BRANDON SCHOOL DIVISION

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THE BRANDON SCHOOL DIVISION, HELD IN THE J. L. MILNE BOARDROOM, ADMINISTRATION OFFICE, 1031 - 6TH STREET, BRANDON, MANITOBA, AT 7:00 P.M., MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2013.

PRESENT:
Mr. M. Sefton, Chairperson, Mr. J. Murray, Vice-Chairperson, Mr. P. Bartlette, Mrs. P. Bowslaugh, Mr. D. Karnes, Mr. G. Kruck, Dr. L. Ross, Mr. M. Snelling, Mr. K. Sumner.

Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. K. Zabowski, Recording Secretary, Mrs. S. Bailey, Live Streaming Video Operator, Ms. K. Boklaschuk.

Senior Administration: Dr. D. M. Michaels, Superintendent/CEO, Mr. G. Malazdrewicz, Associate Superintendent, Mr. Denis Labossiere, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, Ms. B. Switzer, Director of Human Resources.

CALL:

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and referred to the Call.

The meeting had been called for the purpose of considering the following:

a) Giving of Notice – Policy and Procedures 7026 – "Registration of Students",
b) Public Budget Feedback Presentations.

Mr. Glen Kruck
I hereby give notice that at the next Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees, I, or someone in my stead, will introduce a motion to approve Policy and Procedures 7026 – "Registration of Students".

Before proceeding with public feedback presentations, the Chairperson spoke of the Board's budget work to date. He noted the various stakeholder meetings which had been held and reminded the public of the dates and deadlines which the Board must adhere to during the budget process. Mr. Sefton reminded all present of the time limit for presentations and confirmed that the Board would not be responding to any presentations at this meeting.

The following individuals made presentations regarding the Proposed 2013/2014 Budget:

A) Mr. Darren Hardy, President, Brandon Teachers' Association, began his presentation by thanking the Board of Trustees for postponing the meeting scheduled for March 4, 2013 due to inclement weather. He appreciated the Board's thought of safety first when postponing the meeting. Mr. Hardy reviewed the budget process the Board of Trustees undertakes each year noting the amount of consultation and consideration that goes into each budget before it is finally voted upon and passed. He noted he was reviewing the process to ensure the public understood that this is a well thought out process and "not

haphazard in any way". Mr. Hardy reviewed the average operating expenditure per pupil in the Brandon School Division noting the Division is the 4th lowest in the province in expenditure per pupil. He noted expenditure buys quality and asked if "BSD spends less, then is the quality of education in Brandon less than elsewhere?" He confirmed the answer is no as the Division has very dedicated and hardworking staff. However, having more "intelligently allocated resources" would mean an even better education for students. Mr. Hardy highlighted the shortage of substitute teachers in the Division and expressed disappointment that the budget does not contain "anything to alleviate the stress that a lack of substitutes places on the system". He also expressed concern that the public perception of Wellness had such a negative impact on the budget. He noted studies have been very conclusive in this area regarding the need to preserve wellness in the workplace. For every dollar spent on intervention and proactive strategies, the Division can save $4 to $5 on the other end. Mr. Hardy confirmed the BTA was happy to see the addition of classroom and specialist teachers as well as Vice-Principals. He noted schools with Vice-Principal support have shown "real positive impacts in their buildings". He concluded his statements by noting this was a good budget and asked Trustees not to be distracted by "other speakers or 'sound off' comments". He urged the Board to hold the line on the investments they are making with this proposed budget, "and be proud to submit it to the Province by March 15th."

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Hardy for his presentation.

