



TOWN OF GRAFTON
GRAFTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
30 PROVIDENCE ROAD
GRAFTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01519
(508) 839-5421

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MINUTES

SCHOOL COMMITTEE & BOARD OF SELECTMEN

February 4, 2016

Conference Room F, Grafton Municipal Center

6:30 p.m.

School Committee - Daryl Rynning, Chairman, Laura Often, Vice Chair; Peter Carlson, Secretary and Maureen Cohen, Member

Board of Selectmen – Jennifer Thomas, Vice Chair, Bruce Spinney, Clerk and Dennis Flynn

Student Representative – Hannah Kelley

Also Present: Dr. James Cummings, Superintendent of Schools

Call to Order – Open Session

1. Interview Candidates for vacant School Committee Seat

Mrs. Rynning opened the meeting at 6:45 and outlined the interview process. Each candidate would give a brief introduction and each would be asked seven questions. Once the interview process was complete, both boards would deliberate and a vote would be taken. Later this evening, Mrs. Rynning would call each candidate with the results.

Catherine Pisacane introduced herself, she moved to Grafton this past December and was excited to be here. Previously she lived in Hopedale where she was active in the community, specifically holding an elected position on the Planning Board. Ms. Pisacane's current position involved working with children. She is the Executive Director of Project Smile, a nonprofit organization which helped children who were victims of traumatic events. She partnered with shelters, local police and fire departments and was very committed to helping children. When moving to Grafton she began looking for ways to become involved. Seeing the opening on the School Committee she felt this could be a perfect fit for her, considering her background working with children. She also felt it would be a great way to become more involved in the community. Ms. Pisacane felt this was a perfect fit for her and a good way for her to become more involved in her community. Selectmen Thomas asked the first question; what strengths do you believe you would bring to the school committee and what attributes do you believe are essential for successful committee members? To be successful, Ms. Pisacane felt she was a good listener, she knew how to take a step back and look at all sides. She was successful, a good listener, she felt she could look at all sides and take a step back to understand all sides. She felt she would work well with the other members, and community. She also

felt it was a strength to have over 12 years of business experience which included working on budgets and finances. Ms. Pisacane felt she was very committed and worked well with people in general. Selectmen Spinney asked the next question; what goals do you hope to achieve if appointed. Ms. Pisacane hoped to work towards making the School Committee and the Town as successful as it could be, give back to the community and be involved locally. She felt so many people were not involved and she hoped to get more folks involved. She wanted to be involved and make Grafton a great environment for their children. Selectman Flynn asked the next question; are there particular issues that motivate you to serve on the school committee. Ms. Pisacane said she had no one particular issue, she felt she would be an impartial voice. She was new to town and wanted to bring her skills and experience to the committee, learn more about the system and the community as well as meet new people and do a great job. Mr. Carlson asked, given all the issues that arise, how the committee can stay focused on student achievement. Ms. Pisacane felt it was important to start with a clear idea of leadership, have a plan and watch priorities, then work towards the goals. Make sure everyone is working towards the same priorities. Mrs. Often asked question number 5; how can the Grafton School Committee balance the need to provide a quality education with the need to respond to the local taxpayer burden. Ms. Pisacane felt it came down to having good management and an open door policy and good communication so people in town know what is going on. She felt a majority of residents care about the town and if people understood what was going on, it would help get community support. If people understand where money is being spent and why, they tend to buy into and support issues more often. Ms. Kelley asked the next question; what is your vision for education in the Grafton Community. Ms. Pisacane felt her vision was that everyone child succeeds. She stated that there was a number of ways to defined succeed, but if children have the skills and experience they can be the best they can be. Additionally,, Ms. Pisacane felt the worst scenario for a student was being failed within the school department. She felt all children regardless of their background should have equal access and equal rights for the best education available. Mrs. Cohen asked if Ms. Pisacane had any questions for the committee. Ms. Pisacane did not have any specific questions this evening; she had done research on the web site and was excited for the opportunity to fill the position. Mrs. Rynning thanked Ms. Pisacane for taking the time to interview; she would contact each candidate later on in the evening with the results.

Jennifer Connelly introduced herself and gave a brief outline about herself, she lived in Grafton for the past thirteen years and had four children in the school system. With that she felt vested in community. With her background in teaching she found an interest in serving on the School Committee, it had always been on her radar. When her oldest child began in the school system she became active with PTG and other activities. She was also very involved with the Yes Grafton Campaign. She felt with her background in teaching, children in the school system and 13 years in Grafton she was a good candidate for the position. Selectmen Thomas asked the first question; what strengths do you believe you would bring to the school committee and what attributes do you believe are essential for successful committee members? Ms. Connelly felt she was a hard worker, a logical thinker and a quick learner which would assist her on the committee. She was not an emotional decision maker which she felt was a good attribute. Selectmen Spinney asked the next

