



Minutes of the Special Public Meeting of the Ridgewood Board of Education

Minutes of the Special Public Meeting of the Ridgewood Board of Education held on July 17, 2023 at 5:00 pm, at the Education Center.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 5:00 p.m., Mr. Lembo called the Special Public Meeting to Order.

Present:

Mr. Michael Lembo, President; Ms. HyunJu Kwak, Vice President (virtual); Ms. Sheila Brogan, Mr. Saurabh Dani, Mr. Muhammad Mahmoud (virtual),

Also Present:

Mr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools, Ms. Jaime Murphy, Director of Human Resources;

Visitors: There were approximately 5 visitors.

II. FLAG SALUTE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Lembo led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. OPENING STATEMENT BY PRESIDING OFFICER

Mr. Lembo announced that pursuant to the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act, advance notice of this meeting had been given to The Ridgewood News, The Record, and the Clerk of the Village of Ridgewood. In addition, notices were posted in the office of the Board Secretary and in all school buildings.

IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Ramone Hache, President and CEO of the Ridgewood Y, 112 Oak Street, Tonight you'll be voting on a resolution to award the before and after care contract. She wrote a letter on July 3rd to the entire board and he would like to speak into the record today about the concerns that he expressed in that letter. He's very concerned about how this RFP was handled, not just for the Ridgewood Y but for other vendors who submitted proposals. The response deadline was June 23rd and the earliest the board attempted to award a contract was June 30th. It's worth pointing out that June 30 was the Friday before the 4th of July weekend. Almost guaranteeing no participation from the public. Why was the public not included? Here we are today more than halfway through the month of July when the contract is set to begin in early September. He personally polled several superintendents throughout Bergen County and the response is basically the same before and after care contract is usually awarded in the spring, no later than May when you delay the RFP this much you end up in a time crunch and you create an inherent bias towards the existing vendor which is unfair to any potential new vendors. A time crunch limits the board's ability to do proper due diligence like reviewing previous proposals to ensure that current vendors have delivered on what they have said they were delivered in the past. At the last meeting, the board mentioned that parents were satisfied with the current vendor. He has a child in a before and after care program and he was never surveyed as to his satisfaction. Again, why

was the public not included? A time crunch also places new vendors at a disadvantage because of the unrealistic time frame for staffing. He will also highlight that there was no clear benchmarking on a true apples to apples comparison. For example, you penalize our score for financial viability for not providing financials but the RFP did not require us to provide those financials. Our district is best served when we have an open and fair bidding process otherwise discourage vendors from participating in the future and you will eventually end up or we've been before single bidder contracts. Our district deserves better.

Mary Micale, 181 Spencer Pl, said hello and welcome to Superintendent Schwarz. She commented on what happened on June 30 regarding the bid for aftercare and before care recommendation. Full disclosure, she was one of the parents who was on the committee, so she was watching, we are about 6 weeks from the start of school, we have no before or after school program in place for the youngest students in our district who need it. Despite a clear recommendation from the committee who was appointed to review the bids. Reasons for the refusal to vote in support of the committees recommendation range from the validity of the process which has been successfully utilized by this board for other bids, a disagreement as to the importance of the curriculum with regard to elementary age children and pick up and drop off procedures, a desire to elevate financial return over any other factors and in the 11th hour suggestion that parents should be surveyed and a need for more time. The timing was not ideal, but the bid process was appropriate. It was something that has been used and vetted before by this board and it was done honestly and with integrity. As a result of the boards' inaction in the failure to approve the recommendation of the committee there is no program in place and families are left without any plan to care for their kids after school and that simply should not be. This type of behavior, the failure of the board to work together to consider and respect the processes and to be prepared this has real consequences for our committee and not good consequences. The board needs to commit to respecting vetted processes and working together for the benefit of the district. She hopes this misstep is remedied tonight and that is exactly what happens.

