



WINOOSKI SCHOOLS

We are the future.

Winooski School Board of Trustees
Special Meeting
Tuesday, September 15, 2020, 6:30pm
Virtual Meeting

Zoom Meeting information: <https://wsdvt.zoom.us/j/97373389421>
Join by Phone: +19294362866, Meeting ID - 9737338942

All students will graduate from the Winooski School District (WSD) college and career ready at a cost supported by a majority of the Winooski community. WSD students will lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community.

Attendees: Emily Hecker, Sean McMannon, Lydia Mongeon, Ken French (RETN), Sarah McGown-Freije, Jason Ziter, Brian Dalla Mura, Elizabeth Wood, Taylor Parrott, Nikki, Alex Yin, Nicole Mace, Margaret Bass, Tori Cleiland, Dawn Schmoll Kayla Loving, Matthew O'Neil, Yatrika Dhamala, Vicki Wolinsky, Luke Dorfman, Kari Bohlen, Sara Raabe, Heather Win, Mike Decarreau, Rainbow Chen, Sue Messier, Evelyn Monje, Steven Berbeco, Krista Parisi, Hussein Amuri, Erin Brown, Mugabo Thierry Uwilingiyimana, Remy Uwilingiyimana, Rick Herbert, Morgan Rugar, Matthew Webb, Indra Acharya, Katherine, Sarah Murphy, Allison Novak, Courtney Poquette, Chris Freiji

1. Call to Order: 6:33 pm

2. Agenda Review and Adjustments: (5 Minutes)

3. Public Comments: (5 Minutes)

*Lydia Mongeon-The transparency of the board is disgraceful. I think it's absurd you let a group of students railroad and plow through the meeting. When it comes to taxpayers who want to speak, we are shushed. Us taxpayers are paying for an SRO who isn't at the school, and wants to be.

*Sarah McGown-Frieji- Vt Secretary of State Guide to open meetings. "Public bodies must take minutes, minutes are the permanent form of actions of the public body and play an important role in planning in the history of the public body's business.I find it disturbing that there are no minutes of the August 31st meeting between Tori, Chief Heber, Jessie Baker, Sean McMannon, Yatrika and Evelynn.

*Brian Dalla Mura-The concern I have is for the SRO not being on campus. I am the therapeutic Crisis Intervention trainer for the therapeutic programs. In the past, we've had the SRO participate in safety planning meetings that we would have frequently with outside agencies, Howard Center, Therapists & DCF. With the elimination of the SRO, that service has been yanked from a lot of students without any replacement. I have some serious concerns about child abuse and the SRO's involvement in that. Often times we have students talk about domestic violence and child abuse, they want to speak to the SRO that they know and this year that has already happened to me. It's difficult to explain that he isn't here when they don't have anyone safe to talk to.

*Dawn Schmall-I fall in line with all the concerns about the SRO. I questioned it at school when picking up my son. There were some little ones that were straying away, it is a huge safety thing. I have a student with special needs and was at the school when an armed person was outside the school. That is the one comfort for him knowing the SRO is on campus. I am unclear, I didn't know this was transpiring and saw a clip of it on the news, and tried to google this meeting and everything trying to figure out how to get on it. I am frustrated and trying to take it all in. There were a lot of parents who didn't know he wasn't there. If there isn't some sort of officer, I would definitely pull my kids, they need to be safe where they are.

4. Executive Limitations (Policy Section II): (15 Minutes)

a. Policy Title 2.6 Asset Protection

i. Action: Prime Contract Change Order #2

*Sean-the board had the backup and in the memo it states that the full board authorized that Alex Yin and Mike Decarreau as part of the capital project executive committee can approve any changes over to \$15,000. Anything under \$15,000 can be authorized by either myself (Sean) or finance manager, Nicole Mace. We recommend that you approve a change order of \$101,964.35.