question; what goals do you hope to achieve if appointed. Ms. Connelly felt her goals would be to strengthen communication between the school committee and the town. Improve the perception; she felt this could be worked on, show how involved the school committee was. Selectman Flynn asked the next question; Are there particular issues that motivate you to serve on the school committee. Ms. Connelly said she did not have an agenda, but had a passion for education. Education has been with her since high school and now by tutoring she felt she was on top of it. In general she wanted to be sure every child had equal access to education. Mr. Carlson asked, given all the issues that arise, how the committee can stay focused on student achievement. Ms. Connelly felt the Mass insight was a wonderful choice, she wished she had this opportunity as a student and while teaching. When she taught, she said she used MCAS scores to study data and see if there was something missing and find gaps by analyzing data. Mrs. Often asked question number 5; how can the Grafton School Committee balance the need to provide a quality education with the need to respond to the local taxpayer burden. Ms. Connelly felt if she had a black board and text books she could deliver to the students. When the extra items came on board it was great and helpful but not necessary. She felt if you had quality teachers, you did not need all the bells and whistles. Going back to being a logical decision maker you can make a budget work without having absolutely everything Ms. Connelly felt you could make it work without extra's. A lot just deals with quality teachers. Ms. Cohen asked the next question; what is your vision for education in the Grafton Community. Ms. Connelly stated that different children had different needs and it was the duty of the school to provide all the opportunity to the same quality of education. As a teacher she worked on a mission statement, noting it was very similar to Grafton's; for students to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens. Mrs. Cohen asked if Ms. Connelly had any questions for the group. Ms. Connelly said the AP venture was nice but didn't want the students in the "middle" to get lost. What was that a mission of the committee? Ms. Kelley a junior at GHS said every student no matter what their needs was given resources to take an AP course to prepare them. The tools were there to help every student even if they thought they were not an AP student. Ms. Cohen felt providing a wide variety of options for students to pursue their interest whatever it may be, the committee was always looking for new opportunities and to be innovative. Ms. Often felt even at the younger levels the students were continually being challenged at all levels of learning. Mr. Carlson said the district was continuing to strengthen the professional development of the teachers, and enhancing the leadership team has been a great step ahead and one of the committees continued visions. Mrs. Rynning stated that Dr. Cummings has promoted student engagement and all the pieces discussed tonight are complex but always need to be a focus moving forward. Mrs. Rynning has seen a lot of forward moving progress. Noting the drop out levels has dropped dramatically, the "middle" students are getting more attention and this attributes to the ongoing efforts of the district. Mr. Flynn said the Superintendent has worked hard to create an environment where everyone can succeed, and as a selectman he felt it was important to support these standards. Mrs. Rynning thanked Ms. Connelly for coming forward and would contact each candidate later in the evening with the results.

Mrs. Rynning opened the discussion to the members present and the Selectmen. Mrs. Thomas said both candidates were impressive. She did know Ms. Connelly personally

and felt she was fantastic. Ms. Pisacone's budget and business experience stood out as being something that could be very helpful on the committee. Mrs. Rynning agreed that both candidates brought different strengths and they had two candidates what would do a great job. Mrs. Rynning liked a lot of Ms. Pisacones answers, she had a global background. Ms. Connelly was very technical in her answers. Mr. Spinney felt both did well, Ms. Connelly was very technical; he'd worked with her on Yes Grafton and saw a lot of dedication. He felt she had a bit more exposure to the community than Ms. Pisacone. Mr. Carlson felt Ms. Connelly's question of the Board made her stand out and her concern about communication. This made it an easy decision for him. Ms. Often felt very lucky that we've had four great candidates in the past several months. Ms. Often felt Ms. Pisacone had some great qualities and could be an asset to the town, she hoped to see her involved in the future. As for Ms. Connelly, Ms. Often had worked with her and saw her dedication. Ms. Often thanked both candidates. Ms. Cohen was excited to see two strong candidates and agreed with Mrs. Thomas that the business perspective of Ms. Pisacone was impressive and could be an asset. However in reviewing the resumes and knowing Ms. Connelly from working on Yes Grafton, her commitment and passion in town along with her educational experience was an important element for the position. Ms. Connelly seemed to offer a bit more in town experience. Mr. Flynn felt it was great to see two great candidates both with different sets of skills which would be helpful. Mr. Flynn asked if the School Committee felt they could work with either member, was there something they may be lacking that one of these candidates could define. Mrs. Rynning felt her board was not lacking in any area and could work with either candidate. A motion was made by Mr. Carlson to appoint Jennifer Connelly as a school committee member throughout the remainder of the 2016 term. Motion seconded by Mrs. Often. Motion carried 4-0 School Committee; 3-0 Selectmen; 1-0 Student Representative.

At 7:40 p.m. a motion was made by Mr. Carlson, seconded by Mrs. Often to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried 4-0 School Committee, 3-0 Selectmen and 1-0 Student Representative.

Respectfully submitted



Cindy Ide
Recording Secretary