Laurie Weber, She has to agree with Mr. Hache, she is for an open and fair bidding process. She filed a complaint when that didn't happen which is still in the process of being adjudicated so she agrees with that, but what she thinks is missing here is the fact that our business administrator disappeared. She doesn't know what happened to him, she doesn't know the whole story behind it but she does know that we had to scramble and get an interim business administrator. We were left with no annual budget, she thinks Ms. Davenport did a fantastic job, our Interim BA in pulling us together getting what needed to be done in the order that it needed to get done and clearly the budget was more important than the RFP. That being said, she's wondering if Mr. Lembo could explain what he did at the last meeting. Mr. Lembo called a special meeting of the board on June 30th in order to approve the before and after care program contract, a service that many parents rely on apparently the timing of this decision was critical enough for Mr. Lembo to summon his fellow board members to a meeting just for that purpose. However, at the meeting Mr. Lembo explained that he hadn't had time to look over the background material for this decision so what she's wondering then is if Mr. Lembo did not have enough knowledge to vote yes, how did he have enough knowledge to vote no. Why didn't he simply abstain from voting and allow the board members who were prepared to conduct this important piece of board business to go ahead? Given Mr. Mahmoud's absence from the meeting the even number of voting members led to a tie vote. If Mr. Lembo had abstained the vote would have been decisive and today's special meeting. Ms. Weber was asked to address the board as a whole. Ms. Weber continued, she knows the board is all busy and she appreciates your service. She has

a right as a member of the public to question, abort action and she's asking a question and you can choose if you want to respond to it. She has to point out that the three other board members who attended that meeting are also volunteers whose time should be respected and the public who was waiting for that decision to be made also needs to be respected. There is no one opinion that is so important to dispense with board business and board members who are not prepared to vote should simply abstain from voting and let those who are prepared conduct business.

Mr. Schwarz thanked everyone for their kind welcome as he transitioned into the district.

Mr. Schwarz stated that the order of business for the day is to follow the bid award that was determined by the previous purchasing agent. We have a policy which is listed in the regulation, policy 5350 that governs competitive contracting and it sets forth procedures that must be followed when then the cost of a service exceeds the bid threshold. That process was followed by the former business administrator who is the purchasing specialist and that was expressed in the form of a committee and a committee report. He knows the board has some questions and concerns regarding the process.

Mr. Schwarz reviewed the RFP process and timeline. To view this portion of the meeting scroll to 11:41.

Mr. Schwarz has reviewed all of the materials and he does not see any confirmable procedural deficiencies or violations of the policy. Considering the work of the purchasing agent and the committee at this time he is recommending that the bid be awarded to AlphaBest.

Mr. Lembo responded to the public comment regarding the June 30 Special Public Meeting and Board Trustees provided comments about the RFP process.
To view this portion of the meeting scroll to 14:39.

Mr. Dani requested his comment to be included in the minutes. Mr. Dani is requesting four data points, outputs from the administration in the next few months regarding this program. One is waitlist numbers by AlphaBest or before/after care so if we can have whatever frequency you think is appropriate to report to the board and to the public. Number 2, if we can somehow monitor the curriculum that they are providing because that was one of the big reasons for the committee to recommend themes or if we can cross-check from the bid what they've promised and what they are actually providing and at multiple intervals, not just one random shot. Number three, their past revenue contribution to us in the last three years and during their first cycle what was the total revenue they contributed to the district because they had promised 150,000, the same amount last time and then during covid they had come back and asked for some changes. He does not know whether those changes are temporary. The fourth one is ongoing their revenue contribution to us. They have promised a minimum 150 but they have also promised 12% of the total revenue, so what's the actual number that we are getting from them?

Mr. Schwarz responded that we will decide what committee to report that out to and then through committee, the board can decide how they like that presented to the public.

V. RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval: Agreement for Before/After Care Program

The Ridgewood Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Interim Superintendent of Schools, approves the agreement with AlphaBest for the provision of Before and After School Child Care Services, dated July 1, 2023, in the following amount: Guaranteed revenue of \$150,000 for the period of July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024. This bid award is the result of the 6-member Evaluation Committee scoring in **Attachment A**.

The Board has received background information.

Ms. Brogan made a motion to approve A: Agreement for Before/After Care Program since she was part of the committee.