*Approved by all

b. Policy Title 2.8 Communication and Support to the Board

i. Discussion: Superintendent Reflection on WSA Demands Process

*Sean-How impressed and proud of our current and graduate students for their passion, their beliefs and their commitment as they move forward to become an Anti-racist district. They have taught us a lot along the way, had strong voices, and persisted in their pursuit in these demands. I am grateful for the board, the leadership team and many staff and community members who support our aspiration to become an anti-racist district. The challenges that have arisen among this, some of them were voiced during public comments about communication to the broader community. I and the board have not done a very good job of the board governing and me supporting them in their governance the way they have for over 8 years. They adopted a model called policy governance and they have stuck with that, they have been clear about the ends which were built with community input. They have been clear through their policies and also in meetings about what the means are. We got away from that, so I want to point out two very specific parts of policy that I found I didn't look at enough and I didn't call out during the process. I wish I had, that would have helped me support the board in doing a better job of navigating these difficult situations. In policy 2.8: I readily admit I could have done a better job without the many meetings that came quickly and were during a time when we were all affected and continue to be affected by the pandemic. There were a lot of emotional states people were navigating at the time, myself included, and where I fell down was not finding the time in between meetings to get the information to the board they needed, or not having the presence in the meeting to be able to say, "wait a minute, here's the information that you don't have, or that I think you need in order to make informed decisions about specific demands." Secondly, Policy 2.8.5: You will hear from board members how they got away from their governance process policies. My role is that at some point said to them in their meeting "you need to slow down, you need to look at your policies and see if your policies guide you in how you should be working through these demands. Take the time to slow down, look at your section three and four policies to get some help on how they really work through these sensitive, important and difficult issues that were happening kind of at warp speed between July and early August.

5. Governance Processes (Policy Section IV): (30 Minutes)

a. [Policy Title 4.2 Board Job Description](#)

i. Discussion: [#8312 Policy on Public Participation at Board Meetings](#)

ii. Discussion: Board Reflection on WSA Demands Process

*Margaret-I fully accept all the criticisms from the public comments of the members of the community. It is our obligation as elected officials to hear from members of the community before we make any decisions that have ramifications and affect the entire community. I hope that this is a shift of the way we do business, process and procedure. I think that it's at the board's discretion, they need to be clear about public comments.

*Mike-One of the things we ask ourselves as a board is how do we get the community on board. When something's gone horribly wrong is when we get the most community engagement. We didn't stop to get back into the community and ask the questions. With regards to the comments, we need to hear them. Everyone needs to have a voice. I think what happened was we started to govern the public comments more with emotions than reason. I think we've learned a lot over the last two months to help us govern a whole lot better and understand how we focus our thoughts and how we move as a board as being representative to the community.

*Alex-We need to hear all voices. As a board, we have always felt like we have to have a 5-0 vote, but it's okay to disagree with each other. As a board, we need to grow and understand the differences. We are governed by the end statement.

*Matt-I stand together and accept responsibility in the areas in which we have fallen down. I'm optimistic about being able to move forward in a much more positive and proactive way.

*Tori-I am influenced and heavily motivated by black violence and death that is upon us. I certainly let my ideals for anti-racism guide me through the process, where the enthusiasm and the fear of wanting to make this happen and finding something new around the tension of time, we were moving too slowly for some and too fast for others. What I noticed when re-reading all these policies was we have a guidebook in our policies on how to proceed when something comes before the board of elected officials. Some of these policies may have racist ideas in them and what I appreciate about number 6 demands is it's requesting us to do the policy review and to look at "are our policies equitable?"

b. [Policy Title: 4.4 Board Linkage with Ownership](#)

i. Discussion: Board Reflection on WSA Demands Process

*Mike-Since day 1 on the board, we have done work in the past 9 years. We've gotten to a point where the school is highly functioning. Hiring has been a lot easier. The common thread is how do we get out to the broader portion of the community. We've tried through community dinners and front porch forum with limited success. We get those on the edges. Those with an opinion in either direction. What we haven't figured out is "how do we get out and, for instance, putting an item on a ballot when you got Bernie Sanders running and you get 2200 people in Winooski to get out to vote." You know where people stand. When you get 20, 30 or 40 people, it's not a broad support from the community, it's not a breath of input you need from the community to make, at least in this case, the kinds of decisions that we have made. We need that time to get that broad perspective rather than the voices of those of the vocal minority.

*Matt-we have these policies in place and we've strayed from them, we should have slowed down. We should have followed the policies and we didn't. We will learn from this and will do better in the future.