B) Nate Andrews, President, Brandon Chamber of Commerce, acknowledged the Division's Administration for providing the Chamber with information regarding the proposed budget and taking the time to answer their concerns on proposed spending. He confirmed the Chamber continues to support quality education in the community. They understand quality education has a positive impact on the city. However, he noted when taxes rise at a higher rate than inflation people have no choice but to cut back on their spending in other areas. He noted smaller businesses trying to start up are faced with increasing costs and it is hard for them to reach a mature stage in the business' financial health. He reviewed the impact of the taxes on his own commercial property from 2008 to present, expressing concern about sustainability of increasing taxation. He noted the City of Brandon took a very hard look at their budget to find some areas of efficiencies. He notes it has been stated that there have been reductions in the Division's budget as well; however, this is not entirely true as the Board simply did not add as much as it would have liked to add. The Chamber continues to be frustrated with a Province that is mandating initiatives they cannot afford. EAL funding, high risk youth and 20K-3 class size implementation all need increased funding from the Province. He notes some are not affordable by the Division right now and the Chamber is happy to see that the Board revisited the 20K-3 mandate and slowed down the implementation of this item. He feels the Division's proposed budget on this item is more closely aligned with the funding the Province is allotting and through consultation they understand is not enough. But this is "the Province's baby and they need to back it up with a cheque." He commends the Division on their cost per pupil, but feel based on the Division's size that the Division should be able to maintain that status of better based on economy of scale. The municipal tax base pays 6.4% more of its share than the average municipality does. This is approximately $5.21 million on an $80 million budget. He does not feel these are figures that can be ignored. Mr. Andrews concluded his presentation by noting that "taxpayers have been stretched to the limit and change needs to happen sooner than later." He notes Manitoba is one of the last Provinces left in Canada to fund local schools from a large percent in the form of a regressive property tax. Manitoba needs to consider a similar change. He noted the taxpayer is "becoming less elastic every year" and realizes the Chamber's message may be redundant, "But until there is change they will continue down this path until there is".

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Andrews for his presentation.

C) Mr. Ed Kostecki, Retired Teacher, Taxpayer, noted he retired from teaching in 1992 after 35 years of service. His teacher's pension was to be indexed to the rate of inflation, but that did not happen. His pension has not even averaged a 1% increase a year while inflation has increased by 2 to 3.5%. He noted his taxes had increased from 2004 to 2012 by $2,414.64. His school taxes for 2012 were $2,669.95. He felt that if the Manitoba Premier had kept his pre-election promise to remove school taxes from seniors' property taxes, "seniors would be able to afford reasonable increases in property tax and would not be under stress and fear of losing their homes". He noted many seniors have to make choices to cut back on food, heat and light to be able to pay their taxes. He felt it was time the NDP government, Mayor, some of the City Councilors and School Board members showed common sense. He concluded he presentation by advising the Board of Trustees that "when the money well is dry you have to stop spending and make do with what you have."

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Kostecki for his comments.

D) Mr. Robert Smith, past Trustee of Pine Creek School Division – 1982 – 2002, Taxpayer, spoke to the consolidation of small country schools into the modern school system. He felt that during this process several mistakes had been made which have "grown into huge drains on the public school boards". This meant the only choice school boards had was to pass the costs onto the taxpayer. He felt one of the first mistakes made was setting a salary grid for teacher compensation that went from 0-10 years. He noted "year after year this 10 year scale has increased." He felt it was now out of date and irrelevant. The second mistake that has been made is that divisions settle for a percent increase instead of flat dollars. He felt the solution to these problems is "salary bargaining by the Province of Manitoba" as they have the power to force teachers into a zero increase in both salary and benefits. Mr. Smith suggested school boards focus on items they can control such as: transportation of students; maintenance of schools, administration, student support, library services, extra-curricular activities; and public access to schools.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Smith for his presentation.

E) Mrs. Hilda Richardson, Taxpayer, thanked the Board for giving her the opportunity to speak on behalf of many people who are "entering the latter years of their employment or have already entered the retirement years". She felt the tax increase proposed is unrealistic for many of the citizens of Brandon. She noted that "the home owners in Brandon whose remuneration, either through regular wages or through fixed incomes, such as pension, will never increase by 8 percent in a given year". She wants to see students do well in school and appreciates the work that teachers are prepared to put into their job, however she also felt there needs to be "creative and innovative ideas looked at by this Board in order to sustain and maintain the educational standards" the next generation will need to achieve their goals.

The Chairperson thanked Mrs. Richardson for her comments.

F) Mr. Dave Carriere, Taxpayer, began his presentation by acknowledging the "dedication and caring that all of the trustees have regarding the education of the children in this community". He noted this is the greatest responsibility they have. However, he felt there is also a responsibility to the tax payers of the same community. He felt the proposed tax increase is "enormously excessive". Taxpayers in the community did not increase their income by 8.25%. Increase in taxes means the taxpayer must take that money from another area, savings, entertainment, food. He expressed concern that the taxpayer is viewed as "an unlimited source of revenue". He noted as a taxpayer he does not "want to give any more money".

Mr. Carriere then requested clarification regarding the negotiation of contracts. Trustee Ross explained the process and spoke to collective agreements across the Province. She noted teachers are the keystone of the education system and wondered whether the Province or an outsider could do better. She confirmed the Divisions do have professional assistance during the negotiation process from the Manitoba School

Boards Association. Trustee Murray spoke to the arbitration process noting that process was the result of teachers in the Province having given up the right to strike. Trustee Bowslaugh asked if the presenter was suggesting teachers were not worth their pay. Mr. Carriere stated his position that he was tired of paying more and more every year.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Carriere for his presentation. The Chairperson then asked if there was anyone else in attendance who wished to speak at this time.

