

Fort Edward Union Free School District
Meeting of the Board of Education
220 Broadway, Fort Edward, NY 12828

DATE: March 14, 2022

TYPE OF MEETING: Regular Meeting

PLACE OF MEETING: YouTube Channel Link for Public : <https://youtu.be/ISSmZV5QYkY>

MEMBERS PRESENT Thomas Roche, Amanda Durkee, Christina Durkee, James Donahue, Christopher Miles, Ella Collins

MEMBERS ABSENT: Joseph Carroll, Patricia Suprenant, John Guglielmo

OTHERS PRESENT via the above mentioned ways:

Interim Superintendent Mark Bessen, John Godfrey, Tobie Bessette, Jill Boucher, Maggie Torra, Vickie Plude, Barbara Fribourg, Sharlene Petro-Durgan, Greg Diefenbach

President of the Board, Thomas Roche, called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

I. Pledge of Allegiance - Mr. Thomas Roche asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Community Comments: None

A public comment period not to exceed thirty (30) minutes each shall be provided at each business meeting. In an effort to provide an opportunity for all interested speakers, all speakers shall be limited to three (3) minutes during the public comment period. Community members, who wish to address the Board, are requested to complete the speaker request form and submit it to the Clerk of the Board prior to the meeting. Comments regarding agenda items will be taken first. Speakers are reminded of the three-minute time limit. Should the 30 minute time limit expire additional written comments may be taken prior to the meeting's adjournment. A member of the Board or the Superintendent will respond that the BOE received and reviewed the comments.

When members of the public speak to the Board, they shall state their name and address, the name of the organization (if any) which they represent, and the agenda item they wish to comment on. Please be aware that by law individual student information or particular personnel issues cannot be discussed at public sessions of the board. The Board will not permit interruptions, slanderous remarks or "name-calling" by speakers or the audience. We take public comment very seriously and careful notes will be taken. However, the board generally does not respond while the meeting is in public session.

III. Recognition of Success: Mr. Godfrey informed the Board that 3rd graders in Mrs. Smatko's class recently finished their planet research reports. The writing project was a spin off of one of our new Wonder's Program stories students read books on the planet took notes and wrote paragraphs when they were finished they gave a report to the class to practice their listening and speaking skills.

Month of March is Parp month picking a reading partner for PreK-5 This is organized by Mrs. Wendel.

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Students are encouraged to read to or with someone for at least 15 minutes a day five days a week for the month of March to help foster a lifelong love of reading. Every Wednesday in March is crazy dress days with a Dr. Seuse theme students and staff can wear crazy hats or mix matched clothes. Special thanks to the Fort Edward Public Library they have graciously offered to provide each student a flashlight to parp students for Flashlight Fridays, weekly mini prizes, raffle drawing and students will receive a book at the end of the month.

Middle School/High School - Mrs. Lucas students have recently finished a middle school reading project. This is based on an independent reading novel that they chose. Students can choose from a variety of projects, such as creating a comic strip, comparing poem and song lyrics to their book, design a newspaper review, make a character scrapbook or create an original board game that relates to their book. Scoring was based on a 50 point ruler and various point options to choose from and the students did a wonderful job. Mr. Godfrey demonstrated a few of the projects. The students were creative.

IV. Presentation:

(i) Sharlene Petro-Durgan presented to the Board a slide show of the first superintendent's estimated 2022-2023 budget.

Amanda Durkee questioned what is the long term plan if we are looking to put positions in place that the district needs what is the plan after the two years.

