, Board of Education

BOE approval of minutes: May 8, 2017