G) Ms. Sharon Alexander, business owner, felt it was unreasonable to pay an 8.25% increase. She noted the Division cannot afford to be everything to everybody. She felt there were a lot of extras that the Division did not need. She also did not feel that people who rented paid the same for school taxes like they would if school taxes were part of the Provincial Income Taxes. She noted she had a great respect for teachers, however was concerned about the rumour she heard that on Wellness Day teachers went to a movie. She stated there must be some areas where the Board could make cuts as they cannot raise taxes year after year. Ms. Alexander felt the system was backwards. The Divisions should have to be given so much money and told they have to make it work. The taxpayer feels they are not being heard and that the Board of Trustees will do whatever they want anyway.

Trustee Bowslaugh noted that the Board of Trustees consults with a number of stakeholders, including Parent Councils, and many of the requests come from the Parent Councils. She asked how Ms. Alexander would deal with these requests. Ms. Alexander confirmed there comes a point when people cannot afford it any longer and therefore choices must be made. No one can have everything they want on their wish list and priorities must be set.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Alexander for her comments.

H) Mrs. Thomason, taxpayer, asked what percentage of the budget is paid out in substitute teacher costs?

The Secretary-Treasurer advised that 1% of the total budget is paid out in substitute teacher costs.

I) Mr. Dave Chopek, taxpayer, noted he cannot afford an increase like the Board of Trustees was asking for in this budget. He expressed concern with the amount of substitute teachers required. He also noted he disagreed with the need for so many additional support staff in the classroom.

J) Mr. Ray Sitter, taxpayer, spoke to sustainability. He felt the current budget increase was not sustainable. He noted he was not there to tell the Board what to do; they were elected to make things sustainability and live within their budget but 8.2% is too big and as a taxpayer he did not get that increase. He reminded the Board of Trustees that it is their job to make the budget work.

The Chairperson thanked all present for making presentations. He then asked the Vice-Chairperson, Mr. Jim Murray, to read into the record three letters which had been sent to Trustees by members of the public who were unable to attend the meeting.

- Mr. Brent Fowler, March 4, 2013, noting he supports the local elected officials as they try to make a difference in the community and understands the fiscal challenges that the Board faces. He has no objection to a tax increase based on the cost of living and would consider a 3 or 4% tax increase reasonable. However, an 8.2% increase is simply unacceptable. Significant tax increases year after year are unreasonable and unsustainable. He therefore rejects the need for an 8.2% increase and urges the Board of Trustees to bring in a more affordable budget.

- Mr. Ron Boychuk, March 4, 2013, noting he is retired and has not seen any increase in his pension. He worked for the government and when it came to tightening the budget, the workers had a wage freeze. He suggests the Board do that with teachers. He notes Toronto's budget is around 65% wages where Brandon is 85%. He asks the Board to solve the problem from within and be creative. He notes the Division should cut back on salaries. He had to live with a wage freeze, along with the rest of the civil servants, for more than a few years on more than one occasion. He notes immigrants are used as the reason for a high budget and suggested the Division go to the employers who bring these workers in and get some compensation from them.

- Mr. Craig Knight, March 4, 2013, noting he cannot imagine any new "student needs' that require 8.5% mill increase on top of the significant increase in funding received from the Provincial government. He asks for the Board to define what the "needs of the students" are that the Board requires such a drastic increase in taxation. He believes the Board could allocate money from finding inefficiencies within the current system to put towards servicing the "needs of the students". He asks the Board to identify programs that have been cut due to failure of performance standards. He states the citizens of Brandon are not a pot of gold to fund the Board's dreams and desires. He feels the Board has lost sight of what can realistically be sustained by those paying taxes within the catchment area. He references the "free money" the Board gets through home schooled children who never set foot inside a school and asks where that money gets used? Mr. Knight notes it takes courage to make decisions that meet the basic educational needs of the students and to keep those paying for those needs desirous of staying in the area.

Prior to closing the meeting the Chairperson again thanked those who attended the meeting, made presentations and provided feedback. He noted the Board would take a break before returning to the Board Room to begin the regularly scheduled Board Meeting agenda.

Mr. Snelling – Mr. Kruck
That the meeting do now adjourn (8:15 p.m.).

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Chairperson Secretary-Treasurer