

**MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 28, 2021  
WORK SESSION OF THE  
WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

September 28, 2021

**1. Opening Items**

**1.01 CALL TO ORDER**

The work session of the Board of Trustees was called to order at 10:01 a.m. in the Board Room of the Central Administration Building, located at 425 East Ninth Street in Reno, Nevada.

**1.02 ROLL CALL**

President Angela Taylor and Board Members Jeff Church, Ellen Minetto, Diane Nicolet, Joe Rodriguez, and Beth Smith were present. Superintendent Kristen McNeill and staff were also present.

**1.03 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Adam Searcy, Chief Facilities Management Officer, led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Items for Presentation, Discussion, Information and/or Action**

**2.01 COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF THE FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND CAPITAL PROJECTS DEPARTMENT: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE NEW BUILD CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS TO ADDRESS OVERCROWDING NEEDS, REPAIR AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS TO ADDRESS SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND DISTRICT BUILDINGS IN NEED OF REPAIR**

Adam Searcy, Chief Facilities Management Officer, provided the Board of Trustees and community with a comprehensive overview of capital projects in the Washoe County School District, with a focus on the status of projects prior to the passage of WC-1 and after. Schools became strained with increased enrollment beginning in the 2000's and the District began looking for additional sources of revenue. In 2015, legislation was approved to create a citizen-led committee, the Public Schools Overcrowding and Repair Needs (PSORN) Committee, that would explore different revenue options and ultimately provide a ballot question (WC-1) in 2016 related to a sales-tax increase to fund only capital projects within the District, to include the repair and revitalization of existing facilities. The District continued to take very seriously the mandates included in the ballot

question, especially the usage of the Capital Funding Protection Committee (CFPC) to review and recommend projects for approval to the Board of Trustees. Since the passage of WC-1, the District had been able to complete major expansions to or construct 10 schools. Information on the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) priorities was reviewed, including asset renewal, capacity demands, and core school investments. The projected needs of the District in managing the demands and projects included in the CIP were presented. The presentation was concluded with an emphasis on the importance of the passage of WC-1 because it allowed the District to address overcrowding and work to ensure all schools in the Washoe County School District were equitable and provide all students with the access they needed to learn, no matter where they were located in Washoe County.

Mark Mathers, Chief Financial Officer, provided information on the funding of projects. The District used both the revenues from WC-1 and property taxes to fund capital projects. Growth in the area had exceeded the revenue assumptions made by PSORN, even during COVID.

Trustee Church noted the presentation indicated bi-monthly meetings of the CFPC. His understanding was bi-monthly meant twice a month, which was not accurate. Mr. Searcy indicated bi-monthly also meant every other month, which was when the CFPC met.

Trustee Church expressed concern over the limited number of meetings conducted in 2020 and 2021, as well as the length of the meetings. Mr. Searcy noted the Committee was scheduled to meet every even month. There were times when there had not been a lot to put on agendas, so meetings were cancelled; however, if a budget or report had to be approved and forwarded to the Board, the Committee would meet.

Trustee Nicolet asked if the PSORN Committee continued to function. Mr. Searcy stated no, the Committee was dissolved once their charge of developing a ballot question had been completed.

President Taylor highlighted that the CFPC was unique from all other Board committees. If the Board disagreed with a recommendation from the CFPC, the recommendation was sent back to the Committee for reconsideration with an explanation as to why the recommendation was rejected.

Trustee Church mentioned that the PSORN Committee came up with a specific funding recommendation for around \$781 million over a 9 year period. However, at the last meeting of the Committee the end date or sunset was removed from the ballot language, which he had concerns about because the District would now receive more than \$781 million for the building of new schools. He provided additional information that was presented in 2016 from the Car Dealers Association with concerns about residents going to other counties to make high-dollar purchases. Mr. Mathers cautioned that the concerns

raised by the Car Dealers Association had not occurred to any large extent and Washoe County saw sale-tax revenues increase by 16% in 2021.