Mr. Bessen stated that we will hit a cliff in 2025 unless there is other kinds of funding we do not know about, we know about a pilot that is coming in 2025, but This really doesn't help us much. It is \$100,000 that comes in and it will change our aid ratio. Which in the year that it comes in it is going to lower our tax levy where it is going to go into a negative you would have to get a super majority just to do a zero. So when people see pilots coming in it doesn't change it, everything is based on the levy and that 2% for what we have 2% is \$67,000 there is no way to keep up or catch up within the cap. We have that report from Rick Timms and Mr. Bessen is going to replace some of the items that Sharlene showed the Board in July it is going to show you where we're going. There is going to have some tough conversations in the next couple of years. The information was out there and we need to look at it again, the money for those two positions the government takes back. We know under Covid some kids had some mental health issues. We know there are some things that need to be looked at in our Special Education, our RTI. There are some things that maybe with the right people in here for the next two years we can fix a few things and start to lowering some special education costs that might free up some money to keep some of these other guys around. Usually some grant may come up and we have some smart people from FEH looking out for us that there may be some mental health grant around to keep the social worker. The social worker is being paid for out of the grant, but if we grow things right her salary could be covered under the medicaid reimbursement. Amanda Durkee stated that only can be reimbursed for students that have it on their IEP. Mr. Bessen stated that the Director of Pupil Personnel will make sure that this is medicaid reimbursable.

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Barbara Fribourg explained that medicaid has not been billed for the last three years but Lecia Carpenter and Barbara Fribourg went back and pulled consents and then Erica is going to go back and bill from the beginning of the year. We also will have our own Speech Pathologist on staff so that will save us money in the long run.

Mr. Bessen introduced Greg Diefenbach from FEH BOCES that will be helping us in the Business Office and he will start assuming some duties from Sharlene Petro-Durgan.

Barbara Fribourg presented the Annual Special Education Review 2021-2022. Barbara reported that this is a snapshot of where we are today, what our numbers are for special education, where our placements are and what students with disabilities we have in our district. We are at 22% special education students and the state average is 18%. We are on the high side with 5 outstanding referrals. There have been a lot of people saying that the students are below, but Barb is telling them to give them a little more time to catch up, we haven't had continuous education until this year for the last two years, there have been interruptions in education let's see what we can do but she feels there is going to be a lot of referrals coming through, that doesn't mean all those students will be identified. Barbara stated that it goes back to what Mr. Bessen stated that we do not have an RTI process in place so most of the time the student is having difficulties and that goes right to a CSE referral, because there is nothing else but AIS happening. When we look at our students with disabilities we are at roughly 94 students that is 25% and that is high. 77% of those students are in house but one of the issues with the budget is that 23% of our students are housed elsewhere and that comes down to us lacking some supports, not having a psychologist or a social worker in house any students with behavioral difficulties and that is why many of our students wind up out of district because there is not a principal at the elementary there is not social worker there is not a psychologist there and it usual starts in the elementary so those students end up in a more restrictive setting at BOCES or one of the other places. More information in the executive session. If we look at our total population of 400 5% of our kids are not in this building they are out at other placements like Oak Hill, BOCES or Prospect and that is where a lot of our cost is coming from. Last year we spent almost a million dollars at BOCES and only got back about \$350,000 so we spent about \$600,000 on out of district students last year. Ms. Fribourg went on to give give more detailed information regarding percentages of students that fall into which categories. The largest percentage was OHI-Other Health Impaired and this is a concern for Ms. Fribourg when she looks at the data this typically should not be one of the highest categories. This is something that they will have to take a look at when they do the Annual Reviews.

Amanada Durkee asked the question is some students have a diagnosis and it impacts their educational performance, but could their needs be met more through a 504? Ms. Fribourg stated that the problem is we do not have a lot of services available in the elementary school right now. It seems like it has been the go-to move is, let's get them some resource room, or put them in 12:1:1 for ELA or Math, so it is very difficult. As they go through the Annual Reviews they will look deeper into this. She has asked the special education teachers to really look at what services, she has asked for teacher assistant justification

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forms rather than just giving teaching assistants they have to justify to the committee. Also to look at testing accommodations. Barbara stated that we are looking at compliance, number one, and then we move into what's best practice and what we can do to meet the students' needs

Christina Durkee asks about Annual Reviews is there anything on the horizon to declassify. Ms. Fribourg stated that every three years when we re-evaluate these students she is looking at every students data and determining whether they have the ability to be declassified and we have only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the students getting re-evaluated this year. We don't have the ability to reassess every student but will be looking at what is happening. Asking the teachers what special education can do for a student that you can't do?

Mr. Donahue and the rest of the Board thanked Ms. Fribourg for the work she is doing.

