

JOINT MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD & SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Scituate Senior Center, 333 First Parish Road, FL 1, Egypt & Minot Rooms
Thursday, September 9, 2021

Select Board Members in attendance (4): Karen Connolly, Chair, Andrew Goodrich, Clerk, Maura Curran and Anthony Vegnani

Ms. Canfield was not in attendance at this meeting.

School Committee Members in attendance (4): Michael Long, Chair, Nicole Brandolini, Vice Chair, Janice Lindblom, Secretary and Peter Gates

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER/ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA

Ms. Curran made a motion at 6:30 p.m. to accept the agenda for September 8, 2021 Second by Mr. Goodrich Unanimous Vote (8-0)

Mr. Long called the School Committee meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Ms. Connolly said this is the second of three joint meetings of the Select Board and the School Committee to fill a vacant seat on the School Committee created by a member's resignation.

We are committed to an open, fair and respectful process and have taken the following steps to make sure this will happen.

In accordance with Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 11, the School Committee notified the Select Board in writing of a vacancy on the Committee due to a resignation. A process to fill the vacancy was then determined.

On August 5th, we notified the community of the opening on the School Committee through the Town and School websites, the local newspaper, and announcements at regularly scheduled town committee meetings.

We asked interested citizens to submit a resume and a letter of interest to the Town Select Board office. Eight people responded and we thank them for coming forward. We then sent the applicants three questions to answer in writing by September 6th. All complied. We will make all documents available on the Town and School websites on Friday, September 10.

We will interview four people tonight and four people were interviewed last night at the same time and place. The interview schedule is in alphabetical order. We will be voting to fill the vacant seat in an open meeting on September 15.

Our hearings will be broadcast on Facebook live and will be available the next day on Scituate Community TV YouTube.

Our format for tonight and last night follows:

Each candidate will be asked to introduce themselves, explain why they want to serve on the school committee and if appointed, will they run for a full term in the Spring. This introductory statement should be three minutes or less.

Then each committee member will be allowed to ask a question, alternating between the Select Board and the School Committee. Applicants should keep their answers to three minutes or less. Any remaining time will be used for follow up questions if there are any. No interview will take more than 30 minutes.

Committee members will be given a ranking sheet to be completed and returned to Lorraine Devin in the Select Board Office by end of business day on September 13. She will compile the results into one summary document which will be distributed to Committee Members at the September 15th meeting. A discussion and vote will follow. The applicant appointed will serve the balance of the term until the upcoming Town Election in the Spring.

Ms. Connolly asked if anyone on the committee had any questions?

1. School Committee Vacancy Interviews (4):

- **6:35 – 7:05 p.m. Jennifer O'Neill**

Ms. O'Neill has lived in Scituate for 23 years. All three children attended Scituate Public Schools. She has been active in the schools for many years. PTO's, school council, SHORE and CORSE and attending school committee meetings. Timing wasn't right to run for her last year but she is interested in the vacancy and running in 2022. She believes in public education and her children attend public universities. She wants to be committed to the next generation. Mr. Long said there are a lot of divisive topics and what would her approach be. Ms. O'Neill said starting school before or after Labor Day is always a big issue. She would listen to the community and how it impacts the education of students. Her decisions as a school committee member would be based on the needs of students. Mr. Vegnani asked about the diversity and racial issues and the mask wearing and her thoughts on them. Ms. O'Neill was happy the school committee did not have to make the decision. She is pro mask but people need to make choices in some circumstances. She would see the need for example if all high school students are vaccinated they may not need to wear a mask. Ms. O'Neill believes the hiring of the DEI coordinator was a good hire. Ms. O'Neill was very active in CORSE and believes in inclusion. Everyone needs to bring to the table the issues of concern. The role of the school committee is to make sure we are meeting the needs of the students within budget. Ms. Lindblom asked what other priorities she would like to see addressed. Ms. O'Neil said fees are something that need to be reviewed. She was really happy full day kindergarten fees are not charged. She understands everything needs to be looked at but would like to reduce fees. Busing is expensive for some families. Ms. Curran asked if Ms. O'Neil could describe the most pressing issues besides diversity and masks. Ms. O'Neil said she believes it is important to prepare our students for life after Scituate. It is important for students to be ready to take on the world outside of Scituate. It starts in the ECC. We need to hire the best teachers and have the best curriculum. We are in a great position with the leadership we have now. It is important that we have a strong