Trustee Church believed the voters had been misled by those who advocated for the passage of WC-1 because the numbers projected by PSORN were not accurate. Mr. Mathers noted that the projections made by PSORN were based on information known at the time. The revenue amounts anticipated by PSORN had materialized, though sooner than projected.

Trustee Smith requested clarification on the process used to collect sales-tax and the amounts. Mr. Mathers reviewed the process used by the State of Nevada and Washoe County to collect sale-tax and the amounts distributed to the District.

Trustee Nicolet wondered, in terms of school capacities, how the District factored in the usage of "auxiliary" areas, such as cafeterias, libraries, and playgrounds. Mr. Searcy indicated the areas were considered, but not in terms of classroom usage. The District was able to use portable classrooms to increase classroom space, but they were temporary solutions to overcrowding concerns because they did not add to the auxiliary spaces.

President Taylor asked if the portables allowed more students to enroll in a school. Mr. Searcy clarified that the school enrollment was what it was based on the attendance zone. The District needed to find classrooms for all the students who were enrolled, no matter if that number exceeded the base capacity of a school or not.

President Taylor opened the meeting to public comment.

Craig Madole, Nevada Associated General Contractors, spoke in support of the creation and passage of the WC-1 ballot initiative. He provided additional information on the creation of PSORN and noted in 2017, the Nevada Legislature approved sale-tax collection on internet purchases, which was a revenue source PSORN had not contemplated and led to increased revenue. He was proud of the work that had occurred and indicated it was important that the process continue to ensure the core schools were revitalized.

Dylan Shaver had served as the vice-chair of PSORN. He expressed some frustration that he had to defend the work of the Committee. He stated the Committee completely understood what they were doing when they developed the question posed to voters and had not misled the community in any way. PSORN had not contemplated sunseting the sales-tax because the revenue was intended to address the long-term, on-going capital needs in the Washoe County School District. He noted those against the ballot measure had included the lack of a sunset in their arguments and that the voters approved the question by over 12%.

Kevin Kemner, TSK Architects, remarked that WC-1 was a unique funding source for the Washoe County School District nationally because it removed the "bond and bust" cycle of school capital construction. He appreciated the District's commitment to provide a space for students that was safe, warm, and dry, as well as improve the infrastructure so students could learn at the highest levels. He mentioned most people in the community did not see the impacts of overcrowding in schools because they were not in schools when they were fully occupied.

Valerie Fiannaca stated she had supported WC-1 and believed it was a very good funding mechanism for the District. She spoke about the schools she attended while growing up and had taken her children there to show them as well. She understood the importance of maintaining existing facilities because the buildings would last for decades if properly maintained.

Trustee Church noted the difference in numbers between the budgeted estimate for Desert Skies Middle School and the actual cost, which was much higher. He was concerned about the increases and the amount spent on "administrative" functions. Mr. Searcy cautioned that it was important to ensure everyone know the specific numbers because there was a specific cost for construction of a building and the total cost of a project, which would include additional items, such as permitting. The District did employ a number of staff members to work on coordinating projects, reviewing contracts, developing and compiling bid information, and other areas so there was an administrative cost to projects. Mr. Mathers provided additional information on the amounts paid to administrative staff who worked on specific projects.

Trustee Church claimed Washoe County was still losing revenue on high-dollar purchases because of the higher sale-tax rates. He felt there were serious issues with what the public expected the funds from WC-1 would be used for since the District-wide averages for capacity were in the 80% range. He believed some positions in the District had some of their salaries charged to Capital Projects and that was not the intent. He provided examples of what he believed were administrator and principal salaries being paid out of the Capital Projects Fund. Mr. Mathers noted the administrative staff mentioned had allocated a certain percentage of their time directly to programs and projects. The time the positions spent on projects were billed to specific projects. The District worked with the bond and tax legal counsels on what could be charged and what could not be charged to projects based on guidance from the United States Treasury Department. The funds were audited annually. Clarification was provided on what had occurred with principal salaries and that District accountants were the ones to realize the mistake and correct the funding mistake, which he believed that was what the Board of Trustees would want to happen. The information was included in the annual audit because the District reported the information to the auditors. He highlighted that prior to WC-1, the District allocated about 2.3% of Capital Projects Funds to administrative staff when the budget

was approximately \$20 million annually; currently, the District allocated 2.5% of funds to administrative staffing for an annual budget of close to \$110 million.

