

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Town Hall Memorial Room
June 30, 2016
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

Present: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Schneider, Board Members Guagliumi and Thompson, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Interview of Candidates for School Board Member Vacancy

Chair Barnes began the meeting by reviewing the procedures for the public interviews, board deliberations, and selection process for the open position on the school board. After reviewing the outlined procedures, Chair Barnes invited Councilman Bill Boyd to begin his session by providing opening remarks.

Councilman Boyd expressed interest in the open seat to serve as a steward and a caretaker of the seat for the duration of the term and to preserve the continuity of the school board for this year.

Board Member Thompson asked about the impact of potentially serving on two town boards. Councilman Boyd responded there would be no impact.

Board Member Guagliumi asked what Councilman Boyd saw as the biggest issues/areas of concern to face the board.

Councilman Boyd responded that helping to explain/better justify to the public the operating budget is a big issue he'd like to address. His most important priority is to help "sell" the budget to the community, since much of that gets lost in translation.

Vice Chair Schneider asked Councilman Boyd to comment on how he might handle issues that could affect, or be considered by, both the school board and the town council, like polling sites.

Councilman Boyd responded that he did not see major areas of potential conflict in the next 9-10 months and offered that this might be an issue only if he were to consider run for the full term. He cited an important need to liaise with the two boards and to help provide connectivity. He also assured the board that he understands the concept of the majority and would support the will of the majority on both boards.

Chair Barnes asked Councilman Boyd to reflect on skills he has gained in his professional life and how these might positively impact his role on the board.

Councilman Boyd responded that seeing and working with challenged people and their care givers up close has allowed him a greater sensitivity to the needs of such people. He has learned to “make it work” for the good of his clients and to ensure that bureaucracy does not interfere with care.

Board Member Thompson asked Councilman Boyd to comment on ideas or issues he would like to look at more closely as a board member.

Councilman Boyd responded that a major issue for him is water and water quality and how the district will work to ensure water safety for its students.

Board Member Guagliumi asked Councilman Boyd about his Town Council assignments.

Councilman Boyd responded that he serves on the Economic Development Citizen Advisory Committee, the Nashua Regional Planning Commission and as an alternate on the Planning Board.

Vice Chair Schneider asked Councilman Boyd about any areas, beyond budget, that he has a particular interest in.

Councilman Boyd responded that he is deeply interested in the new 9th grade comprehensive level at Merrimack High School and would like to see how that plays out over the course of the upcoming school year.

Chair Barnes asked Councilman Boyd to consider what a quality public education looks like.

Councilman Boyd reflected that many people, families with children, are choosing to come to Merrimack for its quality education. They are, in fact, attracted to the teachers and the schools.

Board Member Thompson asked if there were any miscues of the board that he would have done differently.

Councilman Boyd responded that he is grateful to the board for not choosing to go on line and “vent” and “blast away” and appreciates the board’s efforts to support the idea of respectful engagement. He wondered about the use of district building resources and whether we are optimizing our spaces.

Board Member Guagliumi asked Councilman Boyd if there are any initiatives he would like to see addressed.

Councilman Boyd responded that he looks at the polling site resolution as a good example of cross-jurisdictional cooperation. He hopes to continue the work of outreach to various segments of the community, and credited the superintendent’s active and long history of participation in Rotary. He also cited the Honeywell project (energy efficiency) as a good example of the way that the district can continue to explore public/private partnerships.

Vice Chair Schneider asked Councilman Boyd if he would run for the position next spring.

Councilman Boyd responded that he is highly likely to seek reelection to the council and likely to strongly consider running for a full board term.

Board Member Thompson asked Councilman Boyd if he will continue to strive to be a good liaison between the boards.

Councilman Boyd responded that he wouldn't have said it if he didn't mean it.

At this point there were no additional questions from the board. Chair Barnes invited Councilman Boyd to ask any questions he may have for the board.

Councilman Boyd asked the board to consider what qualities of former Board Member Powell they would hope to see in a new board member

Insurance experience, candor, a desire for facts were among former Board Member Powell's qualities cited by the board.

In conclusion, Councilman Boyd offered that he functions well as a team member and is quick to share.

The board thanked the councilman for his time, commitment to the town and his interest in the school board open position.

At this time, Chair Barnes invited Dr. Naomi Schoenfeld to begin her session by providing opening remarks.

Dr. Schoenfeld began her remarks by praising the extensive experiences of Councilman Boyd and his steady commitment to serve in roles that supports the Merrimack community. She described herself as a former special education teacher and now an academic who earned her doctorate and is currently employed as an professor in the School of Education at Rivier University in the educator preparation program where she conducts research on inclusive education, Response to Intervention (RtI), how schools can better integrate a diverse student body, and the role of technology in the classroom. She offered that she has lived in Merrimack for eight years and has never served on a board like this before but understands that public schools need to be supported. She is currently unsure about her future plans regarding running to finish the term.