superintendent and build from that. Ms. Brandolini asked if she was on school committee our roles go from committee member to decision maker and they are sometimes difficult for all children. Since relationships change, what should a school committee's relationship be with the Superintendent, parents and staff. Ms. O'Neill said collaboration is key and accountability. Sometimes the committee needs to push back and look to the policies that are in place. Parents are very important and there was a group of parents on one side of an issue and she wanted to understand why they wanted what they wanted. What she determined is we all went the best for our children and we need to follow state guidelines. Communication and talking to people are important. Mr. Goodrich asked Ms. O'Neill her leadership style. Ms. O'Neill has a democratic leadership style and everyone needs to be heard. At a certain point you need to step in move forward. She has a background in negotiations and works in Human Resources. It is important that everyone is heard. Mr. Gates said that Ms. O'Neill has attended every school committee meeting over the years and is constantly involved. Ms. O'Neill is aware of the responsibilities for liaison's and committee members representing the school committee. Mr. Gates said we've been through three superintendents over the past five years and he asked why she thinks that is so. One retired and one was not a good fit. The process was transparent to hire a new Superintendent and it helped get the one we have now who she believes is a good fit. Dr. Dutch taking over the business and budgets was a big transparent step forward. It is not easy to be a Superintendent and education changes, with differences in education. Parents can be difficult and hold them accountable. If you make good decisions and have the backup to stand by the decisions that is good. Past Superintendents could not backup their decisions. Mr. Vegnani said on most boards everyone has their different strengths. What are Ms. O'Neill's skill sets? Ms. O'Neill said her ability to build relationships is her strength no matter where someone stands on the issue. Her knowledge and history of Scituate Public Schools is a strength also. Having a historical perspective is important. Mr. Vegnani said she has seen the school from a lot of different angles and has done a lot. Mr. Long asked how board members should evaluate school performance. Ms. O'Neill said there are a lot of benchmarks that can be used for input. MCAS, AP classes vs AP exams are just a couple of benchmarks. Teachers have benchmarks to evaluate how our students are doing. We owe our kids an excellent education. Ms. O'Neill thanked the board for the opportunity.

- **7:10 – 7:40 p.m. Richard Taft**

Mr. Taft would run in the Spring for school committee and ran last year. It was a great experience. He moved here eight years ago and met a lot of people running for school committee. It got him out of his comfort zone and created good memories. He was happy to be a part of it. He did it because he felt the school needed to focus more on academic excellence. Better discussions for diversity equity and inclusion are needed. Some people are afraid to speak up. Speaking up is cause for harassment and shouldn't be viewed that way. It is not the experience people should have. School Committee meetings are intimidating and our culture has shifted and doesn't allow people to speak up. Mr. Taft has travelled and worked all over the world and we all want the same thing, better for our kids. This is very powerful. Mr. Long asked what is the best way to reach out to the community so people feel comfortable. Mr. Taft does not think we'll ever go back to the way it was. We will need to do both in person and remote participation. We