Superintendent McNeill asked if the management response in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report was the same regarding the correction for principal salaries as what was provided at the present meeting and if the response was included as part of the report. Mr. Mathers responded in the affirmative.

Trustee Smith requested clarification in the roll of an external auditor. Mr. Mathers reviewed the scope of work of external auditors, especially related to the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, which was to verify the accuracy of the District's financial statements.

Trustee Church expressed concern over the continued increases in costs for schools. He used the example of the cost of a new high school provided to the Nevada Legislature as \$110 million and then \$135 million to the voters and the final budgeted amount for the new Procter R. Hug High School was \$235 million. Mr. Searcy cautioned the total budgeted amount included everything for a new school, including the furniture, fixtures, and equipment needed to open a school. He anticipated the final cost for the new Procter R. Hug High School to be around \$200 million. The \$110 - \$135 million figures were related to the construction of the school and did not include the costs of design, permitting, or other expenses.

Trustee Church mentioned that \$200 million was still a lot for a new school, even nationally. He wanted to ensure the District looked at everything in terms of building new schools and consider different options. He believed the District should consider providing housing for teachers as an incentive for new teachers or those who worked in remote areas and then look at a live-in academy for at risk students. He would like to see the District go to the Nevada Legislature to decrease the total sale-tax amount in Washoe County to encourage more people to purchase high dollar items in the area and then ask the Legislature to amend WC-1 to allow revenues to be used for staff salaries.

Trustee Smith wondered what the utilization rate was for the core schools to determine if there were opportunities to reconsider the educational facilities in areas where population had changed and the capacities at schools near each other could be consolidated somehow. Mr. Searcy indicated the District was constantly reviewing enrollments and capacities at all schools. Conceptually, the District had considered such a project in the past, but at the time did not have the revenue to explore such an opportunity further.

Trustee Smith asked if there was a plan to remove the portables at all schools. Mr. Searcy noted the portables were intended to be temporary and used for short term periods when a new school was under construction or an existing school expanded; however, the

schools had become dependent on the portables. The District paused the removal of the portables during COVID because they did allow for the additional social distancing needed.

It was moved by Trustee Church and seconded by Trustee Rodriguez that **the Board of Trustees accepts the report from the Facilities Management and Capital Projects Department, understanding that not all Trustees may agree or disagree with the entire contents of the report.** The result of the vote was Unanimous: (Yea: Jeff Church, Ellen Minetto, Diane Nicolet, Joe Rodriguez, Beth Smith, and Angela Taylor.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

### 3. Closing Items

#### 3.01 PUBLIC COMMENT

Valerie Fiannaca called for the business of the Board to be halted until the legality of all votes taken by former Trustee Jacqueline Calvert could be determined, especially the vote to install Joe Rodriguez as the representative for District C. She mentioned the Trustees were employees of the people and not the District. She was frustrated over what had occurred related to Trustee Calvert and wanted to learn more about who knew what and when.

President Taylor noted the Board had requested the Office of the General Counsel look into the concerns. She emphasized there was not a shred of evidence that there was any prior knowledge on the part of the Trustees of Ms. Calvert's residence.

Hope Backman was a parent in the District and had been vocal about her displeasure. She believed she was being targeted by the District because of her advocacy. She stated parents had made it clear they did not want their children or themselves in masks and the District was violating international law by enforcing the mask wearing. She expressed her support for Trustee Church.

Roger Edwards stated there were 116 Board Policies that members of the Board had agreed to follow and he did not believe it was possible for that to occur. He was specifically concerned about the policies specific to Board Governance under the 9000 series.

Casey Rogers claimed the American Medical Association was urging doctors to deceive the public as related to COVID-19 to instill fear in the public at large. She claimed the American Medical Association was a political association, not a medical association. She spoke against the National Education Association as a political organization that would not allow disagreement among members.