V. Reports:

Board Committee Reports (9 Board Committees)

- i. Finance Committee met tonight prior to this meeting
Amanda Durkee went over the finance committee notes that were taken from the meeting with the Committee prior to this meeting.
- ii. Grievance and Negotiations Committee (met 3/1/22 and will meet on 3/22)
- iii. Curriculum Committee (next meeting TBD)
- iv. Policy Committee (Meeting held on March 8, 2022)
Amanda Durkee Reported that Ella Collins, Mark Bessen and herself met regarding the policy for Assistance Animals #3220, and we do recommend adopting this policy. In the future when this policy is implemented it is important to reference NY State Agriculture and Market guidance and laws concerning time limits as well as handler responsibilities. So what that means is the policy covers everything it needs to be covered.
The next policy is Student Gender Identity policy #7552 and the committee recommends to adopt the Policy Services recommendations. We made one minor terminology to ensure students have equal access to "some" District programs, facilities and activities. The last one was Regular Board Meetings and Rules (Quorum and Parliamentary Procedure) #1510 the Committee recommends to adopt as is as it covers all the pieces. Mrs. Durkee stated in reference to the Assistance Animals she recommends we reach out to our attorney. Mr. Bessen stated that the policy states it is an annual renewal
- v. Athletic Committee (next meeting TBD)
- vi. Strategic Planning Committee (next meeting TBD)
- vii. Personnel Committee (next meeting TBD)
- viii. Building and Grounds Committee for Health & Safety (next meeting TBD)
- ix. Building Project Committee (next meeting TBD)

VI. Superintendent's Report: .

- (i) **Superintendent's Search:** Mr. Bessen reported on the Superintendent search that tomorrow night the groups of committee members will be coming for orientation. Wednesday they will interview the

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candidates all day and we will provide them lunch when they are finished with the candidates. Thursday they will come together with the group and give their insights about the three candidates Mr. Bessen reported that something else that is coming up is Board nominations, April 4th you can reach out to Tobie to get the Board Petitions. Each Petition has to have 25 signatures in order to get your name on the ballot you have to hand them in to Tobie by April 18th.

- (ii) **RFP for External Auditor**; Mr. Bessen also reported that the RFP, as you know we have been working with our external auditor, independent auditing that happens once a year. We have had the same auditor for a number of years, and it is good practice to go out and do an RFP (Request For Proposal). Mr. Bessen has been working with Greg Diefenbach and Sharlene Petro-Durgan on this. Mr. Bessen had given the Board a sample of the RFP in which it will be cleaned up and what will happen is Tobie will post it and we will advertise and then we will go through the bids and will come back to the Board for our recommendation of what Auditor will come in this summer and do the audit.

Greg Diefenbach stated that the State Comptroller came out and said that clearly we should be doing an RFP every 5 years. He stated that it could come back that we will have the same auditors, we also will have a new Sr. Accountant and it's a good idea to start fresh could be with the same auditors so let's get out there and sharpen our pencils. Mr. Diefenbach also stated that he put together a good RFP that needs to be cleaned up a little. you have the preliminary draft.

- (iii) **Board Nominations:** Amanda Durkee asked about the seats that are open and Mr. Bessen stated that there will be three seats, two seats that are due this June, and one seat will expire next June and Patty Suprenant stated that she would not be running again.

Mr. Bessen has two resolutions and the Board has to vote to put it on the ballot from moving 9 seats to 7 seats and change the years of service from 5 years to 3 years starting the 2023-2024 school year. There will be two propositions. Mr. Bessen shared with the Board how the seats and years would work out. Thomas Roche asked if this was a vote to put it on the ballot. Mr. Miles asked where did this all come from and Amanda Durkee stated that it was her and that she felt that 9 Board Members was quite large given the size of our district, she felt that 5 year terms are lengthy. Because sometimes people are willing to commit but they are not willing to commit to 5 years. Amanda Durkee asked Mr. Bessen what the process is to even potentially do this and bring it to the table. The process would be is to put it to public vote. Amanda Durkee went and checked with other school districts and there are 4 districts that have 9 and others have less. Mr. Roche also felt that 9 is a large number but there are a bunch of people that want to step up. He felt that the 3 to 5 years was a little to short as the first year you just want to learn, second year you are getting your feet trying to figure out what you want to do and by the third year that's your last year. 5 years seems good to him. Mr. Miles looks at it as a commitment and 5 years shows a commitment. Mrs. Durkee felt that maybe we should table this and look into other schools and their terms of service.