can't give up on this aspect of meeting together in the room, there is no substitute. It is intimidating on zoom and only two people speak up. Something fundamentally intimidating about that process. Mr. Vegnani asked about his opinion on masks and diversification. Mr. Taft said local circumstances and people should be vaccinated. What is appropriate for the age? High vaccine rate and low incidents give you the right not to have masks. This virus is deadly for older people he does not think kids have the severity from COVID. Kids are going to have a hard time learning remotely. Circumstances in our community are that the students don't need masks if our teachers are vaccinated. Ms. Lindblom said historically there has only been one person at school committee meetings. Mr. Taft participated in the advisory DEI group at the school and has not participated on other committees. Ms. Curran asked Mr. Taft to expand on his leadership style. Mr. Taft said his leadership style has positives and negatives. He is interested in learning how people think the way they think and is interested in their thoughts. He is willing to be open minded. He can have a certain amount of overbearingness in digging into the details of why people think the way they do. He wants to understand why they think the way they do. As it relates to the school committee leadership is important. Respectfully disagreeing with others is what people want to see. Ms. Brandolini said public school systems have such depth and breadth. What should a school committee members relationship be with parents and administration and staff. Mr. Taft said we represent the parents. We have an obligation to represent their interest. We should be the agent to partially satisfy the differences. Staff and Superintendents, we are a board and the toughest board members are the ones that succeed the most. Boards aren't necessarily places people always agree, that doesn't mean they aren't respectful of each other. They want the best. Mr. Goodrich asked what our teachers need for academic excellence. Mr. Taft discovered 75% of the budget is personnel the other 10-15% is hardware. The takeaway is a small number is for the resources they need. Our policies need to align with our resources and what the teachers need. If we are out of alignment we are going to get bad results. We need to set policy and set the direction. We don't make widgets, we make minds. Mr. Gates asked if he was aware of the responsibilities. Mr. Taft said yes, he is aware and looks forward to meeting others in the community and being involved. Mr. Gates asked why we've been through many superintendents. Mr. Taft said at some point we have to look inwardly at ourselves. Are we in alignment with the Superintendent and what is expected. Ms. Brandolini asked what the current challenges are for schools. Mr. Taft said we are discovering the concepts of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. They have been reformed to critical social justice. The words and concepts have been in higher education for a very long time. The idea that how we achieve social harmony is completely different now. Today we're told color blindness is bad and it is white supremacy. The ideas and concepts have been grabbed by an extreme element. Life liberty and the pursuit of happiness is the foundation of our country. It is divisive language. He got introduced to these terms and find them divisive. He said the school committee language should be revised. Mr. Vegnani asked what his feeling was for those types of education in our school system. Mr. Taft said as it relates to the education of our kids, we've replaced these fundamental ideas and implemented the critical race theory substituting them in. "Our school system is systemically racist" is just not true. This is the difference that is happening. He does think Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is important and we have so

much in common. We fundamentally are human and have many of the same traits. This is not what we should be teaching our kids. Mr. Long asked his opinion on a district mandated vaccine. Mr. Taft is uncomfortable with it given the nature of the virus. He is uncomfortable being told what to do but he did get the vaccine. It is something we have to think about. Does the school system need to tell all the teachers they need a vaccine or they'll be fired, he does not agree with that?

- **7:45 – 8:15 p.m. Andrew J. Tibbetts**

Mr. Tibbetts is running because he sees this as an important role and he thinks he can help. Service has always been a part of his life. He always looks for ways to volunteer and would like to find ways to give back. He grew up in Scituate. The town is run on volunteers and he is looking for a way to give back. Education is important and he went to Scituate Public Schools. He is a patent attorney and has humanity skills, science and engineering, arts & music and he obtained this through public schools. Whatever the tools are that kids need is what the school should do to help set them up. When he watches the meetings, he thinks he wishes more questions could be asked. He would like to advance the discussion. We should continue to allow people access to the meetings. We need to understand the community's perspective and build trust. He will run for school committee in 2022. Mr. Long asked what his thought process is for decision making. Mr. Tibbetts said he would think about what is the driver of the policy or issue. People get lost in the details. He would educate people on the subject matter and find the place we agree. What is the best way to keep the kids in school. Keep community transmission rates low then masking would support this to achieve our objective of keeping kids in school. Mr. Vagnani asked what issues he is interested in being involved with. Mr. Tibbetts said he is interested in doing the grunt work. He does not have a single issue, he is willing to roll up his sleeves and get involved. He wants to make sure the schools are still performing at top notch. Every principal and superintendent bring new sets of initiatives and some things fall by the wayside. Teachers are pulled in different directions. We need to be sure the school is still achieving. What are the metrics we value and get the data to look at that? We need a clear process to determine this without bias in the data. The curriculum analysis that has been delayed needs to be done. The schools need to be succeeding to the level the community expects and the kids deserve. Ms. Lindblom asked what strengths we have in our district. Mr. Tibbetts said our teaching core. We have lots of AP classes, clubs and sports and opportunities for students. We have great resources and online learning. He feels lucky his children succeeded last year. The tools we make available are different and effective than other districts. We have emphasis on arts and music and they are important. Ms. Curran asked how he would counsel and support the superintendent. Mr. Tibbetts said the best thing the school committee can do is bring in the perspectives of curriculum choices, goals, priorities and bringing in the community perspective. Soliciting input from neighbors and the public is important. Asking probing questions to make sure what we are doing is best. We need to know the targets and peer districts. Ms. Brandolini asked what the relationship should be with staff and superintendent. Mr. Tibbetts said they should not lose sight of what is important. Checking Superintendents decisions to make sure it is important. People need to feel respected speaking to the principals. Mr. Goodrich asked about data driven decisions and if he felt we are spending wisely. Mr. Tibbetts said he