Cathy Reyes spoke in support of Trustee Jeff Church and against the "letter" sent of supposed violations he had committed. She believed the other Trustees were the ones in violation of the law. She claimed Trustee Church was speaking and acting on behalf of those who voted for him.

Jan Pantone spoke in support of Trustee Jeff Church because he was a former Reno Police Officer and Veteran. She believed the District was indoctrinating students in a socialist agenda and that only Trustee Church was there to support what the parents wanted, which was education, and not gender-neutral bathrooms.

James Benthin urged the Board to end the mask mandates in the schools. He spoke in support of Trustee Jeff Church and did not believe the other Trustees were "fit" to lead. He believed the District should focus more on the quality of education and not Trustee Church.

Bruce Parks believed the Board was not following the will of "we the people" and that the actions against Trustee Jeff Church were because of what had occurred with former Trustee Jacqueline Calvert. He stated he was the one who found out where Ms. Calvert lived and informed the District, but because no action was taken, he was forced to go public with the information. He claimed Ms. Calvert owed the public their money back and would take his claim to the Nevada Bar Association and Nevada Attorney General.

President Taylor stated she received an email from Mr. Parks on September 8, 2021 regarding Ms. Calvert's residence. She stated she contacted Ms. Calvert on September 9, 2021 to indicate the concern needed to be resolved prior to the next Board meeting. Two working days later, Ms. Calvert resigned.

Jeannie Quintana spoke in support of Trustee Jeff Church because he supported the constituents. She claimed he was the only one with integrity on the Board and that she was thankful she sent her children to private school. She did not believe the Trustees really cared about what happened to the students, only the bureaucracy and their paychecks.

Debbie Hudgens felt the comments provided by members of the community fell on deaf ears and that the Trustees were not listening. She believed the people present represented the majority of the community and the Trustees should care about what the people were talking about. She found it hard to believe no one knew where Ms. Calvert lived and that she had to fill out a change of address form.

Dr. Fred Simon expressed his disgust in the way the Board and Superintendent treated members of the community through their arrogance.

*President Taylor recessed the meeting for 10 minutes due to continued disruptions by members of the audience.*

Trustee Church urged members of the audience to be respectful and not interrupt.

President Taylor stated that she absolutely supported the community members' right to speak at public meetings. She did not believe that allowed them to treat the Trustees and District staff with disrespect, yell at them, or threaten them. She mentioned she had always tried to be consistent in terms of applause and not have them interrupt the meeting. She invited Dr. Simon to continue with his comments since the timer had been stopped.

Dr. Simon stated he believed the meeting would be more respectful if the Board showed respect for the people. He claimed there were some Trustees who did not believe he should even be present at the meeting because he did not live in Washoe County. He believed the Board was making up their own rules because other school boards in Nevada would engage with the public during public comment periods. He did not believe the Trustees came prepared for the meetings by reading the agenda. He threatened that if Trustee Church were to be censured, that all those who supported it would be indicted.

D. Anderson wondered if the Board was actually fiscally responsible and if they made data-driven decisions based on their own Board Policies. She did not believe that was occurring and the Trustees were in violation of their policies. She expressed concern over the decrease in the budget for the Office of Academics and the increase in the budget for the Office of Accountability.

Pablo Nava Duran expressed concern over the issue of former Trustee Calvert's residence, but was not prepared to blame anyone because he did not have all the information. He understood the concerns of the community regarding the possible censure; however, there were limits to someone's freedom of speech.

Victoria Myer felt that both President Taylor and Superintendent McNeill should have known about where former Trustee Calvert lived as part of their fiduciary responsibilities. She did not believe the Board or District were focusing on supporting academics and instead interested in segregating students based on vaccination status.

Katherine Snediger spoke against the mask requirements because the masks did not protect against the spread of virus or disease. She did not believe there was actually COVID but that it was the flu. She claimed the Board did not have the ability to force people to wear masks.

### **3.02 ADJOURN MEETING**



There being no further business to come before the members of the Board, President Taylor declared the meeting adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

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**Angela D. Taylor, President**

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**Diane Nicolet, Clerk**