Board Member Thompson asked about any community involvement.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that she has none.

Board Member Guagliumi asked Dr. Schoenfeld about issues of importance that she felt ought to come before the board.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that one cannot bring one's own agenda to such a position without first learning and understanding the culture. She believes in the importance of finding the balance between a community's resources and needs and a teacher's expertise.

Vice Chair Schneider asked Dr. Schoenfeld about the tax burden of the schools on the community and how she would proceed to learn about the way our district does budgeting.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that she would read past budgets, budget meeting notes, read and learn everything relevant to budgeting that is available. She believes in the importance of making tradeoffs in a budget. People value their money so we need to negotiate that balance.

Chair Barnes asked Dr. Schoenfeld to reflect on skills she has gained in her professional life and how these might positively impact her role on the board.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that her greatest skills are those of a researcher, with a solid understanding of data. Additionally, her close work with students who have Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD) is an important skill she can bring to the board, especially when it comes to issues facing the board related to children with those needs.

Board Member Thompson asked Dr. Schoenfeld about what views or ideas she would come to the board interested in focusing on.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that she'd like to better understand which constituents feel the least connected/engaged, and why, hoping that we can do something about that. Further, she wonders about equitable education and universal design and wonders where the weakest links are in that regard and how we might address them.

Board Member Guagliumi asked about Dr. Schoenfeld's use of data when making data driven decisions and what kind of data she relies on.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that she deals primarily with qualitative data.

Vice Chair Schneider asked about the high school comprehensive model and how to leverage that with the honors program.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded about her work with Masticola Elementary School and the development of their Diamond Model, which includes giftedness in its full schema, as a good model to follow with regard to the comprehensive level.

Chair Barnes asked about Dr. Schoenfeld's definition of a quality public education.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that for a students to be engaged and happy in their learning and to be a good adult in the community are the best evidence of a quality public education.

Board Member Thompson asked how Dr. Schoenfeld might be able to serve as a good balance to members of the board who strongly represent the business sector.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that as an educator she could provide “an interesting difference” with a perspective that comes more from the learning and teaching side of the ledger.

Board Member Thompson asked Dr. Schoenfeld to comment on what she believes is the most memorable thing she recalls having come out of the board.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that it is a surprisingly functional body, which is not always the case.

Vice Chair Schneider brought up the issue of school rankings and asked Dr. Schoenfeld to consider what she might say to a constituent who brings up the notion that Merrimack is middle of the road.

Dr. Schoenfeld responded that she would ask the individual to focus less on the ranking, which comes from data that can either be unreliable or misleading, and instead refocus the questioner on what it is, specifically, about the system that causes them worry, and work from that premise.

At this point there were no additional questions from the board. Chair Barnes invited Dr. Schoenfeld to ask any questions she may have for the board.

Dr. Schoenfeld asked each board member a number of questions pertaining to their reasons for serving on the board, what unique skill sets each member brings to the board, and what role they believe prior experience serving on a board has on a candidate’s ability to serve.

Each board member responded with specificity to each question.

3. Appoint Candidate to Fill School Board Member Position

The board commenced deliberations concerning the applicants for the open board position. Board member Thompson thanked both parties for participating in the process and for answering all questions so thoroughly. Vice Chair Schneider and Board Member Guagliumi concurred and acknowledged the diverse and highly qualified backgrounds of both candidates.

Chair Barnes encouraged whomever was not appointed to consider serving on the Budget Committee.

After deliberation, Board Member Guagliumi moved, seconded by Board Member Thompson, to appoint Dr. Naomi Schoenfeld for the open position on the Merrimack School Board.

Board Member Guagliumi acknowledged that both candidates are outstanding and spoke about Dr. Schoenfeld’s background in education as providing a perspective on the board different from most other members. She also expressed some concern about an individual serving on two boards simultaneously.

Board Member Thompson agreed, acknowledged a deep regard for Councilman Boyd, and appreciated the “fresh set of eyes” offered by Dr. Schoenfeld.

Vice Chair Schneider expressed having a very difficult time choosing between two outstanding candidates. He shared Board Member Guagliumi's concern about serving on two boards but acknowledged an interest in continuing to forge a tighter bond between the two boards to ensure future collaboration on issues of mutual importance.

Chair Barnes addressed the issue of the business backgrounds of current board members and appreciated the education perspective of Dr. Schoenfeld. She commented on her appreciation for Councilman Boyd and his many contributions to the town.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.