looks forward to learning more about the budget. Does our spending align with our priorities and are we spending wisely is the way he would approach the budget. How much are we spending per student to get the level of achievement we are seeing. If we are spending more and achieving less we need to take a look at it. Mr. Gates asked if he would be available to participate on committees. Mr. Tibbetts said he can serve on other committees. Mr. Gates asked why they have had so many superintendents over the past five years. Mr. Tibbetts said we had one choice that was not a good fit. He would ask why it happened and work to not have it happen again. This is a big impact to the teachers and the kids who need consistency. Mr. Vegnani asked about diversification and its role in the school system. Mr. Tibbetts thinks it is more divisive than it needs to be. This is no different than what is happening. When you suppress differences, it is hard on the people who are different. The one thing lacking is what is actually happening in the school. We want all students to achieve. Mr. Tibbetts used the example of write something that happens when you go camping. For an inner-city student who does not go camping it is bias. These are the types of things that we need to focus on for education. No student should feel ashamed. Mr. Tibbetts thinks there is a lot of Facebook nonsense. Ms. Curran asked what is a pressing issue facing public schools. Mr. Tibbetts said excellence of education needs to be addressed. Better data points need to be collected and student achievement needs to be on par with what jobs people want. There are a lot of options. Automation is something that is coming. More things will be automated. Creativity in all forms needs to be part of education. All jobs of the future are going to depend on research deal with ambiguity and other ways to apply creativity to a problem whether in an office job or not. We need to keep our eye on our future.

- **8:20 – 8:50 p.m. Laurie Withrow**

Ms. Withrow thanked the boards for their service to the town. She said it would be an honor to sit at the table with them. She has been a parent here for 16 years and has three children and two step children. Public education is important to their family. She has listened and learned over the years. Academic excellence and being inclusive is important. We are guided by the state. We have a community with people that have strong opinions. One is not right or wrong. We are here for the children and she did not hear that enough. We represent the community and have to listen to the views of the community, bring that together and move forward. She would run for the school committee position at the next election. In eight months, you just being learning. Mr. Long said Ms. Withrow has been actively involved and what would she accomplish in the next eight months. Ms. Withrow is interested in bringing people together. Budget is important and seeing line items and detail. Transparency of the budget is important. Data driven curriculum is important. Mr. Vegnani said she has been involved with a lot of things for a long time. He asked why she wants to engage now. Ms. Withrow said she has more time right now with her grown toddler and her husband travelling less. She mentors a team of 700 people and has a mindset coach. She has learned to listen more and has come a long way and evolved. Ms. Lindblom asked what strengths the district has. Ms. Withrow said the people, we have great teachers. Retention of the teachers is important and we need to keep the new talent and keep growing. The new administration is energizing and positive. Ms. Withrow is excited to work with everyone to move the school district forward and come together. We are all here for the kids. Ms. Curran

asked if she had to campaign why would she be the best choice. Ms. Withrow said she can get along with everyone and bring a different point of view, talk it out and hear what the other side has to say. Sometimes you have to meet midway whether it is masks or diversity. Her Dad is a democrat and her mom is a republican and they have a very successful marriage. You don't have to hold grudges. She is okay asking tough questions and has a thick skin and works collaboratively. Ms. Brandolini said she is a listener for a living. A group of parents feel strongly about an issue and a decision is made against what they want. Ms. Withrow said everyone is not going to agree 100% of the time. We have to move forward for the children. People are going to have different points of view. You have to be okay with your decisions and move forward. Things do change and you can decide now one way and, in a few years, it may be different. Mr. Goodrich asked what our teachers need. Ms. Withrow said she has been involved with the teachers as a room parent, president of SHORE and working to get grants for teachers. She has run teacher appreciation at the high school and people look to her to get it done. Teachers are critical and the ones in the classroom with our kids on a daily basis. We need to let them do their job and know what they need. We don't need to micromanage the administration. The superintendent is the leader and the school committee is the board. Mr. Gates asked if Ms. Withrow was aware of the commitments outside of the school committee and she said she was. Mr. Gates asked why we have such a big turnover in superintendents. Ms. Withrow would like to see Mr. Burkhead stay for a while. Ms. Withrow was reading the newsletter the superintendent sent out today. She went on the state website to see where Scituate compares to other school communities. Every time we bring in new administration everything needs to be reviewed. We need to retain our current superintendent. Mr. Goodrich asked about her leadership style. Ms. Withrow said she would review the rules to obtain public feedback. Ms. Withrow would consider open office hours to let the public know she is available for questions or discussion. You are there to represent the community and she would find out what the community is feeling. Ms. Curran said taking part in the teacher's union negotiation and balancing the tax payer dollars is part of the job on the school committee. Ms. Withrow said she would want teacher retention and learn. Both sides need to give a little stay strong on things that are important to the district. Bargain in good faith is a good way to put it. This community represents the tax payers.