Mr. Bessen shared with the Board Budget Considerations - not only for this school year, but for years two

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come. The biggest thing for success is thinking years out. Mr. Bessen went over a few topics such as Fiscal History, such as G.E. Dewatering Plant, Tax Cap and Contingency Budget. Mr. Bessen reported that Sharlene shared with the Board a 5 year plan, every year the Board should share a 5 year plan. There are forecasts, there are things in it you know and there are things you don't know. For example 5 years ago no one knew COVID was coming, no one knew COVID money was coming. We did not know Russia was going to invade Ukraine and we would end up with an economy that was out of control with fuel prices rolling over to every aspect of life.

When Budgets fail, you have to share this information and it is hard, we need to find out how to get to our people. Is there a Lion's, is there a Rotary, is there a village place you can go to where community members are to share the Fort Edward Story? People are very supportive of this school but I don't think they understand how the finances of the school work where they might have heard at Stewarts, Cumberland Farms, or the diner.

The biggest thing that draws revenue is State Aid. You saw what Sharlene shared, what has happened to the State Aid and Capital Aid is another one because we are going to be talking about it. 2025 we have a capital project that is going to be paid off. You can not use that as a saving, a savings to lower taxes. When one capital project ends, one has to follow seamlessly and the reason you want to do that is you're trying to keep things on a level playing field. You want it to become what's considered zero effect on the tax levy. We will be working on this soon, with Garret Hamlin our Architect, Greg Diefenbach we are trying to get something together for the new Superintendent. So they can start hitting the ground running with this information and communicate this to the community.

Mr. Bessen shared that any of the positions that are covered with the Board- Sharlene put together the five year plan and she was pretty much on the money. One of the numbers we have here now are new positions that we are going to put under the ARP grant and some of this money is going to disappear in 2024-2025. Any position that we filled under the grant will have to go away or have to be covered by State Aide or the local levy. Every year you need to do a 5 year projection and make sure it is as public as possible. We don't want people to be surprised in 3 years.

Restoring services- Mr. Bessen shared a slide which had partially or fully restored programs or teachers in the 2021-2022 budget and also what was not restored in the 2021-2022 budget. We did not talk about Transportation, we can not straight out afford this. Our district is under the 1 mile regulation to be able to get transportation aid for this. There are a few students that we do get state aid back on that go to the special education placements, early college classes, etc.

Mr. Bessen also shared with the Board that this year we used a lot of the COVID money and the ARP money and we funded parts of our ELA, Social Studies, Music, Math, Science, Health and some other positions. About \$110,000 this year we used. We estimated \$130,000-\$200,000 to restore an administrator, not a principal, maybe more help in the Business Office and a full time secretary for the Superintendent. So when we look at the transportation, that is out. We are still doing a lease because our

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bus is not passing DOT. If you look at the total we would need \$297,000 to \$349,000. Sharlene was pretty much on the money. We had a budget increase of \$65,000. That's 5.93%. We used our increase in foundation aid, this was a 3% increase. There was \$158,000 there was other aid she included in her report but that is the foundation aid and that is where we put directly to our general fund without restrictions. Then we have a 2% tax levy increase which is the cap this year we net \$67,000. Mr. Bessen stated that it is not going to be easy to keep up. The gap between the proposed budget and revenues is \$377,000 and that includes a new position, even though it is paid through ARP. These positions could fall to the red unless some other things happen. Down the road we will need to raise taxes to cover these positions. Unhealthy thing to do is use the fund balance. We are living on a budget that is not within our means. If you keep burning your savings it's going to disappear. So comes a time when you need to start doing things differently. Right now the community has a \$67,000 increase. If we were to raise that \$377,000, that would probably be about \$33.00 a month. The Covid money is either, we spend this, or it goes back to the government. Let's use the Covid money to get a social worker in here, maybe a few things with medicaid and lower costs going out to special education. By moving some things around with the smart people we have working from FEH some of that gap might be closed enough to save a couple of those key positions so our kids are going to benefit from it down the road.