Ms. Kwak seconded the motion, which carried by the following roll-call vote:

AYES: Ms. Brogan, Ms. Kwak, Mr. Mahmoud

NAYES: none

ABSTAIN: Mr. Dani, Mr. Lembo

VI. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Laura McKenna, 861 Bingham Road, she had a chance to watch last meeting on youtube before she came here. Like so many people she was away on vacation that last week of June and what she saw was a little shocking to her. She watched the presentation and she listened to Ms. Brogan and Ms. Kwak and Ms. Davenport and they presented very convincing arguments to her why they chose a program and why they felt it was a good and she was surprised to see the pushback from two men when three women had made very convincing arguments to her. She found that surprising and at certain points we have to trust each other for a committee to work well, it has to delegate certain responsibilities to some committees and the other members have to trust that they are making good decisions. Otherwise we're not going to move forward as a town making decisions. Your school board is important for making decisions and if we're stymied with too many questions then action doesn't happen. There's a fine line between asking great questions and micromanaging. There's a fine line by being budget conscious and nickeling and dining and she wants to make sure that this Ridgewood School Board is always on the right side of that line.

Ann Loving, 342 South Irving Street, She had completely opposed to allowing board members to attend remotely but she can see now that it really works out well so she has to backtrack on her previous opinion. She'd like to say something about the previous speaker's comments. Although the committee did a lot of work and made their recommendations every board member gets a right to vote so it is inappropriate, she thinks to suggest that the whole board should automatically vote the way the committee recommended. However, she was shocked last meeting when the president of the board said that he had not read the material and then voted no. She agrees with Ms. Weber from earlier that was clearly a case for just not voting. You don't vote yes or no if you haven't read the material. It was frankly embarrassing. Finally, the President also stated that his children attend the alphabest program. That to her would not have been grounds for abstaining but grounds for recusal; she does not think that somebody who uses this program should vote. One could argue that everybody's got kids in the school system so they can't vote on anything but this is not the school system. This is a private vendor and in that case, she does not think the president should have had a vote on this matter.

Laurie Weber, she's responding to a couple of comments here. She thinks it's very important that board members retain their autonomy on the board when they're making decisions. So while she might not even have agreed with Mr. Dani's decision making on that particular issue, she respects the fact that he made his decision and she thinks it is important that the board members individually do that. That's why we elect them. We elect them to have robust conversation to really think things through and vet various issues and she thinks that when people don't necessarily vote in unison on an issue it's not a sign of an unhealthy board, it's actually a sign of a healthy board. She would have to agree with the last comment, she doesn't think a user of the program would be disqualified from voting on that contract. If you're not invested in the program financially, if you don't have relatives that own it, there isn't anything unethical about voting that she's aware of simply because you have children who use that program. She really is confused why Mr. Lembo didn't abstain the first time. In abstaining this time, I know you don't want to answer her but she thinks it's important to note that she did actually address the board in her first comment and as a resident she has the right to do so and ask questions.

Judy Knee, CEO of AlphaBest Education, she wanted to extend her thanks and appreciation to the committee, the Board and the administration for a professional process. Of course, it is late in the year much less an ideal for an award, but it is not unheard of. They respond to many RFPs in New Jersey and other places and these things happen. We've heard your concerns tonight, we appreciate the board support, the district administration's support and the parent support. You have her personal assurance that you will receive the follow up information that's been discussed tonight. You'll have the waitlist numbers shortly after enrollment is completed for the fall year, which would be around the start of the school. Certainly a demonstration of our curriculum is always available. We will make sure that we do that for you and with respect to the question around revenue contribution to the district. She thinks it's pretty clear in this proposal that it is the percentage of revenue, she believes 12% of revenue or the minimum guarantee of \$150,000; just to clarify that board members question; it is the higher of those two. Thank you for the partnership and your time and seriousness and reviewing this RFP process.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

At 6:02 p.m., on a motion made by Mr. Lembo, seconded by Ms. Brogan and unanimously approved, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jaime Cangialosi-Murphy
Director of Human Resources



Lucy Papamichael