2. Discuss any other issues that may reasonably come before the boards
Yom Kippur starts at sundown September 15, 2021. The next meeting is scheduled to start at 6:30. The meeting could be pushed to 5:30 p.m. or move it to a different date. Ranking and results are due to Lorraine Devin by end of business on Monday, September 13, 2021. Members would like to meet on September 15, 2021 earlier at 5:30 p.m. Everyone agreed to meet earlier at 5:30 p.m. on September 15, 2021.

3. Adjournment of Meeting

Move to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m. motion by Mr. Vegnani second by Mr. Goodrich Unanimous Vote (8-0)

Respectfully Submitted,

Lorraine Devin, Recorder

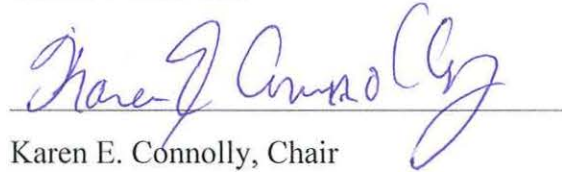
**List of Documents for Select Board & School Committee Joint Meeting Minutes for
September 9, 2021**

Agenda

- **Ms. Jennifer O'Neill letter of intent, resume and answers to questions**
- **Mr. Richard Taft letter of intent, resume and answers to questions**
- **Mr. Andrew Tibbetts letter of intent, resume and answers to questions**
- **Ms. Laurie Withrow letter of intent, resume and answers to questions**

Select Board & School Committee Joint Meeting Minutes for September 9, 2021

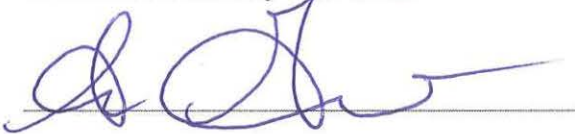
SELECT BOARD



Karen E. Connolly, Chair

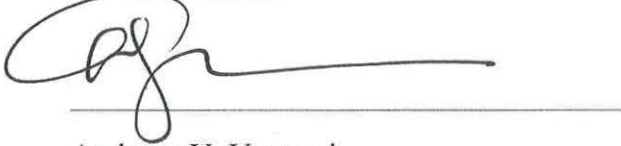
not in attendance

Karen B. Canfield, Vice Chair



Andrew W. Goodrich, Clerk

Maura C. Curran

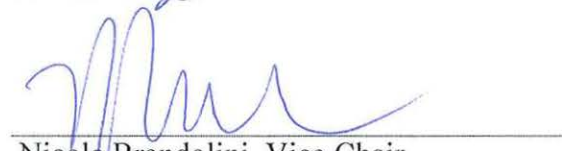


Anthony V. Vegnani

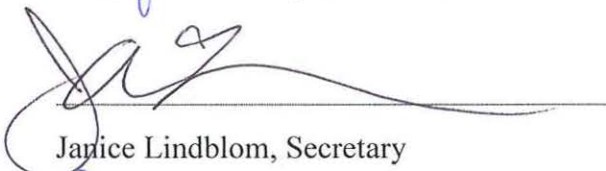
SCHOOL COMMITTEE



Michael Long, Chair



Nicole Brandolini, Vice Chair



Jayice Lindblom, Secretary



Peter Gates