Mr. Bessen went over the Emerging spending trends, Inflation, Negotiations, Health Insurance, Utilities, Interest Rates, Debt Service, Construction, Supplies and Materials, Supply Chain issues. These are things we always have to contend to and think about and you as a Board and a Community need to understand that these are things that the school truly deals with trying to do the best they can with your dollar for your kids

The Budget and Beyond: Think 3 years out; What is changing in the District; What are the goals of the district, Strategic Plan; What resources does the children and the school need to succeed; Prepare revenue and expense assumptions and share them -often-we have talked about doing 4 newsletters; Determine with decision makers long term priorities

Changing Demographics and Needs Shifting:

- **Impact of the Pandemic on Students:** Academic Challenges, Social Emotional Needs, Family Support
- **Demographic Shifts:** SWD, Economically Challenged, Single Parent Households
- **Staffing Shortages:** Minimum Wage Increases, Competing for Skills, Subject Areas

Forecasting: Historical Data Review, Sharlene did a great job doing this and she was able to put together a 5 year plan. Talk to your experts, FEH BOCES, Rick Timms, NYSSBO, State Education, NYSCOSS, SED and ourselves.

Revenues

- Multi Year Tax Cap Forecast
- Changes in Foundation Aid
- Expense Based Aids

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Grants

Investments

Expenses

Debt Service Schedule

Contracts

Fleet Maintenance

Enrollment Projections

Demographic Trends

Forecasting Use of Federal COVID Funds

Strategic-One time purchases

 Purchase of new elementary reading program

 Purchase of O&M Equipment

 Purchase and installation of HVAC for Library

 Temporary Programs to offset learning loss-Enrichment and SS

Non Strategic - use of funds for daily operations-recurring expenses

\$295,470 used for 9 positions 22-23

\$474,635 anticipated from grant to be used 23-24

Foundation Aid and Tax Cap

Foundation aide - 3% in executive budget for 2022-2023

 Election year

 Sustainability

 Declining enrollment

 CPI Currently 7.8

Tax Cap

A formula that provides a number based on exemptions and inclusions

Communication-the Village Well

Seek Community Input

Survey Stakeholders

Encourage Principal to Parent Conversations - Parent Coffee

Provide Regular Updates

Tailor Communication to Fort Edward

VII. Treasurer Report: Report was in packet. The Finance Committee met prior to this meeting.

VIII. Principal's Report- Mr. Godfrey reported that the Jr/ Sr. High faculty committee has been formed to work on the Fun Day scheduled for May 26th for Jr./Sr. High students. The Key Club and National Honor Society will help come up with ideas for the day: They could be Arts and Crafts, yoga, cooking, board games etc. We are looking to hear from the students and see what they are interested in. We have more plans for that day.

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Sophomore student parent meetings have started today. Mrs. Scotch will meet with each student with his or her parents to discuss their career planning and their course of study for the next school year based on each student and what they are interested in.

IX. Buildings and Grounds Report: There is a report in the drive and the Board packets

X. Consent Agenda:

- (a) Motion made by Amanda Durkee, second by Ella Collins to approve the Board Minutes of February 14, 2022. motion carried 6-0
- (b) Motion made by Christopher Miles, second by Amanda Durkee to approve the following:
 - i. Warrants and Claims for March 2022
 - ii. Treasurer Report for January 2022
 - iii. Budget Transfers

Motion carried 6-0.

XI. Action:

- (a) Motion made by James Donahue, second by Ella Collins to **TABLE** the motion to approve the following resolution: BE IT RESOLVED, the Board of Education to consider for public vote the Board member size from 9 members to 7 members and the time of office from 5 years to 3 years. Motion carried 6-0.
- (b) Motion made by Amanda Durkee, second by Ella Collins to approve the 2022-2023 school calendar. Motion carried 6-0.
- (c) Motion made by Christopher Miles, second by Christina Durkee to approve the cooperative bidding with WSWHE BOCES (enclosed in packet) Motion carried 6-0.
- (d) Motion made by James Donahue, second by Ella Collins to approve the 1st reading of revised Policy #3220 Use of Assistance Animals and revise Policy #7552 Student Gender Identity and revised Policy #1510 Regular Board Meetings and Rules (Quorum and Parliamentary Procedure) Motion carried 6-0
- (e) Motion made by Amanda Durkee, second by Christina Durkee to approve the CSE/CPSE Recommendations as included in the Board Packets.