*Alex-owners sometimes implies a certain person. Everybody has a say, there will be gray, there will be conflicting thoughts and that's what makes this hard. We want this community to thrive. I don't think people know what a policy governance is and it's good they are watching this and watching us go through this.

*Tori-It is our job to communicate what policy governance is and to be explicit. In terms of public comments at this point, being more explicit about how it runs, so they understand it's not about rudeness or pushing people out, there are some rules that will help all of us, the policy and process can support the ideals. One piece in the ownership linkage is it requests in our policies to create a 3 year plan and how we are going to reach out. We have had some successes over the past nine years, we've had a multi-stake holder group to help us create our graduation expectations, around the end statement.

c. [Policy Title: 4.6 Chair's Role](#)

i. Discussion: Board Reflection on WSA Demands Process

*Margaret-These policies and procedures are rooted in white supremacy. It is the public's responsibility to get out and vote; for as long as I have been here, board members are running unopposed which signals something about the interest in the community is, aside from when there is an issue that comes up. We are an exception in terms of school districts in VT, population, and it seems to be that we need to look at business as usual, with a different eye if we are indeed doing what we say we are doing. We need to look at policy and procedure and to determine whether or not the policies and procedures that we follow have come from a source that doesn't have any bearing or root in the community in which we live. We have to remember that all of us in positions of power, no matter how we perceive the power, we have to remember who we are and for whom we speak.

*Mike-who we are and whom we speak is bullseye. I agree with the rest as well.

d. [Policy Title: 4.7 Board Member's Code of Conduct](#)

i. Discussion: Board Reflection on WSA Demands Process

*Mike-This one may seem obvious but this is where a lot of boards get into trouble, start going down individual paths. The majority vote of the board ultimately ends up being the voice of the board, regardless of which way it goes with you or without, against what you think, once you get done and have a vote. The decision is the board decision. It may not jive with your clearest thought but to me it's always been one of the key pieces of being on the board. In regards to the conflict of interest is a lot of things, to me the main piece is "it's not necessarily what you say, but how it's received."

* Alex-That's what makes it hard to be a board member and a good neighbor in many ways is in some ways we

self-sacrifice our own values because we know as a board the direction we need to move. We have to be good at listening and be able to take in all the information and have good discussion as a board; then move forward as a board. That is one of the hardest parts about being a school board member.

e. [Policy Title: 4.1 Governing Style](#)

i. Discussion: Board Reflection on WSA Demands Process

*Alex - What this really means is, as a board we will cultivate a sense of group of responsibility. The board, not the staff, will be responsible for excellence in governing. The board will be the initiator of policy, not merely a reactor to staff initiatives; the board will not use the expertise of individual members to substitute for the judgement of the board, although the expertise of the board member(s) may be used in enhancing the understanding of the board as a body. The board will also direct, control and inspire the organization through the careful establishment of broad, written policies reflecting the board's values and perspectives. The board's major policy focus will be on the intended long term impacts outside the staff's organization, the ends, not on the administration or problematic means of attaining those effects. The board's values will be drawn from the diverse values of the community, informed by expert sources from both internal and external to the organization. The board will monitor and discuss the board's process and performance on a regular basis. Self monitoring will include comparison of board activity and discipline to policies of governance process board management delegation categories. This is the one, I have to admit, is the hardest one to do and to be reminded as a board member because I want to admit I want to solve all the problems and be part of the problem solution.

*Matt - well said Alex. Some policies are rooted in white supremacy and we need to make those changes. I think the place we fell down was we were reactive and in doing so, we stepped into means and as a result we put our leadership team in an untenable position. We need to be accountable to that and make corrective action. At the same time, move forward because we are committed as a board to make this an anti-racist district.

*Mike - the place where we fell down is the board is here to govern for outcomes but when it comes to running the district, none of us are qualified to understand the intimate impact of any particular decision that happens within.

Tori - passion, belief, commitment and perseverance of our students and the WSA's demands were amazing. We have not been in line with our policies and the linkage to ownership being proactive drawing from broad diversity, values in the community and scrupulously, morally and ethically observing the current policies enforced while we can recognize that they may not be the policies that we want to follow (being rooted in White Supremacy), and in the policies, the board can change it's governance policies at any time. The policies need to be audited to be sure they are in line with our anti-racist ideas, practices and values moving forward.