Motion carried 6-0

XII. Personnel:

- a. Motion made by Christina Durkee, second by Amanda Durkee to accept the letter of intent to retire from Marian Roberts effective December 31, 2022. Motion carried 6-0.

Amanda Durkee thanked Marian for her service to the district and also for helping out until we find a replacement.

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- b. Motion made by Christopher Miles, second by Amanda Durkee to approve the appointment of Sharon Flexon as per diem substitute at a rate per SASTA effective 2/17/22. Motion carried 6-0.
- c. Motion made by Christina Durkee, second by Ella Collins to appoint Heather Havens, Peter Prindle and Melissa Rosenthal to share the duties and responsibilities of the Faculty Advisors for the Fort Edward Key Club, per the FETA Contract Prorated. Carried 6-0.
- d. Motion made by Christina Durkee, second by Ella Collins to appoint Catherine Briscoe as full time Registered Nurse effective 3/24/22, rate of pay per the FESS Contract. Motion carried 6-0.
- e. Motion made by James Donahue, second by Christina Durkee to revise the date of resignation of Lynn Mykins from 3/1/22 to 3/31/22. Motion carried 6-0.
- f. Motion made by Christopher Miles, second by James Donahue to appoint Joseph St. John as full time cleaner effective 3/10/22, rate of pay per the FESS Contract. Motion carried 6-0.
- g. Motion made by James Donahue, second by Ella Collins to appoint Jessica Smatko and Stephanie Iuliucci as after school teachers for Session 2 Enrichment: Grades 3,4,5,6 Happy Feet, at a rate of pay per CRRSA ACT ESSER 2 grant. Motion carried 6-0.
- h. Motion made by Amanda Durkee, second by Christopher Miles to appoint Ann Marie Bilodeau and (Vicki Plude as special guest volunteer) as after school teacher for Session 2 Enrichment: Grades 3-4 Coding Club, at a rate of pay per CRRSA ACT ESSER 2 grant. Motion carried 6-0.
- i. Motion made by Christina Durkee, second by Ella Collins to appoint Jill Boucher as after school teacher for Session 2 Enrichment: Grades 3-4 CSI-Mystery Matters, at a rate per CRRSA ACT ESSER 2 Grant. Motion carried 6-0.
- j. Motion made by Christina Durkee, second by Christopher Miles to appoint Madelyn Godfrey and Sheri Genier as after school teacher for Session 2 Enrichment: Grades 6 Bakery Buddies, at a rate of pay per CRRSA ACT ESSER 2 grant. Motion carried 6-0.
- k. Motion made by James Donahue, second by Christina Durkee to appoint Kristi Bump as after school teacher for Session 2 Enrichment: Grades 4,5,6 The Art Factory, at a rate of pay per CRRSA ACT ESSER 2 grant. Motion carried 6-0.

There were no coaching appointments.

- XIII Coaching:** All appointments are subject to change and compensation proration, pending emergency school closing and required reductions in force. All coaching appointments are made pending completion and verification of all required coaching credentials, with the stipend per FETA contract commensurate with experience and no other salary or benefits. All coaching, extracurricular appointments are subject to reduction and compensation proration, pending final student enrollment numbers, and pending the

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outcome of any potential mergers and emergency school closings.

Second Community Comments: None

XIV. Executive Session:

At 8:35 p.m. motion made by Amanda Durkee, second by Ella Collins to enter into Executive Session to discuss matters referring to employment of specific individuals. Motion carried 6-0.

At 9:32 p.m. Motion made by Christina Durkee, second by Christopher Miles to return to public session. Motion carried 6-0.

XV. Adjournment: There being no further business, motion was made by Amanda Durkee, second Christina Durkee adjourned the meeting at 9:33 p..m. Motion carried 6-0.