*Mike - this will in no way will diminish our full support with moving to being an Anti-racist district. We ended up moving a little too fast, ahead of the headlights in understanding the short term and long term impacts. That doesn't mean these would go away, I am assuming we can leave them in and continue to work on how we model them so we can move forward and continue along this path.

*Margaret - My frustration is with the absence of process. I have lived under the weight of white supremacy and the year 2020 has just about broken my back. My vote will always be adopting demands 1-8. There's no person in the universe that has no greater care or respect for Jason Ziter than I do. He doesn't do his work because he wears a gun, but because of his heart. We made a decision without consulting the chief of police. Racism doesn't go away just because you make a demand. The idea that you would make a demand and they would say "Okay" is giving you a false sense of how systems are dismantled.

*Alex - I'm struggling because I don't know Jason Ziter all that well, but I know of all the great things he's done and the work, I totally agree with Margaret on everything. It's not the gun, it's his heart and him as a person. I don't know the police chief or the city officials and the process, but there has to be some way to voice discontent, that there is a need and I am alright with that. This is a hard decision I will make but I'm going to just say that like I'm going against what I know about the process, I still stand with support there is a need to emphasize and I wish there was an outlet.

Public Comments:

*Sarah McGowan-Frieji - I fully support ensuring that Winooski is anti-racist but I do take issue with the implication that anyone speaking up about how the board mis-handled this process is racist. I also want to say I am happy the board has acknowledged they didn't follow it's own policies by failing to get input from the entire community and for advocating for a specific interest group. What I would like to know is what happens now regarding the vote of the WSA's demands during the time when the board was not compliant with its own policies I don't think it's enough to simply say, "okay we're going

to go back and revisit demands 2 and 3. I think at this point, all the demands need to be readdressed and you need to follow the proper policies and procedures before accepting any of them.

*Lydia Mongeon - I also want to touch base on policy 4.4 which was brought to my attention last week. No one asked the community as a whole at all about what was going on. Nothing was communicated to anyone, only the people who were on the school board meetings were telling people what was actually happening. I have been on the PTO for years and have put in hundreds of hours there, it is very hard when you're an officer on the PTO and doing so much work to attend all the school board meetings or run to be on the school board.

*Chris Freji - When you guys were doing the capital project, you relied heavily on the community. You had meetings and tours of the school. You don't give the community enough credit. You blanketed the community with information, if you do that with something important, you will find you will get a larger response from the community. You failed in doing that.

*Mugabo - One thing, I want to remind everyone, business as usual is racist, not because we meant to be racist but because this is a racist country. When talking about doing things the right way, we need to be sure to remind everyone that business as usual is racist. The vocal minority are the ones who usually drive these kinds of boards because of the way power works. We talked about community engagement and how hard it is to get community engagement; it's really not that hard to get community engagement. I call my students' parents on a regular basis, but if you look at how the board is designed, it's alienating. The board gave the leadership team permission to bring in the police, so the leadership team already dropped the ball on bringing in other voices necessary to negotiate with WSA.

* Kari Bohlen - I don't have anything prepared but I feel like I need to say something. I've been thinking about all the decisions that have been made in the past that currently exist that "status quo" benefits certain people already. It's not like there is a neutral ground or that our school is a neutral place. As for taking back commitments of specific demands or asking to reconsider all of them; the need to acknowledge that and so starting to work as a district to start censoring our students of color, our experiences of families in our community who are now learning or acknowledging their experiences are different. Going back on this and feeling like we are taking a step back from what felt like stepping forward is incredibly disheartening.

*Motion-move to amend demands 1, 3-8 and instead adopt demands 1, 4-8

*Motion passes 4-1

ii. Discussion/Possible Action: Board Response to [Winooski Students for Anti-Racism \(WSA\) Demands](#)

6. Next Agenda: (5 Minutes)

7. Upcoming Important Dates:

a. Board Retreat: September 26, 2020

b. Regular School Board Meeting: October 14, 2020

8. Adjourn: 7:51 pm